

GracePoint: A Weekly Sermon Discussion

28 – Hell

Announcements:

5/9 @6:30 -

Men's

Discipleship

5/11 @7:00 -

Corporate

Prayer

5/12 @6:30 -

Grace Group

5/15 @8:30 -

Sunday School

ICE BREAKER: John Piper often uses the phrase “preach to yourself”. And I think it is a wonderful thought. So when you are in need of comfort and care, what do you “preach to yourself”?

READ: Matthew 10:26-28

One of the things that happens at the annual conference of the BFC that I go to every year is that *any* church in the denomination is allowed to bring *any* request before the conference to seek input, leading and guidance. The range of topics is often broad, from things like the style of preaching most preferred to the mode of baptism that should be required. This year in particular the subject of Hell came up. Specifically one church requested that the conference “form a study committee... to examine what Scripture teaches about the eternal destiny of the unregenerate, with careful attention to both its apologetic and shepherding use.” Well today, because I am a bit of a contrarian, and one who often thinks things like “we don’t need no study committee!” we are going to do that ourselves in the context of Matthew 10.

Sparing you from the page of argumentation before the request was made, the central issue was this: there are two major beliefs that people have regarding the eternal destiny of those who die without repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and it would be helpful if we had “official literature” from the denomination. Just so we are on the same page, the two are Annihilationism and eternal conscious punishment in Hell (technically there are more than these two, but the rest are not worth mentioning, they are so just wrong).

Since we might not all be familiar with these thoughts, an introduction is in order. The Annihilationist belief is that instead of hell being a place of eternal punishment it is a symbol for the soul being destroyed. We read one of the verses they often quote to suppose this position today. Matthew 10:28b: “Rather fear him who can *destroy both soul and body in hell.*” The other view (which is, just to get this out of the way, the most widely held, scripturally sound, and right view) is that hell is a place of punishment for all who rebel against God. The soul, they would say is eternal for all people, the question becomes will that soul glory in Heaven or be subject to judgment in Hell?

DISCUSS: While it is easy to just say: “you are wrong!” It is better to first seek understanding. So WHY might someone hold the annihilationist view? What responses can we give to these? What response can we give to their reading of Matthew 10:28?

But Now I would like to look at the second half (and in my humble estimation, far more important portion) of the request which is that the committee should have “careful attention to the apologetic and shepherding use”. The apologetic answer is much more straightforward. That there is a place called hell is first a powerful message that we take to a lost world headed there. Secondly, knowing that is the fate of all those who do not come to the Father through Christ is a great motivation for me. But now we can turn our attention to its “shepherding use” or as I would say the pastoral considerations. When we think of pastoral concerns, the central issue is how can I use this to care for the flock of God, and so personally how can this doctrine be of value for me? I truly believe that a proper understanding of hell (well every doctrine really, but today let’s focus on this one!) should be a source of comfort, confidence and even joy in the life of a believer. The question is how do we teach it in such a way?

DISCUSS: How can the doctrine of hell be a source of comfort? Confidence? Joy!?