

Hell #04: How It Should Affect Us

by Edward Donnelly

The reality of hell should lead to repentance and faith in Christ for the unconverted and a daily commitment to putting sin to death, unbroken contentment, and pervasive seriousness for believers.

Duration: 1:14:36

Scripture: Luke 19:41

Topics: "Hell"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the main effect of the preaching of the word of God, which is to reach the unconverted and those without hope. He pleads with non-Christians to consider their eternal destiny and choose to enter the family of God rather than face eternal damnation. The speaker expresses deep concern and sorrow for those who have not accepted Christ. He also expresses gratitude for the opportunity to speak at the conference and for the lessons learned from fellow believers. The sermon concludes with a challenge to the audience to take action and share the message of salvation with others.

Transcript

Thank you all very much for inviting me to speak at this conference. Thank you for your warmth and friendship and great kindness to my wife and myself. Thank you for the challenge of the teaching which I have been privileged to sit under.

Pastors don't often have that joy. And for the challenge of fellowship with many of you. We have seen much of Christ in you and have learned many lessons.

Thank you for the privilege of being here. May God bless you all in your churches and in your individual and family lives. The fourth question and the last question that we want to consider this evening, as we think together of the biblical doctrine of hell, is a very practical one.

What effect should the reality of hell have on us? What effect should the reality of hell have on us? The main effect is a very obvious one on which we spent a great deal of time yesterday evening. Its main thrust is obviously to the unconverted. To those who are still without Christ and without hope.

Perhaps still some here. And if you are not a Christian now, if you have not been born again by God's Spirit, I appeal to you again. Think.

Remember what you heard yesterday evening. Don't let it drop out of your mind. Jesus wept over Jerusalem because he could look into the future and see the wretchedness which faced them.

If you are not a Christian, we weep for you. We are sorry for you. Desperately sorry.

You have two alternatives. You may, by faith, enter the family of God and heaven forever. Or you may go forever to the lake of fire.

I appeal to you again. Why will you die? God himself invites you. You have another opportunity.

God has been very good to you. You resisted him yesterday. You have been resisting him since.

But he is merciful and he is patient. Don't abuse his mercy. Don't try his patience.

Please, call on Christ to save you. Ask him to give you the new heart, the new ability to do for you what you cannot do for yourself. To grant to you repentance and faith.

Call on him. Receive him. Rest upon him for salvation.

And he will save you. That is the great overwhelming effect which the reality of hell should have to those who are destined to go there. May you repent and believe in Christ.

But I want to spend the bulk of our time this evening applying this doctrine to believers. But it's not just for the unconverted. James tells us that we are to be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving ourselves.

And that applies to all of us. In the doctrine of hell, we have heard God speaking to us, not man. Who can hear the voice of God and remain unchanged? Surely it would be a tragic thing if we sat together for four evenings and thought about this awesome and fearful doctrine and went away the same people as we were when we came.

If it left no mark on us. If we were unchanged by it. My dear friends, surely we should ask the Holy Spirit to so impress hell upon our redeemed consciousness that from now on, we will be different people.

I said at the beginning that I commenced the study of this doctrine some months ago with a degree of reluctance and hesitation. But I want to say now that that feeling rapidly changed to one of thankfulness and privilege. And long before I had finished my preparation, I was glad that I had been asked to study this doctrine.

And I hope and pray that it has made an effect on me and changed me as a person. So I want to bring before you this evening six things which the doctrine of hell should produce in us. There are many more, but we concentrate on these.

What effect should the commitment to putting sin to death have? A daily commitment to putting sin to death. That was one of the lessons which our Lord himself drew from the doctrine of hell. In Matthew chapter 5 verses 29 and 30, he says to his disciples, if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you.

If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your whole body to be cast into hell. There's the doctrine of hell.

And Christ is using it. He's inducing the doctrine of hell. He's bringing it to bear on the consciences of his disciples.

And he says the only alternative for you to going to hell is to deal radically with your personal sin. To amputate, to pluck out, to cut out, to cast away. If you do not do that, you will go to hell.

If you don't deal with your sin, you will go to hell. If you don't pluck out your eye or cut off your hand, you will go to hell. Now we may say that's a strange thing for Christ to say.

Is it not true that we are saved through faith in Christ? Is that not all that was required? Was the dying thief able to pluck out his right eye and cut off his right hand? Did Jesus not say to him, today you will be with me in paradise? Do we not believe that the acting of repentance and faith so unites us to Christ as to render us safe for time and for eternity? Do we not believe that we're kept to glory by the power of God and not one of his people will be lost or can be lost? Is the gospel not exceedingly simple? If you're unconverted, believe. If you're converted, you're safe. Where does amputation come in? Where does hell come in as a possibility? But to think in this way is to misunderstand salvation, as many do.

People think, you see, of salvation as one self-enclosed instantaneous transaction that is over and done with, full stop, end of story. And once you have carried through that transaction, you have a legal right to heaven. It's like purchasing a house.

If you had enough money to put down the whole purchase price, that house would be yours forever. You could never lose it. You would have nothing more to do, nothing more to worry about.

But that's a misunderstanding. Believing in Christ is the beginning of a new relationship. It is not a self-enclosed little capsule in our past history which we took away in the deposit box of our memory but has no further effect on us.

Exactly as we heard in the morning sessions, the same grace which saves is the same grace which sanctifies. It is a relationship which is daily, which is continuing, which is identical with the original. I believe in Christ today as I believed on him the day I was saved.

I recognize my helplessness and my sinfulness. I turn from it. I cast myself upon him for mercy.

I believe that he can and does save me. We are believers, people who believe every day, on and on and on. That's the great difference between true faith and false faith.

It may well be that at this conference God has been dealing with some of you regarding your salvation. Perhaps you came here unconverted and in some of the meetings God has spoken to you. God has drawn near to you and you've been moved and you've been convicted.

Perhaps it's the case that some of you have confessed your sins to Christ and turned from your sins and called on Christ to save you. We hear that that may be the case with some here. What wonderful news! How delighted we are, how thrilled we are to hear that you have done that.

We praise God for that transaction. And if it's true faith, that means that you have everlasting life. You will never be condemned.

You will never go to hell. But perhaps if that is the case with you, you've already wondered to yourself, is it true faith? Is it true faith? Perhaps I was just emotional last night. It was a terrible subject.

Perhaps I was just carried away. Is it true faith or is it false faith? There's a very easy way to tell. Start putting sin to death.

Young person, if God has been dealing with you, if you've professed faith and you're wondering to yourself, I trust it's true, I hope it's true, is it true? I don't want it to be false. Well, let me tell you what you must do now, this evening, is set yourself to a lifetime of killing sin and a lifetime of obedience. Make the determination in your own heart and soul, from now on I will turn away from sin.

I will fight it. I will wrestle against temptation. I will read my Bible.

I will seek God in prayer. I will come to the means of grace. I will listen to the preaching of the Word.

I will take counsel. I will tell my friends that from now on I'm a Christian. I will make a determined, permanent commitment and ask God to help me and enable me to have done with sin.

That's what you must do. And as by God's grace you do that from day to day, as you persevere in that, putting sin to death, then the assurance will grow in your heart that that night indeed Christ did save me, that it was real, that it was permanent, and your parents and your friends and your pastors will see the change in you and they will say, yes, praise God, a work was done. We saw one of the men this afternoon, perhaps some of you did, showing us how to climb a tree.

I'm sure all the pastors were noting down many sermon illustrations. Did you see the knotty tide? It would move up, but it wouldn't move down. You could push it up with two fingers.

You couldn't pull it down with all your strength. That's what you must do in your consciousness, only upwards, only upwards. I don't want to fall.

I don't want to go down. I only want to go up. That's what the doctrine of hell should say to us.

Perseverance of the saints means perseverance in repenting and believing. That's what it means. It means that we repent every day and we believe every day.

And the special mark of the disciple is that the disciple of Christ deals with sin. In Romans 8.13, Paul says, If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. Young people, if God has been dealing with you, we are thrilled.

Give yourself now, as you sit here, make that resolve. God helping me, I will put to death the deeds of the body, that I may see the change, that others may see the change, that Jesus may be glorified in me, that it may be plain that I am a true disciple. Our Lord is telling each one of us that we are never to treat hell as irrelevant for us.

No matter how long you've been a Christian, the evidence that you're not going to hell is the way in which you deal with personal sin. John Owen says, Make putting sin to death your daily work. Be always at it whilst you live.

Cease not a day from this work. You've heard this phrase many times, I'm sure. Be killing sin, or it will be killing you.

The mark of a disciple is that they're killing sin. And when each one of us is tempted, when sin seems attractive to us, and we're reluctant to pay the price, and to meet the cost, say to yourself, if I commit this

sin, I am telling God that I want to go to hell. That's what Matthew 5 is saying.

That's what those verses are saying. In the committing of this sin, I'm saying, I choose hell. I want hell.

How many times will a true believer say that to God? Friends, say that to yourself when temptation comes. Do I want hell? Do I choose hell? Is that what I'm saying? And if that doesn't stop you from sinning, then you are in a dangerous position. So the first effect of the doctrine of hell is to lead us to a daily commitment to putting sin to death.

Secondly, the doctrine of hell should produce in us unbroken contentment in all life's circumstances. Unbroken contentment in all life's circumstances. Paul, while lying in prison, could say in Philippians 4.1, I have learned in whatever state I am therewith to be content.

He had to learn it. It was a very difficult lesson for the Apostle. And it obviously took him time to learn it.

But he did learn it. And he could say without affectation or pride, I have learned to be content. I could be poor or rich.

I can be full or empty. I can be honored or obased. I have learned to be content.

Can you say that? Can you say, I have learned to be content? One of the Puritans, Jeremiah Burroughs, wrote a book about Christian contentment. He gave it an interesting title, The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment. And in that title he's telling us that it's not often seen.

It is something very rare and precious and special. And in that book Burroughs says, to be well skilled in the mystery of Christian contentment is the duty, glory, and excellence of a Christian. It is a great mark of grace to have learned to be content.

And there are times when it's easy to be content. And there are times when it's difficult, when life is hard, when we're disappointed in ourselves, in others, when we meet what the Puritans called God's frowning providences. It's hard to be content.

And it's made harder by the fact that we're living in a world whose commerce is fueled by creating artificial discontent. The whole world of advertising is designed to make us discontented. If we weren't discontented, the economy of the Western world would grind to a halt.

We're described by our government as consumers. That's a very elevated phrase, isn't it? I think of pigs at a trough. They're consumers.

That's how we're seen. That's exactly how we're seen. You cannot turn on your television without seeing advertisements designed by experts with this one purpose, to make you discontented with your house, with your car, with whatever it is.

And that affects us. It helps to make us discontented. And the devil likes to make us discontented.

We heard how irrationally Adam and Eve were discontented. In the Garden of Eden, perfection, everything they could possibly need or want, but what happened? They were discontented. So it is a thing that we need to learn.

Discontent is a sin. It angers God. It robs us of happiness.

It's a very poor witness to others to see discontented, complaining, murmuring, grumbling Christians. It was a great characteristic of Israel after the Exodus. We don't like this manna.

We wish we were back in Egypt. Why did you bring us out into this wilderness? God says, how long shall I bear with this evil congregation who murmur against me? Now, there are many things which should make us contented. God's sovereignty should make us contented.

He orders all things in his wisdom and mercy for our good. That should make us contented. God's blessings should make us contented.

God's promises for this life and the future life should make us contented. But we should also be contented quite simply because we're not going to hell. John Wesley wrote once in his diary, at about 11 this morning, it came into my mind that this was the very day in which 40 years ago I was taken out of the flames.

I gave way to the voice of praise and thanksgiving and fell down in great rejoicing before the Lord. The remembrance of his deliverance from hell made him happy. And when we're tempted to feel sorry for ourselves, one of the best cures is to look at someone else who's worse off.

During times when I have periods of minor ill health, when I'm feeling a bit sorry for myself, a bit down in the mouth, I just need to look down from my pulpit on the Lord's day and see a gracious Christian lady in a wheelchair with a crippling and incurable disease and all my self-pity vanishes. What are you complaining about? Look what she has to bear. My friend, we're living in a world surrounded by multitudes who are going to hell.

They're infinitely, eternally worse off, and yet we complain. We complain. One of the Puritan pastors used to just look mildly at a complaining member of his congregation and say, friend, not in hell, I'm complaining.

Not in hell, I'm complaining. What have we to complain about? We have been saved from everlasting torment. The next time you think that life is treating you hardly, the next time you think that life is unfair, that God has could have done more for you, look into the pit of hell and say to yourself, I was going there, but now I'm not.

I'm going to heaven. God has saved me. What have I to complain about? What are all the miseries and disappointments and sorrows of this life? What if I were to be treated to endless pain from now to the day I die? It would be nothing, nothing compared to what I deserve, to what I was destined for, to what God has saved me from.

The psalmist says, I will praise you, Lord, my God, with all my heart, and I will glorify your name forevermore, for great is your mercy toward me, and you've delivered my soul from the depths of the pit. The doctrine of hell should make believers supremely contented and happy, grateful and thankful to God in every circumstance of life. Thirdly, it should produce in us a pervasive seriousness in our thinking and behavior, a pervasive seriousness in our thinking and behavior.

It seems to be that one of the great fears of many modern evangelicals is the fear of being thought gloomy. We're told that an essential part of our witness is that Christianity is great fun, and you see in some churches a frantic, forced joviality, which seems to be part of the witness. In many evangelical churches, the elders of Mebane who have introduced these meetings would be seen as pathetic,

inadequate failures.

No jokes, no warm-up lines, no laughs. These poor men just come over here and say, let us worship God and lead in prayer and announce the opening praise. Where's their grasp of human psychology that we're going to have a real fun time this evening? Many Christian testimonies are nothing but happiness and success and blessing, and how uninterruptedly wonderful the Christian life has been with nothing else.

You go to some churches and you think that the people who greet you at the door have something wrong with their jaws. They greet you like this, as if they just got their teeth capped while practicing ventriloquism. Wonderful to see you.

You say, what is wrong with you? Why are you grinning like that? What do you think of people who go about grinning all the time? But that's part of the Christian witness, and yet we come to the Lord Jesus Christ, and he was a man of sorrows. He wasn't a bundle of laughs. He said, happy are the people who mourn.

Happy are the people who mourn. How can we explain that? Well, there are many reasons, but one of the greatest of them is the doctrine of hell. How can we be people who go through life giggling and tittering and laughing when we are surrounded by millions who are going to damnation? If a plague was raging in a city, and there were dead bodies lying everywhere, and there were a group of people teething and giggling their way along because they had a cure, what would you think of those people? The psalmist says, rivers of water run down from my eyes, because men do not keep your law.

Now, that does not mean that as believers we are to be gloomy or morbid. We have a joy unspeakable and full of glory. We rejoice evermore.

And if I can go back on what I said, haven't we had fun here this week? Haven't we laughed together in our fellowship around the meal table? Haven't we had a tremendous enjoyable time? Haven't we gone to the swimming pool and seen the children screaming with delight and leaping in and having the best time? Haven't we experienced a great deal of natural, healthy laughter and fun? I don't see you as a very gloomy, depressed, morbid people, but there is a difference between happiness and frivolity, between joy and shallowness. And the awareness of hell should produce in us an underlying seriousness, a gravity, a realism among the lost and dying. I suppose I have a strongly developed sense of humor.

I do tend to see the funny side of life, and funniest of all are human beings. And the funniest human being that I know is speaking to you now. And I do use humor when I'm preaching.

I think it can be appropriate. I think it can be blessed by God. But the difference between humor and clownishness is that you know when it is totally, totally inappropriate and out of place, and when it is utterly banished, as it is for much of the time, in the declaration of the Word of God, it has to be very restrained.

We haven't had many laughs this week. What sort of buffoon would you have thought I was if I tried to introduce humor in addresses on hell? What an obnoxious thing. And yet, friends, it's done.

It's done. It's done by surprising people. I saw a video recently of a Reformed conference, three or four very eminent men were the speakers.

One of them was asked if all the people who went to his church were converted. And he said, well, there are some of my church members, and I certainly wouldn't like to be handcuffed to them when they die.

And the whole audience burst into laughter.

Do you find that funny? Is there something defective in my sense of humor that I didn't find it funny? Do you think the pastors here say that to each other? There are some members of my congregation, I wouldn't like to be handcuffed to them when they... Do you think their parents are saying that about their children? You see, it's completely and utterly out of place. We're to be serious people. One of our Reformed Presbyterian ministers, a very famous minister, J.P. Struthers in Scotland at the end of the last century, was one evening walking along the streets of Greenock, the town in which he lived and preached, and he saw in the distance a drunk man.

He was staggering and mouthing and singing and making a fool of himself. And he was surrounded by a laughing group of citizens, several of whom were members of Mr. Struthers' church. Struthers walked into the middle of the circle, and he just looked at the people, and he said, For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and tell you again, weeping, weeping that they are enemies of the cross of Christ.

What are you laughing at? What's funny about it? And the crowd melted and went away. Now people may think we are morbid. People may think we're gloomy.

People may think our meetings are stodgy and dull. Don't have the glamour and the glitter and the sparkle of the polished ecclesiastical comedians. But I'll tell you one thing.

When people are in trouble, they'll not turn to the clowns. When people are at a real crisis in their life, they'll not want somebody to tell them little stories and make them laugh. And you'll find that if there is a seriousness, a dignity, a gravity about you, that people will be drawn to you.

People will feel here is someone in touch with life. And in the long run, your impact will be far, far greater. The book of Ecclesiastes says, it is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools.

Let us be sober. Let us be serious. Let us be thoughtful as we live in a world where multitudes of our fellow men are perishing.

Fourthly, this doctrine of hell should produce in us a deeper appreciation of the love and merits of the Lord Jesus Christ. A deeper appreciation of the love and merits of the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter says that though we have not seen him, we love him.

That's true. And we long to love him more, don't we? How can we love him more? How can we love him more? He himself stated a principle in the Gospels when he said, to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And the corollary would be to whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much.

How much have we been forgiven? How much have we been spared? What did it cost him to save you? We know that he came to earth for us, that he lived as a man, that he suffered and died. That's wonderful. It's beyond comparison.

But one writer says, until we stare hell in the face, we take Christ's love for granted. Until we stare hell in the face. It's already been alluded to in prayer this evening.

Yesterday, we tried feebly to imagine what hell must be like, and it was truly appalling. And we remind ourselves now that our Lord Jesus does not need to imagine it, for he has experienced. He has

experienced.

He has experienced separation from God. He has experienced God's angry presence. He has experienced agonizing pain.

He has drunk the cup of God's wrath to the very dregs. The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. It pleased the Lord to bruise him.

He did not spare his own son. He visited on him all the fury of his holy wrath for sin, damnation. And he took it.

He took it for you. He took your damnation. He suffered your hell.

He took it in his own person, should we not love him. Lord Jesus, you were condemned for me. You suffered what I suffered.

You paid in my place. You took all that horror upon yourself because you loved me. And more than that, hell gives us a new insight into the merit of Christ's death, into its worth, the value of the atonement.

We saw something last night of how terrible the punishment is for each and every sinner. And yet it is just, it is deserved, it is measured. And we saw that eternity itself in hell will not satisfy God's anger.

And that you have suffered for millions of years, you will not have satisfied his anger. But the Lord Jesus Christ, somehow, by his death, made full atonement for all the sins of all his people, the precious blood of Christ. How can we begin to understand that? How infinitely worthy such a death may be, that one death at one moment in history was sufficient to pay for all the sins and all the damnation of all God's elect, so that he could cry, it is finished.

How much is the death of Christ worth? We cannot begin even to describe it or think of it, what a mystery it is, how great a being he must be, how precious in his Father's eyes, how infinitely worthy that his blood can cleanse us from all sin, that his death can pay that awful, awful, unimaginable price, that Calvary makes up for all eternity in damnation, that God can say, I am satisfied. Well, might Paul say, God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, the preciousness of his death, the depths of his love, the love that suffered for our sin, the death that made atonement. Hell brings us to Christ, hell brings us to our knees, hell fills us with love, hell moves us to wonder, hell brings glory to the Savior, hell transforms us and inspires us with a new adoration for him who loved us and gave himself for us, the love which went to hell for us, the love which emptied hell and drained hell and destroyed hell and cancelled hell for us.

That's what he's worth, that's who he is. That's why, young people, when you believe in Jesus, you have linked yourself to a being of unimaginable power and grace and might and glory that this cosmos cannot comprehend or imagine. It isn't a small thing to believe in Jesus, it isn't a trivial thing for the Lord Jesus Christ to say, come unto me.

He's not a small person, he's not a limited being, he's a being of such glory and majesty and power and worth and kindness and grace, he calls you to himself, to be your friend and your Savior and your Lord, so loving, so powerful, so worthy. Christ saves from hell by experiencing the pains of hell. If we don't go away loving our Savior more and esteeming his death more highly, then we've studied this topic in vain.

Fifthly, the doctrine of hell should produce in us a renewed zeal for biblical evangelism, a renewed zeal for biblical evangelism, and perhaps this is the most obvious effect. I'm quite sure you've all thought of it already and wondered when is he going to come around to it. Even a moment's thought would lead us to that conclusion.

We must do something. If people around us are going to hell, and hell is a terrible place, we must do something. So many are lost.

We have the only gospel. We have been lost ourselves. We have freedom for now, in your country and mine, to proclaim it.

Freedom may last, we don't know. We are God's means for the salvation of the elect. Our responsibility is immense and inescapable.

And we're thankful for all the evangelism that is taking place in the church throughout the world. Countless efforts being made all over the globe to bring men and women and boys and girls to Christ. Yet, as I look at my own heart and life, perhaps you feel the same way.

I have to acknowledge that I am not nearly, not nearly as zealous for evangelism as I should be. But I'm greatly to fault and seriously to blame. R.L. Dabney, in his systematic theology, is writing about the heresy of universalism, the belief that all will be saved.

And Dabney says the chief practical argument in favor of universalism is the sinful callousness of Christians towards this tremendous destiny of their fellow creatures. Can we, he says, contemplate the exposure of our friends, neighbors and children to a fate so terrible and feel so little and make efforts so few and weak for their deliverance? How can our unbelieving friends be made to credit the sincerity of our convictions? Here, he says, is the best argument of Satan for their skepticism. In other words, they don't mean it.

They don't really believe it. If they believed that we were going to hell, they would do something about it. Dabney says the best refutation of this heresy is the exhibition by God's people of a holy, tender, humble, yet burning zeal to pluck men as brands from the burning.

And here it is possible, I think it's more than possible, I think it's probable, that we who are reformed Christians, who love the doctrines of grace, may be particularly at fault. And I would suggest to you that as in so many other areas, our strength may also be our weakness. We love the Word of God.

We love the doctrines of the Word. We love exploring this precious book. We feel that here is a treasury that we have only begun to examine, that we're only at the edges of the Word of God.

And it is a sheer delight to us, individually and corporately, to explore together the mighty revelation of God's wisdom and power. And we feel that eternity itself, we know that eternity itself will be too short. In October, if I live, I'll have been a pastor for 29 years.

I feel I'm just a beginner, a mere beginner at studying the Bible, that I'm still at the very fringes of it. And we have this passionate, God-implemented longing for more and more of the Scriptures. But friends, the danger is that we become so absorbed in that, so lost in that, so devoted to developing our theology and constructing our churches along biblical lines that we forget the dying, ruined masses round about our doors.

And our strength, and it is a strength, it is a strength, our strength becomes our weakness. And we can learn, as we've heard, from other Christians. And one of the things that I have been most challenged by in many, many thoroughly Arminian Christians and churches is their overwhelming zeal, their passion for the lost, their enthusiasm for evangelism, and the prayer of the salvation of many.

And I have to tell you, in my own country at least, God blesses that. And God brings many, many people to faith through Christians whose theology is defective, whose evangelism is distorted, and whose methodology is poor. And I'm defending none of those things.

I'm commending them for what is commendable. And their zeal is commendable. And their passion is commendable.

And it is a rebuke to us, and a challenge to us, and we should learn from it. And if we were true to our own tradition, we would be learning from it. Read of Spurgeon.

We all know of his evangelistic zeal. We all know of his mighty gospel preaching. But do we also know that on a Sabbath evening, his people were scattered out across London, holding meetings, missions, Sabbath schools for children, meetings for drunks and women of the streets, spreading out throughout the week, going out in evangelism, bringing people to hear their pastor preach.

A great exploding, active commitment. Where is our zeal? How often have we criticized those who do it imperfectly? Arminianism, poor methodology, wrong statements. Perhaps the voice of God should come, why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye? You who have not spoken to another human being about faith in Christ for the last month, for the last six months, and you criticize this brother, this sister, because they do imperfectly what you are not doing at all.

Surely this doctrine should motivate us. Surely tonight we need to repent. I do.

We need to gaze into hell until we feel the pain of those who are on their way to damnation. The story is told of Francis Schaeffer. And one night in the chalet at Labrie, there were a lot of keen young intellectual disciples sitting at the great man's feet and listening to his profound philosophical thoughts on many matters.

And they were profound. And eventually one young man said, Dr. Schaeffer, what about those who have never heard the gospel? And waited for the brilliant answer. And Schaeffer bowed his head and he wept.

That's all. There was the heart of the man. You boys and girls have been hearing about Hudson Taylor, haven't you? One time Hudson Taylor came home from China.

And he was very concerned that the people in England didn't care about people who didn't know Jesus. And he told the people about a time in China when a man fell into a river. And he was in the river drowning.

And the Chinese people there just stood and looked at him. And not one single person jumped into the river to help him. And the man drowned.

The audience were gasping in horror at such hard heartedness. Hudson Taylor said, men and women, there are millions lost. What are you doing to rescue them? My friend, is there someone to whom you should speak when you go home? A neighbor? A colleague? A workmate? A member of your family? Is

there someone for whom you should daily pray? I sometimes think, with a degree of shame, of the innocent simplicity I had as a young Christian.

When I was on fire for the salvation of my friends, a key part of my devotions every day was to pray for an opportunity to speak to them. Oh, I'm much wiser now. I have much greater concerns in my mind now.

But we need to get back to that basic belonging, to see men and women coming to the Savior. And it must be biblical evangelism. An evangelism which speaks of hell.

I stress only that point. We must refuse to be intimidated. We must refuse to back off.

People don't know about hell. They think of God as a need meter. They need to understand that they're turning their backs on the Savior from hell.

And I must warn you that it is quite possible that in the short term this emphasis will be counterproductive. I was talking today to a Christian lady who has been involved in serving God in bringing children to a Sunday school to learn the teaching of Scripture. And she would collect them, and she would bring them, and she would teach them the Bible.

And one day she taught them about hell. And when she went back the next week to collect one child, she was met by a very angry mother who said, My child won't be coming anymore. How dare you teach my child about such a horrible thing which is not true.

And in the short term we may have to suffer for that. It may put people off. It may seem counterproductive.

But in the long term, God will bless it. Hell should produce in us a renewed zeal for evangelism. If each one of us were to go away from this conference with one person in our mind and say, By God's grace, I will pray for that person daily.

And as I have opportunity, I will speak to them of the Savior. I'll bring them to hear the word. I'll do all I can for their salvation.

Will you do that? If you haven't been doing it. And then sixthly and lastly, hell should produce in us a humble acceptance of God's sovereign purposes. A humble acceptance of God's sovereign purposes.

And I want to divide that into two areas. First of all, regarding our present responsibility. Regarding our present responsibility.

If we are not moved for the lost, now there is something terribly wrong with us. Paul could say, I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart for my kinsmen according to the flesh. He was filled with sorrow for those he knew who were not Christians.

We should have that sorrow. We should have that grief. We should be moved for the lost.

We should be zealous for them. Our responsibility is immense and inescapable. We must evangelize.

We must evangelize. And nothing that I am about to say should take away from the passionate, lifelong commitment to spreading the gospel by every means in our power. And yet, and we're coming back to these ever-present biblical tensions.

And yet, there is a too frequent evangelical imbalance, even dishonesty here. And this is the point at which many conference speakers would exert an intense emotional pressure on the people of God and would tear and rip and rend your consciences and say, listen, if hell is real, drop everything else and spend your whole time telling people to believe in Jesus. How can you do anything else? How can you think of anything else? If there's a hell and people are going to hell, nothing else is worthwhile.

And the people will be filled with a sense of guilt. And perhaps they would imagine that the man who said these words lived up to his own preaching and they would be intimidated by his godly zeal. Friends, I cannot do that.

God's will for most of you is not that you should drop everything for evangelism. If you did that, life on this earth couldn't continue. The church couldn't continue.

God's will for you is to rear your families. God's will for you is to do your daily work, to serve your employer in a righteous and godly way, to serve in the church and community. We have to accept God's sovereign purposes.

You do have a responsibility for other people. You do. But it's a limited responsibility.

It's a limited responsibility. Ultimately, each individual is responsible for himself or herself. If someone goes to hell, it is their responsibility.

God says in Ezekiel 18.20, the soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.

We will be guilty if we're silent, but the ultimate responsibility must rest with the individual. Now, friends, don't take more responsibility on yourselves than God puts on you. It'll break you.

My fellow pastors, don't take more responsibility on yourself than God puts on you. It'll break you. I've seen pastors, broken, good men, sensitive men, conscientious men, men who would have died for their people.

But in their very conscientiousness, they took upon themselves a burden too heavy for any mortal to bear. God is the Lord. Parents, the church says, don't take upon yourself a responsibility that God hasn't given you.

And remember that every single one of Christ's sheep will be saved. We don't need to panic. We don't need to be filled with terror that if we don't do something now for everybody we know, they will drop into hell by mistake.

The Lord says, all that the father gives to me will come to me. Those whom you gave me, I have kept. And none of them is lost.

Some years ago in Edinburgh, Scotland, my wife and I talked to a man of 64 who had just become a Christian. His parents had been godly people. They had died 30 years earlier, heartbroken at their dissolute, wicked, godless son, who'd rejected every piece of advice and who'd broken his parents' hearts.

And that man said to us, I believe I owe my conversion under God to the prayers of my father and my mother. They died. And they died with their son unconverted, but their son was converted.

Now that's not a guarantee. That's not an absolute. That's not a promise.

But we have to trust God. We have to hold on to God. We have to give the ultimate responsibility to him, even for our nearest and dearest, because it'll break you.

It'll break you. Can't live with it. It's that tension, isn't it? Our true responsibility, our biblical responsibility, but no more, to rest in God.

And then third, and then secondly and lastly, we have to accept humbly God's sovereign purpose regarding hell itself. And I need to be careful here in what I say. It's a terrible doctrine.

It's a terrible doctrine. And we can't help feeling deeply for our lost fellow human beings. And it's right that we should do so.

We're commanded to love our neighbors. We're commanded to love our enemies. The most evil human being you know may be elect.

You don't know that he isn't. He might seem a devil incarnate, a soul of Tarsus. He may be one of those whom God chose in eternity and whom God is going to redeem.

Everybody you meet, they may be elect. We do not know. You remember Spurgeon was told by Hyper Calvin, as he said, Mr. Spurgeon, we should only offer Christ to the elect.

Spurgeon said, right, you point out the elect to me and I'll offer Christ to them. And I said, well, I don't know who the elect are. And Spurgeon said, no, neither do I. We feel.

And God feels. He says, I have no pleasure in the wicked. But here's another tension.

Our natural compassion can very easily slip over into a dislike of this biblical doctrine. C.S. Lewis. There is no doctrine which I would more willingly remove from Christianity than this, if it lay in my power.

John Stott. Emotionally, I find the concept intolerable and I do not understand how people can live with it without either cauterizing their emotions or cracking under the strain. In other words, these men were saying, I wish there were no hell.

Now that's understandable. That's understandable. But is it right? Is it right? Should we see hell as an embarrassing, distasteful reality? Something we really wish didn't exist? Something that we'd be glad to forget about in heaven.

And the problem with this view is that scripture shows us the glorified saints praising God for his judgment on sin and worshiping him for the overthrow of wickedness. You are righteous, O Lord, because you have judged these things, for they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink, for it is their just due. We give you thanks, O Lord God Almighty, because you have taken your great power and reigned.

The saints in heaven praise God for hell. Should we? Now be careful. Be careful.

I would guess that in a gathering of this size, there are some brothers and sisters who are unbalanced in a particular direction. You're a little bit too rigid, a little bit too harsh. There's just a tinge of cruelty.

In your home, in your relations with your wife, in your relations with your children, there's an iron, a sourness. If you're listening to a sermon, you're more ready to say amen to passages that speak of wrath and judgment than passages that speak of grace and mercy. My friends, that's not good.

That's not good. That's a weakness in you. That's an immaturity.

Perhaps it's because you've recently come to the Reformed faith, and you're so thrilled with it, and you're so enraptured with it, and you're reacting against the shallow sentimentality and softness that you find repugnant. Be very careful. We can certainly, unreservedly, here and now tonight, give thanks that there is a hell for Satan without any reservation.

And we can go on our knees and say, thank you, Lord God, that you have prepared flames of fire for the devil and all his angels. I'm glad he's there. I'm glad he'll be there forever and ever.

I praise you, Lord, for your torment of him. I'm thinking aloud here. Can we go further? Can we tonight thank God that there's a hell for wicked people? Now, I'm not speaking dogmatically here, and I'm open to correction, but I have to say that as I look at my own heart, I cannot.

I cannot. I know too much of my own sin. I know that it's only because of Christ's grace that I'm not in hell.

And, brethren and sisters, I do not trust myself to do it in a holy way. I know I will do it in heaven. We will do it in heaven.

It's a mystery, but we will praise God as we see the reprobate in hell, suffering. We will praise God for that. We will worship God for that.

I would hesitate a long time before I would do it now. I think it could only be a very, very holy person, a person especially sensitive, a person close to God, a person filled with the mind of Christ to do such a thing. And yet, we must realize that God will be glorified in hell.

His justice will be glorified. All the injustices of this world will be cleared up. His righteous judgment will be revealed.

Everything will be made right. All inequities will be swept away, and we will see the fairness and the justice of it all. God's majesty will be glorified, and all those who have raised themselves up against Him in their arrogance and pride will be humbled and cast down.

God's grace and love will be magnified. God will be glorified in hell, and if the glory of God means more to us than anything, and if He is glorified through hell, can we be sorry that hell exists? We cannot be. We cannot be.

And in heaven, we will be transformed. We will be perfect. We will be able to praise God for all that He has planned and all that He has done, including hell.

Jonathan Edwards writes, it becomes the saints fully and perfectly to consent to what God doth, without any reluctance or opposition of spirit. You see how very, very careful his language is. It becomes us to consent to what God doth, without any reluctance or opposition of spirit.

And then he goes on, it becomes them to rejoice in everything that God sees meet to be done. I cannot yet aspire to that. That is my weakness, but we will.

We will. There are many things we cannot grasp of the glories of heaven, of hell and God's purposes, but we will. I would say to you in closing that this doctrine, like every doctrine in scripture, should lead us to worship.

Let us now worship. Father in heaven, forgive us for a sinful, cowardly, sentimental reluctance to think about hell as we should. Lord, we have been influenced by the jibes and mockery and objections of the world.

We have been intimidated to some degree. We have felt embarrassment. Lord, this is wrong.

You are the mighty and perfect God. You do all things well. You act in justice and in holiness and in righteousness.

Lord God, we have spent these evenings considering this doctrine, but we pray earnestly, Lord, that that doctrine will now transform our lives and behaviour. That we will be changed men and women. Lord, that we will deal with sin in our own lives.

That we will have a new contentedness and thankfulness and gratitude. That we will have a humility, a seriousness, a gravity in all our behaviour. That we will love the Lord Jesus Christ with an ever more passionate love and esteem his death and calvary as worth more than the universe.

Lord, that we shall have a new concern for those around us who are lost, without hope and without God, and seek to save them from the flames. Lord, that we may be filled with a humble, trustful submission, fulfilling our responsibilities, but not arrogantly going beyond them, bowing, O Lord, in reverence and worship and meekness before you, exalting and glorifying your holy name. We look forward to that day, O God, when we shall know, even as we are known, when we shall see you face to face, when your glory will be revealed in all that you have made and in all that you do.

So keep us, we pray, in Christ's name. Amen.

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