

Hell: Should We Keep Quiet About It?

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The thinking I want to address in this article is this: There are some people who profess Christianity who say that it doesn't matter whether hell is real or not, the doctrine of hell is an unnecessary teaching that can be dispensed with, and, in fact, speaking of hell as a reality is harmful to the furtherance of Christianity. Their reasoning goes like this: Since (whether



we believe in a literal hell or not) we would all agree that Christians are not going to hell, therefore Christians don't need to hear anything about hell. They may as well just forget about it. Further, since many non-Christians refuse to believe in a God so cruel that He would condemn people who do not trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior to eternal torment in hell, then it would be better if we also stop talking to them about hell. In other words, we would get more people saved if we dropped hell from our vocabulary. Thus, why don't we just stop talking about hell altogether? This sounds reasonable to many people. Is this sound thinking? Does the Bible support it? Is there a flaw somewhere?

Teaching Hell to Christians

I certainly agree that Christians are not going to hell, and, therefore, they don't have to worry about it. Nevertheless, just because we don't have to worry about something doesn't imply that we should remain ignorant of it. Since God determined in eternity that there would be a hell and what it would be like, learning what the Bible teaches about hell tells me something about God and His plan for humanity. This is important. Christians are to know whom they have believed (2 Timothy 1:12). Part of God's written revelation to us is His revelation about hell. Just because we don't have to worry about going there doesn't mean that we should avoid that part of His revelation.

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Evangelizing and Hell

When it comes to speaking of hell while evangelizing, we can fall into ditches on either side of the road. One ditch is the Jonathan Edwards' type of evangelism in which the preacher scares people into a profession of faith by painting vivid pictures of a vengeful God who may drop them into the eternal fires of hell at any moment. Not only does this promote a wrong idea of God, but it also could easily scare many non-elect people into making false professions simply because they're scared. Neither Jesus nor the New Testament writers ever said that preaching about hell must be a central part of heralding the Good News of Jesus Christ as our Savior.

Central to the Gospel is God's love expressed in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross for the sins of all who will trust in Him as their Savior. The Bible says that the goodness (*chrēstotēs*—kindness, gentleness, graciousness) of God, not His anger, leads to repentance (Romans 2:4). It doesn't say that preaching hellfire and damnation leads to repentance. Paul says that "when the kindness of God our Saviour and his love towards mankind appeared, not by works of righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy, he saved us...." (Titus 3:4-5). The Gospel isn't a horror story about the torments of hell. It's a love story: "By this God's love was revealed in us, that God has sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:9-10).

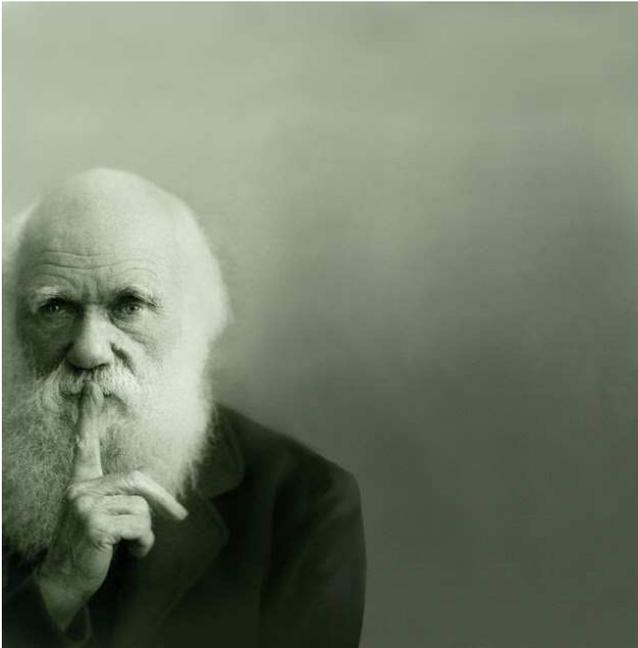
On the other hand, just because the fact that unbelievers are on the road to hell isn't the focus of the Gospel, this doesn't mean we should sweep hell under the rug. Doing so would be the ditch on the other side of the road. After all, the Gospel is an announcement of salvation in Jesus Christ, and salvation is a coin with two sides. Not only are we saved to heaven and eternal life with God, but we are also saved from sin, condemnation, and death (John 5:24). Moreover, the Bible doesn't teach death as oblivion but as eternal punishment in hell (Matthew 13:50; 25:46; 2 Thessalonians 1:9). I don't believe that the Bible instructs us to scare people with hell, but I do believe it is entirely appropriate to speak of salvation from hell as one of the benefits Jesus Christ has purchased for believers.

Deception Is Not an Acceptable Approach to Evangelism

People who refuse to believe in a God who has decreed that unbelieving sinners will be eternally tormented in hell are refusing to believe in the true God. This is because the Bible certainly teaches hell as real. The Jesus Christ who died on the Cross for sinners cannot be separated from the Jesus Christ who is recorded as speaking or warning of hell (either Hades or Gehenna) about fifteen times.

Preachers who purposely avoid speaking of hell are deceiving their audience. The real Jesus spoke about the real hell. Are we to avoid these words of Jesus just to satisfy the carnal sensibilities of people whose minds are as yet self-evidently untouched by the Holy Spirit? No! If we were to do this, where would the deceptions end? A Jesus who didn't believe in hell is a Jesus who never existed; He is a fairy tale Jesus, and a fairy tale Jesus cannot save anyone. The ministers of such a Jesus might increase the number of people who make a profession of faith, but they are false professions because the object of their faith is a false Jesus. What's more, when we agree to stop talking about something, we are almost guaranteeing that error will creep in to take its place. Denying the existence of hell is only a couple of small steps from the heresy of universal salvation.

Fear of the Truth



When people say we should stop talking about something, it is most often because they are afraid. Totalitarian regimes repress many books and outside news sources because they are afraid that their citizens will learn the truth and work to overthrow them. Religious cults tell their followers to not read "dissident literature" because they are afraid of losing control over them. Christians must not be like this. "God didn't give us a spirit of fear, but of power,

love, and self-control" (2 Timothy 1:7). Paul didn't avoid certain subjects so as to fool people into believing. He said, "I didn't shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

I believe that people who reject a God who will condemn unbelievers to hell are afraid. They may express their fear as scorn or anger, but I believe the root of their response is fear. Of course, there's really no need for their fear, if they would just believe on Jesus. And that's why their criticisms against the God who created hell are really hollow.

How can you possibly denounce a God who gave the gift of life to people He did not have to give it to, who put the first people in a paradise where they could have stayed if they had just obeyed one simple command (remember, it was they who sinned and brought on all the suffering in the world, not God), and who gave us such a simple and sublime remedy for sin and way out of hell that it makes you want to smile or maybe even laugh. Just trust in His Son as your Savior. That's all. How simple can it get? How can you criticize such a God? Yet, these people do criticize because in their hearts they are rebels against the God of the universe. They want to set the rules themselves and make God in their own image, and their desire to suppress the truth about hell must not to be catered to by avoiding the subject.

Preachers who want us to stop talking about hell are doing no one any favors. Sadly, most of their proselytes are likely unconverted. One day, they'll learn the truth about hell. Hopefully, that will be in this life, and they will come to believe the true Gospel. Otherwise, they will learn when it is too late and hell becomes for them an empirical reality. Jesus spoke the following words to the Pharisees of His day, but they can, quite ironically, be applied to many of today's preachers: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you go about the sea and the dry land to make one proselyte; and when he has become so, you make him twofold more a son of Hell than yourselves" (Matthew 23:15, *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible*).