

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
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Hell under Fire

Selected Passages

Keywords: Hell, Hades, death, destruction, Annihilationism, judgment, condemnation, wrath

PowerPoint Presentation included: NONE

SermonAudio Blurb: In this sermon Pastor Matt gives a brief overview of the challenges to the traditional view of hell. He then brings the words of Jesus to bear on that same subject, showing the severe and very real nature of hell.

Dismiss

I. Introduction.

A. Rob Bell, *Love Wins*.

1. Firestorm of reactions and responses.
2. Helpful because it showed the great divide today.
3. In too many churches the popular approach today is a minimalistic approach to theology. This book was helpful because it brought a lot of scrutiny onto the doctrine of hell.
4. The essence of the book is summarized well by Kevin DeYoung:

Hell is what we create for ourselves when we reject God's love. Hell is both a present reality for those who resist God and a future reality for those who die unready for God's love. Hell is what we make of heaven when we cannot accept the good news of God's forgiveness and mercy. But hell is not forever. God will have his way. How can his good purposes fail? Every sinner will turn to God and realize he has already been reconciled to God, in this life or in the next. There will be no eternal conscious torment. God says no to injustice in the age to come, but he does not pour out wrath (we bring the temporary suffering upon ourselves), and he certainly does not punish for eternity. In the end, love wins.

5. While this sounds wonderful, it is also deadly wrong and Bell was rightly taken to task over it.

B. This is not something new, it is something that has been part of the Church for centuries. But it is something that is worth our time to consider in light of God's Word.

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- C. There are various ways that the doctrine of hell has been attacked by people: Outright rejection, universalism, and annihilationism.
- D. My goal today is to describe these views and show their inadequacy biblically.

II. Rejection.

- A. This is the easiest to describe, it is what it says.
- B. Either by outright rejection or by redefining it. Hell on earth, lack of justice, loss of joy, etc.
- C. It is a hallmark of what is known as liberal theology, which is actually a non-Christian theology that claims to be Christian. You can find this all over our little town.
- D. It is always easy to just make something go away; but it is not necessarily wise.

III. Universalism.

- A. There are various positions on this but they all end up at the same place so we will not need to follow every view.
- B. This is where Rob Bell comes into focus and his is a reasonable expression of universalism.
 - 1. His argument essentially is that God wins in the end and the way God wins is because His love triumphs over our best efforts to reject Him.
 - 2. All shall, in the end, be saved. All shall enjoy eternal life in the presence of God.
- C. Key passages:
 - 1. “For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.” (Colossians 1:19-20)
 - 2. “When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32)
- D. Typically, this and the third view, hold the love of God as the basis for their position.
- E. For universalists there is usually the idea that God will punish the people who did not love Him or follow Him.
 - 1. Specific length of time.

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2. Dependent upon the nature of your sin.

F. Some even hold that Satan will be redeemed as well.

G. Some people you may recognize who hold to universalism. Rob Bell, Brian McClaren, William Barclay, and William Law, best known for *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*.

H. These two are false views.

IV. Annihilationism.

A. Here we step into a different situation.

B. Annihilationism is a view that holds that there is a hell and all who do not believe God will be there.

1. They will not eventually be brought into eternal life.

2. Most (not all) are what is known as 'conditionalists.'

a. This means that the soul of person is not inherently immortal, that is a conditional reality, which God only gives to those entering heaven.

b. If the person going to hell is not immortal, then he shall not suffer for eternity, but for a specific time.

3. Key passages would be:

a. Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matthew 10:28)

b. 'Destruction' passages like "While they are saying, 'Peace and safety!' then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape."
(1Thessalonians 5:3)

4. This view also is usually based upon the idea of God's love. As Clark Pinnock wrote, "the nature of hell must not contradict what we know about God's love...."

5. Key people: John Stott, Clark Pinnock, Greg Boyd. Also Seventh Day Adventism and JW's.

V. Traditional view.

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- A. Tom Clayton of Grace to You gives three good questions to ask when considering what a person is teaching on hell.
1. Does this view of hell diminish the threat of God's judgment?
 2. Does this teaching soften the urgency of repentance?
 3. Is this offering the sinner any hope of salvation beyond this life?
- B. In one way or another, these three positions fail miserably on this subject and grant a false peace to those who listen and believe.
1. They are like the prophets and priests of Israel as it was facing God's judgment, 'They have healed the brokenness of My people superficially, Saying, "Peace, peace," But there is no peace. 'Were they ashamed because of the abomination they have done? They were not even ashamed at all; They did not even know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; At the time that I punish them, They shall be cast down,' says the LORD.'" (Jer 6:14-15)
 2. No one likes to talk about hell or what it entails, but denying it or making it less than the Scripture describes is dangerous.
 3. Studies have been done many times and they consistently show that people in America believe in a heaven of some sort and that they are going to be there.
 - a. Yet at the same time, in one study, only 1% thought they would go to hell.
 - b. This is a place for the "bad" people and of course those are almost always other people.
 - c. Many who are raised as RCC are betting a lot on the doctrine of Purgatory.
- C. A basic primer on Hell.
1. It is foolish to assume or exalt one attribute of God over all others.
 - a. This is where God's love comes in.
 - b. This assumes that God is a one dimensional being that is only love and fails to see that He is altogether holy.

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- c. In reality, no attribute can be exalted, God is not merely the sum total of His attributes, His nature. Rather all attributes need to be seen in relation to all the others.
 - d. This assumes that love is first and foremost directed toward us and not also a perfect love that is directed toward Himself and His glory.
 - (1) D. A. Carson said it well, "Is the magnitude of our sin established by our own status, or by the degree of offense against the sovereign, transcendent God?" (*The Gagging of God*, 534)
 - (2) To put it another way, is it not an infinite sin to reject the infinitely glorious God who created us?
 - e. The bible clearly emphasizes that the great expression of God's love toward us is the Cross. To reject that is to reject God's love. In essence, when a person rejects God (Jesus) they are saying, "I want hell."
2. Jesus is the primary teacher of hell.
- a. He has said more on this subject than all of the other writers put together. He did not hide it nor did he reject it.
 - b. There is no safety in trying to appeal to Jesus therefore.
 - c. Tim Keller said it well, "we have to realize we are saying to Jesus, the pre-eminent teacher of love and grace in history, 'I am less barbaric than you, Jesus--I am more compassionate and wiser than you.' Surely that should give us pause! Indeed, upon reflection, it is because of the doctrine of judgment and hell that Jesus' proclamations of grace and love are so astounding."
3. What Jesus says about hell is simply terrifying.
- a. There is no joking, no vagueness by Him. He treats the entire subject bluntly.
 - b. His use of metaphors are powerful and shocking when you realize that a metaphor is almost always weaker than the reality. Jesus paints a picture with words that should make us shudder.

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- c. **Matthew 5:29-30. Hell is so bad you should be willing to part with parts of your body.**
 - (1) **Hyperbole.**
 - (2) **But speaks of the seriousness of sin and how vicious we must be in attacking it. We cannot let it have a place in our mind. We must attack it like we would a limb filled with gangrene.**
- d. **Matthew 7:13-14. Hell is easy to enter.**
- e. **Matthew 8:12. Hell is a place of conscious suffering.**
 - (1) **Speaks of both massive sorrow and massive hate.**
 - (a) **In Revelation there is a point in human history where God begins to bring about His wrath.**
 - (b) **Revelation 6:14ff.**
 - (2) **Outer darkness, not a place of parties or of relationships.**
 - (3) **You are left with you. And you find no comfort in that.**
- f. **Matthew 10:28. Hell is a place that involves both body and soul. Far worse than physical death.**
- g. **Matthew 11:21-24, there appears to be degrees to hell.**
 - (1) **Context starts in vs 16.**
 - (2) **To the one who has been given much light and revelation, much judgment will be experienced.**
- h. **Matthew 13:42, 50; Mark 9:48-49 Hell is a place of great pain.**
 - (1) **Note again the greater context.**
 - (2) **I hold that the imagery fire is the pain of the wrath of God which never finds an end.**
 - (3) **The worm is possibly a picture of the gnawing horror of a polluted conscience.**

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- (4) There is no grace here, no mercy, no kindness, no patience, no relenting. The dam holding back His righteous wrath is broken.
- (5) The suffering is not a grace that brings cleansing, it is one that brings judgment.
- (6) In life we live as sinners and in death we die as sinners.
 - i. Calvin says essentially that these descriptions bring into play all of our senses. We smell, taste, see, hear and feel the terrors of hell.
 - j. Matthew 24:46. Hell is for eternity.
- 4. Jesus says that currently there is great deception in the minds of those in hell at this point in time.
 - a. Matthew 7:22 (explain).
 - b. "That day" is described by Jesus in Matthew 25:31ff.
- D. We get a glimpse of the nature of God's wrath when we consider Jesus on the Cross.
 - 1. Mark 15:34, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" And then he gave up His spirit and died.
 - 2. When the Father turned his wrath that was for us onto Jesus the reality became one of forsakenness.
 - 3. It is a withdrawal of the smile of God.

VI. Conclusion.

- A. What would Jesus say to the one who rejects Hell categorically?
 - 1. He would call him a fool.
 - 2. That this man speaks on what he cannot know for certain, rejecting the warning words of the One who will condemn him to hell.
- B. What would Jesus say the to the universalist?
 - 1. Did you not read my Word? Do you not see that on that great day I shall separate all of mankind?
 - 2. Some shall go to eternal life, the others to eternal torment.

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3. Why do you whisper words of comfort to those who shall never feel comfort unless they repent?
- C. What would Jesus say to the annihilationist?
1. What part of eternal do you not understand?
 2. If eternal torment and eternal fire and an undying worm really means only a temporary suffering, then what hope does the man or woman have when they are promised eternal life?
- D. What does Jesus say to you today?
1. The gospel gives life.
 2. The gospel gives forgiveness.
 3. The gospel gives adoption.
 4. Believe the gospel.
 - a. At the core the issue is this. Matthew 13, parable of the hidden treasure, the value of Kingdom of God is so surpassingly wonderful that it is a happy trade-off of all other delights.

Small Group Questions

- Have you ever had a discussion with anyone about hell? Describe what happened and how it went.
- What stands out for you about the fact the Jesus was the most out-spoken regarding hell?