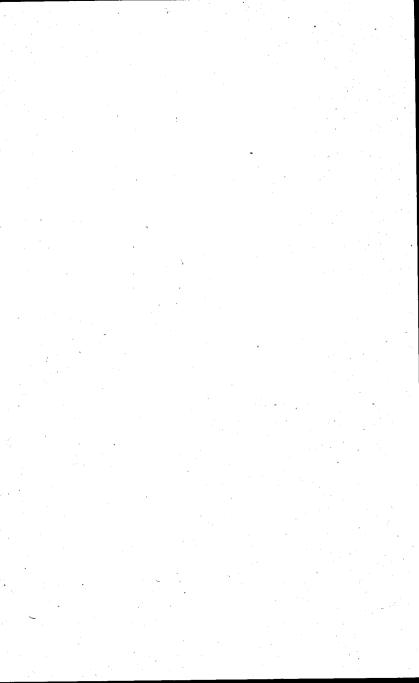
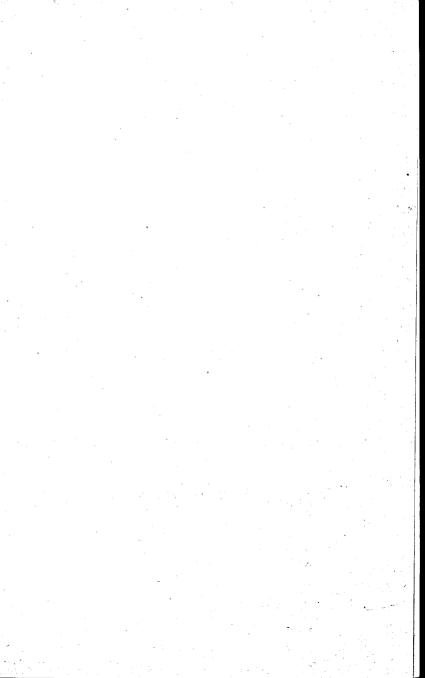
# THE WARATH OF COOL

**Eryl Davies** 



## THE WRATH OF GOD



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THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF WRATH, FINAL JUDGMENT AND HELL

Eryl Davies

**EVANGELICAL PRESS OF WALES** 

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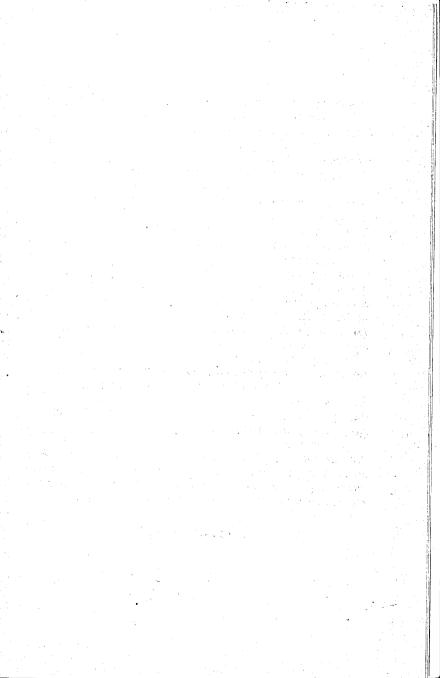
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### **Foreword**

Having been present when these messages were first delivered, and witnessed their sobering effect on speaker and congregation alike, I considered it an honour and a privilege to be asked to write a few words commending their publication. Having now had opportunity to consider again their impassioned plea for the faithful declaration of the whole counsel of God—rather than a judicious selection of themes more palatable to human taste—one wonders what preacher

among us these days is worthy of such a privilege!

With a ruthlessness that brooks no argument the truths affirmed in this booklet have been firmly rejected by two, if not three, generations of 'Christians' in our land. For them they represented merely the primitive gropings of a Christianity not fully come of age, the accumulated debris of myths fabricated in the period between the days of our Lord on earth and the time when His teachings and the writings of His apostles were incorporated in the canon of the New Testament. Little did they realize that in making such claims they were effectively undermining the authority of Scripture in all its parts. For, as this booklet clearly demonstrates, the entire body of revealed truth stands or falls together. The rejection of parts of God's revelation entails the destruction of the whole. The doctrines of wrath and judgment in the Scriptures are found inextricably intertwined with all other strands of biblical truth, the Sermon on the Mount itself being no exception. Thus, in applying the scissors to neatly trim off its unacceptable edges, these people were effectively committing the whole of Scripture, and its message to sinners, to the shredding machine—with calamitous consequences for church and society alike.

At the heart of this process were the doctrines propounded in this booklet. Indeed, no other truths were treated with such arrogant disdain—so much so that those of us once tutored in this approach, whose eyes have since been opened to the wonderful truth of God's intervention in grace to save lost sinners, have to confess to our shame that we have often lacked the courage in our own day to deliver this message to the people with the urgency, firmness and passion it deserves.

That is why this book is addressed in the first instance to ministers and preachers of the gospel. It deserves and it needs to be read, however, by a wider public, for there are few publications available today that confront men and women with these awesome realities in their true biblical perspective, in order that they might be saved.

In an age that fondly believes that, if there is a God at all, He exists to serve our ends—and woe betide Him if those ends and interests are challenged!—small wonder that men resist the thought that the reverse is true. Yet such indisputably is the case. God made man for Himself. For that reason He gave him a soul which would enable him to enjoy God's presence beyond the brief span of this earthly existence. This book tells us clearly what will happen if we accede to God's wishes, and what will happen if we do not.

I make but one appeal to all who read—that they look up the Scriptures to which the author refers. He has faithfully brought them to our notice and endeavoured to explain their significance with a due sense of their awesome reality. Let our argument be not with him but with the great Author Himself, whose words we would do well to heed.

J. ELWYN DAVIES

# **Preface**

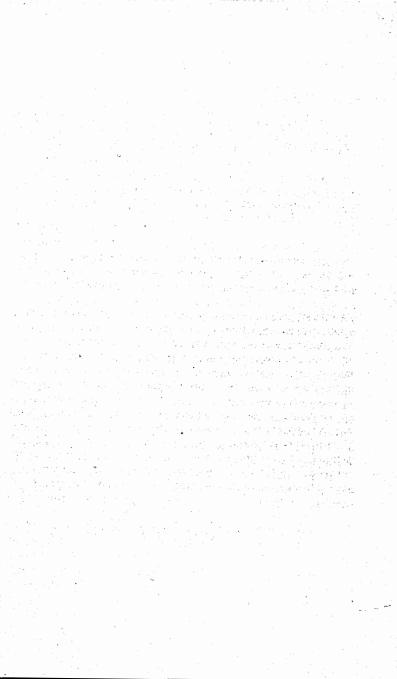
The contents of this book formed the substance of addresses delivered at the annual Ministers' Conference of the Evangelical Movement of Wales at Bryn-y-groes, Bala, in June 1981. To many ministers in both England and Wales the 'Bala Conference' is a precious time of instruction, fellowship and conferring together. Although on this occasion we greatly missed the presence and leadership of Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones who had so recently been taken from our midst, we found the conference a most profitable time in which God graciously encouraged and challenged us. To speak in such a fellowship and atmosphere was both a privilege and delight.

I am grateful to the conference members for the way in which they received these talks and I am happy to respond to their requests that the talks be published. To ensure that the basic biblical principles are kept clear and relevant, I have resisted the temptation to expand various aspects of the subject. Mrs Elizabeth Prichard, one of my church members, was responsible for typing and preparing my manuscript for publication. I greatly appreciate her encouraging and invaluable help.

As readers will quickly discover, this is not an abstract, academic study of doctrine, but an attempt to establish and elucidate biblical truth concerning the wrath of God in the practical context of evangelism and, particularly, the preaching of the gospel.

May God be pleased to bless His truth to all who read these pages, and stir us in the faithful discharge of our responsibilities in these challenging days of opportunity.

**ERYL DAVIES** 



# 1. The Wrath of God

MORE than one writer has drawn attention to the fact that there are more references in the Bible to the anger and wrath of God than there are to the love of God,¹ and a careful reading of a concordance will quickly confirm this fact. If further evidence is required, we can add that there are in the Old Testament alone over twenty Hebrew words used to describe the wrath of God, and these words are used nearly 600 times. Contrary to popular opinion, the New Testament retains and develops this emphasis, so that one writer claims with justification that 'the Bible could be called the book of God's wrath, for it is full of portrayals of divine retribution, from the cursing and banishment of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 to the overthrow of "Babylon" and the great assizes of Revelation'.²

Besides defining the wrath of God in this chapter, I intend to provide biblical examples of God's wrath in action before finally considering some difficulties in relation to this doctrine.

#### A definition

The attribute of wrath describes the controlled and permanent opposition of God's holy nature to all sin. Such abhorrence of sin on God's part is not a whim or a mere decision of the will, nor is it uncontrolled temper or capriciousness, as some imagine, but the reaction of His glorious and perfect nature to sin. For this reason, wrath is as basic to the divine nature as is love; and without wrath God would cease to be God.

- 1. One example is A. W. Pink, The Attributes of God (Baker), p.97.
- 2. J. I. Packer, Knowing God (Hodder & Stoughton, 1973), p.166.

Wrath, therefore, describes God's permanent opposition to sin, an opposition which has been and is still being revealed in the world. In his exegesis of Romans 1:18, Professor Tasker rightly contends that this revelation of divine wrath is not a 'prophetic present' (that is, a wrath which 'is going to be revealed' in the final day of wrath, as in Romans 2:5); nor is it a 'strict present' (namely, a wrath which 'is at this moment being revealed'—its manifestation thus being restricted to Paul's day); but rather, argues Tasker, it is a 'frequentative present', that is, a wrath which 'is continually being revealed'.3

#### Manifestations of God's wrath

Both the Bible and history confirm the correctness of this exegesis. For example, the disharmony within nature and the existence of pain and death are eloquent testimonies to the divine wrath, as were the Flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. When Israel disobeyed God, whether, for example, in the wilderness or in the period of the Judges or prior to the Exile, God's wrath was regularly stirred into activity against their sin. The destruction of both the Temple and Jerusalem in AD 70, involving the massacre of over a million Jews and the dispersing of others, must be similarly explained by the wrath of God. 'How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers!' warns the Lord Jesus. 'There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people' (Luke 21:23, NIV).

On the other hand, this wrath is sometimes expressed differently; such is the case in Romans 1:24,26 and 28, when God withdraws, in varying degrees, His restraints from sinners, thus allowing them uncontrolled indulgence in the most detestable and hideous forms of sin. While such indulgence is temporarily attractive, yet God's justice and wrath ensure that sinners reap what they sow. Suffering, violence, strife, anarchy, wars, immorality, crime and unhappiness follow in the wake of such sin as the manifestations of God's wrath.

<sup>3.</sup> R. V. G. Tasker, The Biblical Doctrine of the Wrath of God (Tyndale Press, 1951), p.9.

Governments, magistrates, God-honouring laws, godly parents, a holy church, the knowledge of the Word, are some of the means God uses to restrain and control sin. Through such means God exercises a preventing and restraining influence upon sinners, with the result that they are often unable to indulge in the grosser sins which rage in their hearts. In this way sin is curbed and the standards of justice and morality are maintained and enjoyed within society. There are times, however, when the holy God withdraws these restraints and in His wrath abandons people to the pursuit of their evil desires. The contemporary situation in our own land needs to be understood in the light of this basic principle.

#### The day of wrath

The wrath of God, however, is not only manifested in the 'frequentative present', as in Romans 1:18. The Bible also teaches that this divine wrath will burst in like a flood upon the ungodly in the final 'day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God' (Rom. 2:5). It was this final manifestation of wrath to which John the Baptist referred when a group of Pharisees and Sadducees approached him one day requesting baptism. 'You brood of vipers!', he replied, 'Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?' (Matt. 3:7,NIV). He then urged upon them the necessity of true conversion as the only means of escaping this wrath, which he symbolized in terms of 'fire' in verses 10 and 12.

Some of our Lord's parables stress this point, as, for example, in the imagery of the final 'harvest' at the end of the world; similarly the apostle Paul, speaking of his fellow-countrymen, says, 'thou . . . treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath' (Rom. 2:5). Whilst unbelievers are in this world 'the children of wrath' (Eph. 2:3), and experience the wrath of God at death, there is in addition 'the day of wrath', when the divine anger will fall upon the ungodly in a way which will be unrestrained.

In Romans 5:9 Paul again refers to this eschatological wrath which is to be unleashed upon the unbelieving world at the day of judgment, but here he speaks of it as a wrath from

which believers will be saved through Christ. This point is underlined by the apostle in 1 Thessalonians 1:10, where we read that the Lord Jesus has delivered us from the *orgē* or 'wrath to come'. John Flavel wrote:

He died not to procure a mitigation or abatement of the rigour or severity of the sentence, but to rescue his people fully from all degrees of wrath. So that there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ, Romans 8:1. All the wrath of God to the last drop, was squeezed out into that bitter cup which Christ drank off, and wrung out the very dregs thereof.<sup>4</sup>

It is in the Apocalypse, however, that the most vivid descriptions are given of this impending wrath. In the sixth chapter, when the sixth seal is opened, symbolizing the introduction of the judgment day, a description is given of the accompanying signs, such as the earthquake, the darkness of the sun, the moon's blood-like appearance, the rolling up of the heavens like a piece of paper, and the moving out of position of the mountains and islands. It is not, however, these great cataclysmic changes, nor death, that seize the ungodly with terror, but rather the presence of God and the 'wrath of the Lamb'. (A similar terror is voiced in some of the Old Testament prophecies. In the words of the prophet Zephaniah, 'The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord; the mighty man shall cry there bitterly' (1:14). Joel adds, 'the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?' (2:11), while the question posed by Malachi is, 'But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?' (3:2).) Here then in the Apocalypse we hear the universal cry of unbelievers: 'the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?' Rather than face this wrath of God, people will vainly request annihilation for themselves.

Then in Revelation 14 our attention is drawn to the victory of the church. Here a description of the bliss of the Lord's people is followed by a series of warnings to mankind of the

<sup>4.</sup> The Works of John Flavel (Banner of Truth, 1968), vol. 1, p.470.

events preceding the *parousia*, and the warning loudly issued by the third angel is that the divine wrath will fall upon all those who 'worship the beast' (vv.9,10). Here and now, of course, the wrath of God is mixed with His grace and kindness, but in the last day this wrath will be unmixed and unrelieved.

Finally, in chapter 19, after the account of the marriage of the Lamb, we are provided with a description of our victorious, conquering Saviour, here called 'Faithful and True'. He is pictured at His second appearing seated on a white horse 'smiting the nations' and 'ruling them with a rod of iron'. In other words, Christ treads 'the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God' (v.15) by executing the divine sentence upon the ungodly.

It is within this context and against this background that we must view our ministries. The wrath of God is a fact and reality that we must preach, for it will break out upon the whole world one day, and even at death it sends the ungodly

to hell.

#### A basic question

At this point a fundamental question must be raised as to the propriety of claiming that God reacts to sin in this way. Is not this a reaction which is unworthy of God? In a society where tolerance and permissiveness regulate the behaviour of the majority of people, the wrath of God is naturally regarded by them as an anachronism which is unintelligible and unreasonable. Here then is an objection which undermines not only the gospel, but the character of God Himself.

Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones, commenting on Romans 3:25, argues that there is only one reason why people object to the doctrine of the wrath of God: 'it is', he claims, 'that they substitute Greek philosophy for the biblical revelation.' <sup>5</sup> He is correct. To the ancient Greek philosophers the concept of wrath was obnoxious; they viewed it as a mere defect of

D.M. Lloyd-Jones, Romans: An Exposition of Chapters 3.20-4.25, Atonement and Justification (Banner of Truth, 1970), p.79.

character, which needed to be eliminated from people, and even from God. They regarded God as an impassive Being who was incapable of reacting to human behaviour. Under this dominant influence, scholars and theologians throughout the present century have rejected the biblical concept of the divine wrath as something which is 'unworthy' of God and 'primitive' in origin.

In contrast, the Holy Spirit has brought us under the supreme authority of the Scriptures rather than Greek philosophy. In addition, as ministers of the Word we have been called and equipped by God to preach His infallible self-revelation.

It is at this point that we need to examine ourselves, our beliefs and our preaching critically. Are we declaring the whole counsel of God? Does the glory of God's perfections permeate our thinking and preaching, or are we in danger of reducing God in the eyes of our congregations to a benign and helpless grandfather figure? Some of us may be assailed by lingering doubts concerning the divine wrath and hell, or we may be reluctant to preach this doctrine for various reasons. One of the reasons, I submit, is our failure to appreciate the ineffable glory of the triune God. Consequently His holiness and wrath have not been given a proper biblical emphasis and balance in our preaching.

Allow me to suggest two contributory factors here. One is a wrong pietistic emphasis, which seeks in the main a devotional blessing or uplift, and which then shrinks from grappling with the revelation of the glory of God. Do not misunderstand me. I am not depreciating the experimental, but I am arguing that a proper experimental approach must be God-centred, and I fear that, generally speaking, we are not digging into the riches of the Word in order to gaze with awe and wonder on the glories of God. There is another factor too, and that is our difficulty in recognizing the awfulness of sin. If our view of sin is superficial and tolerant, then we are more liable to think at times that God's opposition to sin is rather extreme, with the result that we tone down (subconsciously at least) the biblical emphasis.

Writing in 1700, the Rev. John Morgan, Vicar of Aberconwy, declared: 'Let not the one who understands the perfection of God marvel that the sinner deserves eternal punishment.' 6

To underline this important point, I want briefly to relate the perfection of God's moral nature to sin in the context of Isaiah 6, for unless we see this important relationship, our understanding of God's wrath will be defective. There are two main points I want to establish in this context.

#### 1. The majesty of God

First of all, let us consider sin as an affront to the *majesty* of God. Our forefathers viewed sin in this way primarily, as an offence and insult against the infinite dignity and majesty of God.

Consider how this majesty is described in the opening words of Isaiah 6. He is, for example, 'the Lord'. The Hebrew word is adonai, which means He is the One who is able to carry out all His purposes. There is no weakness or failure in God at all. God is the Almighty One who declares, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure' (Isa. 46:10). He is also described as 'sitting upon a throne', and here we are introduced to His sovereign rule over heaven and earth. We are then told that He is 'high and lifted up', that is. He is apart from us and wholly other than ourselves, transcendent and exalted above all. Such is the infinite majesty of God that He is surrounded by seraphs who cry out incessantly before Him the chorus 'Holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts . . . ' (Isa. 6:3). If you view sin in this context, you will not marvel that God is angry with the sinner and that He determines to punish him in hell.

Sin is an offence and insult against this glorious Person. 'When they knew God,' writes Paul, 'they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but . . . changed the glory of the incorruptible God . . .' (Rom. 1:21,23). Sin involves a despising of the divine majesty and greatness; it is an offence against an infinite Being. As dreadful as hell is, affirms

<sup>6.</sup> University College of North Wales Library, Bangor MS 421, p.302.

Jonathan Edwards, it is 'not more so than the Being is great and glorious against whom you have sinned . . . The wrath of God that you have heard of . . . is not more dreadful than that Majesty which you have despised and trampled on is awful.'

It is in relation to God that sin assumes its essential significance: it is not a mere defect or weakness in man, or an unsociable action, but rather an offence against God. 'Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight,' confessed David (Ps. 51:4). 'How then can I do this great wickedness,' exclaims Joseph to Potiphar's wife, 'and sin against God?' (Gen. 39:9). Sin is active rebellion against God, opposition to His authority, contempt of His person, the breaking of His law and the despising of His word and love.

We see this illustrated in the sin of our first parents, when they refused to submit to and obey the revealed will of God. In the words of the Puritan Samuel Bolton, 'Sin is the practical-blasphemy of all the name of God. It is the dare of His justice, the rape of His mercy, the jeer of His patience, the slight of His power, the contempt of His love.' Sin, says Ralph Venning, is 'an anti-will to God's will', or in the words of Thomas Manton, 'an affront to God's authority', 'contempt of God Himself' and 'unsubjection to God'. It is 'downright opposition to God and His Law', adds John Owen, in which 'the whole authority of God, and therein God Himself, is despised'. God has created all things for His pleasure and glory; yet man has defied his Creator, and even attempts to remove God from His throne.

We must warn sinners of the One against whom they sin—that they are sinning against the all-perfect, wise, almighty, holy, infinite, loving God, who has given us all things richly to enjoy. Here is the evil of sin: it is committed against this great God, who will nevertheless ensure that His holy name will be glorified in creation, whether in the salvation of the elect or the damnation of the ungodly.

<sup>7.</sup> The Works of Jonathan Edwards (Banner of Truth, 1974), vol.2, p.887.

<sup>8.</sup> These definitions are quoted in E. F. Kevan, *The Grace of Law* (Carey Kingsgate Press, 1964), p.49.

#### 2. The holiness of God

Let us consider sin, secondly, in relation to the *holiness* of God. As the seraphs gazed upon the holy nature of God they chanted the anthem of Isaiah 6:3. I want to draw attention here to two aspects of God's holiness.

First of all, the holiness of God means that He is free from all sin. It is difficult for us to appreciate this truth, for we are ourselves so accustomed to sin. Sin is active within our lives as believers and preachers, and it is acted before our eyes in the world and, regrettably, in the church too. We live in a world dominated and permeated by sin, so it is far from easy for us to conceive of God as being free of all sin. Yet this is the testimony of the Bible: 'God is light, and in him is no darkness at all' (1 John 1:5). There is no trace of evil or imperfection in God; His nature shines with a purity that compels the seraphs to veil their faces in reverence.

Secondly, the holiness of God means that He hates sin with an intense hatred. Any deviation from His pure and spotless nature, and from the law which mirrors that holiness, is abhorrent to Him. Let me illustrate this point, for it is

foundational to our appreciation of the divine wrath.

As a consequence of regeneration and the continuous work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification, believers have themselves a hatred of sin which is universal. I recall dealing with a particularly sordid problem on one occasion, and being compelled to leave the room with a feeling of deep abhorrence. One felt angry and sickened at what one heard. Or consider the reaction of the apostle Paul when he saw the city of Athens wholly given over to idolatry. Luke records that 'his spirit was stirred in him' (Acts 17:16); that is, Paul was angry, and there was a fire of indignation and detestation burning within him.

We must, however, multiply this kind of reaction millions and millions of times over before we begin to approximate to God's intense and perfect hatred of sin. 'For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness,' writes the psalmist, 'neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity . . . the Lord

will abhor the bloody and deceitful man' (Ps. 5:4-6). The holiness that even the angels possess is by comparison like the feeble light of a matchstick on a dark country road compared with the blaze and light of the sun at midday. Such is the contrast, and if we are to preach God's wrath with conviction and urgency, there is need for us as preachers to be gripped and moved by this aspect of the divine glory.

It is because God hates sin that His wrath is stirred against the sinner, but 'it is our insensitivity to sin', writes Jonathan Edwards, 'that prevents our realizing how hell-deserving sin is; our devilish dispositions make sin not appear "horrid". <sup>9</sup> Is this not true? Audacious, proud sinners ridicule the concept of divine wrath; even some 'evangelicals' titter in incredulity at the mention of hell; but these people do not reckon with the holiness of God. 'Hell', remarked one preacher, 'is scorched through and through by the holiness of God.' Therefore 'to sin', wrote Isaac Watts, 'is not a light and trifling matter'.

How hateful is sin to us? Are the truths of the wrath and holiness of God, for us, only theories which leave us soundly unmoved? One thing is certain. If we fail to reckon with the infinite holiness of God, the wrath of God will always remain for us a difficult doctrine. God hates all sin, including the sins committed by Christians. His holy nature cannot compromise with sin or tolerate it anywhere; not even on the cross did the holy God change His attitude towards sin, but He punished it in the Person of our Redeemer, thus magnifying His justice and holiness. One of the reasons why Martin Luther distinguished between the merciful wrath of God and the wrath of His severity was because of God's universal hatred of sin. The merciful wrath of God is shown to the saints, leading them to repentance and faith. While God chastises and humbles believers for their sin. His wrath towards them remains a merciful wrath; but the wrath of His severity He reserves for the ungodly, and it always leads to hell.

John Gerstner, Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell (Baker, 1980), p.81.

#### Evangelism

Before I conclude this brief study of the divine wrath, I want to relate this doctrine to evangelism, and more especially to our work as preachers of the gospel.

In 2 Peter 3 the apostle gives us a twofold reason why the day of the Lord has not yet come. The first reason concerns the character of God, namely, His eternity and faithfulness (vv.8,9). The second reason, which I want to emphasize, has to do with the purpose of God, and in this context there are three points which can be underlined and applied.

First, Peter tells us that God is 'longsuffering' towards us. While God's wrath is a fact, yet He is extremely patient and forbearing with sinners. The way in which John Elias disciplined his children is an instructive example of long-suffering. He firmly believed in correcting and punishing his children, but on the first offence he would only rebuke the child. If the offence was repeated, Elias would issue a further rebuke, but this time, in addition, he would extract a promise that the child would not misbehave again. When the bad behaviour was repeated a third time, John Elias used a rod to punish the child, but first of all he prayed with his wife, beseeching God's mercy for their child. Elias was certainly not guilty of impetuous or bad-tempered behaviour towards his children; his response to their sin was a controlled and patient one.

Now Peter is saying something similar in this verse. The wrath of God is the controlled reaction of God's holy nature to sin, but it is a wrath He holds back for as long as possible. He will justly punish sinners, but He stays His hand of wrath for as long as possible, as He did in the days of Noah and prior to the Exile. The reason, then, why this awful day of wrath has not yet arrived is owing to God's kindness and longsuffering towards us.

When faced with suffering and the desperate needs of other people, even Christians can be indifferent and heartless in

<sup>10.</sup> A most helpful biography which this writer commends is John Elias, Life and Letters by Edward Morgan (Banner of Truth, 1973).

their response. We know, for example, that unbelievers are in the greatest danger, yet our attempts to reach them with the gospel are pathetic and half-hearted. Our Lord wept over Jerusalem, but it is a rare occurrence today for His people to weep in prayer for the vast multitudes of people who are speeding towards hell. Are we projecting our own heartlessness and indifference on to God? If so, we are misrepresenting Him, for He burns in love and passionate concern for sinners. Peter continues by saying He is 'not willing that any should perish'. God is not a heartless being. 'As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked' (Ezek. 33:11). Hell is a dreadful punishment, but God does not gloat over the prospect of hell or the punishment of sinners in hell.

The final statement to be noted here is 'but that all should come to repentance'. Although God's purpose is the saving of His elect, His goodness and love invite and command all to repentance. Yet, according to verse 10, the doors will be closed one day, the end will come, and the day of grace will pass away. As preachers of the gospel we find ourselves today in a day of grace and opportunity. The great day of the Lord's wrath has not yet come. So, while there is still time, we must declare to sinners the glorious gospel of Christ.

# 2. Final Judgment

In much the same way as the divine wrath culminates in the great day of wrath, so the judgment of God upon sinners reaches its climax in the final judgment. 'The Lord is a God of judgment,' says Isaiah (30:18), and He is so continually, both in the affairs of this life and more personally at death, when our destinies are sealed in private and personal judgment (Heb. 9:27). Nevertheless, the Scriptures also look forward to a final judgment, which is associated in the Old Testament with 'the day of the Lord' (Amos 5:18ff; Zeph. 1:14ff; Mal. 4:1, etc.), and in the New Testament with the personal return of the Lord Jesus in glory (e.g. Matt. 25:31-46).

Dispensationalists and pre-millennialists believe that there are at least three different final judgments. First of all, they distinguish a judgment of risen and living believers, which will take place immediately at the second coming of Christ. The purpose of this judgment will be to distribute rewards and vindicate the Lord's people. Then, they teach, some seven years later, at the day or revelation of Christ immediately following the great tribulation, there will be another judgment in which the Gentile nations will be judged as nations. Thirdly, a thousand years later, they claim, will follow the judgment of the unbelieving dead, which will take place before the great white throne.

It is my conviction, however, that the Scriptures speak not of several judgments, but of one judgment at the end of the world. For example, the Lord warns, 'Many will say to me in that day...' (Matt. 7:22); further, the apostle Paul declares, 'he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world

in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained' (Acts 17:31); Peter, too, speaks of the heavens and the earth being 'reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men' (2 Pet. 3:7). I do not intend to argue this position here: instead, I want to underline basic principles relating to the final judgment which are relevant to the theme of God's wrath and also to the preaching of the gospel.

There are four aspects of the final judgment which I want

briefly to emphasize:

#### (a) Its inseparable relationship to the wrath of God

Rather than being a change of subject, final judgment is necessarily related to the character and glory of God. We can observe this in several ways.

In the first place, the law by which God will judge people is not an arbitrary standard, but the expression of His holy nature and will. It is the One who is *holy*, declares Peter, who 'judgeth according to every man's work' (1 Pet. 1:17).

Again, God's justice is inseparably related to this final day of judgment. The justice of God is the attribute by which He deals in vengeance with all the violations of His law, and in the final judgment He will dispense rewards and punishments both to humans and angels. All the injustices, wickedness, hypocrisy and irregularities that mar the life of the world will be punished then, and this retributive justice will be a signal expression of the wrath of God. In this world it often seems as if corruption and might prevail rather than justice, and sometimes there seems to be no God in heaven. But although God allows injustice to continue here, He records human deeds in His book, and He has appointed Christ to judge the world and execute a righteous judgment.

Furthermore, as God's supreme purpose in the world is His own glory, the final judgment will provide a glorious display of His majesty and authority. This will be a public judgment, as distinct from a private one as at death; it will involve the judgment of body and soul and will be confirmatory in character. This public, universal judgment will be the platform on which God will display to the whole world His

glorious Person, including His fierce wrath, His strict justice and His amazing love. We must view the final judgment, then, as a necessary and glorious expression and vindication of the justice and wrath of God.

#### (b) Christ Himself the Judge

In His mediatorial role Christ will be the Judge. As He Himself tells us, God the Father has 'given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man' (John 5:27). The privilege, then, of judging men and angels has been granted to Christ as part of His reward and exaltation for His obedience 'unto death, even the death of the cross' (Phil. 2:8). 'Judgment', explains John Flavel, 'is the act of the whole undivided Trinity. The Father and Spirit judge, as well as Christ, in respect of authority and consent, but it is the act of Christ, in respect of visible management and execution.' Thus, since the Father and the Holy Spirit judge by Him, the Lord can say without contradiction, 'the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son' (John 5:22).

The act of judging relates, of course, to the kingly office of the Lord Jesus. Because of His humiliation He did not regularly exercise this kingly office when He was upon earth, though we see examples of His kingship in His triumphant entry into Jerusalem prior to His death, and also in the title Pilate wrote over His cross—'This is Jesus the King of the Jews'. In the final judgment, however, this kingly office of the Saviour will be apparent for all to see.

Jonathan Edwards, in his usually thorough way, suggests six reasons for the appropriateness of Christ being appointed judge of the world rather than the Father:

- 1. God seeth fit, that he who is in the human nature, should be the judge of those who are of the human nature.
- 2. Christ hath this honour . . . given him, as a suitable reward for his sufferings.
- 1. The Works of John Flavel (Banner of Truth, 1968), vol.1, p.525.

- 3. It is needful that Christ should be the judge of the world, in order that he may finish the work of redemption . . . Now, the redemption of fallen man . . . is actually fulfilled, in converting sinners . . . in carrying them on in the way of grace . . . and in finally raising their bodies to life, in glorifying them, in pronouncing the blessed sentence upon them, in crowning them with honour and glory in the sight of men and angels, and in completing and perfecting their reward.
- 4. It was proper that he who is appointed king of the church should rule till he should have put all his enemies under his feet; in order to which, he must be the judge of his enemies, as well as of his people... and then he will deliver up the kingdom to the Father: 1 Cor. 15:24,25... it is proper that he who at present reigns, and is carrying on the war against those who are of the opposite kingdom, should have the honour of obtaining the victory, and finishing the war.
- 5. It is for the abundant comfort of the saints that Christ is appointed to be their judge . . . the same person who spilled his blood for them hath the determination of their state left with him . . . What matter of joy to them will it be at the last day, to lift up their eyes, and behold the person in whom they have trusted for salvation . . . and whose voice they have often heard inviting them to himself for protection and safety, coming to judge them.
- 6. That Christ is appointed to be the judge of the world, will be for the more abundant conviction of the ungodly... How justly will they be condemned by him whose salvation they have rejected... and whom they have pierced by their sins!<sup>2</sup>

We must proclaim, as did the apostle, that the One who died for sinners is the King who will return gloriously to earth one day and judge all men: 'God... hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained' (Acts 17:30,31). God does not merely invite or beseech sinners, but He also commands them to repent. On the authority of God's Word we too must command sinners in this authoritative way.

 The Works of Jonathan Edwards (Banner of Truth, 1974), vol.2, pp.193-4.

#### (c) The majesty of the Judge

'If Felix trembled when Paul preached of judgment (Acts 24:25),' exclaims Thomas Watson, 'how will sinners tremble when they shall see Christ come to judgment!' Certainly the majesty of the scene will be breath-taking, especially when the Judge Himself appears in His unveiled glory to judge mankind.

The brief glimpses we have in the New Testament of Christ's glory during His earthly ministry help us to appreciate something of the majesty of His appearance at the final judgment. Matthew, in his account of the transfiguration, tells us that the Lord Jesus was 'transfigured', that is, 'transformed' (Matt. 17:2). Luke uses a different word. saying that 'the fashion of his countenance was altered', that is, while His face remained the same, its appearance was transformed (Luke 9:29). According to Matthew, 'his face did shine as the sun'—'with an innate, inherent light', suggests Matthew Henry, 'the more sensibly glorious, because it suddenly broke out, as it were, from behind a black cloud'.4 His clothes, too, were 'white as the light'. The explanation for this, of course, is that His whole body was altered just as His face was, and the light of His glory shone through His clothes. So Luke could describe them as 'glistening', for He was one blaze of celestial glory.

On the last day, however, what the world will see will be Christ's Person in unveiled and magnificent glory, and this will be an awe-inspiring sight. Let us consider briefly three descriptions of this scene in the New Testament. The first is our Lord's own description: He pictures the Son of Man accompanied by the angels and seated 'upon the throne of his glory'—a throne of unimaginable splendour, matching the splendour of its occupant (Matt. 25:31). Secondly, in 2 Thessalonians 1:7 we find the apostle Paul using the Greek word apokalupsis to describe the descent of Christ from

<sup>3.</sup> Thomas Watson, A Body of Divinity (Banner of Truth), p.218.

Matthew Henry's Commentary (Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1953), vol.5, p.242.

heaven: the Lord in His glory will then be fully 'disclosed' and 'uncovered' for the entire world to see. At the same time, the accompanying angels will be surrounded by fire, indicating the holiness of God manifest in judgment. The final picture is John's vision of 'a great white throne, and him that sat on it' (Rev. 20:11). The appearance of Christ upon this throne is so terrifying that earth and heaven run away from Him in fear. Jesus Christ will then be clearly revealed as the Judge, and all creatures will be compelled to acknowledge His deity and glory.

#### (d) The basis of judgment

While angels will assist Christ in judgment (Matt. 13:41,42; 25:31), it is clear that the fallen angels will be judged themselves (Matt. 8:29; 1 Cor. 6:3; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6), as well as every human person, whether alive or dead (Eccl. 12:14; Matt. 25:32; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:12).

#### Judgment of believers

Believers themselves will be judged in the last day, although, of course, they will not be liable for *condemnatory* judgment, for they have been justified through Christ and eternally saved from the wrath to come. In considering the significance of this judgment for the elect we can appeal to several verses.

The words found in 2 Corinthians 5:10 are pertinent and extremely challenging, showing that there can be no question but that all believers will be judged: 'For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.'

Several words in this verse deserve comment. Bengel reminds us that the word 'appear' means that 'we must all stand revealed in our true character before the judgment seat of Christ'. There will be no possibility of pretence or deception before the omniscient Judge. We shall be laid bare before Him, 'stripped of every outward façade of respect-

ability', writes P. E. Hughes, 'and openly revealed in the full and true reality of one's character. All our hypocrisies and concealments, all our secret, intimate sins of thought and deed, will be open to the scrutiny of Christ.' <sup>5</sup>

The thought of 'the judgment seat of Christ' should not depress us, but rather serve as a stimulus to greater zeal and obedience. 'Let us then imagine Christ's judgment seat to be present now,' pleads Chrysostom, 'and reckon each one of us with his own conscience, and account the judge to be already present and everything to be revealed and brought forth. For we must not merely stand but also be manifested. Do you not blush?' A similar thought is found in 1 Corinthians 3:13—'Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire'. Believers, and especially preachers, will undergo a searching test, for the day will 'declare' or 'show' in its true character the quality rather than the quantity of our work.

What is the purpose of this judgment for believers? According to 1 Corinthians 3:14, 'he shall receive a reward' (or 'wage'). This is not a reference to salvation, but to a reward within salvation for the quality of our work. We see from 1 Corinthians 5:10 that the purpose is not wholly negative, for it includes the disclosure and reward of what is both good and bad. Dr Philip Hughes warns us against viewing this judgment as the reflecting of punishment upon believers: 'The judgment pronounced is not a declaration of doom but an assessment of worth with the assignment of rewards', but all within the framework of grace and salvation. The rewards will vary from one believer to another according to the degree of faithfulness and diligence shown (Luke 19:16ff.).

One question which especially troubles believers when they hear mention of this judgment is, If God has forgiven us, how can He recall our sins again? Some contend that our sins will

P.E. Hughes, Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians (Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1962), p.180.

<sup>6.</sup> Hughes, 2 Corinthians, p.180.

not be raised in the day of judgment. The implication of Scripture, however, is that our sins will be 'manifest', but only as forgiven sins. The fact that God will judge 'every idle word' (Matt. 12:36) and 'the secrets of men' (Rom. 2:16), as well as 'according to that he hath done' (2 Cor. 5:10), suggests that our sins will not be excluded, for all will be 'manifest'. How then does this square with forgiveness? It must be that while we shall see our sin, we shall see it only in the light of His covenant of grace: and seeing it as sin washed in the blood of Christ, we shall then be the more able to admire and praise the riches of God's grace in Christ.

Here there are two points of application to be made. First of all, this fact of judgment should make us more zealous and faithful in our service of the Lord Jesus. After mentioning the fact and significance of the judgment seat of Christ, the apostle goes on immediately to say, 'Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men' (2 Cor. 5:11). These words are very significant. The apostle is filled with awe at the thought of his Lord and the prospect of judgment, and in the light of this he is more constrained to 'persuade men', both believers and unbelievers. Does the judgment seat of Christ have this effect upon your life and ministry?

Secondly, it is helpful to note how the apostle applies this principle of judgment in 1 Corinthians 4:1-5, by urging ministers to be faithful stewards, irrespective of the opinion and attitude of people towards them. The only competent judge is the Lord, so we must wait for His appearance, when judgment will be meted out to all, including believers. 'The Lord . . . will bring to light the hidden things of darkness' whether motives, actions or thoughts-'and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts.' Here is infallible and perfect judgment; 'and then'—and only then—'shall every man have praise of God'. We must not be preoccupied with and distressed by the unfair and ungodly behaviour of people who oppose us: instead we must maintain our integrity. follow after holiness, continue in faithful service of the Lord, and keep our eyes on the future, for the Lord will one day deal with all people, including ourselves.

Judgment of unbelievers

With respect to the judgment of unbelievers, the basis of judgment will be the revealed will of God, both for those who are ignorant of the gospel and for those who have been privileged to hear the gospel.

Some Christians believe that only those who have rejected the gospel will be judged. One implication of this view is that pagans who have never heard of the way of salvation will be spared from appearing before the Judge or, if they do appear, will get off comparatively lightly. It is surprising how popular and widespread this belief is. Christians who hold it are suggesting that there is a double standard, depending on whether or not people have heard the gospel; this means that in the final judgment the pagan will be better off for not having heard the gospel.

This popular belief is, however, unbiblical. People are guilty and condemned, whether they have heard the gospel or not. Paul states, 'by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned... by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation' (Rom. 5:12,18). The argument, therefore, that unbelief is the only sin meriting judgment and condemnation is an unbiblical one. Unbelief is, of course, a great sin, so that the person who does not believe is condemned; but unbelief is not the only reason for condemnation. Before a missionary pioneers the gospel in a pagan area, and before a minister preaches to people in his vicinity, those people are already guilty and under the wrath of God.

An important question, and one to which we need to be sensitive at this point, is this: Is it fair for God to judge the heathen who have not heard the gospel at all? The biblical answer includes the following important principles.

First of all, God's judgment is always just and right. 'We are sure', says Paul, 'that the judgment of God is according to truth' (Rom. 2:2); again, in the words of the apostle John, 'in righteousness he doth judge' (Rev. 19:11), and according to the psalmist, 'he shall judge the world in righteousness, he

shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness' (Ps. 9:8). The testimony of the Bible is that God is never unfair or biased in His judgments. We must guard this principle jealously, as it concerns the glory of God's character.

In the second place, passages like Matthew 11:21-24 and Romans 2:12-16 teach us that there are degrees of knowledge and of sin and, consequently, degrees of rewards and punishments. 'The longer sinners live,' argues Jonathan Edwards, 'the more wrath they accumulate.' This is one reason why Edwards pleaded with children not to start living a life of sin but to be converted at an early age. 'All men', he adds, 'partake equally of original sin, but men do not partake equally of "actual sins", so that the sooner the persevering sinner dies the better!' Some people, our Lord says, are more privileged than others, and more responsible. For this reason it will be more tolerable in the day of judgment for pagan cities like Tyre, Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah than for Bethsaida and Capernaum. All these cities will be judged and punished, for no one is let off lightly; yet there will be greater punishment for some than for others.

Finally, an examination of what Paul says in Romans 2 helps us to see more clearly the basis of God's judgment. He first states the basic principle, namely, that He 'will render to every man according to his deeds' (v.6), and then proceeds to expand it in the verses that follow. Continuing in verses 11-16, he teaches that the important question is not knowledge or ignorance, but sin. All who sin, whether in ignorance or in knowledge of the law, are regarded by God as transgressors, and they will therefore be rewarded according to their deeds.

But is this fair to the unenlightened and pagan Gentiles? The answer of Paul is in verses 14 and 15. The Gentiles who are without the written Law nevertheless have law written on their hearts, so they have an innate moral consciousness. Hendriksen suggests we should accordingly preface verse 16

John Gerstner, Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell (Baker, 1980), p.65.

with the words 'All this will become clear'8—that is, thoughts, words, motives and actions will be exposed and judged in that day.

#### **Implications**

Now this is an important point in relation to our preaching today. It is not enough for us to give textual exegesis and preach soundly; in addition, we must use what Spurgeon called 'heart argument'. The truth must be addressed to the minds in the first place, but preachers dare not stop there; the consciences of the hearers must also be touched and stirred by the application of the law of God. It is a fact of the utmost significance that humans are all created in the image of God and have 'the work of the law' written upon their consciences. thus providing what Cornelius Van Til has described as 'the point of contact'.9 'Deep down in his mind', writes Van Til, 'every man knows that he is the creature of God and responsible to God. Every man, at bottom, knows that he is a covenant-breaker. But every man acts and talks as though this were not so. It is the one point that cannot bear mentioning in his presence.'10 For this reason, if preachers do not aim for the consciences as well as the minds of their hearers, they will be defective in their work.

The doctrine of final judgment also implies human responsibility and accountability. Men and women are held responsible by God for their own sin: 'the soul that sinneth,' God warns, 'it shall die' (Ezek. 18:4). It will not be possible to hide behind or blame other people for one's own sin. The punishment of sin will be borne by those who commit sin, unless, of course, they become Christians. Here is a truth which must be emphasized in evangelistic preaching. Despite even the pervasiveness, corruption and dominance of sin throughout man's entire nature and the consequent inability to please or obey God, man is still held responsible by God

<sup>8.</sup> W. Hendriksen, Romans 1-8 (Banner of Truth, 1981), p.97.

<sup>9.</sup> Cornelius Van Til, *Apologetics* (1966), ch.3: 'The Point of Contact', pp.38-58.

<sup>10.</sup> Van Til, Apologetics, p.57.

for his sin and his response to the gospel. Whatever his attitude to God and sin may be, the sinner must be informed of this basic and alarming truth.

There is another sobering aspect to the subject of human responsibility, namely, the responsibility and accountability of preachers and elders to God for the quality and extent of their work. This note is sounded repeatedly throughout the Bible. The prophet Ezekiel, for example, is told, 'I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me' (Ezek. 3:17). God then warns His servant:

When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.

(Ezek. 3:18,19)

#### On this passage Patrick Fairbairn comments:

A salutary lesson is conveyed here to all who are put in trust with souls, as well in regard to the nature of the charge itself, as to the manner in which it ought to be fulfilled. It is emphatically the work of God they have to do, and the instrument to be wielded in the doing of it is his own word. Let this be plied with unwearied diligence, with affectionate tenderness and fervency of spirit; for the work is of infinite importance, and results past reckoning depend on it. Eternal weal or woe grows out of it to all who come within the field of its operations. And for oneself—whatever may be the result for others—the path of duty is the only path of safety; faithfulness to God must be the supreme rule, and his glory the chief aim. 'I have a commission to fulfil, I must deliver my own soul,'—let this be the one answer to all countersolicitations from the flesh or the world; and it will also be the best guarantee of ultimate success.<sup>12</sup>

11. There are two helpful footnotes on this subject in A. W. Pink's *The Sovereignty of God* (Banner of Truth, 1961), pp.99,108.

 Patrick Fairbairn, An Exposition of Ezekiel (Grand Rapids: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1971), p.23. In all probability the apostle Paul had these words from Ezekiel in mind when he declared to the Ephesian elders at Miletus, 'Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men' (Acts 20:26). This claim was made only after three years of intensive and zealous evangelism in Ephesus, during which all the inhabitants had heard the gospel through Paul, either publicly or in their homes (v.20). Such care for souls on the apostle's part absolved him from blame and responsibility in the day of judgment.

A similar principle is found in Hebrews 13:17, where submission to church officers is enjoined. It is clear here that elders and preachers carry a heavy and solemn responsibility, for 'they watch for your souls, as they that must give account'. Such is their responsibility that David Dickson described the ministry as 'the most dangerous of all charges, because the account of lost souls within the church shall be craved at their hands, whether they have done all that which became them to do'.13

The Scottish preacher, John Welch, felt this sense of responsibility greatly and spent at least eight to ten hours daily in prayer. Even in the middle of the night he would frequently rise to pray for his people. His wife naturally expressed concern at seeing him out of bed on a cold winter evening with only a plaid wrapped around him while he prayed. Welch's answer was: 'O woman, I have the souls of three thousand to answer for, and I know not how it is with many of them.' In the light of the fast approaching day of judgment, we all need to show the same diligence and burden for souls.

ng propinsi kalendara akang bajaran sak

<sup>13.</sup> James Ferguson and David Dickson, *The Epistles of Paul and Hebrews* (Banner of Truth, 1978), 'Hebrews', p.80.

# 3. Hell

# Some definitions and objections

As there are four words which are translated 'hell' in the Authorized Version of the Bible, we must begin by carefully defining these words. This is especially important because liberal scholars, as well as the proponents of conditional immortality who espouse annihilation, claim that our belief in a traditional hell is owing to ignorance and prejudice. For example, Seventh Day Adventists, Christadelphians and Jehovah Witnesses insist that we have misunderstood the correct significance of these biblical words. This is a serious charge, and one which we need to answer immediately.

The four words translated 'hell' in the Authorized Version are Sheol, Hades, Tartarus and Gehenna. We shall examine each in turn.

#### **Tartarus**

This is a Greek name for the underworld, and especially for the abode of the damned. It is used only once in the New Testament, in a verbal form ('cast down to Tartarus') in 2 Peter 2:4. Here Peter is describing the punishment of God upon the fallen angels; they are consigned to a place of intense darkness which functions as a prison for its inhabitants. Clearly therefore this is a reference to hell.

The real controversy, however, rages around the other three words, which we must now consider in more detail.

#### Sheol and Hades

One of the most common Hebrew words to describe the location of the dead is She'ol, which means 'the depths' or

'the unseen state'. This word occurs 65 times in the Old Testament. Another word similar to it is the Greek word Hades, which appears ten times in the New Testament. What then is the significance of these two words? If we study their usage in the Old and New Testaments we will find that they are employed in more than one sense. This fact is crucial to a correct understanding of them.

Sometimes the word 'Sheol' denotes the state of death into which believers and unbelievers alike are brought; references like 1 Samuel 2:6, Job 14:13,14 and 17:13,14, and Psalm 89:48, all have this connotation. Similarly in the New Testament the term 'Hades' sometimes has this meaning. In Acts 2:27 and Revelation 6:8 this is clearly the case: what is signified in these passages is not 'hell' as such, but the state of being physically dead.

At other times, however, the word 'Sheol' can have the more restricted meaning of 'the grave', as in Job 7:9 and Genesis 37:35. One Watchtower article ridicules the doctrine of eternal hell by suggesting that, according to this latter verse, when Jacob died he went bodily into hell (Sheol). This is a biased judgment, however, for in this and a few other contexts in Scripture the word 'Sheol' simply means 'the grave'.

But, thirdly, it must be said emphatically that these words are also used in passages where 'hell' is clearly in view. For example, in Psalm 9:17 God warns the ungodly of their future punishment, and in Deuteronomy 32:22 we are told that the wrath of God burns in Sheol. Likewise, in at least six out of the ten New Testament references, Hades is used in this sense, the most obvious example being Luke 16:23, where Dives is described as being 'in hell... in torments'.

One argument used by Conditionalists against the orthodox doctrine of hell is that the word used by the Lord Jesus here is Hades, and not Gehenna, and that according to Revelation 20:14 even Hades is to be cast one day into the lake of fire. So, they claim, the passage is pictorial rather than literal. Two comments must suffice here, for the teaching of annihilation

<sup>1.</sup> Quoted in E. C. Gruss, Apostles of Denial (Baker, 1974), p.163.

will be considered at a later stage. In the first place, our Lord's use of the word 'Hades' rather than 'Gehenna' in Luke 16:23 does not constitute an argument against eternal punishment, for the former term is more frequently used to denote hell than to denote the state of death. Secondly, what the word 'Hades' signifies in Revelation 20:14 is the state of death which results from the cessation of physical life.

The Lord Jesus in His human nature was in Hades, that is, in a state of physical death, whereas His 'Gehenna' was experienced on the cross, where He drank to the full the cup of the Father's wrath against sinners. Peter reminds us in Acts 2 that it was impossible for Hades to hold the Son of God indefinitely. Christ rose from the dead, and now, according to Revelation 1:18, He has 'the keys of death and Hades'. With reference to this statement Hendriksen asks, 'Does not the Son of Man reveal that He has the keys of death whenever He welcomes the soul of a believer into heaven? And does He not prove that He has the keys of Hades when at His second coming He reunites the soul and body of the believer, a body now gloriously transformed?'<sup>2</sup>

With respect to Revelation 20:14, the context is that of judgment and the general resurrection of the dead which will take place at the last day. The sea is pictured as giving up all its dead; so also do death (the separation of soul and body) and Hades (the state of separation). In this sense both death and Hades cease at the last day, for never again, either in heaven or in hell, will there be a separation between body and soul. Thus, in graphic, pictorial language, death and Hades are described as being cast into the lake of fire.

Louis Berkhof, who provides us with a brief but helpful survey of the meaning and use of the words 'Sheol' and 'Hades' in the Scriptures, concludes his study in this way: 'In the Old Testament the word *sheol* is used more often for grave and less often for hell, while in the corresponding use of *hades* in the New Testament the contrary holds.' This conclusion is a fair and responsible one, allowing for the

<sup>2.</sup> W. Hendriksen, More Than Conquerors (Tyndale Press, 1966), p.57.

<sup>3.</sup> L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology (Banner of Truth, 1959), p.686.

varied use of these two words in the Bible. William Hendriksen sheds further light on our understanding of 'Hades'. He argues that when the word is used in relation to the intermediate state, it refers to 'the abode of the souls of the wicked before the judgment day'; whereas when the word 'Gehenna' is used, 'the reference is generally to the abode of the wicked, body and soul, after the judgment day.' 4

#### Gehenna

Gehenna was the name of a valley south-west of Jerusalem where children had once been sacrificed by fire to a pagan idol named Molech. King Josiah later desecrated this pagan site, and it was then used for the burning of the city's rubbish and offal. The name was used in New Testament times as a symbol of future and eternal punishment, but several of the twelve references to Gehenna in the New Testament support Hendriksen's contention. The word is used seven times by Matthew: note especially Matthew 10:28—'And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.' It is also used three times in Mark 9:43-47. These verses draw a vivid contrast between hell and life, the only alternative destinies facing mankind; our Lord warns that it is possible to go with 'two hands', 'two feet' and 'two eyes' into hell fire.

Having considered these three important words, we can say by way of summary that Sheol and Hades refer to the grave as well as to the state of death, but that they also refer sometimes to the state of the ungodly in hell. While Sheol is used less frequently for hell in the Old Testament, Hades carries the meaning of hell more frequently in the New Testament, and refers to the abode and punishment of the ungodly before the general resurrection of the body. Gehenna describes the same place, that is, hell, but includes in it (and this is unique to the term 'Gehenna') the punishment of both body and soul which will occur immediately after the final judgment.

<sup>4.</sup> W. Hendriksen, The Bible on the Life Hereafter (Baker, 1975), pp.196-7.

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Having considered these three important words, we can say by way of summary that Sheol and Hades refer to the grave as well as to the state of death, but that they also refer sometimes to the state of the ungodly in hell. While Sheol is used less frequently for hell in the Old Testament, Hades carries the meaning of hell more frequently in the New Testament, and refers to the abode and punishment of the ungodly before the general resurrection of the body. Gehenna describes the same place, that is, hell, but includes in it (and this is unique to the term 'Gehenna') the punishment of both body and soul which will occur immediately after the final judgment.

<sup>4.</sup> W. Hendriksen, The Bible on the Life Hereafter (Baker, 1975), pp.196-7.

Against this background we can appreciate the urgency and directness which characterized the proclamation of the gospel in the New Testament. Sinners are in the greatest danger, for hell awaits them unless they believe. Preaching on Matthew 8:11,12, C. H. Spurgeon quotes a minister who told his congregation, 'If you do not love the Lord Jesus Christ you will be sent to that place which it is not polite to mention.' Spurgeon gives us his opinion of this preacher:

He ought not to have been allowed to preach again, I am sure, if he could not use plain words. Now, if I saw that house on fire over there, do you think I would stand and say, 'I believe the operation of combustion is proceeding yonder!'? No, I would call out, 'Fire! Fire!' and then everybody would know what I meant. So, if the Bible says, 'The children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness,' am I to stand here and mince the matter at all? God forbid. We must speak the truth as it is written. It is a terrible truth, for it says 'the children of the kingdom shall be cast out!' 5

This is precisely what our Lord did. 'And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul,' our Saviour taught, 'but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell' (Matt. 10:28). Again, He warned, 'if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched' (Mark 9:43,44).

In some of His parables, too, such warnings are clearly expressed. The parable of the wheat and tares concludes with these words: 'The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth' (Matt. 13:41,42). In the parable immediately following it, our Lord warns: 'So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire' (Matt. 13:49,50).

C. H. Spurgeon, New Park Street Pulpit (Banner of Truth, 1963), vol.1 (1855), p.306.

Looking forward to the general resurrection of the dead, the Saviour revealed that 'the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation' (John 5:28,29). And in answer to people who were disturbed about certain incidents He said, 'Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish' (Luke 13:3-5). Later in that same Gospel He described Dives: 'he . . . being in torments . . . seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom, and he cried . . .' (Luke 16:23,24).

Notice, first, that in the majority of these references the Lord Jesus was instructing and warning His followers, informing them in detail of eternal issues such as life and death, heaven and hell and the end of the world. Whilst He did not confine His teaching to them, He did concentrate on their instruction and preparation. I wonder whether the general vagueness of belief concerning hell, and its remoteness from church life, is owing to our failure as preachers to instruct and warn believers sufficiently.

Notice, secondly, that our Lord did not shrink from emphasizing hell in His ministry; in fact, He frequently used imagery and symbolism to convey to His listeners a sense of its awfulness. What emphasis do we give to hell in our ministries? How frequently have we preached on this subject? To refer to hell briefly or occasionally, or to talk about it in vague terms, is inadequate, for there is a wealth of biblical material on hell which must be preached if we are to declare the whole counsel of God. Do we seek to do this, or do we shy away from preaching hell?

Finally, notice that our Lord preached this and other doctrines authoritatively. There was nothing apologetic or diffident or uncertain in His proclamation of judgment and hell, for He knew He was referring to something true, certain and awful. Could this be said of us? One verse that greatly influenced John Bunyan throughout his preaching ministry was Revelation 21:5, and especially the words, 'he that sat upon the throne said . . .' So deeply aware was he of the

divine origin of his message that he preached with considerable certainty and conviction. That is one of our needs too. We are not suggesting possibilities to people, nor are we conveying to them the fruit of our own speculation; we are proclaiming the verities which God has revealed to us in His Word.

Our Lord and the apostles, then, held out one of two possible destinies for mankind—heaven or hell, life or death. We all stand on the brink of eternity, and we will either experience salvation in heaven or suffer damnation in hell. These are the only alternatives before us, and beyond death there are no further opportunities of salvation for the unbelieving. All this adds to the seriousness and urgency of our work as preachers. We must preach as dying men to dying men, pleading with sinners to repent before it is too late.

Before proceeding to a description of hell, I want to consider briefly three objections to this biblical teaching which are widely advocated today.

#### Universalism

Universalism has a wide general appeal today, both within and outside Christendom. According to this theory all people will be saved, eventually if not immediately. This error is so obviously unbiblical that we need not spend much time with it except to notice some of the scriptures which universalists misuse. Those texts to which they appeal, such 1 Corinthians 15:51, Philippians 2:10 and 1 Timothy 2:4, do not, of course, teach universalism. The first text—'We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed'—has reference to believers only. The words in Philippians—'That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow'-affirm that the ungodly will acknowledge Christ's lordship; vet we know from other scriptures that for them this will be done unwillingly and apart from salvation. The last reference—that God 'will have all men to be saved'—underlines the universality of salvation, but only in the sense that God purposes to save people from different backgrounds of race, culture and status. In view, then, of Christ's clear teaching concerning the future

punishment of sinners, universalism must be rejected, for it requires us 'not only to revise our view of judgment', remarks one recent writer, 'but also change our view of the Judge'.

## Purgatory

The next objection or modification we must consider is purgatory. As formulated by the Roman Catholic Church, purgatory is an abode available after death to the imperfect 'faithful' of the Roman Church; it is preparatory to heaven, and here people stay for longer or shorter periods until they purge away their sin. The ramifications of this teaching will be familiar to many: for example, prayers for the dead, indulgences, lack of assurance, and the serious undermining of the sufficiency and finality of the Saviour's sacrifice.

I want to remind you, however, that Roman Catholics, and particularly Roman Catholic Charismatics with their newfound interest in the Bible, are using Scripture increasingly to support their belief in purgatory and other Popish errors. We can dismiss as irresponsible exegesis their appeal to Matthew 3:11 (particularly the words 'he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire'); likewise also to 1 Corinthians 3:15 ('he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire'), and Jude 22,23 ('... others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire'). And though at first sight their appeal to verses in Peter's first epistle is more persuasive, upon examination it becomes clear that these verses too lend no support whatever to a belief in purgatory or the possibility of a second chance after death:

a) 1 Peter 3:18-20. The purpose of Peter in this passage is to provide his readers with encouragement and comfort in face of persecution and to remind them of the fact of judgment and the approaching end (e.g., 1 Pet. 4:5-7). Basically, his message in verses 18-20 is that Christ has suffered and died in the flesh for our sin (v.18). What He did in His earthly ministry (such as preaching), He now continues to do, but

<sup>6.</sup> Bruce Milne, I Want to Know What the Bible Says about the End of the World (Kingsway Publications, 1979), p.117.

with this important difference: He does it now in the Spirit and through the apostles. A parallel situation was the judgment and Flood at the time of Noah; but before that judgment, too, Christ preached in the Spirit through Noah, and he and his family were saved. Similarly, through baptism into Christ's body these early Christians were secure, even if they faced death.

b) 1 Peter 4:6. Here the apostle refers to believers who, though physically dead, were alive to God in glory, so that death had not deprived them of salvation. The gospel had been preached to them before their death, so that the judgment due to them as sinners was accomplished 'in the flesh', that is, while they were in the world.

Clearly, then, purgatory finds no support whatsoever in the Bible. To those who believe in Jesus Christ an abundant entrance is given, not into purgatory but into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:11). Those, however, who die without Christ will be punished, says Paul, 'with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord' (2 Thess. 1:9). Hell, not purgatory, awaits unbelievers at death, immediately and eternally. A verse written by Rev. Griffith Jones, Llanddowror, and included as part of an appendix to his Catechism, is as relevant today as it was in the eighteenth century:

Think how death hastens, Judgment comes apace, And heaven or hell will shortly be thy place (For Purgatory's a mere dream, nor can the prayers of priests redeem a sinful man).

#### Second probation

Another theory gaining wide acceptance, especially among Jehovah Witnesses, is that of a 'second probation'. Briefly, this sect teaches that in the 'resurrection of judgment' those people who wanted to do right, but previously lacked the

<sup>7.</sup> The Christian Faith, or The Apostles' Creed Scripturally Explained by Questions and Answers (1762), p.73.

knowledge of God's purposes, will be brought back to paradise—earth—where they will be instructed in the truth. If they obey then, according to the Watchtower, they will inherit life. This is a more refined form of the 'second-chance' doctrine, and it illustrates how far these Bible students have themselves departed from the Bible. For example, the passage in question (John 5:28,29) assumes that the destinies of people are already decided. Further, in the light of passages like John 3:18-21, the division between believers and unbelievers cannot be altered after death; indeed, in this respect verse 18 is conclusive: 'He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.'

Now that we have seen the meaning of the relevant biblical words, and considered, albeit briefly, certain objections and modifications to the orthodox doctrine of hell, we will turn to a consideration of what hell is like.

# 4. Hell

## Its nature and duration

How does the New Testament describe hell? This is the question I want to answer, and I intend to group together and expound some of the biblical descriptions of hell under two main headings: separation and punishment.

#### 1. Separation

Paul's statement in 2 Thessalonians 1:9, that unbelievers 'shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power', underlines the fact that separation is an essential feature of hell. The verb 'punished' here means 'to pay a penalty', which is then specified as 'everlasting destruction'. Although this phrase is found nowhere else in the New Testament, it is a phrase which has been used to support the theory of annihilation. However, the Greek word olethros (translated 'destruction' in the Authorized Version) is qualified in an important way by the adjective aionios ('eternal'), which serves to stress the idea of duration rather than extinction. Furthermore, the phrase is immediately amplified in the following words, 'from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power'. It is not extinction that is taught here, but rather a definite severance on the part of unbelievers from the presence and glory of Christ, which is the opposite of everlasting life. Originally the Greek word here translated 'power' was used to describe the authority and power exercised by magistrates (while its related adjective ischuros was used of an army or a fortress). Unbelievers, says the

apostle Paul, will be separated from the splendour and glory of this power which belongs to Christ inherently, and which He uses especially on behalf of the elect to effect their salvation and glorification.

Our Lord also uses this principle of separation to describe the nature of hell. At the last day, for example, He will show great wrath towards the unbelieving despite their gifts and miraculous works, saying, 'I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity' (Matt. 7:23). 'They that would not come to Him to be saved', remarks Matthew Henry, 'must depart from Him to be damned. To depart from Christ is the very hell of hell; it is the foundation of all the misery of the damned, to be cut off from all hope of benefit from Christ and His mediation.'

Later in Matthew's Gospel we find our Lord's words, 'Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels' (Matt. 25:41). Here separation is shown to be the exact opposite of inheriting 'the kingdom' (v.34) and 'eternal life' (v.46), while separation itself involves 'everlasting punishment' (v.46). To depart from Christ does not mean that in hell sinners are banished from the presence of God, for God is omnipresent; it does mean, however, that they are separated from the presence of His love. To be in the presence of God without a Saviour is to be in hell, for our God is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29).

God's love and kindness towards mankind mean that unbelievers can live happy, meaningful lives here, being wellprovided for by God in His providence. In expounding part of the section on Providence in the Westminster Confession of Faith, A. A. Hodge writes:

Thus also the providential government of God over mankind in general is subordinate as a means to an end to His gracious providence toward His Church, whereby He gathers it out of every people and nation, and makes all things work together for good to those who are called according to His purpose... The

Matthew Henry's Commentary (Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1953), vol.5, p.97.

history of redemption through all its dispensations, Patriarchal, Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Christian, is the key to the philosophy of human history in general. The race is preserved, continents and islands are settled with inhabitants, nations are elevated to empire, philosophy and the practical arts, civilization and liberty are advanced, that the Church, the Lamb's bride, may be perfected in all her members and adorned for her Husband.<sup>2</sup>

Thus there is a special care that the Lord shows towards His believing people, and for this reason unbelievers benefit greatly from the presence of the church in the world. During World War II my father worked on the railway, and for part of the time he helped to move British and, later, American soldiers quite regularly. After being away from home for two or three days he would return with a bag full of 'goodies' that excited us as children; the chocolates, sweets, wrapped cream biscuits and chewing-gum were all displayed on the table for us to see and share. My father was not an American, nor was he a soldier, but he benefited greatly from the American presence in our country.

This is a picture of God's dealings with the world. Unbelievers are not part of the living church of Jesus Christ; yet they benefit greatly from God's love towards His church. Here in this world unbelievers can be happy and can find enjoyment and fulfilment in God-given relationships and responsibilities; but in hell unbelievers will be deprived of all these expressions of divine love and kindness. Hell, therefore, is separation from the love and favour of God, so that the ungodly in hell will be exposed to His wrath without any mercy at all.

#### 2. Punishment

The New Testament also emphasizes the fact that sinners are punished in hell by God.

In Matthew 25:46 the Lord Jesus describes the fate of the ungodly as that of 'everlasting punishment'. The significance of the adjective aiōnios will be considered later, but I want at

2. A. A. Hodge, The Confession of Faith (Banner of Truth, 1958), p.101.

this point to indicate the significance of the Greek word kolasis, translated 'punishment'. (The Watchtower translates the word as 'cutting-off', adapting it rather conveniently to support their doctrine of annihilation; but this translation is wrong.)

The word is used in its verbal form in Acts 4:21, where we are told that the Sanhedrin tried in vain to obtain evidence on which they could lawfully *punish* Peter and John. It is also used in 2 Peter 2:9, with reference to the unjust being reserved in punishment until the final judgment. In this latter reference it is important to note that the verb is in the present tense and the passive voice, giving the sense 'are being punished'. It means that the ungodly are being punished both in the world and in hell, but after the final judgment they will receive the full measure of their punishment. Again, the word occurs in 1 John 4:18, where we read that 'fear has to do with punishment' (NIV).

'Punishment', then, and not 'cutting-off', must be regarded as the correct translation of the word kolasis in Matthew 25:46, and it is this concept of punishment that is used by the Lord Jesus and by the apostle Peter to describe

the nature and purpose of hell's sufferings.

Today the idea of punishment is frowned upon. Capital punishment has been abolished and prison sentences are regarded as reformatory and educative rather than punitive. Mr James Jardine, chairman of the Police Federation, speaking a few years ago to police officers in Matlock Bath. Derbyshire, said: 'Long ago people in power stopped talking about the punishment of crime and began to talk of treatment, as if every young thug was sick and in need of a prescription from the chemist. Discipline has disappeared in our schools and the concept of parental responsibility went out with the Ark.'3 Within education corporal punishment has been largely withdrawn, and parents are discouraged by psychiatrists and sociologists from punishing their children. Religious education specialists tell us we should withhold biblical material, whether stories or teaching, if it includes 3. The Daily Telegraph, 14 July 1981, p.2.

suggestions of violence or death—and this in spite of the fact that children are extremely knowledgeable about cowboys, TV 'thrillers', football hooliganism, IRA atrocities and, more recently, the street violence in several English cities! Some children also see their mothers and other relatives beaten regularly in their homes by cruel and often drunken men.

How do we communicate the truth of eternal punishment in this contemporary situation? Where do we begin? We must begin with God and His Word, for punishment is an integral part of God's justice. His rectorial justice has instituted a moral government in the world, and God decrees that this should be exercised, through parents, magistrates, governments and kings, etc. But there is another aspect to His justice, namely, His distributive justice, in which He executes His law and distributes rewards and punishments to both humans and angels. In His wrath He inflicts penalties justly on sinners, through parents, civil authorities, and even by means of the actual consequences of our own sins, as well as through various material and physical judgments. Hell, however, is the climax of this distributive or retributive justice. Rather than being offensive and an unnecessary addendum to life, it is the continuation of a principle God already upholds within the world, and without which social life would deteriorate into anarchy.

## What constitutes the punishment of hell?

Our Lord tells us that the soul and, eventually, the body are involved in punishment; consider, for example, Matthew 10:28 and Mark 9:43-45. Writing early in eighteenth-century Wales, the Rev. Jenkin Jones remarked that hell's punishment will be terrible not only 'because of the loss the sinner will suffer in the body and soul there, but also the loss he will suffer in every part of both body and soul. Not only will the unbeliever be in hell, but hell will be in him too'4—in his conscience, in his body and in his soul.

 Thomas Vincent, Christ's Certain and Sudden Appearance to Judgment (1667)—quoted from the Welsh translation by Jenkin Jones, Dydd y Farn Fawr (1727), p.161. Conscience will inflict its own punishment on sinners in hell. John Flavel writes:

Conscience, which should have been the sinner's curb on earth, becomes the whip that must lash his soul in hell . . . That which was the seat and centre of all guilt, now becomes the seat and the centre of all torments . . . should the Lord let a sinner's conscience fly upon him with rage . . . it would put him into a hell upon earth . . . But he keeps a hand of restraint upon them . . . But no sooner is the Christless soul turned out of the body . . . but the conscience is roused and put into a rage never to be appeased any more. <sup>5</sup>

The reference in Mark 9:44 to 'their worm dieth not' is regarded as a reference to a condemning conscience which persists throughout eternity.

Punishment in hell is also described as 'everlasting fire' (Matt. 18:8), 'the fire' that 'is not quenched' (Mark 9:46), 'flaming fire' (2 Thess. 1:8), 'eternal fire' (Jude 7). We are told that 'the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever' (Rev. 14:11; 19:3). Dives was also 'in torments' and 'in this flame' (Luke 16:23,24), while the devil, the beast and the prophet 'shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever' (Rev. 20:10). Thomas Boston describes these torments as being universal (that is, every part of the person is affected), manifold, uninterrupted, unpitied and eternal.<sup>6</sup> In addition to pangs of conscience, references like Matthew 8:12 and 13:50. Mark 9:43-48, Luke 16:23-28, Revelation 14:10 and 21:8 underline other subjective punishments, such as anguish, despair, weeping and gnashing of teeth, which will constitute an essential part of hell's punishment after death for unbelievers.

#### Hell-fire

How literal is the fire of hell? John Owen, the Puritan divine, was clear as to his interpretation of it: 'By "hell-fire" we

5. The Works of John Flavel (Banner of Truth, 1968), vol.3, p.137.

Thomas Boston, Human Nature in its Fourfold State (Banner of Truth, 1964), pp.487-91.

understand nothing but the "wrath of God" for sin; into whose hands it is a fearful thing to fall, our God being a consuming fire.'7 Jonathan Edwards also stresses that the all-important feature of heaven and hell is God Himself. God makes hell and He is hell: 'God will be the hell of one and the heaven of the other . . . 'Tis the infinite almighty God that shall become the fire of the furnace's and, figuratively speaking, the wrath of God is a consuming fire. When pressed to answer whether hell-fire is literal or figurative, he replies that the symbol is 'very probably literal',9 for verses like Matthew 10:28, he suggests, require it. Berkhof lacks Edwards's assurance and says we cannot be sure, but 'There will be some positive punishment corresponding to our bodies.'10 For Herman Hoeksema terms like 'fire' and 'worm' indicate 'an existence in unspeakable suffering of both body and soul'.11

Personally, I like the caution and emphasis of men like Owen and Edwards, namely, that God Himself is a consuming fire to the ungodly. This God-centred approach needs to be stressed in our preaching of hell. In his commentary on 2 Thessalonians, Hendriksen issues what is a much needed warning. With reference to the phrase 'in flaming fire' (2 Thess. 1:7) he says:

To speak about a 'mere' symbol in such connections is never right. The reality which answers to the symbol is always far more terrible (or far more glorious) than the symbol itself. Human language is stretched almost to its breaking-point in order to convey the terrible character of the coming of the Lord in relation to the wicked.<sup>12</sup>

- 7. The Works of John Owen (Banner of Truth, 1966), vol.12, p.147.
- John Gerstner, Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell (Baker, 1980), pp.57,53.
- 9. Gerstner, p.55.
- 10. L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology (Banner of Truth, 1959), p.736.
- 11. Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1973), pp.866-7.
- 12. W. Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: I and II Thessalonians (Banner of Truth, 1972), pp.159-60.

That this 'everlasting fire' involves considerable suffering is emphasized in the New Testament; for instance, in Revelation 20:10 we read that Satan will be 'tormented day and night for ever and ever'! Both in the realm of the body and the soul unbelievers will suffer the fire of God's wrath without being themselves consumed, just as in a very different situation the three Hebrews in Babylon stood inside the burning furnace without being burnt in any way (Dan. 3).

Our Lord also teaches that there will be degrees of punishment in hell. In Matthew 10:14, for example, referring to the custom amongst the Jews of removing the dust from their clothes and sandals after travelling through a pagan area, the Lord warns that even a Jewish city or house can be unclean if it refuses to welcome the gospel. When people refuse to hear the gospel, He tells the disciples, they too must indicate that such people are pagans by turning from them and shaking the dust from off their feet (cf. Acts 13:50,51). Those who spurn the gospel are here warned that they will be punished more severely in the final judgment than the notoriously wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

This point is reiterated in Matthew 11:22-24 with reference to the unbelief of the people living in Capernaum. Despite our Lord's great Galilean ministry, involving a lengthy period of residence and ministry there and including numerous miracles, the inhabitants had not repented. These mighty works performed by Christ amongst them should have caused them to repent, and so the Lord warns them:

And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted into heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

This truth He explains in greater detail in Luke 12:47,48—'... For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required ...' Here we can underline the following principles. First of all, ignorance, though it is inexcusable and punishable in the most dreadful manner, will nevertheless be

punished less severely in hell. This is an important principle, for it is suggested by some believers, and stated officially by Jehovah Witnesses, that sinners are unworthy of punishment until they hear and reject the Word. If this were true, it would be a powerful reason for disengaging the church from its task of world mission. But this cannot possibly be the case; it is clear from the Scriptures that all men are already condemned in Adam and will be judged and punished righteously by the Lord.

Secondly, increased knowledge implies increased responsibility: the greater the light, the greater will be the liability and punishment. In his comments on Matthew 25:46 Bishop Ryle asks:

Who shall describe the misery of eternal punishment? It is something utterly indescribable and inconceivable. The eternal pain of the body; the eternal sting of an accusing conscience; the eternal society of none but the wicked, the devil and his angels; the eternal remembrance of opportunities neglected and Christ despised; the eternal prospect of a weary, hopeless future,—all this is misery indeed . . . And yet this picture is nothing compared to the reality. <sup>13</sup>

#### **Eternal**

Let us now consider the *eternity* of hell's punishment, doing so against the background of the contemporary controversy.

#### Aiōnios

First of all, we need to consider the meaning and significance of the Greek word aiōnios in the phrase 'everlasting punishment' (Matt. 25:46). This word and its cognates are used 71 times in the New Testament. While it sometimes denotes an 'age' or an indefinite period of time, it is used in the majority of cases in the New Testament in the sense of 'everlasting'. For example, both in Romans 16:26 and in 1 Timothy 1:17 the word expresses the eternity of God; in Hebrews 9:14 it describes the eternal Spirit, and in Revelation

13. J. C. Ryle, Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: Matthew (James Clarke, 1954), pp.344-5.

1:18 the endless reign of Christ. On 51 occasions the word is used to describe the unending bliss of the redeemed in heaven. The fact that this same word is used twice in Matthew 25:46, both to describe the duration of 'everlasting life' and to describe the duration of hell, means that one cannot escape the conclusion that when descriptive of hell it has the sense of 'everlasting'.

Augustine has a helpful statement on this discussion of the meaning of aiōnios:

What a thing it is, to account eternal punishment to be a fire of long duration, and eternal life to be without end, since Christ comprised both in that very same place, in one and the same sentence, saying, 'These shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal'! If both are eternal, either both must be understood to be lasting with an end, or both perpetual without an end. For like is related to like; on the one side, eternal punishment, on the other, eternal life. But to say in one and the same sentence, life eternal shall be without end, punishment eternal shall have an end, were too absurd: whence, since the eternal life of the saints shall be without end, punishment eternal, too, shall doubtless have no end to those whose it shall be.<sup>14</sup>

Writing much later than Augustine, the Rev. E. B. Pusey, Professor of Hebrew at Oxford, expressed his exasperation in 1880 with the way people were playing fast and loose with the inspired words of Scripture: 'They who deny that any of the words used of future punishment in Holy Scripture express eternity, would do well to consider, whether there is any way, in which Almighty God *could* have expressed it, which they would have accepted, as meaning it!' 15

The conclusion, however, that aiōnios means 'everlasting' in relation to hell, is questioned by the advocates of Conditional Immortality, who argue that eternal punishment is eternal in its effects but not in its suffering. On this interpretation Conditionalists deny the immortality of the soul and affirm the annihilation of the unbelieving at death.

<sup>14.</sup> Augustine, De Civitate Dei, xxi 23.

E. B. Pusey, What is of Faith as to Eternal Punishment? (James Parker, 1880), p.44.

#### **Immortality**

Consider, first of all, the immortality of the soul. This is everywhere assumed in the Bible, although it is not explicitly stated.

One argument used by Conditionalists is Paul's statement 1 Timothy 6:16 concerning God, 'who alone immortality'. While endless existence is implied here, states Hendriksen, this does not exhaust its meaning, for 'the concept immortality . . . means that God is life's never-failing Fountain'. 16 So, in this double sense, only God has immortality in and of Himself. We can add another point here. All men have been created in the image of God and are thereby capable of unending existence even in hell: it is believers, however, who exclusively enjoy eternal life in the sense of the duration and fulness and blessedness of life which has been brought to light through the gospel (2 Tim. 1:16). 'For the believer', concludes Hendriksen, 'immortality is therefore a redemptive concept. It is everlasting salvation. For God it is eternal blessedness. But while the believer has received immortality, as one receives a drink of water from a fountain, God has it. It belongs to His very Being. He is Himself the Fountain.'17

Jehovah Witnesses go further than Seventh Day Adventists, by denying that there is any evidence in the Bible for life or consciousness or activity after death, apart from the 144,000 who are now in heaven. But this position can be easily refuted by Old Testament references: for example, Psalms 16:8-11; 17:15; 49:15; 73:24-26; Isaiah 14:9-17; 25:8, and Ezekiel 32:21. The command against consulting evil spirits is also a strong argument for immortality and, of course, numerous New Testament references are a distinct embarrassment to the Watchtower Society: for example, Matthew 17:3; Luke 12:4,5; Philippians 1:21-23; 2 Corinthians 5:1,6,8, and 1 Thessalonians 5:10.

<sup>16.</sup> W. Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: I and II Timothy and Titus (Banner of Truth, 1959), pp.207-8.

<sup>17.</sup> Hendriksen, I & II Timothy and Titus, p.208.

Another plank in the argument supporting annihilation is that descriptive terms like 'death', 'destruction', 'perishing' and 'fire' suggest an end. Let us consider one of these words, the Greek verb *apollumi* which is translated 'destroy' in Matthew 10:28. The word occurs 85 times in the New Testament; it is translated variously as 'lose', 'perish' or 'destroy' in the AV, but nowhere does it mean annihilation.

In 2 Peter 3:6 Peter says that 'the world . . . being overflowed with water, perished' (apōleto). On the Watchtower interpretation of this word the world would have become extinct with or after the Flood! Rather than the world being destroyed in that absolute sense, however, the world was in fact preserved and renewed by God. Quoting Psalm 102, Hebrews 1:11,12 tells us in reference to creation, 'They shall perish' (apolountai); but we are told that God will 'change', not obliterate, the earth and the heavens. Similarly, we are told in Luke 19:10 that our Lord came 'to save that which was lost' (apolōlos), and clearly it would be absurd to interpret this as meaning extinction.

To enforce the correctness of this exegesis, notice that the Bible consistently speaks of suffering and loss rather than annihilation after death for unbelievers. Furthermore, the fact that there are degrees of punishment in hell is incompatible with annihilation. Coupled with the force and use of the adjective *aiōnios* and the fact that the character of sinners in hell does not change, thereby incurring God's wrath eternally, we must conclude that annihilation has no biblical warrant whatsoever.

Bishop Ryle's summary of the biblical position deserves to be mentioned here:

The misery of the lost, and the blessedness of the saved, are both alike for ever: let no man deceive us on this point. It is clearly revealed in Scripture: the eternity of God, and heaven, and hell, all stand on the same foundation. As surely as God is eternal, so surely is heaven an endless day without night, and hell an endless night without day.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18.</sup> Ryle, Expository Thoughts: Matthew, p.344.

In 1975, an editor of *The Evangelical Magazine of Wales* questioned a prominent evangelical on his views concerning revival and the eternity of hell. 'I believe in the reality of hell and the eternity of hell,' he affirmed. 'I don't know what eternal consciousness means. Are people conscious of the passing of time eternally?' When asked whether unbelievers would be eventually annihilated, he replied, 'Well, it's about that that I am prepared to remain agnostic. You see, I think that those who emphasize the time factor, who emphasize that hell will go on and on, have not faced up to the problem of time.' <sup>19</sup>

Clearly it is difficult for humans, bounded as we are by space and time, to conceive of eternity as being timeless, and for this and other reasons we can agree with Jonathan Edwards's statement that we have no positive idea of hell's eternity. He says, 'It is that duration that has no end', and then, after listing several negative and positive qualities of hell, he repeats, 'eternal means there will be no end'. Again, in struggling to explain the eternity of hell, Edwards adds that 'all arithmetic here fails, no rules of multiplication can reach the amount, for there is no end'. 1

Thomas Boston was naturally compelled to use the time-category to describe the eternity of the unbeliever's misery in hell. He makes two brief statements concerning it: first of all, it has a beginning; secondly, it will never have an end. 'Wherefore eternity, which is before us,' writes Boston, 'is a duration that has a beginning but no end.' He then qualifies that statement: 'It is a beginning without a middle, a beginning without an end . . . There is no end of it: while God is, it shall be.' <sup>22</sup>

The position of the prominent evangelical quoted earlier, however, is an unsound one at this point. It is one thing to acknowledge the difficulty of describing eternity, as did

<sup>19.</sup> The Evangelical Magazine of Wales (Evangelical Movement of Wales), vol.14, no.4, pp.12,22.

<sup>20.</sup> Gerstner, Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell, p.73.

<sup>21.</sup> The Works of Jonathan Edwards (Banner of Truth, 1974), vol.2, p.883.

<sup>22.</sup> Boston, Human Nature in its Fourfold State, p.495.

Jonathan Edwards, but it is quite another to introduce the possibility of eventual hope or annihilation for unbelievers in hell. For this possibility there is no biblical basis whatsoever.

The eternity of hell's sufferings should make us the more zealous and eager to tell people of the only One who is able to rescue them. Do we shrink from declaring these solemn truths? Does the thought of hell displease us? Remember that God will be glorified even through the eternal sufferings of unbelievers in hell. His injured majesty will be vindicated. In his famous sermon on 'Sinners in the Hands of an angry God' Jonathan Edwards says, 'God hath had it on His heart to show to angels and men, both how excellent His love is, and also how terrible His wrath is.' <sup>23</sup> What is supreme in the purpose of God in the election and reprobation of men is His own glory, and hell also will glorify the justice, power and wrath of God throughout eternity. In the meantime it is our responsibility to pray and work for the salvation of sinners before such awful punishment overtakes them.

<sup>23.</sup> The Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol.2, p.10.

# 5. Hell

# Its challenge

Before concluding this brief study, I want to apply the doctrine of hell in more detail to evangelistic preaching, and then to the need of compassion and zeal in the church for reaching hell-bound sinners with the gospel of Jesus Christ. First of all, however, I must sound a note of warning concerning the implications of rejecting or modifying the orthodox, biblical doctrine of hell.

#### A word of caution

To those tempted to abandon the traditional view, John W. Wenham has provided a much needed caution. He warns, for example, of the danger of twisting clear statements of Scripture, and allowing our thinking to be dominated by contemporary liberal thought rather than by the Word of God. Wenham also observes that the revival of Conditionalism earlier this century was pioneered largely by Socinians and Arians, who at the same time rejected such fundamental doctrines as the deity of Christ. 'Be wary', he adds, 'of such bedfellows.' That Jehovah Witnesses, Christadelphians and Seventh Day Adventists all teach Conditionalism rather than eternal punishment is significant, and this fact must be regarded as a warning to Christians not to compromise in the smallest detail with biblical truth.

I cannot agree with Wenham's conclusion that Seventh Day Adventists 'stand essentially in the broad stream of traditional evangelicalism, having eccentricities which may be

<sup>1.</sup> John Wenham, *The Goodness of God* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1974), p.38. This is a useful but disturbing book.

regarded as more or less peripheral'. The contemporary crisis within Adventism only confirms the fact that the group has neither accepted nor taught consistently such basic truths as justification by faith, the sufficiency of Christ's atoning sacrifice, or the supreme authority of the Bible in contrast to the writings of its leader Mrs Ellen White, which have hitherto been regarded as sacrosanct. These differences are by no means 'peripheral'. In a different category, admittedly, are Jehovah Witnesses and Christadelphians; as well as the doctrine of hell, these two heretical sects reject the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit, justification by faith, the sufficiency of Christ's atoning death, total depravity and the necessity of regeneration.

It is invariably true that the rejection of the orthodox doctrine of hell involves also the rejection of other foundational truths. A writer in the *Christian Remembrancer* for April 1863 confirms this fact and avows that 'we have not been able to discover a single impugner of the dogma of eternal punishment who is consistent in his denial, and at the same time orthodox'. Seventeen years later, E. M. Goulbourn made the same point, but in more detail:

It is a dangerous thing to meddle with the theology of the Bible; because all its doctrines, though many of them soar far beyond us into the region of mystery, are yet so wonderfully coherent that to touch one is to imperil the rest. Scriptural theology resembles an arch, so constructed that all the great stones shall be key-stones. Displace any of these stones, and you will find that the whole fabric falls to pieces under your hands. Dislodge the doctrine of eternal punishment from the system of scriptural theology, and you will find, if you employ against it similar objections, that the Atonement itself begins to give way; for if you are determined to reject the idea of a finite sin having an infinite penalty, you will find it at least equally hard, or even more hard, to understand how a finite sin can demand an infinitely precious Sacrifice. But the Atonement is not the only fundamental doctrine which you shake by dislodging that of eternal punishment.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2.</sup> Wenham, p.38.

E. M. Goulbourn, Everlasting Punishment (London: Rivingtons, 1880), p.26.

Recent history and trends in our country confirm Goulbourn's statement. Earlier this century many churches rejected the doctrine of eternal punishment, and long afterwards these same churches began to question and then reject other basic doctrines, with the result that most church denominations are now apostate. It is an alarming fact that some evangelicals today dislike the biblical doctrine of hell; but their theological position in other respects is equally disturbing, for they also deny doctrines like inerrancy, total depravity, etc. It is essential, then, for believers to embrace the orthodox doctrine of hell, not only because it is scriptural, but for the added reason that this doctrine is interrelated with other key doctrines (such as the wrath of God, the Trinity, the atonement, justification by faith, the doctrine of Scripture) and is dependent upon them.

## **Evangelistic preaching**

This doctrine also has a bearing upon the content and urgency of evangelistic preaching. Although as preachers we may not deny the orthodox doctrine of hell, yet we still need to ask ourselves whether we preach it with the clarity, frequency and urgency that God demands of us. 'The hearers are led to deny the truth which the preacher leaves out of his sermon,' was the perceptive observation of John Elias, to which he added, 'Omitting any truth intentionally in a sermon leads to the denial of it.'4 In the same context Elias speaks of the deficiencies in many preachers. He laments the fact, for example, that 'It is not plainly declared that all the human race are by nature "the children of wrath", and that the "sentence of condemnation" is passed on every one; that none can save himself; that no one deserves to be rescued. and that none will come to Christ to have life.'5 We need to examine our preaching in the light of this lament, for we may believe the right things about hell, and yet fail to preach it as

<sup>4.</sup> Edward Morgan, John Elias, Life and Letters (Banner of Truth, 1973), p.354.

<sup>5.</sup> Morgan, p.354.

an integral part of the gospel message. The warning of Professor John Murray at this point is pertinent:

A conspicuous defect . . . is the absence of warning and of condemnation in evangelistic effort. The naturalistic temper of our age, united with its callousness, makes the doctrine of hell peculiarly uncongenial. It is more often the subject of crude jest than it is of solemn warning or foreboding. The supposed politeness of modern etiquette has too often succeeded in creating the sentiment that any serious reference to hell and damnation is not accordant with the canons of good taste. These evils have in many cases ensnared even the orthodox.

But hell is an unspeakable reality and, if evangelism is to march on its way, it must by God's grace produce that sense of condemnation complexioned by the apprehension of perdition as the due reward of sin. For it is in the anguish of such a sense of condemnation, in the anguish of a conscience that stings with the apprehension of the wrath and curse of God, that the gospel of God's free grace becomes as cold water to a thirsty soul and as good news from a far country. <sup>6</sup>

We must then be thoroughly biblical and orthodox in doctrine and, at the same time, faithful in the proclamation of this divinely given message.

Our attention can now be turned to practical matters, such as warning, simplicity and directness in the preaching of hell, as well as the need of compassion for the lost.

## Warning

The note of warning must be sounded loud and clear in our preaching. Although we are accused of using the doctrines of wrath and hell in order to frighten people into the kingdom of God, our real purpose is to warn sinners of their danger and of their urgent need to trust in Christ for salvation. Furthermore, this is something which God commands us to do. It was God Himself who warned Adam and Eve of the punishment their sin would receive; He also sent Jonah to warn Nineveh of impending judgment; and Jesus Christ

6. Collected Writings of John Murray (Banner of Truth, 1976), vol.1, p.130.

during His earthly ministry frequently warned people of the consequences of unbelief and sin (see, for example, Matthew 7:13-14; Luke 13:1-5, and John 3:15-18). As the Lord's servants, however, we sometimes feel unsure as to the way in which we should issue this warning to sinners, and we are in need of both encouragement and guidance.

## Simplicity and directness

Jonathan Edwards's 'strategy' in preaching hell is helpful at this point. There is, he argues, a spiritual reality about hell that can affect most unconverted people. The motivating principle of humans is self-interest, and matters concerning their welfare or doom are of the utmost importance to them. Being in their natural state, men and women cannot see God's excellency, but they can most certainly hear His thunders. So Edwards argues that good, practical use should be made of the doctrine of hell in evangelistic preaching. He himself shows us how it should be done. Preaching on Ezekiel 22:14 with the express purpose of revealing the unavoidable and intolerable punishment of the wicked in hell, Edwards asks his hearers to imagine themselves being thrown into a fiery oven or a great furnace for a quarter of an hour:

What horror would you feel! . . . And after you had endured it for one minute, how overbearing would it be to you to think that you had it to endure the other fourteen!

But what would be the effect on your soul, if you knew you must lie there enduring that torment to the full for twenty-four hours . . . a whole year . . . a thousand years!—O then, how would your hearts sink if you knew that you must bear it for ever and ever! that there would be no end! that after millions of millions of ages, your torment would be no nearer to an end, and that you never, never should be delivered!

But your torment in hell will be immensely greater than this illustration represents . . .

You who now hear of hell and the wrath of the great God, and sit here so easy and quiet, and go away so careless; by and by will

7. John Gerstner, Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell (Baker, 1980), p.181.

shake and tremble, and cry out, and shriek, and gnash your teeth, and will be thoroughly convinced of the vast weight and importance of these things which you now despise.<sup>8</sup>

Clearly part of Edwards's strategy in preaching hell was the telling use of illustrations, to warn and enforce the doctrine with a sustained application at a level and in a language the people understood. In addition, such plain and direct talking was accompanied by deep concern, expressed particularly in pleading with his hearers.

Another preacher gifted in this respect was Charles Haddon Spurgeon. In his sermon on Matthew 8:11-12, for example, describing those who will be cast out when they arrive at heaven's gates, he pictures Justice saying, 'There he comes! there he comes! he spurned a father's prayers, and mocked a mother's tears.' He then goes on to underline the eternity of hell, where sinners have no hope:

They have not even the hope of dying—the hope of being annihilated. They are for ever—for ever—for ever—lost! On every chain in hell, there is written 'for ever'. In the fires, there, blaze out the words 'for ever'. Up above their heads, they read, 'for ever'... Oh! if I could tell you tonight that hell would one day be burned out, and that those who were lost might be saved, there would be a jubilee in hell at the very thought of it. But it cannot be—it is 'for ever' they are 'cast into outer darkness'.9

In this sermon Spurgeon remonstrates with the old men in his congregation, beseeching them to consider their danger: 'Let me warn you, grey-headed men; your evening is coming. O poor tottering grey-head, wilt thou take the last step into the pit? Let a young child step before thee and beg thee to consider . . .' Here is another aspect of the 'strategy' in preaching hell, namely, the importance of exhorting and warning each age-group and class of people in the congregation in a searching application of the Word.

The Works of Jonathan Edwards (Banner of Truth, 1974), vol.2, pp.81-3.
 C.H. Spurgeon, New Park Street Pulpit (Banner of Truth, 1963), vol.1 (1855), pp.307ff.

#### Compassion for the lost

Some of the Welsh preachers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were masters in the art of applying the gospel to their hearers. One of them, the Rev. Jenkin Jones, although an Arminian, was a popular and effective preacher of the gospel. Ordained in 1726 to the Welsh Congregational ministry in West Wales, he had a tremendous passion and zeal for the lost, and this was naturally expressed in his preaching and writing. Picturing the separation of believers and unbelievers at the second coming of the Lord, he describes the reaction of the unbelievers when they see the elect taken up into the air to be with Christ: 'O! take us up with you. What are you doing leaving us behind?' At this point the preacher hears their cry of anguish and replies:

What can I do now for you? I must tell you that I told you these things before, but you did not consider them. I called you to repentance and preached Christ to you and showed to you the way of salvation, but you did not accept Him...O, what can I do with you now?... Now it is too late... What can I do? You know how I endangered my life because of you to preach to you... but now the treasury of the gospel is sealed up and the day of grace has passed...<sup>10</sup>

Repeatedly the preacher expresses his anguish and perplexity as he sees these unbelievers being separated from the elect and later sent into hell. In this man's ministry there was much more than directness, simplicity and application; his heart was burning with compassion for the lost, in the realization of their awful danger outside of Christ.

Is it not here that many of us fail? Applying the gospel and pleading with sinners is more than a technique and more than oratory; it is essentially the language of a heart stirred and deeply affected by the gospel. Paradoxically, orthodoxy is both essential and inadequate, for the truth must also be *felt* by the preacher before he will be able to warn and exhort sinners effectively. In other words, if the gospel is to be

Thomas Vincent, Christ's Certain and Sudden Appearance to Judgment (1667)—quoted from the Welsh translation by Jenkin Jones, Dydd y Farn Fawr (1727), pp.61-101.

preached as God intends it, the essential qualities required are compassion coupled with a deep sense of urgency. Here and now God intends that His people love and care for unbelievers. There can be no excuse for indifference or cold professionalism among preachers. Our hearts must throb with the love of God. Dare we speak of the Lord's infinite love and the Saviour's glorious sacrifice with lips and hearts unmoved towards the lost? Compassion is required of us now, before it is too late. In heaven we will not need compassion for the lost; there, we shall exult in God and His glory, shown not only in our salvation but also in the just damnation of those in hell. Compassion for the lost, therefore, is confined to this world, where the doors of heaven are still open to repenting sinners.

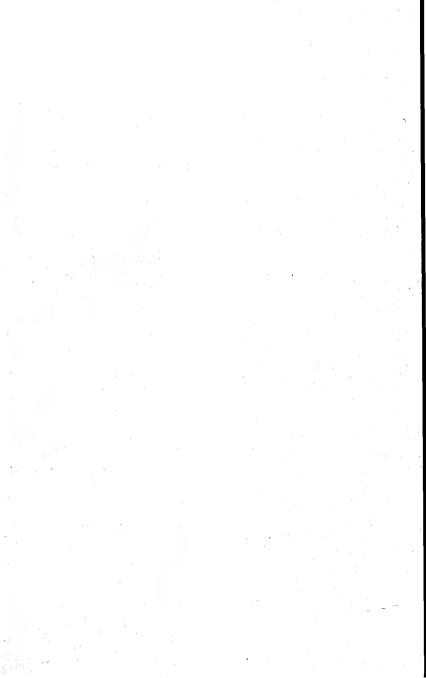
During his first furlough in England, Hudson Taylor addressed a large missionary conference in Scotland. He began his talk by relating the story of a Chinese man who fell into a dangerous river in China and was allowed to drown by a number of indifferent onlookers. The conference members were, of course, disgusted to hear of this callous indifference on the part of the bystanders. Hudson Taylor lost no time in applying his illustration. 'You are very upset by their refusal to rescue a drowning man from physical death,' he said, 'but what of your indifference to the spiritual death and hopelessness of thousands and thousands who die each year in China without ever hearing of the Lord Jesus?'

Hell is an awful reality, and without Christ it is to hell that men and women will go, whether they live in China or Wales or any other part of the world. Brethren, I plead with you as preachers of the gospel to love and warn and rescue people from hell. I know it is only God who saves, but do not hide behind the sovereignty of God. The sovereign God who elects sinners has also sovereignly appointed prayer, preaching, witnessing, etc., as the means by which He will gather in His elect, and we must therefore be diligent and zealous in the use of these means.

It is also true that compassion belongs to the very nature of God, and only God can give it to His people. However hard

we may try, it is impossible for us to work up genuine compassion for unbelievers. But the challenge remains. Are we imploring God for more and more of His compassion? Do we repent of our indifference and professionalism? Are our hearts and lives right before Him?

Each year, at least 30 million people throughout the world die. Each time the second finger of my watch moves, a person dies and goes to either heaven or hell. Do we cry to God for the conversion of these people, and are we doing our utmost to reach them with the gospel? One thing is clear. The days and months and years are speeding by for us as preachers too. Soon our ministries will end and 'every man's work shall be made manifest'. Our responsibilities are onerous indeed. It is time for us to reappraise our ministries and our priorities, and to give ourselves wholeheartedly to the Lord and His gospel for the salvation of the lost before the end comes.



# THE WRATH OF GOD

THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF WRATH, FINAL JUDGMENT AND HELL

With a ruthlessness that brooks no argument the truths affirmed in this booklet have been firmly rejected by two, if not three, generations of 'Christians' in our land. For them they represented merely the primitive gropings of a Christianity not fully come of age . . . Whereas, as this booklet clearly demonstrates, the entire body of revealed truth stands or falls together . . . The doctrines of wrath and judgment in the Scriptures are found inextricably intertwined with all other strands of biblical truth, the Sermon on the Mount itself being no exception. Thus, in applying the scissors to neatly trim off its unacceptable edges, these people were effectively committing the whole of Scripture, and its message to sinners, to the shredding machine—with calamitous consequences for church and society alike . . . Those of us once tutored in this approach, whose eyes have since been opened to the wonderful truth of God's intervention in grace to save lost sinners, have to confess to our shame that we have often lacked the courage in our own day to deliver this message to the people with the urgency, firmness and passion it deserves. That is why this book is addressed in the first instance to ministers and preachers of the gospel. It deserves and it needs to be read, however, by a wider public, for there are few publications available today that confront men and women with these awesome realities in their true biblical perspective, in order that they might be saved.

From the foreword by J. Elwyn Davies, General Secretary of the Evangelical Movement of Wales

Eryl Davies is Minister of Ebeneser Evangelical Church, Bangor, North Wales. He is Editor of the theological journal *Foundations* and Director of the Evangelical Movement of Wales' Christian Study Course

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