



# Spirit of Grace Herald

The Ministry of Dennis  
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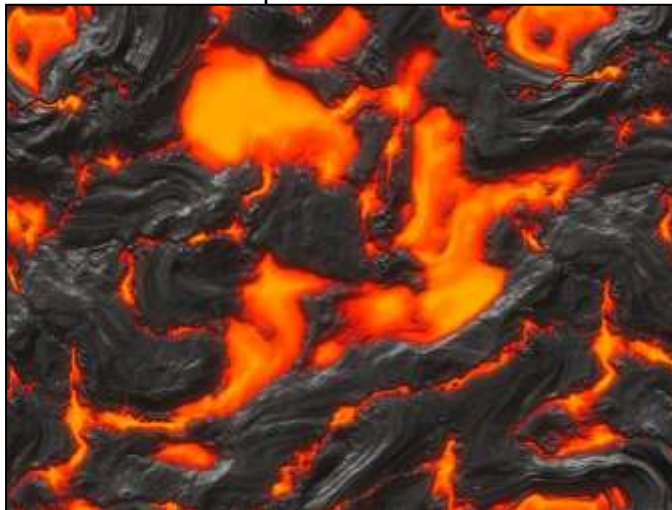
## Spirit of Grace Ministries

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## The Problem of Hell

In the latter part of the twentieth century, a charismatic black preacher named Carlton Pearson was making a huge splash on American Christianity. In those days he seemed as though he was everywhere and doing almost everything. Carlton had talent in almost every area that a person can be talented. He was a great speaker, a wonderful singer, he was funny, charming, and dynamic, and had a stellar personality. It seemed as though there was no limit as to how far he would go as a leader in the Christian world. He was a rocket headed for regions few ministers would ever go, and there appeared nothing that could stop his appointment with greatness and destiny.



But in the midst of his meteoric rise, he suddenly shocked his 6,000 member congregation and the rest of the American Christians who followed him with an announcement that would soon bring his ministry crashing down to earth in record time. Carlton announced that while watching a video about starving African children, he heard the voice of God speaking to him. But what he heard disagreed with almost every other evangelical Christian in the world. Carlton declared that God had told him there was no hell. No “sinners” would ever go to hell because there was no hell. And the logical

extension of this was that every single person in the world was already saved.

Carlton was extremely naïve in supposing that Christians would either accept this new concept he was espousing or else just ignore it. In fact, they did neither. There was an immediate uproar among the Christians of his own congregation as well as Christians who watched him on television or simply knew about him. His church began to bleed members and over a couple of years the remaining faithful were forced to sell the building. Within a very short time, for most American Christians Carlton Pearson dropped out of sight and became essentially irrelevant to evangelical Christianity: unseen, unheard, and ignored.

Although at first he tried to suggest that he was not rejecting Scripture, but simply “re-reading” it and seeing it in a new light, over the years he moved away from any pretense of believing in the inspiration of the Bible. His favorite slogan these days is that the Bible is not “the inspired word of God,” but rather the “inspired word of men about God,” which is a disingenuous way of saying, “It’s a great book, but don’t be so stupid as to believe it all.”

Jesus Christ, the One we honor as Savior and Lord, and as our Alpha and Omega, referred to hell and a punishment for the wicked in the afterlife more than any other person in the Bible. Jesus tells us:

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body,

and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him! (Luke 12:4-5).

Elsewhere He warns:

If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched (Mark 9:43).

# The Problem of Hell

The church has for years had a big problem with the idea of hell. Much of this problem has to do with the traditional view of the nature of this place of the damned. Hell has often been pictured as a great sea of molten lava, bubbling and boiling with intense heat, where every sinner who dies will be plunged, and forced to suffer there year after year, century after century, and millennia after millennia. The horror of this results in most pastors rarely mentioning hell in their sermons, and if they do, they almost never go into the specifics. It would be bad PR for God.

One Bible passage that throws into question our traditional view of hell is this one, from the mouth of Jesus:

And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more. (Luke 12:47-48).

Jesus, comparing men and women to servants of a rich master, declares that some, who never properly heard what their boss expected of them, would be punished with "few stripes," a rather light beating. But the servants who knew exactly what their master expected would be beaten with many stripes, a much more severe beating. Now if Jesus is referring to the punishment of sinners in hell, this presents a big problem for the traditional viewpoint. If hell is a boiling mass of hot lava, where every single sinner will be plunged and be tortured in it forever and ever, this makes no sense. How can God punish people with many or few stripes? How can the punishment of any sinner be worse or milder than any other sinner? Being perpetually burned up in hot lava or a fiery, cosmic furnace is going to be equally bad for all. Is God doing to turn down the temperature slightly for some sinners and turn it up more for others? If nothing else, this concept of differing punishments for sinners demonstrates that there is probably a lot about hell we do not know. Perhaps our understanding of hell is a bit fuzzy.

But whatever the specifics, we know 1) hell will be terrible, 2) those who die without Jesus will find themselves there after death, and 3) those who receive Jesus will never go there, but will live with God in heaven forever. The Bible tells us: "Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:15).

## NEXT MONTH: MISSION NIGERIA/KENYA

**Next month, September 2020, we are planning our "Fall Mission" in the African nations of Nigeria and Kenya. Due to the Coronavirus restrictions in these nations we cannot minister as we usually do. Benedicta and I will not be traveling there and teaching in conferences and preaching in evening evangelistic meetings. We will instead be supplying badly needed relief to the hurting men, women, and children in four cities, two in Nigeria and two in Kenya. Through our contacts in these nations we will provide the funds to purchase food items to help with dire needs, especially among three different groups of people:**

**Orphans**—even in the best of times orphans really struggle just to survive in Africa. There are no formal foster family programs, and orphanages are hit and miss in various communities. In nearly every case there is no way they can provide for all the orphans and "street children" that are rampant throughout much of Africa.

**Widows**—Women who lose their husbands are often in critical and desperate need. Unless they have grown children who can provide for them, they can become destitute, living from hand to mouth.

**Adults who can no longer work** due to lockdown orders. Without government assistance, many men and women are facing a very difficult time.

**If you are eating regularly, here is a way for you to express your gratitude to God by sharing with those who are in need. Any gifts you can make to support this mission is greatly appreciated.**

