

The Discerner

the voice of... **Religion Analysis Service**

A QUARTERLY EXPOSING
UNBIBLICAL TEACHING & MOVEMENTS

Volume 31, Number 1

January • February • March 2011

Eckankar
Confucianism
Hare Krishna
Freemasons
Jehovah's Witnesses
Humanism
Jainism
Judaism
Neopaganism
MOONIES
Universalism
Wicca
Islam
Hinduism
Exposed!
MORMONS
BAHA' I FAITH
Buddhism
Scientology
Satanism

In This Edition:

Office Notes	2
<i>RAS Team</i>	
Dear Reader	3
<i>by Rev. Laurence J. Sutherland</i>	
With This Issue	4
<i>by Rev. Laurence J. Sutherland</i>	
Religious Tolerance in America.....	5
<i>by Pastor H. Van Someren</i>	
Purgatory	10
<i>by Steve Lagoon, RAS Staff Writer</i>	
Is There a Hell?	26
<i>by Roy E. Knuteson, Ph.D.</i>	
Notes Section	32
QUIZ: Health and Religion.....	34



*"Hereby know we the spirit of truth
and the spirit of error" 1 John 4:6*

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OFFICE NOTES

Please continue to pray for Dr. William BeVier, former president of RAS and editor of *The Discerner*, as he is now in hospice care for cancer. Remember too his wife JoAnn, family and friends.

A good number have commented about our last issue on Evolution. We believe that Evolution is one of those lynchpins that Satan is using to destroy the faith of many, particularly of young believers. More copies of this issue are available upon request.

We celebrate with countless Christians throughout the world the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible this year (1611-2011). The King James Bible or the so-called Authorized Version, originally written in Elizabethan/Shakespearean English, has been revised several times and used largely by Protestants. Depending on our age and, perhaps our denomination, we surmise that the King James Version will continue to be treasured for preaching, teaching, and devotions in the coming years as well.

RAS TEAM

DEAR READER

Permit me to inform you about a personal ministry item. Since 1994, I have been deeply involved with several teaching and preaching ministries in Eastern Europe. In this regard, I have made over 40 trips to Latvia, Romania, Ukraine, and Bulgaria. Generally, these trips entail teaching in modular programs of two weeks in length with preaching opportunities on the side. Again this year, I will be going to Latvia and Romania, May 5 – May 23, to do some follow-up contacts for ministries begun several years ago. This will be a joyous event for me: 1) to see and visit with former students who are now in full-time service; 2) to renew contacts with fellow workers at the Riga International Bible Institute in Riga, Latvia; 3) to encourage pastor friends in Riga and in Novadari, Romania; and 4) to fellowship with old friends in support ministries.

This trip is designed to be very interactive and instructive as I represent many supporters and friends in the USA and Germany and also as a board member of the Minnesota Coalition for Eastern Europe (MCEE) that endorses and sustains some 25 ministries in Eastern Europe, primarily in Bulgaria, Latvia, Ukraine, and Romania. God is blessing most of these works in very demonstrable ways. For instance, the Riga International Bible Institute has regular student bodies of both Russians and Latvians numbering around 30. The MCEE has sent some 120 containers of clothing to Ukraine. The church in Novadari, Romania has doubled in the last two years. I was privileged to help start this church with students from the Romanian Bible College about 10 years ago. A Romanian youth center is being constructed to reach the hundreds of young people, including gypsies and Muslims. In a nearby city, we purchased a tractor for farmers so that churches in the area could literally “feed their flocks.”

All the above relates to our ministry with RAS of: “exposing aberrant teachings and movements.” The cults (there is a new Mormon Temple in Kiev, Ukraine now) and various false teachings such as the “Health and Wealth Gospel” are making inroads all over Eastern Europe. My materials on the cults are often used by my former students.

Your prayers for me and these ministries are appreciated. May God bless you as you serve our Lord Jesus Christ in your niche.

Larry Sutherland

WITH THIS ISSUE

There are doctrines that should especially sober our souls — I refer to hell and judgment. Modern preaching seems to either gloss over these doctrines or to omit them entirely. Even to read as literature the “Divine Comedy” by Dante or Jonathan Edwards’ famous sermon: “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” can cause many to tremble in fear or quickly seek a diversion. Both a personal judgment and a final hell are taught with vivid, rhetorical skill in the Bible by none other than our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

The treatment of “Purgatory” by our RAS staff writer, Steve Lagoon, is thorough and comprehensive. He gives us the historical, theological, and practical aspects of this prominent teaching by the Roman Catholic Church, citing both Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians in an analysis, that goes back to the Apocryphal writings before the Christian era. He deals as well with the New Testament texts that relate to the Intermediate State. Our other frequent RAS writer, Dr. Roy Knuteson, supplies a related study on “hell.” We know that this word is used overhand in curses and common vulgarities. God forgive us for our limited blasphemous vocabulary! Knuteson’s biblical exposition should correct our ignorance and any frothy banal understanding of hell.

Our other article is revivalistic, provocative, stinging, and appealing, all at the same time. These are the words of an earnest Protestant pastor as he surveys America’s spirituality. Using a Pew Research instrument as his launching point, Rev. Van Someren sizes up the American religious scene with graphic and incisive comments and appeals for America to repent and experience the glorious mercy of God.

Lastly, religion is bound to affect our health, right? The quiz tests us on how various religious bodies and the Scriptures themselves relate to our well-being — for example, the promise of health and wellness. Let us know if you score 80% or more.

Larry Sutherland

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN AMERICA

by Pastor H. Van Someren

The word “tolerate” used to mean putting up with something we disliked, e.g., a rude neighbor or loud music from a neighbor’s yard. We certainly didn’t agree with these things, but we patiently put up with bad and selfish behavior. Today, the word “tolerance” has taken on a different meaning. Not only are we to tolerate but to accept what we do not agree with as being OK. If we disagree, then we are accused of bias, intolerance, and even hate speech in some cases. The pressure from the liberal left in combination with liberal theologians and preachers is generating a negative effect on the church. The lack of sound Biblical doctrine being preached from the pulpits of this land is eroding the foundation of the Body of Christ.

While in Montana, I read an interesting article by Eric Gorski, AP Religion Writer. He stated, “America remains a nation of believers, but a new survey finds most Americans don’t feel their religion is the only way to eternal life – even if their faith tradition teaches otherwise.”

Last year the Pew Forum on Religious Life conducted a survey in which they found that 57% of those who attended evangelical churches believed that there was more than one religion that led to heaven. When all Americans with a religious affiliation were considered, it was found that 70% held to the belief Jesus is not the only way to heaven.

D. Michael Lindsay, a Rice University sociologist of religion stated, “The survey shows religion in America is, indeed, 3,000 miles wide and only three inches deep.” He further stated that “There is a growing pluralistic impulse toward tolerance and that is having theological consequences.”

A few of the things this theological tolerance has led to are:

- Homosexual pastors in the pulpit and in other positions of authority in the church.
- Failure to proclaim the name Jesus in the sermon for fear someone might be offended.
- Failure to preach about sin, repentance and forgiveness and the need of the blood of Christ to cleanse us from all sin lest someone of a different religion become offended.

- Gay marriage in some states.
- Approval of abortion of unwanted babies.
- In many cases allowing the church to be used to promote political agendas.
- The preaching of salvation by works.
- The approval of worldly activities in the church.

Many more things could be added to this list, all done in the name of tolerance so as not to offend anyone or any belief system.

Many Beliefs

In a recent survey, 70% of religious Americans say they believe many faiths can lead to an eternal state.

Question Asked: Can many religions lead to eternal life?
 Following are the percentages of those answering yes:

Hindu-----	89%
Buddhist-----	86
Jewish-----	82
Catholic-----	79
Orthodox Christian-----	72
Protestant*-----	66
Muslim-----	56
Mormon-----	39
Jehovah's Witness-	16

*Includes Evangelical (57%), mainline (83%) and historically black churches (59%).

SOURCE: Pew Forum on Religion and Life

These statistics rile my soul. Why is it that 57% of the Evangelicals believe that there is more than one way to heaven? This is a staggering statistic! What is the reason behind this heretical thought?

Let me mention a few reasons that I believe causes this falling away from the Truth:

- Church leadership and pastors accepting secular teachings and bringing secular thought into the church.
- Lack of sound Biblical doctrinal preaching from the pulpit.
- Bringing the world into the church. In my community, an evangelical church viewed the last Super Bowl in the church on Sunday evening.

- Lack of sound Biblical teaching in the Sunday School and Bible Study classes.
- Lack of church discipline.
- Lack of home devotional times.
- Lack of Christians attending Sunday School and Bible Studies.
- Lack of prayer.
- Replacing the old gospel hymns that challenged and fed the soul with so called “Christian Rock” with a beat that appeals more to the emotions than the heart. My heart cries as I see many churches no longer singing the old Gospel Hymns and other solid hymnody that challenged our lives and touched our hearts with the abundant grace of God.

Christians are increasingly viewing life from a secular world view instead of from a Biblical world view. Let me contrast a few things from these two worldviews:

CWV – Christian World View (Biblical World View)

SWV – Secular World View

Sin

CWV: - Sin is a violation of Divine order or rebellion against God’s commands.

SWV: - Sin does not exist and is recognized only as a mistake or error in judgment – right and wrong is defined by the sinner’s own lustful desires.

Abortion

CWV: Life begins at conception and to abort a fetus is to murder a child. A child is God’s gift to the parents.

SWV: The fetus is a blob of flesh and the “so called rights of the mother” supersede the right of the unborn child that in reality has no rights from a secular world view.

Gay Marriage

CWV: God has ordained that marriage is between man and woman beginning with Adam and Eve. The Bible nowhere speaks of marriage between two people of the same sex. This is an abomination before God and a strong indicator of the immoral abyss into which our country is falling.

SWV: The same rights should be given to two partners of the same sex if they choose to get “married” and this unholy union should be seen on the same level as marriage between man and woman.

Sexual Relations

CWV: Sexual relations are reserved only for men and women who are married. Sex outside of the marriage bond is called adultery and fornication by God and a grievous sin against Him.

SWV: Since God’s commands are irrelevant, there are no restrictions on satisfying the lusts and desires of the flesh. Let each person decide for him or herself.

Way of Salvation

CWV: There is only one way to heaven and that is through Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God. Act 4:12: “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” 14:6 “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’”

SWV: All religions lead to heaven with the emphasis on good works by which man earns his way to eternal life.

Ministers of the Gospel

CWV: A minister of the Gospel is called by God to serve Him in this special capacity. He must uphold the Word of God in truth and purity and not compromise or add to or remove from its content.

SWV: Ministers of the Gospel should have the freedom to pick and choose which parts of scripture are applicable to modern thought. Instead of adapting current life style according to Biblical absolutes, the Scriptures must be changed to adapt to current lifestyles and secular thought.

Followers of Christ or Christians

CWV: These are those who trust in Christ for salvation, adhere to God’s commands and live accordingly. They are called to share the Gospel with the lost and strive against all that is evil.

SWV: For many, Christianity is an obstacle to be removed. Christian morality and ethics are considered out of date and to be eliminated. Christians are considered fair game to be harassed and mocked whenever opportunity arises.

Jesus

CWV: Jesus Christ is deity, the God-man who was crucified, dead, buried, rose bodily from the grave, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father. Christ and He alone bore the sins of the world and shed His blood on the cross of Calvary as a sacrifice to God for the sins of mankind. He and He alone is the one by whom the sinner is saved from his sins and is given the gift of eternal life. There is no other way to heaven!

SWV: Jesus is a historical character only, not the Son of God. He was a good man and prophet of His day, but the world considers many of His teachings and commands irrelevant. The name Jesus is to be denigrated and put down whenever possible. It is to be eliminated from all public prayer but is more than acceptable as a curse word. It is the name most feared by the secular world.

More and more we are seeing Christians and congregations across this land incorporating secular thought into the teachings of the church. Are you one of those who think the church should go with the flow and adapt to secular thought or do you believe the church should stand its ground and not compromise the inerrant Word of God? Do you find yourself more tolerant of secular teachings and immoral behavior? Pastors, where do you stand on these issues? Are you standing firm on the Word of God or do you find yourself compromising here and there so no one is offended by what the scripture says on contemporary issues?

I pray that God will challenge each of us to evaluate in the light of His Word our stand on the Word of God. Are we standing firm on the Solid Rock or are we backing down in fear of the world's onslaught?

1Co 16:13: Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.

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PURGATORY

by Steve Lagoon, RAS Staff Writer

In this article we will examine the doctrine of purgatory. Boettner states that purgatory is a belief of both the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches.¹ It is also held by some in the Anglican/Episcopalian tradition.² We will focus on the doctrine primarily as it has been espoused by the Roman Catholic Church. In part one, we will provide a comprehensive overview of the doctrine of purgatory. Part two will provide a response that shows that the doctrine of purgatory is both unreasonable and unbiblical. Most importantly, we shall find that the doctrine of purgatory results in a wholesale distortion of the saving gospel of Jesus Christ.

Part One: Overview of the doctrine of purgatory

The most recent catechism of the Roman Catholic Church defines the doctrine of purgatory:

All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven. The Church gives the name *Purgatory* to this final purification of the elect, which is entirely different from the punishment of the damned.³

Understanding purgatory in its Roman Catholic theological setting

In order to understand the Roman Catholic view of purgatory, we have to understand how the doctrine fits within the overall system of Roman Catholic theology. Perhaps a good place to start is with the problem of sin. With Protestants, *Rome* (hereafter, shorthand for the Roman Catholic Church) recognizes the serious nature of sin and the separation it causes from God.

Two types of personal sin

Also, in agreement with Protestants, Rome distinguishes between original sin (the corrupt nature we all inherit from our progenitors) and *actual* or *personal* sin. It further distinguishes two types of personal sin. Boettner explains: "The Roman Church divides all sin into two classes, making an important and elaborate distinction between so-called 'mortal' and 'venial' sins. Mortal sin is described as

‘any great offense against the law of God’ and is so called because it is deadly, killing the soul and subjecting it to eternal punishment.”⁷⁴ The *Handbook for Today’s Catholic* defines venial sin: “A venial sin is a less serious rejection of God’s love. Venial means ‘easily forgiven.’ A sin is venial if the offense is not serious... Venial sin is like a spiritual sickness which hurts but does not kill.”⁷⁵ Boettner correctly observes that, “There seems to be no very definite catalogue of which sins are mortal and which are venial. The classification varies from place to place and from priest to priest.”⁷⁶

What to do about sin?

In the big picture, Roman Catholic theology is a sacramental system in which God’s saving grace is administered through the sacraments of the church. Rome says: “There are seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony.”⁷⁷ The first step for sinners, according to Rome, is to get water baptized by the Church since “both original sin and personal sins are cleansed away in the waters of baptism.”⁷⁸ After baptism, penance is necessary, for “Penance is the sacrament by which the sins committed after baptism are forgiven through the absolution of the priest.”⁷⁹ Further, “The priest gives us a penance after confession that we may make some atonement to God for our sins, receive help to avoid them in the future, and make some satisfaction for the temporal punishment due to them.”⁸⁰

Enter purgatory

It is at this point we can introduce purgatory into Rome’s system. This is because penance will remove the eternal consequences of sin, but not the “temporal punishment due to them.” Boettner elaborates: “The priest forgives the guilt of mortal sin, which saves the penitent from going to hell; but he cannot remit the penalty due for those sins and so the penitent must atone for them by the performance of good works which he prescribes.”⁸¹ Indeed, “Even after a penitent has received pardon, a large but unknown amount of punishment remains to be expiated in purgatory.”⁸² The *Handbook for Today’s Catholic* says: “If you die in the love of God but possess any ‘stains of sin,’ such stains are cleansed away in a purifying process called purgatory. These stains of sin are primarily the temporal punishment due to venial or mortal sins already forgiven but for which sufficient penance was not done during your lifetime.”⁸³ Catholic apologist Bertrand Conway agrees: “All, therefore, who die in venial sins, or with the temporal punishment of their sins still unpaid must atone for them in purgatory.”⁸⁴ However, penance isn’t the only way to cut short the punishment due in purgatory. Rome has invented another avenue as well... indulgences!

Indulgences and the treasury of merit

S. Lewis Johnson explains the Roman Catholic doctrine of indulgences:

Further, the church maintains a ‘treasury’ of merit earned by saints for deeds going beyond God’s normal requirements. The merits may be distributed to those in need of remission by the bishops of the Christian communion through their ‘power of the keys’ (cf. Matthew 16:19). These indulgences were remissions of the debt of temporal punishment... The Reformers saw the treasury of merit, consisting of rewards for meritorious deeds of the saints, which might be conveyed to individuals as means of forgiveness of sins through indulgences paid for by money, as a denial of the sole saviorhood of the Son of God.¹⁵

Boettner agrees:

Indeed, that the saints can even store up excess merits in heaven beyond the requirements of duty, through such things as regular attendance at church, masses, rosary prayers, fastings, the wearing of medals, crucifixes, scapulars, etc. These excess merits Rome calls ‘works of supererogation.’ Mary and the saints are said to have stored up vast treasures of merit, from which the pope can draw and dispense to the faithful.¹⁶

The Baltimore Catechism explains it from a Roman Catholic point of view:

How does the Church by means of indulgences remit the temporal punishment due to sin? The Church by means of indulgences remits the temporal punishment due to sin by applying to us from her spiritual treasury part of the infinite satisfaction of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the saints... What is the superabundant satisfaction of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the saints? The superabundant satisfaction of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the saints is that which they gained during their lifetime but did not need, and which the church applies to their fellow members of the communion of saints.¹⁷

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: “Through indulgences the faithful can obtain the remission of temporal punishment resulting from sin for themselves and also for the souls in purgatory.”¹⁸ What this all means is that in Roman Catholic theology there are in fact two ways to get out of purgatory. The person in purgatory can suffer until they have been fully cleansed of the stains of their sin or those still living can remit indulgences in the person’s behalf, thereby shortening their time in purgatory.

Help for those in purgatory

Catholic author Anthony Wilhelm puts it this way: “Those in the state of purgation cannot help themselves, but we can help them attain heaven by praying for them, offering Mass for them, offering our sufferings, good actions, etc.”¹⁹ The Baltimore Catechism is equally direct: “Can the faithful on earth, through the communion of saints, relieve the sufferings of the souls in purgatory? The faithful on earth, through the communion of saints, can relieve the sufferings of the souls in purgatory by prayer, fasting, and other good works, by indulgences, and by having Masses offered for them.”²⁰

To sum things up to this point: We have seen that Roman Catholic theology teaches that most Christians, upon their deaths, do not go to heaven (or hell), but to purgatory to suffer for their earthly sins (and even sins committed while in purgatory) and be purged by the cleansing fires of suffering. We have also found that those in purgatory can have their sentences in purgatory shortened through indulgences granted by the Church, which can be obtained by various good works. Before we assess this doctrine in light of the Bible, let us take a brief detour to find out how this doctrine developed in the church.

The historical development of purgatory

Now that we have defined the doctrine of purgatory, and how it fits into the Roman Catholic theological system, we will examine the historical roots and development of the doctrine. Roman Catholic author Anthony Wilhelm stated: “Parts of the Christian Church almost from the beginning believed in a state of purgation after death.”²¹ A review of early church history shows that Wilhelm’s statement is fairly accurate. Reformed Theologian Louis Berkhof is quite instructive in tracing the development toward purgatory in the early church:

It was only when it became apparent that Christ would not immediately return, that the Church Fathers began to reflect on the state between death and the resurrection. One of the first was Justin, who said: ‘The souls of the pious are in a better place, those of the unjust and wicked in a worse, waiting for the time of judgment.’ He denounced as heretical those who said ‘that their souls, when they die, are taken to heaven. The general opinion of the later fathers... was that the dead descend into hades, a place with various divisions, where they remain until the day of judgment or, according to Augustine, until they are sufficiently purified... An exception was soon made for the martyrs who, according to Tertullian, were at once admitted

into glory... And when the doctrine of the meritoriousness of good works became prominent, it was taught that those who were diligent in their performances were worthy of passing into heaven at once.²²

Church historian Philip Schaff sums up the belief of the early church relating to the intermediate state of believers after death until the time of Christ's coming:

Christian martyrs and confessors, to whom were afterwards added other eminent saints, pass immediately after death into heaven... The majority of Christian believers, being imperfect, enter for an indefinite period into a preparatory state of rest and happiness, usually called Paradise (comp. Luke 23:41) or Abraham's Bosom (Luke 16:23). There they are gradually purged of remaining infirmities until they are ripe for heaven... After the fifth or sixth century, certainly since Pope Gregory 1, Purgatory was substituted for Paradise.²³

Millard Erickson adds further details tracing the development of the doctrine of purgatory: "The Council of Trent reiterated the belief, pointing to various church fathers and synods as authorities for it... there was an ancient tradition of praying, offering the Mass, and giving of alms for the benefit of the dead. Tertullian mentions anniversary Masses for the dead, a practice that suggests belief in purgatory."²⁴ Erickson briefly mentioned the early church practice of praying for the dead. Roman Catholic theologian Alan Schreck states: "Praying for the dead makes sense only if those prayers can benefit the dead. If they had already arrived at their final eternal destiny, heaven or hell, then praying for the dead would be futile. However, if the deceased were undergoing the healing and purification of purgatory, then prayer for God's mercy on them would be reasonable and fitting."²⁵ However, Schaff asserts: "The current prayers for the dead were originally only thanksgivings for the grace of God manifested to them. But, they afterwards passed into intercessions, without any warrant in the teaching of the apostles."²⁶

In summary then, the early Christians tended to believe that only saints and martyrs went to heaven immediately upon death, the rest of Christians went to paradise (Abraham's Bosom) awaiting Christ's second coming and future judgment. Over time, the idea developed that those in paradise (later known as purgatory) would go to heaven after a time of purifying suffering

Indeed, these early Christians thought, they did well to pray for their departed loved ones, perhaps helping them along on their journey to heaven.

The nature of purgatory

But, if we ask if purgatory is a real place with real fire, we shall find a range of opinion amongst its advocates. Catholic apologist Dave Armstrong says: “The Catholic Church has not defined whether purgatory is a place or a process, or whether it contains real fire.”²⁷

Father Oscar Lukafahr speaks to the same issue: “Nor does the Church teach that there is physical fire in purgatory. The symbolism of fire has been used to express the real pain of purgatory, but the fire cannot be physical because those in purgatory do not have material bodies that can be burned. The ‘fire’ of purgatory is the fire of God’s love... Popular expressions of purgatory in the past have sometimes included graphic descriptions of the suffering of the ‘poor souls.’”²⁸

Lukafahr mentions the “popular expressions of purgatory” with “graphic description of” purgatorial sufferings”. Indeed these were the prevailing ideas about purgatory through the middle ages. For instance, William Cathcart has provided multiple examples in history to show how the Catholics of the middle ages understood the literal fiery torments of purgatory:

Of the tenth century Mosheim wrote: “The fire which burns out the stains remaining on souls after death, was an object of intense dread to all, nay, was more feared than the punishment of hell... In A.D. 1196 a monk of the convent of Evesham had a vision of purgatory. In it he beheld some leap suddenly forth from their place of torture and fly away as far as possible; then he saw them, dreadfully burned as they were, assailed by the tormentors with forks, torches, and every instrument of torture, and driven back to their punishments. Though burned, pierced to the entrails by lashes, and shockingly mangled, they were subjected to more tolerable pains. He saw some roasted before a fire; others were fried on pans; red hot nails were driven to the bone into some; others were tortured with a horrid stench in baths of pitch and sulphur, mixed with melted lead, brass and other metals; immense worms with poisonous teeth gnawed some; others were transfixed on stakes with fiery thorns; the torturers tore them with their nails, flogged them with scourges, and lacerated them with dreadful agonies.”²⁹

With such descriptions of purgatory holding the popular imagination, it is no wonder how the church had become so corrupt in the practice of selling indulgences (“when the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs!”), and why it compelled Martin Luther to protest with his Ninety-five Theses in 1517 sparking the Protestant Reformation.

Despite the traditional graphic description of purgatory, the Roman Catholic Church has softened its stance in this regard, particularly at the time of the Council of Florence as David Steinmetz explains: “The Greek Church had difficulty with the final form of the Latin doctrine of purgatory, rejecting the notion of atonement through suffering and the idea of material fire. The Greeks and Latins, however, were able to agree at Florence (1439) that there is such a place as purgatory, and that prayers for the dead are both useful and appropriate.”³⁰ Contemporary Catholic writers greatly downplay the painful nature of purgatory in comparison with the past. Catholic teacher Leonard Foley says: “We must not make purgatory into a flaming concentration camp on the brink of hell—or even a ‘hell for a short time.’”³¹ Karl Adam, in his book *The Spirit of Catholicism*, went so far as to compare the nature of purgatory to the “beginning of spring.”³²

Part Two: An evangelical response to the doctrine of purgatory

At this point, we can examine biblical arguments put forth by the Roman Catholic Church to support its belief in purgatory. It is common to see evangelical Protestants criticize the belief in purgatory for lack of biblical support. However, it may surprise some to see the same assessment from well-informed Roman Catholics themselves. For instance, Father Richard McBrien, Chairman of the Department of Theology at the University of Notre Dame, in his monumental work *Catholicism* stated: “There is, for all practical purposes, no biblical basis for the doctrine of purgatory.”³³ A more significant admission to the same effect was made at the Fifth Lateran Council (1512-1517) which categorically stated “Purgatory cannot be proved from Sacred Scripture, which is in the canon.”³⁴

The lack of biblical support for purgatory would seem to be a problem. But for Roman Catholics, Church Tradition is a valid source for theology. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, “Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, then, are bound closely together... both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring... Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.”³⁵

Here lies an important distinction between Roman Catholics and evangelicals, for evangelicals insist that theology must be drawn from and grounded in the Scriptures themselves. In the case of purgatory, we have seen that it was a mistaken development within the early church without biblical support. Indeed, a brief examination will

show the flimsy nature of the biblical evidence put forth in support of the doctrine by Catholic apologists.

The most famous one, of course is from the apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees 12. We must begin with the obvious. This passage is in the apocrypha and so is not accepted as Scripture by Protestant evangelicals for good reason. Further, Wayne Grudem comments: “This passage in 2 Maccabees is difficult to square even with Roman Catholic teaching, because it teaches that soldiers who had died in the mortal sin of idolatry (which cannot be forgiven [after death] according to Catholic teaching) should have prayer and sacrifices offered for them with the possibility that they will be delivered from their suffering.”³⁶ Church historian Philip Schaff agrees: “Roman Catholic divines use this passage [2 Maccabees 12] as an argument for the doctrine of purgatory. But it would prove too much for them; for the sin here spoken of was not venial, but the deadly sin of idolatry, which is excluded from purgatory and from the reach of efficacious intercession.”³⁷

Matthew 12:32

The first biblical passage usually appealed to by Roman Catholics is found in Matthew 12:32: “Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.” Conway states: “Our Lord speaks of the forgiveness of sins in ‘the world to come’ (Matt. xii, 32), which refers to purgatory according to St. Augustine (*De Civ. Dei.*, xxi., 24) and St. Gregory the Great *Dial.*, iv., 39).”³⁸ Likewise Lukefahr: “From this [Matthew 12:32] the Church has concluded that some sins can be forgiven in the age to come, in the state we know as purgatory.”³⁹

Geisler and Mackenzie offer a most salient response:

The text is not speaking about forgiveness in the next life after suffering for sins, but the fact that there will be no forgiveness for this sin in ‘the world to come’ (Matt. 12:32). How can the denial that this sin will not ever be forgiven, even after death, be the basis for speculating that sins will be forgiven in the next life? Also, purgatory involves only venial sins, but this sin is not venial; it is mortal, being eternal and unforgiveable. How can a statement about the unforgiveness of a mortal sin in the next life be the basis for an argument that non-mortal sins will be forgiven then?⁴⁰

Matthew 5:26 (Luke 12:59)

In a parable about resolving conflicts, Jesus admonishes disputants to “settle matters quickly” lest a judge have you “thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny” (Matthew 5:26). Dave Armstrong provides a Catholic understanding of the passage: “Now let us consider a little where this repayment... is to be made. And we find from most ancient Fathers that it is in Purgatory”⁴¹ Geisler and Mackenzie again provide the response: “Jesus is not speaking about a spiritual prison after death but a physical prison before death... Nothing in the context warrants the conclusion that he intended the concept of a ‘prison’ to refer to a place (or process) of purgation for sins in the next life.”⁴²

We can add to this that the text falls within Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount which contents are essentially ‘kingdom ethics.’ Jesus is explaining how believers should live their lives on earth (on subjects like marriage, divorce, adultery, oaths, prayer, alms, etc), not making eschatological pronouncements. True, Jesus does refer to “danger of the fire of hell” in the same context (Matthew 5:21), but, this is no help to Rome’s interpretation. This is because the reference to hell is explicit, whereas Rome’s reading of 5:25-26 would require that Jesus suddenly shifts into an allegory in the middle of a section that is otherwise entirely narrative teaching. Indeed, it is preposterous to suggest that either a first century audience or a modern one would read the passage as allegory when it makes perfect sense as narrative within a narrative section.

1 Corinthians 3:10-15

A final passage that is often cited by Rome in defense of the doctrine of purgatory is 1 Corinthians 3:10-15:

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But, each one should build with care.¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw,¹³ their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work.¹⁴ If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward.¹⁵ If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

Dave Armstrong says, “This is a clear and obvious allusion to Purgatory... Thus thought the Church Fathers.”⁴³ Conway says, “St. Paul, speaking of slight sins to be burned away and the ‘soul saved so as by fire’ (1 Cor. iii. 11-15) refers to Purgatory.”⁴⁴

In Romans 14:10, the apostle Paul, speaking to Christians said, “You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat.” Likewise, in 2 Corinthians 5:10, Paul said, “For we must all appear before the judgment of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” Charles Ryrie comments on this “Judgment of Believers’ Works”:

Two principal passages recount the fact and details of this judgment (1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10)... The site of this judgment is the bema of Christ... Only believers will stand in this judgment, for Paul makes clear that it relates to those who have built on the Foundation, Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11-12). The nature of the believer’s works will be examined in this judgment... The outcome will be either reward or deprivation of reward. Salvation is not in question, for those deprived of reward ‘shall be saved, as though through fire.’⁴⁵

It is utterly clear that the apostle Paul is not speaking of a place or process called purgatory, where in Christians go upon their death to have their sins purged. On the contrary, the passage is speaking of a singular event of judgment before Jesus Christ, resulting in rewards, or loss thereof for deeds done while in the body. The image of fire is not of an ongoing act of suffering and purging, but rather represents the once and for all judgment of Christians at the bema of Christ.

Biblical view of the intermediate state

Indeed, the New Testament is not silent about what happens to Christians at death. Theologian Charles Hodge stated:

The Protestant doctrine on the state of the soul after death includes the continued conscious existence of the soul after the dissolution of the body... The souls of believers are at their death, made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection... There is nothing contrary to Scripture in the assumption of a sudden and immediate change from imperfect to perfect holiness. The Protestant doctrine is that the souls of believers are at death made perfect in holiness.⁴⁶

Conway objects to the Protestant idea defended by Hodge of “a sudden and immediate change from imperfect to perfect holiness” upon death. He speaks of “the unwarranted assumption that God by ‘some sudden, magical change’ purifies the soul at the instant of death.”⁴⁷ Hodge, however, notes what the writer of Hebrews said, “But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God... You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect” (Hebrews 12:22-23). Yes, just as our God will raise our bodies in the twinkling of an eye (1 Corinthians 15:52), He will also perfect our souls at the moment of our translation to heaven.

Further, because Roman Catholics believe that purgatory will end at Christ’s second coming, and that those who have just entered will be immediately purged of their sins and go to heaven, they have no ground to object to the Protestant view so described.

The New Testament record displays the confident expectation that Christians will immediately be in heaven upon death. For instance, Paul said, “I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far, but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body” (Philippians 1:23-24). He also said, “We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). Paul clearly expects to go to heaven straightaway upon his death without any stops along the way. The writer of Hebrews declares: “Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment” (Hebrews 9:27).

We can sum up the biblical information concerning the question of purgatory by agreeing with the Fifth Lateran Council that the teaching is not found in the Bible. We can even say that it contradicts passages in the New Testament that show the expectation of Christians was to be in the immediate presence of the Lord upon death.

Purgatory and the early church

In a previous section, we noted the ideas held by many early church fathers that lead to the full blown doctrine of purgatory in the middle ages. We have shown that the doctrine does not originate from the Bible, but is a post-biblical development and speculative belief of the early church. Is this tradition a valid reason for accepting the doctrine of purgatory? We must answer with a categorical no. We cannot simply assume ‘early is better.’ There were heresies already during apostolic times (proto-Gnosticism, docetism, legalism). In the period between the second through the fourth centuries, the church

battled such heresies as Arianism (which denied the deity of Jesus Christ), Modalistic Monarchianism (which denied the Trinity), and Marcionism (which rejected the Old Testament and much of the New from a Gnostic perspective). The fact that these heresies were held early and by many does not mean that they should be accepted today. The standard in the church has always been and must always be the Scriptures themselves. If a doctrine or teaching is not in accord with the Bible, it must be rejected.

Purgatory and reason

But Roman Catholics argue that the doctrine is so reasonable. So says Conway:

The reasonableness of the Church tradition doctrine has been admitted by honest non—Catholics. Mallock writes: ‘It is becoming fast recognized that it (purgatory) is the only doctrine that can bring a belief in future rewards and punishments into anything like accordance with our notions of what is just and reasonable. So far from its being a superfluous superstition, it is seen to be just what is demanded at once by reason and morality.’⁴⁸

Lorraine Boettner disagrees:

The doctrine of purgatory rests on the assumption that while God forgives sin, His justice nevertheless demands that the sinner must suffer the full punishment due to him for his sin before he will be allowed to enter heaven. But such a distinction is illogical even according to human reasoning. For it manifestly would be unjust to forgive a criminal the guilt of his crime and still send him to prison to suffer it.⁴⁹

Lukefahr suggests that the doctrine of purgatory is comforting to Catholics: “The Catholic Church has continued to pray for the dead, and this prayer has brought consolation and peace to the bereaved. When we stand at the grave of a loved one, we are not helpless onlookers. By God’s grace we can reach across space and time to assist the faithful departed by our prayers.”⁵⁰ This is a false comfort at best, since there is neither biblical evidence for purgatory or the idea that we could assist departed loved ones. Is it not much more comforting to know that despite our sins, Jesus has paid the price for them, has atoned for them, and that we enter into the very presence of God the moment we close our eyes in death?

Also, despite the fact that Lukefahr and other Catholic writers suggest that it brings comfort to Christians to know they can aid their

loved ones in purgatory, the Fifth Lateran Council suggests otherwise saying, “The souls freed from purgatory by the suffrages of the living are less happy than if they had made satisfaction by themselves.”⁵¹ So now, what is a good Catholic to do? Should they attempt to help free their loved ones from the sufferings of purgatory knowing it will make them “less happy?”

We may also wonder how comforting the doctrine is to Christians who are alleged to be in purgatory. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says, “All who die in God’s grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation.”⁵² Likewise Lukefahr asserts, “Those in purgatory are assured of heaven.”⁵³ However, the Fifth Lateran Council explicitly contradicts the current catechism when it stated: “The souls in purgatory are not sure of their salvation, at least not all.”⁵⁴ Perhaps the reason these ‘poor souls’ in purgatory are not “sure of their salvation” is because, as the same Fifth Lateran Council declared: “The souls in purgatory sin without intermission, as long as they seek rest and abhor punishments.”⁵⁵

How much more comforting to believers is the doxology of Jude in comparison to the unbiblical speculations of Rome: “To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now, and forevermore. Amen (Jude 24-25).

Conclusion of the matter

There is, to be sure, a difference between the immediate consequence of sin (the temporal) and the eternal consequence for the same. Yes, when a Christian sins, it does affect the harmonious relationship between them and God. Indeed, God may punish the Christian just as a human father punishes his children (Hebrews 12:5-11). But the fact remains that though we punish our children, they are still our children. It is indeed true that from an eternal standpoint, our sins have all been forgiven, and yet in the temporal sense we can and will be punished for the same. This is meant to teach us and draw us closer to God. It is not meant to help us merit eternal life.

What is wrong with the Roman Catholic view is that it wants the Christian to earn or merit eternal salvation, rather than understanding that Christ has already done that at Calvary. What prepares us for heaven is not purging in purgatory, but the glorification of our beings at death (the soul) and resurrection (the body), based on the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ (1 John 2:2). Millard Erickson remarks: “The concept of purgatory implies a

salvation by works. For humans are thought to atone, at least in part, for their sins. This idea, however, is contrary to many clear teachings of Scripture.⁵⁶ Boettner sums up well serious problems with the doctrine of purgatory:

While Romanism teaches that Christ died for our sins it also teaches that His sacrifice was not sufficient, that our sufferings must be added to make it effective... ‘The basic and fatal error of Romanism’ says Dr. C. D. Cole, ‘is the denial of the sufficiency of Christ as Saviour... What He did on Calvary must be repeated (in the mass) and supplemented (through works of penance), and this makes priestcraft and sacramentalism necessary... It offers salvation on the installment plan, and then sees to it that the poor sinner is always behind in his payments, so that when he dies there is a large balance unpaid, and he must continue payments by sufferings in purgatory, or until the debt is paid by prayers, alms and sufferings of his living relatives and friends.’⁵⁷

We conclude with the important words of Geisler and Mackenzie:

Purgatory is a denial of the sufficiency of the cross. Protestants reject the doctrine of purgatory primarily because it in effect denies the all-sufficiency of Christ’s atoning death. Scripture teaches that when Christ died on the cross, He proclaimed, ‘It is finished’ (John 19:30)... The writer of Hebrews declared emphatically that salvation by Christ’s suffering on the cross was a once-for-all accomplished fact. ‘For by one offering he has made perfect forever those who are being consecrated’ (Heb. 10:14). These verses demonstrate the completed, sufficient nature of the work of Christ. To affirm that we must suffer for our own sins is the ultimate insult to Christ’s atoning sacrifice.⁵⁸

Yes, it is finished (John 19:30)!

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IS THERE A HELL?

by Roy E. Knuteson, Ph.D.

One of the commonly used words in the average unbeliever's vocabulary is the word "hell." This biblical word has been reduced to a slang or a swear word. Its users never seem to realize the true meaning of what they are saying when they so flippantly use the term "hell" to describe the weather, or to add emphasis to what they are saying. Part of the reason for the misuse of this Bible word is the way it is used in the world of religion. Liberals, for example, rarely if ever, mention hell in their sermons. Sadly, many Evangelicals are omitting the same, perhaps for fear of being labeled a "Hell-Fire and Brimstone Preacher." Some are even questioning the reality of the flames of hell and a few now believe that hell really means annihilation. This article will examine beliefs of four of the world's religions and four of the cults of Christendom in reference to the question: "Is there a hell?"

What Hindus Believe

Hinduism is a very complex religion, embracing an unusually wide system of beliefs and practices. Central to this multi-faceted religion is the concept of reincarnation, as in Buddhism. This is the belief that a person's present state of existence is a direct result of his performance in a previous lifetime. The object then is to somehow remove one's self from the cycle of successive births and deaths and to eventually achieve eternal bliss. The determining factor is the amount of "Karma" (moral consequence and action) accumulated during a single lifetime, whether past, present, or future. Nothing in Hinduism even remotely corresponds to the biblical doctrine of hell, unless it is the person's present state while awaiting the next cycle of existence.

What Buddhists Believe

Buddhism began in India in the Fifth Century B.C. as the reaction of a monk, Siddhartha Gautama, to Hinduism's caste system and its doctrine of reincarnation. He became known as "The Buddha," meaning "The Enlightened One." His teachings were known as "The Four Noble Truths" and "The Eightfold Path" which addressed the subject of suffering and the practical steps to overcome it. Buddhism tolerates a variety of beliefs, but central to all of its many forms is the concept of "Nirvana" or "Enlightenment" — the highest spiritual

plane anyone can attain. The essence of Buddhism is to cease from sin, to get virtue, and to purify the heart, primarily through meditation. According to Buddhist doctrine, man is worthless, and therefore he has only a temporary existence. There is no concept of an eternal existence in a place of torment for unbelievers. Instead, there is the endless cycle of birth, suffering, death, and re-birth for everyone.

What Muslims Believe

The religion of Islam is one of the outstanding phenomena of history. One century after the death of its founder, Mohammad, the Muslim Empire stretched from Southern France and North Africa into Central Asia and China. Wherever it went, it was permeated with the teachings of Mohammad. Many of the Muslim doctrines come from the Bible. In fact, the historical foundation for the Quran (Koran) comes from the Old Testament, including the doctrine of sin and future judgment. Mohammed taught that recording angels monitor the works of the individual believers. Depending on their faithfulness to the “Five Pillars” (The Creed, Prayer, Almsgiving, Fasting, and the Pilgrimage to Mecca), Muslims may be granted residence in the Muslim heaven, a place of sensual pleasure for men. All unbelievers (infidels) will be consigned to the torments of hell. All must enter the fire temporarily, but no true Muslim will remain there forever.

What Catholics Believe

Roman Catholics believe in baptismal regeneration, meaning that their church is the only true church and a Catholic baptism the only valid baptism for salvation. Therefore, Rome teaches that all un-baptized persons worldwide go immediately to hell, the place of eternal torment upon death. For Catholics, it is another matter. In 1548 A.D. the Council of Trent confirmed that the invisible world was divided into heaven, hell, and “Purgatory.” Believing that baptism removes all previous guilt (both original and actual), does not, however, cover the sins committed after baptism. The doctrine of Purgatory rests on the twin heresies: 1) that Christ’s atoning death was not sufficient to remove all of sin’s consequences; and 2) that God’s justice demands that the Catholic sinner must suffer for his sin in order to “purge” himself before being allowed into heaven. Rome teaches her people that the souls of their Catholic relatives and friends suffer excruciating pain in the flames of Purgatory. In fact, the fires of Purgatory do not differ from the fires of Hell, except in duration.

How long a person must remain in this place of purging is dependent on the amount of prayers offered and masses conducted by the priests on behalf of the departed. The Pope also has the authority to grant indulgences (i.e., relief from suffering) as he sees fit.

However, no one, including the Pope, knows how long this suffering must last. This unscriptural doctrine is an instrument of terrifying power. It is also the chief means of financial income for the church. In addition to the monies contributed for prayers and masses, many Catholics leave substantial portions of their estates for future services.

There are also various types of masses which are dependent upon the wealth of the person requesting the services. Recently, a friend of ours gave \$65,000 to the church for future masses on behalf of herself!

Interestingly, some Catholic newspaper obituaries state that the person “went to be with the Lord,” or they “joined their loved ones in heaven.” However, if the doctrine of Purgatory is true, these obituaries ought to read: “He went to Purgatory, pray for him now.” Summing up, Catholicism teaches that there are three realms of perdition. For all the un-baptized world-wide, there is a burning hell awaiting them where the fires never die out. This would mean that the six billion non-Catholics now living, unless converted, will be sentenced to hell to join the trillions who are already there. For all Catholics there is a limited hell, the prison called Purgatory, from which a Catholic is released to his or her heavenly reward. All un-baptized infants and small children are sent to a third realm called: “Limbus Infantum,” where they are forever excluded from heaven, but in which they suffer no positive pain. This Catholic dogma drastically distorts the biblical teaching of hell and should be exposed for the fraudulent doctrine it is.

What Mormons Believe

Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, claimed that the Angel Moroni revealed to him that there are three heavens and there is therefore no need for a separate place called hell. The highest of these three heavens is the “Celestial Kingdom” reserved for men who have attained the Melchizedekian Priesthood by having complied with the many requirements of exaltation to Godhood. Such men will have their own planet Earth complete with all the pleasures of polygamy and the creation of immortal souls.

The “Terrestrial Kingdom” is the secondary degree of heavenly glory reserved for Mormons who failed to meet the requirements

for exaltation. Finally, Smith claimed that the present God has established a “Telestial Kingdom” which is reserved for the rest of humanity who have no belief in Christ or the Mormon gospel. Everyone will eventually be saved and therefore there is no need for hell or a place of everlasting punishment.

What Christian Scientists Believe

Christian Science claims to be a restatement of pure Christianity. In reality they deny everything that is revealed in God’s word, the Bible. Evil, sickness, and death are really an illusion, according to Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of this strange cult. Sin does not exist and therefore there is no need for a Savior to save us from the penalty of sin which is death and hell. Hell is merely a figment of mortal imagination and can be defined as “mental anguish.” The practicing “Scientist” claims that hell is mental and the Christian has no part of it. Christian Science, Mrs. Eddy claimed, proposes to extinguish all belief in matter which is nothing beyond an illusion, and that includes the belief in a literal hell.

What Seventh-Day Adventists Believe

Since the beginning of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in 1844, this denomination has held many heterodox teachings, including the cardinal doctrine of “Soul Sleep.” Briefly defined it is the teaching that when people die, they do not immediately go to heaven or hell. Instead, the body and soul enters the unconscious state of the dead and conditional immortality. This means that all, (believers and unbelievers alike) sleep as they await a general resurrection at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Then, the righteous will enter their eternal home in the Kingdom of God. The unbeliever’s body and soul will then be cast into hell which, according to Adventist teaching, means eternal destruction or annihilation.

What Jehovah’s Witnesses Believe

Jehovah’s Witnesses are widely-known for rejecting many biblical doctrines including the Trinity, the Deity of Jesus, the Person of the Holy Spirit, the physical resurrection of Jesus, and the existence of a burning hell. Hell, they say, is a “place of rest in hope” and not a place of eternal torment. The Old Testament word for hell is “Sheol,” and its New Testament equivalent is “Hades.” In some contexts, both of these words are translated “grave” and refer to the place of burial. But this does not mean that “hell” is reduced to mankind’s common grave. Based on their limited understanding of the Word of God, they reject the doctrine of a burning hell. Like the Liberals of Christendom, they

say that this cannot be true for the following reasons: (1) It is wholly unscriptural; (2) It is unreasonable; (3) It is repugnant to God's love; and (4) It is contrary to justice.

These humanistic rationalizations do not alter, nor destroy, what the Holy Scriptures plainly teach. In order to further support these arguments, they have also reinterpreted the word "Gehenna" as a place where Satan and his angels will be destroyed, along with the clergy of Christendom, and all others who oppose Jehovah's Theocratic Kingdom. For such persons there is no resurrection or release, whereas all others, both the good and the bad rest in their graves as they await the resurrection to a renovated planet earth.

What the Bible Teaches

The Holy Scriptures teach that hell is a real place as revealed by two Greek words: "Hades" and "Gehenna." Hades, as previously noted, is sometimes translated "grave" or "the depths" (Luke 10:15) with reference to the place of burial, meaning the exit to the unseen world (Matthew 16:18; Revelation 1:18). Gehenna was a place in the valley of Hinnom just outside the city walls of Jerusalem where ancient human sacrifices were offered. In Bible days Gehenna was the city dump where fires burned continually, illustrating the unending judgment of the wicked. The word is found in Matthew 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:19; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5; and James 3:6.

In every reference to Gehenna but the last, the word is used by Jesus as a solemn warning of the consequences of sin. In fact, Jesus spoke more of hell than He did of heaven. Gehenna is further described in literal words as a place where "their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:48); "a place of darkness" where there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 8:12); "unquenchable fire" (Luke 3:17); "a fiery furnace" (Matthew 13:42); It is also called "the lake of fire" in Revelation 19:20; 20:10,14,15; and "a fiery lake of burning sulphur" (Revelation 21:8). Unbelievers "will be tormented with burning sulphur in the presence of the Holy Angels and of the Lamb, and the smoke of their torment rises forever and ever. There is no rest day or night" (Revelation 14:10-11).

"Hell", "The Lake of Fire", and the "Second Death" are identical descriptive terms and are used for the eternal state of all unbelievers. It is also the eternal abode of Satan and his evil angels (Matthew 25:41). Imagine spending eternity with those unspeakably evil spirit beings! Most of these descriptive words regarding the eternal state of perdition must be taken literally, This is certainly true of the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. Incidentally, this

story by Jesus is not a parable as the Jehovah's Witnesses argue since parables never include proper names. In hell, the rich man was suffering in the flames, and he had all his mental faculties since he could remember what happened on earth before he died. In some contexts, a few of these descriptive words are figurative, but these do not modify the thought which the figure expresses. The reality behind the figure is actually greater than that conveyed by the obvious meaning of the words of Scripture.

Application

A study of the neglected doctrine of hell provides the greatest motivation, apart from the Great Commission, (Matthew 28:18-20), for witnessing and soul-winning. We must never assume that anyone is a true believer, unless his works confirm his profession. Instead, we must mentally picture the vast multitudes of people who are going down "the broad road that leads to destruction" (Matthew 7:13-14). We must also think of those who have died without Christ and the awful anguish and suffering they are experiencing since they were cast into hell with no possible release forever.

Our minds would try to reject this awful truth as the religionists and cultists have done. We quite naturally try to extinguish the flames of the Lake of Fire, but we must not.

One of the reasons Jesus provided a glimpse of the experience of the rich man in hell (Luke 16:27-31) was because He wanted His hearers to realize that in hell soul-winning is a major concern of its inhabitants. After describing his painful experience in the flames, the rich man pleaded for Lazarus "to go to his father's house and warn his five brothers so they would not come to this place of torment" (Luke 16:27-31).

Once a sincere Christian realizes the awful reality of hell, he or she will never be the same. The more we know about hell the more aggressive and vocal we will be in our efforts to lead people to Christ. This is another reason why Jesus spoke more about hell than He did about heaven. Is there a hell? Absolutely! We dare not deny the truth nor shirk from our personal responsibility "to snatch others from the fire and save them" (Jude 23).

All scriptural quotations are from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.

QUIZ: HEALTH AND RELIGION

1. The great health center of the Seventh Day Adventists is in
 a. Pittsburgh, PA
 b. Eugene, OR
 c. Loma Linda, CA
 d. Rochester, MN

2. Yoga originated with
 a. African animism
 b. Buddhism
 c. Christian Science
 d. Greek mythology

3. Peyote is used for religious ceremonies by
 a. Native Americans
 b. Eskimos
 c. African Pygmies
 d. Turkish Muslims

4. Which religious group in the Bible forbade the use of alcohol?
 a. Nazarites
 b. Pharisees
 c. Ishmaelites
 d. Epicureans

5. Who of the following lived the longest?
 a. Abraham
 b. Moses
 c. Isaac
 d. Joshua

6. Naaman was healed when he dipped into the river named
 a. Euphrates
 b. Jordan
 c. Nile
 d. Arnon

7. The Hebrew name for the “God who heals” is
 ___ a. Jehovah-Jireh
 ___ b. Jehovah-Shammah
 ___ c. Jehovah-Zidkenu
 ___ d. Jehovah-Rapha
8. Christian Science teaches that
 ___ a. Mary Baker Eddy never was married
 ___ b. Sin is actually wrong thinking and is illusory
 ___ c. Sin has been dealt with through Jesus’ death
 ___ d. Sin has actual physical consequences.
9. Jesus healed Bartimaeus of
 ___ a. Leprosy
 ___ b. Demon possession
 ___ c. Yellow fever
 ___ d. Blindness
10. Who propagates the “Health and Wealth Gospel”?
 ___ a. Rush Limbaugh
 ___ b. Arnold Schwarzenegger
 ___ c. Ken Copeland
 ___ d. Rick Warren

Answers:

1. (c); 2. (c); 3. (a); 4. (a); 5. (a); 6. (c); 7. (d); 8. (b); 9. (d); 10. (c)

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