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The Doctrine of Hell and Missions

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Hell, the Motivation for World Evangelism

When I became a believer at the end of my junior year in high school, I remember wrestling with the notion that most of the people I would pass in the hall way had never heard the gospel story that I finally had understood and accepted with all my heart. If they never heard the story of a personal salvation through Christ, they were lost and did not know it, just like I was. If they were to die, their eternity would be just as they lived, without Christ forever. If someone did not intervene in their lives as someone did in mine (my high school Spanish teacher in a public high school), they may continue on through life and never meet another Christian. Was I to be God's instrument to stop them from going to a Christless eternity in hell?

These and many other thought kept surfacing in my conscious mind every day as I looked at the crowded halls of my high school between classes. I decided, as a result, to do my best to share this amazing story, that I had just come to understand, with as many of my fellow classmates as I could, in spite of the fact that I was scared to death to be seen as a fanatic or even as a Christian. Just telling someone that I was now a Christian was painful as I strove to overcome the fear of rejection by my peers.

God allowed me to get involved in an active Bible Club and get trained in personal evangelism, then lead others to witness for Christ. "Saving souls" through witnessing was seen as the norm with my new-found friends after becoming a Christian. Hell loomed just over the horizon in a very real perspective, that motivated me to witness and later to give my life to reach several tribes in the jungles of Colombia.

What happens to people anywhere when they die? What should happen to people before they die? Does it matter to me or not? Do I ever think about where people I see (or hear about) will spend eternity? Van Reheenen observes, "Once people preached and responded to the gospel out of fear of hell or because of the lostness of humanity. These motivations have waned in the postmodern context. The motivation for missions is frequently defined by postmodern Christians as "giving glory to God" or "an overflowing of thankfulness." (Pinnock, 1992, p. 161)

Peterson states, "Evangelicals historically have understood hell as a spur to evangelism. Recently, however, some have debated how prominent a place hell should have in Christian witness." (Peterson, 1995, p. 30)

What about people who have never heard?

Tim Keller tells of a successful thirty-year-old businessman with only loose connections to a mainline church and little knowledge of Christianity, who was searching for spiritual answers. His spiritual interest grew so that he was ready to embrace the gospel -- except for one obstacle. "You've said that if we do not believe in Christ," he said to Keller, "we are lost and condemned. I'm sorry, I just cannot buy that. I work with some fine people who are Muslim, Jewish, or agnostic. I cannot believe they are going to hell just because they don't believe in Jesus. In fact, I cannot reconcile the very idea of hell with a loving God-- even if he is holy, too." (Van Rheenen, 2005, p. 169)

One of the most frequent questions asked by the unsaved when they understand how the gospel is exclusively for those who hear and trust in Christ. The fact that anyone who does not hear and trust in Christ is lost forever is a doctrine that is hard for some to

accept. Most do not meditate on the eternal implications for the unsaved because it is an uncomfortable concept and hard to accept from a human perspective.

What about people who never hear the gospel? Can anyone be saved without actually hearing the gospel and believing in Christ? Does God have some other way to heaven? Would a loving God send a sincere person who has never heard about Christ to hell? Is it possible that unevangelized people will have a chance to hear and believe the gospel after death? How can people be held responsible if they do not believe in a Christ of whom they have not heard?

There is about as much speculation concerning these questions as any other -- partly because we Christians tend to be uncomfortable with our own answers. Worse, the more biblical the answer the more uncomfortable we often become. It seems God often takes special delight in pushing us out of our intellectual comfort zones (Hesselgrave, 2005, p. 54).

Some arguments are emotional: sympathetic. This focus is humanistic: the thought of millions of people going to hell without ever hearing of Christ is hard to accept. It just does not seem fair.

Some arguments are deductive: “a loving God would not send anyone to hell.” This focus depends on your perspective of the character of God, the Bible and the nature of salvation. How could God be this way?

Some arguments are exegetical: Everyone will be reconciled to God in accordance with 1 Cor 15:22, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.” This focus is hopeful exegesis putting a spin on passages in the Bible to give hope to those who have no interest in or knowledge of the gospel.

Eleven Positions of the “uninformed”

Theologians wrestle with this issue in an attempt to reconcile their humanistic conclusions with their theological conclusions in order to come up with different ways to resolve this enigma to their biblical worldview. The following are a list of at least eleven different solutions to the dilemma of the unsaved that never heard the gospel which is enumerated by Allen Turnburg:

- 1. Universalism** – The belief that all mankind will, in the end, be saved, regardless of their lives. Nels Ferre wrote, “Heaven, to those who truly love all, can be heaven only when it has emptied hell... The Good Shepherd insists on finding the hundredth sheep” (*the Christian Understanding of God*, p. 229)
- 2. Inclusivism** – The notion that the saving work of Christ encompasses all people of sincerity and goodwill, regardless of their religious faith and irrespective of their awareness of Christ’s death on the cross. R. Panikkar wrote in *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, “The good and bona fide Hindu is saved by Christ and not by Hinduism, but it is through the sacraments of Hinduism, through the message of morality and good life, through the Mysterion that comes down to him through Hinduism, that Christ saved the Hindu normally. This amounts to saying that Hinduism has also a place in the universal saving providence of God.” (p. 54).
- 3. Qualified universalism:** Salvation pertains to those who do not refuse it, that is the atonement of Christ applies to everyone except those who reject it. According to this view, all men are saved except those who deliberately reject Christ. Neal Punt wrote,

“Those who will be finally lost are those, and only those, who, in addition to their sin in Adam, throughout their entire life, willfully and finally reject or remain indifferent toward whatever revelation of himself God has given to them... We no longer see all persons in Adam, outside of Christ, on the way to hell, with some specifically mentioned exceptions. We now see ‘the world,’ ‘all persons,’ ‘everyone’ as elect in Christ, certain-to-come-to-salvation, except for those specifically mentioned exceptions who will be finally lost” (*What’s Good About the Good News*, pp. 24, 29)

4. **Extended probation:** For a limited time after death a person is given a 2nd chance to repent, have faith and be converted are possible for an indefinite period of time. P. Tl Forsyth wrote, “Death does not fix the moral position of the soul irretrievably... There are more conversions on the other side than this, if the crisis of death opens the eyes as I have said” (*This Life and the Next*, p. 12, 37)
5. **General revelation as a door to saving faith:** God will accept a limited knowledge of Himself as sufficient for salvation without ever hearing of Christ. An honest inquirer will be led to saving faith, in spite of never hearing the special revelation. A. H. Strong is quoted, “Man may receive a gift without knowing from who it comes, or how much it has cost. So the heathen, who casts himself as a sinner upon god’s mercy, may receive salvation from the Crucified One, without knowing who is the giver, or that the gift was purchased by agony and blood.” (*Systematic Theology*, p. 843)
6. **Extraordinary applications of the atonement:** The benefits of the gospel may apply to someone where there it is impossible to respond to the gospel, such as the mentally incapacitated, the infants who die as babies, and thus, this same situation applies to the unevangelized who have never heard the gospel due to circumstances beyond their control. Loraine Boettner wrote, “Certainly God’s ordinary method is to gather His elect from the evangelized portion of mankind, although we must admit the possibility that by extraordinary method some few of His elect may be gathered from the unevangelized portion” (*The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, pp. 119-120)
7. **“Faith that would have been.”** This view holds that God’s omniscience can determine if a person would have believed the gospel had they heard it, thus salvation is appropriated through a “faith which would have been.” Donald Lake wrote, “God knows who would, under ideal circumstances, believe the gospel, and on the basis of his foreknowledge, applies that gospel even if the person never hears the gospel during his lifetime.” (“He Died for all: the Universal Dimensions of the Atonement” in *Grace Unlimited*, p. 43).
8. **Agnosticism:** No one can really know for certain about the state of the unevangelized. Since we do not know the answer to their eternal state it is better to not be dogmatic on this issue. John Stott wrote, “I believe the most Christian stance is to remain agnostic on this question,” (*Evangelical Essentials*, p. 327).
9. **Traditionalism [restrictivism]:** Except for infants and the mentally incapacitated, only those who hear and believe in Christ in this life are saved. There is a universal awareness of our sinfulness (conscience or revelation in the Ten Commandments – (Romans 1-3), therefore, they are accountable and responsible to hear and believe in order to be saved. Harold Lindsell wrote, “Again we go to the source of our final theology and there we discover that there is absolutely nothing in the revelation which states or infers that there is any hope for those who die without having heard of Christ” (*A Christian Philosophy of Missions*, p. 111).

- 10. Annihilationism and conditional mortality:** The conscious existence of the unsaved will cease at the time known to God. This view denies the eternal lostness of sinners, denying an everlasting conscious punishment apart from Christ, rather it holds to an Annihilationism and conditional immortality, softened by limiting its duration. This is also called “Conditionalism.” Edward Fudge wrote, “The term ‘conditionalist’ is used for the view that the wicked will suffer conscious punishment precisely measured by divine justice, but that they finally will perish in hell so as to become totally extinct forever” (*The First That Consumes*, p. xvi). Since 1988, the respected evangelical theologian John Stott has tentatively embraced Annihilationism, the “view that unbelievers are finally annihilated and thus do not experience torment that is eternal in duration.” (Peterson, 1995, p. 30)
- 11. Degrees of punishment in hell:** The unevangelized, though eternally lost, will suffer a varying degree of punishment in hell depending upon their awareness and rejection of the revealed truth. Richard Nicole wrote, “...there is no one who will have a legitimate grievance against the judgment. And indeed, the Bible makes it plain that there will be degrees of punishment, not in duration, but in severity” (“Universalism: Will Everyone be Saved?,” *Christianity Today*, Mar. 20, 1987, p. 38).
 “Such corporate dialogue and study will help ensure that we are not unconsciously allowing the present cultural mood to squeeze the Church into its own mould on this awesome subject of the destiny of those who are uninformed about Christ.” (Tunberg, 2006, p. 9)
- Many of these are either subcategories of the other or nearly synonymous. Therefore, there are three major categories of human responses to this difficult to accept biblical reality: restrictivism, Inclusivism and universalism.

Restrictivism – the unevangelized in this life are lost forever

Conservative missionaries are highly motivated because of their persuasion toward this position. Hudson Taylor...is widely reported as saying that he would not have gone to China had he not believed that the Chinese were lost and needed Christ (Hesselgrave, 2005, p. 55). Some soften this position by the teaching that the “degree of punishment” will reflect what they knew.

Although Christopher Little is not a strict restrictivist, he does maintain the need for special revelation, which he generously expands to include all forms of claimed revelation, but with a priority given to the biblical revelation as the benchmark of other types of revelation. Little agrees that the unsaved need to hear and believe the gospel of Christ according to the Scripture, but he broadens the scope of special revelation beyond the Scripture to include oral tradition, miraculous events, dreams, visions, angels, and human messengers of the biblical gospel (Little, 2000, pp. 118-131).

It is imperative that we understand that, in addition to those obligations placed upon missionaries to go and proclaim God's truth in a culturally understandable way, God places an obligation upon hearers to listen with open minds and hearts to understand what is being communicated. A Russian proverb says that men are like donkeys; to get them to go in the right direction one must grab them by the ears. ... The goal is to transmit the original meaning of the text insofar as the translator is able. Hearers/readers have a responsibility to “get the message” and respond to it (Hesselgrave, 2005, p. 68).

Inclusivism – salvation is available apart from special evangelization

Inclusivism holds that salvation is accessible apart from special evangelization (as long as they recognize their spiritual need and throw themselves on the mercy of God – whether they ever hear and believe the gospel or not).

Pinnock could not accept the narrow view of restrictivism joining the "Wider Hope" position that contends that all will ultimately be evangelized, if not before, then after, death. He holds that God's love, which defines his character, will not change when the sinner dies. Thus he claims that the unevangelized (in this life) will have a "grace-filled postmortem encounter" with Christ and then go to heaven.

The implication of popular eschatology [i.e., restrictivism] is that the downtrodden of this world, unable to call upon Jesus through no fault of their own, are to be rejected for eternity, giving the final victory to the tyrants who trampled them down. Knowing little but suffering in this life, the unevangelized poor will know nothing but more and worse suffering in the next (Pinnock, 1992, p. 183).

It appears that according to Pinnock, the only ones who finally will go to hell are those who refuse to accept Christ and actually prefer to not go to heaven with Christ.

Hesselgrave quotes William Crockett and James Sigountos who show that Inclusivism is not a new idea. They show that this has been a common view throughout Church history. Some examples of this position include Justin Martyr (ca. 100-165), John Chrysostom (ca. 347-407), Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531), and John Wesley (1703-1791) who believed that God would save the unreached who earnestly sought Christ -- even though they might never have heard the gospel (Hesselgrave, 2005, p. 55).

A modified form of Inclusivism, in my estimation, is the Reform view of Unconditional Election, where God arbitrarily chooses the unsaved and regenerates them, whether or not they ever hear the gospel in their lifetime. The emphasis on salvation being so totally of God implies that no man is necessary for men to be saved. This view was presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Toronto, Canada, in 2005, and will be discussed in the chapter on "Calvinism and Missions."

Universalism – all will be saved

Although there are a number of different theories explaining the universalistic position, they all hold that God's enduring love and eternal purpose will include everyone who has lived. Some contemporary writers who hold this view includes C.H. Dodd, A.T. Robinson, and Paul Knitter.

Not a real option for Bible-believing Christians and has little impact except in liberal circles.

Various Other Views

Hesselgrave describes seven other views that have been used to attempt to make slightly more palatable the notion of eternal damnation or the limited possibilities of the unsaved (pp. 57-59). Some of these views are classic illustrations of the primary three

categories of views of eternal destinies. It seems like theologians will clutch at anything to save the unevangelized short of doing everything possible, and encouraging all believers to see to it, that everyone in every generation hears and understands the gospel.

1. Acceptance of extrabiblical modes of **special revelation** (Little) which means that God can reveal himself in a variety of ways to individuals, especially through dreams, visions and emanations.
2. The **acceptability of “God-fearers”** (Anderson), whether or not they hear a clear presentation of the gospel. Many of the Charismatics hold this view to show that their encounter with God is really their second work of grace or a post-salvation experience.
3. A **“grace-filled postmortem encounter”** with God (Pinnock)
4. Whenever a sinner calls out to whatever gods are known them, it is interpreted by the God as a reaching out to the true God. (Knitter) Sincerity is the only factor.
5. **The “Melchizedek factor”** (Don Richardson)—assumes he knew God through general revelation (Gen 14:18-20; compare Ps 110:4; Heb 7:1-7) and it is the same type of general revelation that is found in other religions – certainly makes it easier for them to come to Christ
6. **Implicit Christians or implicit-faith** (Millard Erickson) – can be saved if they have responded to God in the sense of seeking “glory and honor and immortality” (Rom 2:7) – God will save them, because if they would have heard the gospel, God knows they would have accepted it.
7. **Annihilationism/conditionalism** (John R. W. Stott) – At the death of the unbeliever he becomes extinct. No person is actually immortal until an immortal soul is given at conversion. The unsaved do not survive death in any form. Stott calls this view the "conditional immortality" view (Edwards, 1988, pp. 313-320).
8. **Agnosticism** (C.S. Lewis): He claims that theologians do not know what God will do with those who have never heard, although his perspective is more from that of a philosopher perspective rather than a theologian.

Is it not frightfully unfair that this new life should be confined to people who have heard of Christ and been able to believe in Him? But the truth is God has not told us what His arrangements about the other people are. We do know that no man can be saved except through Christ; we do not know that only those who know Him can be saved through Him (Lewis, 1952, p. 50).

Variety of Views by other Religious Groups

The difficulty of accepting the biblical teaching of hell is not just difficult for post-modern Christians, but likewise for cults and false religions.

1. **Christian Science**, founded by spiritist Mary Baker Eddy, teaches that "there is no death." They believe that "heaven and hell are states of thought, not places. People experience their own heaven or hell right here on earth."
2. Edgar Cayce, a **Spiritist** and New Age prophet, said that "the destiny of the soul, as of all creation, is to become One with the Creator" and that no soul is ever lost.
3. **New Age** cult leader Sun Myung Moon of The **Unification Church** believes that "God will not desert any person eternally. By some means...they will be restored."

4. **Mormonism**, founded by occultist Joseph Smith, argues, "The false doctrine that the punishment to be visited upon erring souls is endless...is but a dogma of unauthorized and erring sectaries, at once unscriptural, unreasonable, and revolting."
5. **Jehovah's Witnesses**, founded by Charles Taze Russell maintains that the wicked are forever annihilated because "the teaching about a fiery hell can rightly be designated as a 'teaching of demons.'"
6. The Church of the New Jerusalem (**Swedenborgianism**), founded by Spiritist Emanuel Swedenborgh, emphasizes that God "does not condemn anyone to hell."
7. **Eckankar**, a New Age religion founded by Paul Twitchell and Darwin Gross, insists that "there is no death" ..and that there is no eternal hell.
8. **Lucis Trust and the Arcane School/Full Moon Meditation Groups**, established by New Age spiritist Alice Bailey, argue that "the fear of death is based upon...old erroneous teaching as to heaven and hell."
9. The **Love Family** (The Children of God), founded by Spiritist David Berg, views hell as a temporal purgatory: "The lake of fire is where the wicked go to get purged from their sins...to let them eventually come...out."
10. **Rosicrucianism**, an occult philosophy, declares that "the 'eternal damnation' of those who are not 'saved' does not mean destruction nor endless torture," and that "the Christian religion did not originally contain any dogmas about Hell."
11. **Unitarian Universalism** confesses the following: "It seems safe to say that no Unitarian Universalist believes in a resurrection of the body, a literal heaven or hell, or any kind of eternal punishment."
12. The **Theosophical Society**, founded by medium Helena P. Blavatsky, declares, "we positively refuse to accept the...belief in eternal reward or eternal punishment." Hence, "Death...is not...a cause for fear." (Rawlings, 1993, pp. 81-83)

Their ambivalence toward hell was reflected in Rayan Shaw's study of the mission focus within campus fellowships. The problem of universalism and the reality of hell were the most frequently noted problem hindering student involvement in world missions. Shaw writes:

There are many in the body of Christ who quietly are not sure what to make of hell. Though most Bible believing churches assert that apart from Christ people will suffer eternally in hell, some believers have a hard time bringing themselves to accept this truth deep in their hearts. In our pluralistic, politically correct society it is especially frowned upon. A leader in Colorado commented, "To adhere to something which cuts out such a large segment of society for such a horrible demise is seen as narrow and arrogant." (Van Rheenen, 2005, p. 169)

With great creativity and an ingenious way of putting a spin on the Bible text to make their view more appealing to the critic or religious constituent that they do not want to lose over this issue, moderate or liberal theologians attempt to justify their disbelief in the clear statements of Scripture and the overwhelming emphasis given by Jesus. Were this not the case, Jesus would never have had to go to the cross. Were any of these options possible, as Jesus said, "any other way," surely God would have accepted any alternative, instead of being forced to send His Son to the cross for the cruel punishment for our sins. So complete and final was the death-payment on the cross that God determined the only manner to find acceptance before a holy God would be a personal, definitive and

intentional trust in His sacrifice as the only hope for cleansing from the guilt of their sin. Unregenerate man is eternally lost.

Five Clear Teachings

Hesselgrave doubts that there will ever be a consensus of opinion if views are based on what we do not know, that is our speculations from our own views of the way we would order the universe if we were God. He proposes five teachings from Scriptures that are clear and certain (pp. 61-69).

"Belief in heaven and damnation is routinely dismissed today as a vestige of a less sophisticated era. The atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell, writing half a century ago, captured the ethos of the times when he quipped, 'Hell is neither so certain nor so hot as it used to be.'" (Van Rhee, 2005, p. 169) There is a consistency within the Christian church: One of the ways to measure the level of understanding the significance of hell can be measured by the commitment to world missions.

1. True Light Enlightens Everyone: everyone has heard.

"In him was life, and the life, was the light of men... The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world" John 1:4,9

"For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So that they are without excuse (Rom 1:19-20)

"Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world" (Rom 10:18)

This usually refers to indirect or general revelation that is evident through the observation of creation, conscience, history and reason. Some have received more than others, but everyone has some understanding or light. This may include a subjective form of special revelation, as the common experience of dreams that motivate some Muslims to accept Christ into their lives.

2. People love darkness more than God's light and turn a deaf ear to God's voice

"And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil." (John 3:19)

"God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day" (Rom 11:18)

"None is righteous, no not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." (Rom 3:10-12)

Not only have men and women NOT been passed by in the giving of revelation, but also their lifestyle reflects their REFUSAL of it. Hesselgrave quotes Darrell Bock who notes, "the term *ignorance* most often describes the lifestyle of the unsaved before conversion" to say that they have chosen to remain ignorant, rather than seek for the truth.

3. The degree of judgment is proportionate to the intensity of the light seen and clarity of the Word that is heard.

“While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light”
(John 12:36)

“For all have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law” (Rom 2:12)

Is God just in judging the unevangelized? Remember God is always just (Ps 89:14) when he judges the unevangelized. He cannot be criticized on the basis of our perspective, but rather He must be understood on the basis of His nature. Justice is the very nature of His person. It was justice that dictated the response of love to drive Christ to the cross to satisfy His justice.

The Scriptures indicate that whoever responds positively to the light available to him will receive more light from God. If a people reject the opportunities afforded them, then God removes the option of more light.

God’s judgment on people is based on what they have done with divine revelation. Jesus condemned the residence of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum because they would not repent in spite of their witnessing the great miracles he performed in their midst (Matt 11:20-24). The biblical description of the White Throne Judgment describes two books of everyone’s life history: the first is the book of life and the second records all one’s works, specifically all they did in response to the revelation of God’s will and word.

4. The missionary who comes to proclaim the gospel is vital to the plan of God

“He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.” (John 1:7-8)

“And thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else’s foundation, but as it is written, “Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.” (Rom 15:20-21)

Jesus gave the Great Commission to the early believers as a perpetual command to be enforced until the “end of the age” (Matt 28:20). Had this been obeyed, everyone on earth would have had ample opportunities to hear of Christ. Paul gave a series of rhetorical questions to establish the serious imperative of “going with the gospel.” This is and has always been God’s proof of His justice to give all men an ample opportunity.

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

How will they call on one in whom they have not believed?

How can they believe in one of whom they have not heard?

How can they hear with out someone preaching to them?

How can anyone preach to them unless someone is sent? (Rom 10:13-16)

Each of these questions is rhetorical waiting the obvious answer, “They can’t.” The only option that God’s Word gives to mankind is for a person to go to them with the message of salvation that they can understand. Think of this: a part of the motivation to evangelize the globe is to show how just God is because He leads and provides ample resources for every man to understand the gospel and God’s will. Is our life worth bringing honor to God’s reputation in the world by letting Him use us globally?

5. Only by hearing and believing in Christ during this life can men and women be saved.

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12)

“As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world (John 9:5)

“I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish...For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom 1:14, 16)

Millions go to hell each year for one primary reason: they were never told the gospel by those who know and believe in the gospel. Secondly, they are condemned because of their own sinfulness and response to the revelation they have been given.

It is imperative that we understand that, in addition to those obligations placed upon missionaries to go and proclaim God's truth in a culturally understandable way, God places an obligation upon hearers to listen with open minds and hearts to understand what is being communicated. A Russian proverb says that men are like donkeys; to get them to go in the right direction one must grab them by the ears. ... The goal is to transmit the original meaning of the text insofar as the translator is able. Hearers/readers have a responsibility to "get the message" and respond to it (Hesselgrave, 2005, p. 68).

Final Word on Hell

Within the current postmodern, pluralistic cultural context, Christian teaching on hell, while never particularly popular, is increasingly unacceptable. As early as 1932-33, in preparation for the International Missionary Council in Tambaram, India, William Hocking wrote in the infamous Layman's foreign Missionary Inquiry, "There is little disposition to believe that sincere and aspiring seekers after God in other religions are to be damned: it has become less concerned in any land to save men from eternal punishment than from the danger of losing the supreme good." (Van Rheenen, 2005, p. 169)

We have to leave the final word on the fate of men in the hands of our God: “Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen 18:25). He makes no mistakes.

How do we engage this trend?

Missionary recruiting and training during this time of cultural transformation is a colossal paradox. Moderns are training post moderns. In postmodern language, rationales are teaching emotionalist; cognitivists are mentoring experientialist; propositionalists are equipping narrativists. Consequently, many of the old models are being challenged publicly and privately. New mission agencies, more attuned to contemporary issues of culture and Christianity, are growing, and older agencies are declining (Van Rheenen, 2005, p. 176).

As long as the “contemporary issues” demote the motivation for world evangelism from the ultimate realities of heaven by the grace of God or hell by the lack of a Savior, into a humanistic, feeling-based evangelism and a god who overlooks sin, while wanting man to spend his time worshipping and fulfilling the American dream, is doomed to corruption and demise.

His final words took all reality into account. He left us with the simple focus with all eternity at stake: “Go and make disciples of all nations...” Matt 28:19

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Personal Application Question

What do you consider to be the importance of the Bible teaching on hell for the motivation for world missions? Give your reasons and personal response.

Study Guide Questions for Quiz

1. How do postmodern Christians want to define the motivation for missions?
2. What is the exclusivism that is so offensive to modern man?
3. What are the three types of arguments against an exclusive message?
4. Define in your own words these terms:
 - a. Universalism
 - b. Inclusivism
 - c. Qualified universalism
 - d. Extended probation
 - e. General Revelation as sufficient
 - f. Extraordinary applications
 - g. Probably faith
 - h. Agnosticism
 - i. Traditionalism
 - j. Conditional mortality
 - k. Degrees of punishment
5. Why are missionaries motivated by Restrictivism?
6. What is the term for salvation being available without evangelization?
7. What is the view of extra biblical special revelation?
8. Are “God-fearers” believers?
9. What is a “grace-filled postmortem encounter”?
10. Define the “Melchizedek factor?”
11. What is John Stott’s “conditionalism?”
12. Why is C.S. Lewis agnostic on the issue?
13. What do these groups teach concerning hell:
 - a. Christian Science
 - b. Unification Church
 - c. Mormonism
 - d. Unitarianism
 - e. Theosophical Society
14. What does Rayan Shaw believe to be the major hinderance to student involvement in world evangelism?
15. What is the “light that enlightens everyone?”
16. How does what a person loves effect their just consequences?
17. What are the decrees of punishment mean for the unsaved?
18. What is the key element in God’s plan for the issue of hell?
19. In all of God’s revelation, what is the one hope for man to avoid hell?