

What Motivates A Men To Be Missionaries

What motivates a man to leave his family and friends to become a missionary? What causes young men and women to spend years in preparation in schools of nursing, liberal arts or Bible colleges, seminaries; to undergo language study, loneliness, disease, culture shock, disappointments? Why should churches budget for missions and encourage members to prayerfully support missionaries?

In much of current mission literature, the call to missionary service often comes as an appeal to help the needy, the starving, the sick. Wells need to be dug. Health education must be given. Agricultural programs should be developed and self-help and feeding programs encouraged. We read about development aid and educational projects. Daily newspapers, magazines, radio broadcasts and TV bring the stories of starving millions, earthquake victims and the refugees right in our living rooms.

The cry comes persistently: "Come over and help us." And, of course, as Christians we should be shocked into action by the appalling living conditions, hunger and injustice in so many countries. In Christ's name we must be willing to meet human needs. But how often do we hear about the spiritual predicament of mankind, the lostness and the hopelessness of all who die without the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ? Is hell frozen over?

Reformed Christians treasure their confessions. Our Heidelberg Catechism writes about God being "terribly displeased with our original as well as actual sins; and will punish them by a just judgment temporarily and eternally, as He has declared; "Cursed is everyone who continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them." (H.C. q.a. 10). Do we believe this confession or do we act so little as people who live among a race rapidly perishing with an everlasting destruction? I believe that there is a shocking indifference to the Lord's command to preach the Gospel wherever we are located.

What are some of the forces and philosophies that hinder the progress of missions? As I read recent literature on missions, produced by various denominations and para-church agencies, I have drawn these general conclusions. Sentiment runs against the doctrine of eternal punishment. There is the strong temptation to preach what is palatable.

Many say: "If God is a God of love, He will not let anyone perish." They just cannot imagine the endless perdition of creatures. Yet these same people neglect the thought of God's holiness and the awfulness of sin and guilt. They let their hearts run away with their heads.

Syncretism, the idea that all religions have some elements of truth and eventually lead to God, doesn't encourage missionary endeavour. Universalism, the teachings that considers all men already saved and simply need to be told of their condition, doesn't stimulate love for missions.

Why bother to proclaim the Gospel, if everyone is saved anyway, if the emperor Nero will share eternity with the apostle Paul? Activism can also hinder the advance of missions. Activism is service without word proclamation; an emphasis on housing, education, medicine, civil rights, sanitation.

Dr. Anthony Hoekema, professor emeritus of Calvin Theological Seminary, wrote:

One can certainly understand the difficulties people have with the doctrine of eternal punishment. We all naturally shrink from the contemplation of such a horrible destiny. But this doctrine must be accepted because the Bible clearly teaches it.

How true! The Bible does teach the reality of hell. When missions ignore the doctrine of the lost condition of men, an emasculated gospel is preached. Mentioning hell is never easy. It is a very serious matter. Just think of the awful description of hell by the poet Milton, in *Paradise Lost*:

Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
And rest can never dwell; hope never comes
That comes to all, but torture without end.

Mission work loses much of its force when the doctrine of eternal punishment is either left out or hidden somewhere in the theological background. The exhortations to immediate repentance and faith lose their urgency- if everyone is going to be saved anyway. No one will ever truly desire salvation, unless he first realizes that there is something to be saved from. "By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear, built an ark to save his family" (Hebrews 11:7a N.I.V.).

The lost condition of mankind outside of Christ should drive the Church to intensified mission efforts. Said Dr. Hoekema: "For our missionary enterprise, the doctrine of hell should spur us onto greater zeal and urgency. If it be true that people in foreign lands may be bound for a Christless eternity unless they hear the gospel, how eager we should be to bring them that gospel! For "how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?" (Rom.10:14).

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