

Hell #01: Why Consider It?

by Edward Donnelly

The speaker argues that we should think about hell because of its intrinsic importance, the pervasiveness of unbelief about hell, and the urgency of the situation.

Duration: 1:06:32

Scripture: Matthew 7:13-14, Matthew 10:28, Matthew 25:41, Mark 9:43, John 3:36, John 14:6, James 3:6

Topics: "Hell"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of understanding and studying the concept of hell. He highlights the reality of God's existence and our accountability to Him. The speaker acknowledges the discomfort and heaviness that comes with contemplating the fate of the damned, but stresses the necessity of addressing this topic. He presents four reasons why thinking about hell is crucial: the sheer number of people entering their eternal destination, the abundance of biblical references to hell, the emphasis Jesus placed on the topic, and the personal relevance of death to each individual.

Transcript

My dear friends, it is indeed a very great pleasure and privilege for me to be back here in Dayton for your family conference. This evening earlier I found it hard to believe that seven years had passed since I last had the privilege of being with you. But when I was standing beside Pastor Faulkner a moment ago singing, I realized that I couldn't read the words of these songs without my glasses.

I didn't have that problem seven years ago, so the passage of time is taking its toll. I've always said that I never enjoyed a conference more than the last time I was with you, and I'm enormously grateful for the invitation to return. My pleasure at being with you and at the prospect of renewing old friendships and making new ones has been heightened by the presence of my wife with me, whom I hope many of you will have an opportunity of meeting.

She has kindly been invited by our hosts. Another great plus of the visit was the opportunity to spend the weekend in Mebham and to develop fellowship with the people of God in that place. I look forward to the whole of the conference.

I look forward with enormous pleasure to the prospect of ministry from Pastors Hendricks and Pizzino each morning and to fellowship with you all. The subject allotted to me for this conference was the doctrine of hell, and I plan to approach that subject on the four evenings topically or thematically. I trust our studies

will be exegetical, but we shall not be focusing in on a particular passage each evening.

Rather, I want to approach the subject by means of four questions, and the first one this evening is why should we think about hell? Why should we think about hell? It is an extremely unpleasant subject. One writer has described it as the ultimate horror of God's universe. And you, of course, are here for a holiday conference.

You're here to relax, to be refreshed, to enjoy yourself. A few weeks ago a friend was asking me, well perhaps he wasn't just as close a friend as I imagined, but he was asking me where I was going and who I was speaking for, and he said, what is your topic? And I said, I've been asked to speak four times on the doctrine of hell. And he said, isn't that absolutely typical of Reformed Baptists? When they meet together for a relaxing, enjoyable holiday, what subject do they choose to consider together but the topic of hell? What a morbid people they must be.

Why should we think about hell? And perhaps we are put off the subject further by the way throughout history that Christians, zealously but unwisely, have caricatured and distorted and misrepresented the biblical doctrine. Let me give you some quotations. One preacher speaks of the wicked hanging by their tongues from hooks while the flaming fire torments them from beneath.

Another says of someone in hell, the flames of fire gushed from his ears and eyes and nostrils and out of every pore. Another describes the damned eating each other, tearing each other with their teeth. One preacher, and I quote, sounds almost gloating or joyful about hell.

He says, the little child is in this red hot oven. It beats its little head against the roof of the oven and stamps its little feet on the floor. Hear how it screams to come out.

See how it turns and twists itself in the fire. Now much of those statements go far beyond the sober, measured, restrained statements of scripture. They owe more to a vivid imagination than to the teaching of the Holy Spirit.

They are crude, they are inaccurate, they are unbiblical, and they have brought the whole subject into disrepute. And we have a reluctance to be clasped with that sort of representation of the doctrine of hell. And then there is a personal reluctance in dealing with the doctrine.

A friend who I esteem highly warned me before I began to study, and he said, this study will cost you, it will mark you, it will be a burden upon you. And I have to say that it has. And at times I have sometimes thought of my friends in Lebanon and said to myself, why did they assign me such a talk? There are so many truths in scripture which thrill us and excite us, and as we think about them we are filled with joy and gladness and we are moved to worship and gratitude over these glorious truths.

It is a joy to study them and to prepare them. It is a foretaste of heaven. But to sit and to ponder on the fate of the damned brings a heaviness on the spirit.

And in my human weakness I want to be liked. I want to be popular. I want you to think of me with gratitude as a friend.

And there is that in my flesh that was saying, but these people will not remember my messages with anything but a sense of dread. How I wish I could speak on something else, such a somber and terrible theme. And so I have asked myself this question, why should we think about hell? And we all need to ask.

If we are going to spend four evenings studying it, we need to be convinced, convinced in our hearts and souls that it is mandatory that we should study it. That it is of the utmost importance for our souls and the souls of a generation to come. That this is a key doctrine which we cannot and dare not neglect.

And only if we do so will we come with appropriate seriousness and expectation. Why should we think about hell? I want to suggest three reasons this evening. We should think about hell in the first place because of its intrinsic importance.

Its intrinsic importance. Now of course everything in the Bible is important. But it is nonetheless true that there are some truths which have proportionately a greater and more vital importance than others.

If we are ignorant of the fine points of the doctrine of angels or of some of the details of the Old Testament food laws, we will be the poorer. That is to be regretted. But we will not be damned.

We will not be lost. We will survive. Other doctrines however are indispensable.

In his great book *The Reformed Pastor*, Richard Baxter urges pastors to preach on these doctrines more than others. He says other things may be known. But these must be known or else men are undone forever.

And hell is such a doctrine. It must be known. Let me adduce four lines of evidence to emphasize its intrinsic importance.

The first is the massive weight of biblical testimony. The massive weight of biblical testimony. Hell is not something that is referred to occasionally, now and then, here and there, in one or two obscure disputed passages of scripture.

No. Huge sections of the Word of God bear on this doctrine. There are more references in the Bible to the wrath of God than to the love of God.

The Old Testament is full in every book of our Lord's fierce judgment on his enemies. Foreshadowings of hell. Our Lord Jesus Christ had far more to say about hell than he did about heaven.

That surprises some people. But it's true. One scholar says that there are approximately eighteen hundred and seventy verses in the New Testament which record words of Christ.

Thirteen percent of these deal with judgment and hell. For an eighth of what he says he speaks of judgment and hell. More than any other topic.

The key word for hell in the New Testament is Gehenna. And on every single occasion except one, that word is spoken by Jesus. The one exception is James chapter 3 verse 6 with reference to the tongue.

We call him the Savior. And even that very blessed name draws attention to the dreadful fate from which he saved us. There is a massive weight of biblical testimony.

Now my friends, if God has chosen in his wisdom to provide us in his holy word with so much information about hell, is it not patently obvious that it is something which is hugely important? And that alone would be reason enough for studying. We cannot neglect it if the Holy Spirit has given us such a weight of information about it. But then secondly, it's intrinsically important not only because of the proportion of scripture given to the doctrine, but to the actual content of the doctrine itself.

It tells us of a place of torment where millions of human beings will be enclosed forever. I'm told that 95 million human beings die every year. I haven't checked the math of this, so please don't correct me, but I think it's approximately right.

That means that every second three human beings are entering hell or heaven. By the time I have finished this address, 11,000 of our fellow human beings will have gone forever to a place of joy or a place of everlasting torment. And as you sit here, imagine them dying even now as I speak.

One and another and another and another and every time my hand falls, another human being, think of it, another human being is entering heaven or hell forever. If there had been a plane crash this morning, if two or three hundred people had suddenly been snatched into eternity, we'd all be talking about it this evening. We'd be grief-stricken.

Our minds would be full of it. We could think of nothing else. And yet 11,000 of our fellow human beings every hour of every day of every week of every month of every year are entering their eternal destination.

Surely this is a reason why such a doctrine is intrinsically important. And thirdly, it's important because we are not remote from this catastrophe. I remember the phrase of Sam Waldron and something he wrote death is not a spectator sport.

When we're at a spectator sport, we're not involved. We don't feel involved. We're indifferent.

It doesn't touch us. I'm looking forward with immense interest and eagerness to the volleyball match on Wednesday evening between the elders and the deacons, and I will be able to see just how sanctified some of my fellow elders are. And I do so with a greater pleasure because I know that nothing on earth would persuade me to stand on that volleyball court and participate.

I will be a spectator. I am not involved. I say that officially now.

We feel uninvolved. It doesn't really matter what happens. It doesn't concern us.

But friends, that is not true of this doctrine. For every one of us in this room by nature is headed to that very place. It is not something that doesn't concern us.

We have all sinned and we fall short of the glory of God and the wages of sin is death. And it is appointed for men to die once and after death. The judgment every one of us is intimately involved.

Some of you may think that there are some Bible doctrines that don't involve you. You would be unwise to think that, but you may think that none of none the less. Some of you who are not parents may feel that the biblical instruction to parents is of no immediate concern to you.

Some of you who are not employers may skip lightly over the teaching of the word of God to employers or to the rich or to so on. Now that would be a mistake on your part, but it would be understandable. You would say, well it's interesting, it's true, but it doesn't immediately concern me.

But none of us, none of us can ever dare to say that of the doctrine of hell. It is the certain destiny of every unsaved sinner and we are born sinners. And then fourthly and lastly, it is intrinsically important, not only because of the massive weight of biblical testimony, the content of the doctrine, the way in which we are involved in it, but because there is only one way of escape from hell.

It is not the case that there is a whole range of options open to us. There is possibilities to lessen our anxiety. All sorts of categories of people who won't go there.

We can't say to ourselves, well hell is dreadful, hell is a reality, but after all there are many ways of avoiding hell. So I don't need to be unduly concerned. The scripture is clear.

Only one way through faith in Jesus Christ. He who does not believe the Son, says the Savior, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. Everyone else is damned.

If you do not believe on Christ as your Savior, you are damned. You are headed straight for hell. Why should we think about hell? Because we're going there, unless we find the one way of escape.

So here is our answer to those who would speak of those morbid people, who at a holiday conference think about hell. And I would say to them, would you bring that same charge against a conference of physicians, who met to discuss cancer? Would you say what a morbid group, what an unhealthy type of men they must be. They meet together and all they can discuss is this sickness.

We wouldn't say that would we? We would be thankful that there were men who were studying it. We would be grateful that there were people who were giving their skill and their insight and their knowledge to dealing with this dreadful reality. That they might help us, that they might bring us healing, that they might be a blessing to us.

We would thank God for those people who were studying that disease. We would pray that they would be helped and blessed. And we would say they're not studying cancer because they like to, but because it is a reality.

Thank God for men and women who are honest enough to face reality. But hell is a reality, a dreadful reality. And the most positive, the most loving, the most responsible thing that we can do is to study that doctrine, that we may be used to deliver men and women from that dreadful place.

That is our reason and our purpose. It's intrinsic importance. Why should we think about hell? The second reason, because of the pervasiveness of unbelief about hell.

Because of the pervasiveness of unbelief. If hell was something which was universally accepted, which all people believed and agreed on, something on which everyone was accurately informed. If everyone knew about hell and believed in hell, then we mightn't need to spend so much time studying it together.

But the truth of the matter is that in our generation, belief in hell has declined almost to the point of disappearance. Let me just very briefly illustrate that on three levels, three levels of unbelief. There's first of all what we might call popular mockery.

Popular mockery. Some time ago, I think it must have been about ten years ago, my wife and I attended the Christmas pageant in the local school. And all the children were doing little skits and plays.

Quite a pleasant evening. Until to our horror, a number of children appeared on the stage dressed as devils. Their mothers had made paper horns and tails.

And they circled round the platform and they sang a song about hell. Where people frizzled and fried. This was children.

And the audience laughed uproariously at the humor of the thing. And we sat with our flesh crawling with horror. And we could almost hear the words of Christ, whoever offends one of these little ones, it were better that a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast in the depths of hell, is a joke.

We all know how heaven and hell are themes in advertising. Whether it be a candy bar or a perfume or anything else. This very day as we crossed the border into Tennessee, we stopped at the visitor center with friends.

My wife picked up this advertisement for a restaurant. It's in a building which used to be a church. It has now become an eating place.

The brochure begins regarding the food so heavenly it must be sinful. Our chef uses the freshest ingredients available to produce so satisfying cuisine. Just as Eve tempted Adam, we are going to tempt you with today's dessert creations.

Imagine our devilish chocolate ecstasy. And so on. And then it ends.

Good cheer and God bless. It's a joke. I'll not pollute your ears with further examples.

There are many of them. We have no wish to repeat these blasphemies. But people regard hell as a joke.

Hell fire preachers are a figure of fun. And people who believe in hell are either laughed at or pitted. You know that for yourself.

It's a matter of popular mockery. Secondly it's a matter of serious unbelief. Serious unbelief.

We must not underestimate the degree to which some unbelievers do think seriously. They're dead. Yes.

They're blind. Yes. They hate God.

Yes. Their thinking is distorted. Yes.

But they are serious people. They do reflect deeply on important issues. They're wrong.

But they do think. And it is a simple fact that to many 20th century people the idea of hell is morally disgusting. To them it is a primitive superstition.

They are genuinely offended by it. They think of it as a crude bogeyman used by a tyrant church to terrify and manipulate simple uneducated people. The philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote, I do not myself feel that any person who is profoundly humane can believe in everlasting punishment.

It is a doctrine that put cruelty into the world and gave the world generations of torture. And we need to realize that many of the people we live among and work with and meet on a daily basis will despise us for believing in hell. That's true.

I say that to you young people. As you go out into the intellectual world of the university and the workplace, face up to the fact that intelligent people whom you meet and work with and know will think your belief in hell contemptible or wicked. We'll see later why they think this way.

There is serious unbelief. But then thirdly, as we think of pervasive unbelief, there is most tragically and surprisingly of all what we might call evangelical questioning. And by this I mean those who profess to be

born again, those who profess belief in Christ as saviour, and in many cases may have belief in Christ as saviour.

I do not wish to pass judgement on the spiritual condition of these men. For a long time the liberals have disbelieved hell. We expect that.

But what has happened in our generation is that many leading evangelicals have begun to question and worse than question that doctrine which was the unanimous faith of the church for over 1800 years. And in many leading evangelical centres of influence you will find now not the orthodox teaching of hell, but the teaching of what is called annihilationism or conditional immortality. The belief that God at some stage will simply allow the wicked to pass into nothingness.

And certainly in the United Kingdom, I don't know the position here, that belief is on the verge of becoming the majority belief among evangelicals. Men as eminent as John Stott, a man who has written so wisely and helpfully on many topics, Stott has gone on record as dissenting from the doctrine, the orthodox doctrine of hell. Philip Edgecomb Hughes, once a friend of Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones, the author of a marvellous commentary on Hebrews, has come out very strongly against the doctrine of eternal punishment.

Other writers suggest what they call post-mortem evangelism. The idea that somehow after death there will be another chance or a first chance for those who did not hear the gospel during their lifetime. Clark Pinnock has moved to what he calls inclusivism.

The belief that God will forgive and receive to himself followers of other religion, if they have lived up to the light which they have received. A good Buddhist will go to heaven, a good member of Islam will go to heaven, if they have been faithful to the light given in their own religion. Evangelical questioning.

And it's bad enough that these men seek to abolish hell. But some of them also attack the biblical doctrine with appalling vigor and blasphemy. Let me give you two quotations, one from a British scholar, one from an American.

John Wenham, a Greek, a New Testament scholar, at a conference in 1991, a leading evangelical, makes this statement. I believe that endless torment is a hideous and unscriptural doctrine which has been a terrible burden on the mind of the church for many centuries and a blot on her presentation of the gospel. I should indeed be happy if before I die I could help in sweeping it away.

Clark Pinnock goes even further. I apologize for bringing these words before you, but brethren and sisters we have to realize what is happening. We cannot be naive.

Here's what Dr. Pinnock has to say. I consider the concept of hell as endless torment an outrageous doctrine, a theological and moral enormity. How can Christians possibly project a deity of such cruelty and vindictiveness? Surely a God who would do such a thing is more like Satan than like God.

Everlasting torment is intolerable from a moral point of view. It makes God into a bloodthirsty monster who maintains an everlasting Auschwitz for victims whom he does not even allow to die. This is the unbelief.

This is the unbelief. This is the questioning. And in the face of such questioning it would be easy for the Lord's people to be swept away.

To say, well these are clever men, these are great scholars, these are eminent leaders of the church and it is such an unpleasant doctrine. Is it not possible that they are right? Is it not possible that new light has come and that we should follow their example? And even where evangelicals hold to the doctrine they often hold to it timidly, half-heartedly, hesitatingly. One writer speaks of a man who was preaching and he warned his hearers those who do not turn to Christ will suffer grave eschatological ramifications.

What a roundabout way of trying to say something which the Bible makes plain. Evangelicals are silent about hell. In a recent volume of Evangelical Theology the volume itself is 800 pages long.

Eight lines are devoted to the doctrine of hell. Is that the balance of the scriptures? Why should we think about hell? Because it is a very important doctrine. Because it is under savage and sustained attack from the world outside and from inside the professing church.

Because here is where the battle is raging. Perhaps you remember Martin Luther's definition of a good soldier. It was something like this, he said, You may be as brave as you like at every other point of the field but if you run away where battle is joined you are no soldier at all.

It is easy to be a soldier where there is no battle. It is easy to parade up and down in your uniform and wave your shiny weapon and make great speeches but in the blood and guts and wounds and sweat and danger of the fight that is where the soldier is proved. And here is a doctrine where there is a battle.

Here is a doctrine which is being attacked by the devil. Here is a doctrine where skillful otherwise orthodox eloquent, persuasive and gifted men are seeking to overthrow the truth of the word of God. And friends that is reason enough for us to think about it.

It is possible you know for doctrines to be lost. Lost for centuries. It has happened in history in the past.

The gospel itself has been submerged. It has been distorted. It has gone underground.

And for hundreds of years generations have perished because Christians didn't hold on to the truth and fight for the truth. Do you want your grandchildren to grow up in a world where hell is never preached and never taught and no one believes in it and it is looked upon as a superstition of a past age. No.

We have got to keep this doctrine alive. We have got to know what we believe and why we believe it and be sure and firm and clear that we may do battle for it. Why should we think about hell? Because of its intrinsic importance and because of pervasive unbelief of the doctrine.

Both of these are valid reasons for study. But there is a third and last reason which is infinitely, infinitely more significant than either of these. And it is this.

We should think about the doctrine of hell because unbelief is a symptom of a deeper problem. Unbelief is a symptom of a deeper problem. That's what a symptom is.

A symptom has an importance far beyond itself. One day you find a lump on your body. The lump itself is no problem.

It is not painful. It doesn't discommode you in any way. It doesn't prevent you from living as normal and doing your work.

The lump in and of itself is insignificant. Yet do you say that? Of course not if you have any sense or any care for your body. You go to your doctor.

You ask for an examination. You seek treatment. It's not because of the lump.

It's because of what it might signify. What it might be a sign of. A deeper malady.

Something more deadly and dangerous than the very symptom itself. Now that's not a perfect illustration because disbelief in hell is far far more than a symptom. But it's true to this extent that it is a symptom of something even worse.

Unbelief in hell is a symptom of man's deepest problem. Man's most wicked sin. And that is man-centeredness.

Man-centeredness. The sin which puts us at the center of our universe. At the focus of interest.

We become the people round whom all else revolves. It goes back to Eden. Where Satan said to Adam and Eve You will be like God.

It goes back further. Satan himself had said that. I will be like God.

The sin of putting yourself instead of God in the center of your world. And what I want to say friends is that this sin of self-centeredness of humanism for that's another name for it. Although it has always been present in the world has at the end of the 20th century completely overwhelmed and saturated and dominated our culture.

So that it masters the whole world in which you and I live. Man-centeredness is as pervasive as the air we breathe. And it is as unnoticed as the air we breathe.

And there's no one in this building who is unaffected by it. We can't escape it. It's like pollution in the atmosphere.

It's there. We take it in. We absorb it.

We breathe it in. We are poisoned by it. What I want to say to you is this.

That it is this man-centeredness which is at the root of the objections to hell. And especially the evangelical objections. These objections are not due to new exegetical discoveries.

They are because men have imbibed the spirit of the world. I don't know the particular stamps of the American writer David F. Wells. But he has certainly written some very, very perceptive material.

Here's his comment on hell. These truths today have become awkward and disconcerting to hold. Now get this.

Not because of new light from the Bible. But because of new darkness from the culture. That is exactly true.

Now that's not what we're told in the evangelical books. The evangelicals say now we've greater understanding now. We've gone into the meaning of these words.

We've studied the background. We've greater knowledge than our forefathers. And as a result of our exegetical skill and insight we are now able to correct what they believed.

And it is our exegesis which has led us to question the doctrine of hell. No it is not their exegesis which has led them to question the doctrine of hell. They have been affected by the world and by the spirit of the world and then they have prostituted their exegetical skills to construct the conclusion that they have already chosen and decided upon.

It's exactly the same with the issue of feminism. We have this whole movement today and we're told of these great new insights. And the great research into Greek vocabulary and understanding and how we have to transform what we previously believed.

That's rubbish. Rubbish. That is intellectual dishonesty of the worst kind.

Their minds were made up in advance. And then they're clever enough to construct a rationale for what they have arrived at irrationally. And naive people read and say oh look at the scholarship look at the cleverness.

No no. It's not new light from the bible. It's new darkness from the culture.

Let me in closing give three examples of how this spirit is manifested. It's shown firstly in a man centred view of man. A man centred view of man.

I mean by that that the highest imaginable good in our society is human well-being and human happiness. That is the key. That is the ultimate.

That is the purpose of all activity. The reason for all life. The foundation on which our whole civilisation is built.

People must be happy. People must be happy. And the doctrine of hell comes like a great brutal violent fist and smashes its way through the fabric of that humanistic world view.

It rips it to shreds. It shakes the foundation to the core and it tells us that millions of human beings will be unspeakably wretched in a place of torment forever. And friends that just blows people's minds.

That just blows all the fusers. They just they cannot take that in. That is completely unacceptable.

It calls into question everything modern man lives for and modern man stands for. People must be happy. Man's well being is the goal.

And the doctrine of hell speaks of the millions of the damned. They just can't accept it. It's not rational.

It's emotional. And even Christians can be affected. How often have we heard the question or asked the question how could we be happy in heaven knowing that other human beings are in hell.

Now I want to treat that question tenderly because I know that for many of you it's an agonizing question. It's a personal question. I'm not making fun of it.

And we look at it a later evening but I would just say my friend just reflect for a moment when you're in heaven and see the glory of God and the Lamb who was slain and your minds and your hearts are filled with God himself I can assure you you will not be unhappy. And if you were to say yes but it wouldn't be

enough to see God. It wouldn't be enough to be with Christ.

It wouldn't be enough to be glorified if I knew that some human beings were in hell. Is that not man centeredness? Is that not the influence of the world creeping in and affecting us? It's natural but it's still there. It's interesting that people have no problem with heaven.

Heaven agrees with their worldview at least their degraded distorted concept of heaven, a place where everyone is happy. Oh that's fine but hell it contradicts it it shatters the man centered view of man and then secondly it opposes the man centered view of sin the man centered view of sin. What is sin in the modern world? Sin is what hurts other people.

They don't call it sin of course and they're very selective they don't mind hurting unborn children who are inconvenient they don't mind driving scissors into the back of their necks and sucking out their brains and crushing their skulls and dragging them from their mothers womb and mark my words they won't mind hurting the disabled and they won't mind putting the elderly to sleep when they become too expensive to care for we're heading for a world of horror if God does not move in revival.

It's very selective, it's very dishonest but yet there's a generally held view among decent civilized people that you shouldn't hurt other people you shouldn't steal you shouldn't kill, you shouldn't do violence, you shouldn't exploit you shouldn't tell lies and many of our fellow men are ashamed of these things and they try not to do them and they think the world would be a better place if these things didn't exist and they're troubled in their conscience about these things because they hurt other people but they have absolutely no sense of sin as against God you could talk to them about the 6th the 7th the 8th commandment and they would see some reason in that but you shouldn't kill, you shouldn't commit adultery you shouldn't steal but try talking to them about the 2nd, 3rd and 4th commandment you shouldn't make graven images or worship God in any other way than that is appointed in his word you shouldn't take God's name in vain, you should remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy they think you're mad does the average person have any sense of guilt about the way he or she spends the Lord's day?

I don't think so, I don't think it ever crosses their mind that they're doing anything wrong and if you were to go next door to them and say do you know that you're sinning you're out there cutting your grass, you're going out to the theatre, that's a very wrong thing to do, they would look at you and say what sort of religious freak are you and what would their question be what harm does it do who am I hurting no one, we even hear the clamour for what is called safe sex it doesn't matter how perverted it is, it doesn't matter how unnatural, it doesn't matter how responsible, it doesn't matter how unclean as long as it's safe because that's a lie it's anything but safe but the rationale is there so for modern man sin isn't a big deal it's hurting people and you shouldn't hurt people but

if you hurt them, well you can pay them, you can apologise you can get therapy you can do something about it and there's our heredity, our environment, our genes, we can't help these things, we shouldn't hurt people but it's not a big deal and hell comes and hell smashes this facade to pieces and hell says there is a great awesome, holy almighty being in whose eyes you are dreadfully guilty hell comes to a man who has committed murder and adultery and the spirit of God leads him to say, oh God against you you only have I sinned and done this evil in your sight and this doctrine tells human beings that sin is so fearfully serious so damnable in God's eyes that it must be punished by an eternity of suffering and it lifts human wrongdoing onto an entirely different plane and sets it in the

context of accountability and judgement and everlasting consequences, that's why people don't want anything to do with it because it tells them that sin is far far more serious and awful than they would ever want to admit it merits damnation a man centred view of man a man centred view of sin and lastly hell contradicts a man centred view of God and that's worst of all have you noticed how for several generations our culture has systematically destroyed in our young people any sense of respect or awe or admiration, we have no heroes anymore it's interesting to examine biographies written 50 years ago and biographies written today 50 years ago they would tell you about some great man, his achievement his ambitions, his virtues and you read the biography and you were stirred and you were

stimulated and you thought to yourself well I'm sure they've covered over some weaknesses, he wasn't perfect but the effect was ennobling and uplifting, but what does a biographer do now, if you were writing a biography and you wanted to sell, what would you do you'd ferret out all the dirty little secrets wouldn't you all the inconsistencies all the scandals and you would publish those and you would say in your book he's no better than us, he's no different from us, there are no heroes, there are no noble people, they're all liars they're all on the take and that's because they hate the hero the supreme being, that's because they want to level everyone down that's because they fear the thought of goodness and holiness which stands in judgment over them behind it all is a hatred of God

and the God people speak about today is a God who if he exists at all is for man's benefit man's benefit God's purpose is to supply our needs to provide for our happiness to meet our desires God is a heavenly bell boy and whenever you need him you press the button and whenever you don't need him you tell him to go away you've no interest in him the first answer of the shorter catechism has been rewritten God's chief end is to satisfy man and to provide for him forever isn't that the view of God even in evangelical churches to make us happy, to solve our problems, to meet our needs to answer our prayers to heal our sicknesses, to give us good marriages, to give our children good jobs, to make us happy that's what God is for Martin Luther described it as using God using God what a

disgusting phrase what did you think of a man who spoke of using his wife what a wreck she would be have you ever been used some of you thought was your friend you thought they loved you you thought they liked your companionship, your fellowship you thought you could trust them and depend on them and then you found out they were using you they laughed at you behind your back they took what they could get and they sneered at you that's what people are doing with God that's how they think they can treat the God of heaven and earth no holiness no majesty, no awesomeness he's a little puppet who stays on a box until we press the switch to let him out but friends the doctrine of hell confronts us with a God who is far far different, a God who is overwhelming in his anger terrifying in his

power awesome in his justice a mighty sovereign who holds the whole earth in his hand like a pinch of dust high as the heavens above the earth all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing, he does according to his will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth no one can restrain his hand or say to him what have you done hell speaks to us of a God who is terrifying a God who is sovereign a God who is uncontrollable a God who takes us and does with us as he pleases a God whom we can't manipulate or ignore or marginalize or use, who wants a God like that people today don't want him and they will banish any doctrine which brings him frighteningly before us and that is why it is so vital that we think seriously about hell, because it brings us every one face to

face with the living God and it is a litmus test for our souls am I God or am I man, hell will test you, hell will test you, and I believe there will be no belief in hell until there is a recovery of a belief in God and I believe,

although I won't take time to expand on it now, that that is why our reformed churches are so so vital who will tell of the great God who will tell of the great God, people must hear, until they hear of this God, they will not believe in hell I don't think you could teach the doctrine as an isolated thing on it's own you have to see God you have to understand God, his holiness his majesty, his power his infinity, hell doesn't make sense until you see God you can't grasp it, you can't get hold of it but once you see God once you are confronted by God the living

God the true God, once you and I gaze into the face of that holy, majestic powerful being then we are ready to understand to believe all that God says when the day of judgement comes no one will be laughing no one will be producing little flippant brochures about heaven and hell no one will be questioning the morality of eternal punishment no broad minded preachers will be saying I don't believe a God of love could send anyone to hell, we'll all be in our faces we'll all be in our faces we'll be overwhelmed before the majesty the intense reality of the living and true God and that's why this week I've decided not to spend time refuting the errors of these men I hope you're not disappointed by that at first I was going to and then I thought why should we let these men set our agenda why

should we spend time answering their silly little objections when we know that that's not the real problem the real problem is they haven't seen God they don't know God why should we think about hell because it brings us face to face with the overwhelming reality of God that's our greatest need that's why the devil has attacked this doctrine so persistently some of you here tonight are unconverted you need to meet God we're not playing games here we're not spinning words you need to face up to the reality of the God who made you the God who gives you breath as you sit here the God against whom you have sinned the God to whom you are accountable the God who will judge you the God who will condemn you certainly if you do not cry for mercy to His Son some of us as believers have been

influenced by the world become man centered the vision of God has become dim and our view of Christianity is becoming a little bit selfish we've come to this conference thinking what's in it for me what will I enjoy what practical lessons will I learn there's nothing wrong with that but more than anything else we need as believers again to meet our God in His glory and in His majesty may He use this doctrine to bring it before some of you dear saints have a sorrow deeper than tears for loved ones who are now gone from this earth with as far as you know no interest in Christ and they were bone of your bone flesh of your flesh and you loved them and you were right to love them and the thought that they are now lost that they are now damned is unbearably painful to you I cannot comfort you

but I can bring you to God by His grace and strength I know that if you will come into His presence with your tears and your questions and your anguish then He'll put His Father's arms around you and He'll hold you and He'll comfort you you may not have the answers but you'll feel around you the God of love who does all things well whose ways are all righteousness and truth who cannot hurt any of His children but who is to be praised and honoured in all that He does and you will be comforted remember the words of the redeemed in heaven we give you thanks O Lord God Almighty because you have taken your great power and reigned the nations were angry and your wrath has come and the time of the dead that they should be judged great and marvellous are your works Lord God Almighty just and true

are your ways O King of the sin who shall not fear you O Lord and glorify your name for you alone are holy for your judgments have been manifested that's the only answer to our hearts to see God blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted

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