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Teaching Notes

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The Doctrine of Hell

The lake of fire is the second death.
Revelation 20:14

Hell

A. Definition

Wayne Grudem: “Hell is a place of eternal conscious punishment for the wicked.”

B. Jonathan Edwards and John Piper on Hell

1. Jonathan Edwards, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousands times more abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours.

2. Piper’s comments

a. Edwards struggling with language to describe Revelation 19:15

Revelation 19:15 he [Christ] treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

The words are exceeding terrible. If it had only been said, "the wrath of God," the words would have implied that which is infinitely dreadful: but it is "the fierceness and wrath of God! The fierceness of Jehovah! O how dreadful must that be! Who can utter or conceive what such expressions carry in them?

b. Why did he wrestle with such images?

What high school student is ever asked to come to grips with what really is at issue here? If the Bible is true, and if it says that someday Christ will tread his enemies like a winepress with anger that is fierce and almighty, and if you are a pastor charged with applying Biblical truth to your people so that they will flee the wrath to come, then what would *your* language be? What would you say to make people feel the reality of texts like these?

Edwards labored over language and over images and metaphors because he was so stunned and awed at the realities he saw in the Bible. Did you hear that one line in the quote I just read: "Who can utter or conceive what such expressions carry in them?" Edwards believed that it was impossible to exaggerate the horror of the reality of hell.

High school teachers would do well to ask their students the really probing question, "Why is it that Jonathan Edwards struggled to find images for wrath and hell that shock and frighten, while contemporary preachers try to find abstractions and circumlocutions that move away from concrete, touchable Biblical pictures of unquenchable fire and undying worms and gnashing of teeth?" If our students were posed with this simple, historical question, my guess is that some of the brighter ones would answer: "Because Jonathan Edwards really believed in hell, but most preachers today don't."

[http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Biographies/1458_The_Pastor_as_Theologian/]

C. Natural Human Repugnance

1. Charles Darwin

In his autobiography, he wrote of his spiritual slide from acceptance of general Christian doctrine to complete unbelief. The key step was his rejection of the doctrine of hell:

"I can hardly see how anyone ought to wish Christianity to be true; for if so, the plain language of the text seems to show that the men who do not believe, and this would include my Father, Brother, and almost all my best friends, will be everlastingly punished. And this is a damnable doctrine." [http://www.update.uu.se/~fbendz/library/cd_relig.htm#2]

Interestingly, when his wife read this statement later, she (a devout Unitarian) wanted to edit it as "too raw"; in preparing the second edition of the *Autobiography*, she wrote this note: -- "I should dislike the passage in brackets to be published. It seems to me raw. Nothing can be said too severe upon the doctrine of everlasting punishment for disbelief -- **but very few now wd. call that 'Christianity,'** (tho' the words are there.) There is the question of verbal inspiration comes in too. E.D." Oct 1882. This was written six months after her husband's death, in a second copy of the *Autobiography* in Francis's handwriting. The passage was not published.

2. Clark Pinnock

Canadian theologian whose wandered far from his evangelical roots:

"I was led to question the traditional belief in everlasting conscious torment because of moral revulsion and broader theological considerations, not first of all on scriptural grounds. It just does not make any sense to say that a God of love will torture people forever for sins

done in the context of a finite life.... It's time for evangelicals to come out and say that the biblical and morally appropriate doctrine of hell is annihilation, not everlasting torment.”
(*Theological Crossfire: An Evangelical/Liberal Dialogue*, 226-7)

3. John Stott

Emotionally, I find the concept [of eternal conscious torment] intolerable and do not understand how people can live with it without either cauterising their feelings or cracking under the strain. But our emotions are a fluctuating, unreliable guide to truth and must not be exalted to the place of supreme authority in determining it . . . my question must be — and is — not what does my heart tell me, but what does God's word say? [Stott, *Essentials*, 315-16.]

D. Christ's Emphasis on Hell

1. Dorothy Sayers' quote

There seems to be a kind of conspiracy, especially among middle-aged writers of vaguely liberal tendency, to forget, or to conceal, where the doctrine of Hell comes from. One finds frequent references to the “cruel and abominable mediaeval doctrine of hell,” or “the childish and grotesque mediaeval imagery of physical fire and worms.” ...

But the case is quite otherwise; let us face the facts. The doctrine of hell is not “mediaeval”: it is Christ's. It is not a device of “mediaeval priestcraft” for frightening people into giving money to the church: it is Christ's deliberate judgment on sin. The imagery of the undying worm and the unquenchable fire derives, not from “mediaeval superstition,” but originally from the Prophet Isaiah, and it was Christ who emphatically used it.... It confronts us in the oldest and least “edited” of the gospels: it is explicit in many of the most familiar parables and implicit in many more: it bulks far larger in the teaching than one realizes, until one reads the Evangelists through instead of picking out the most comfortable texts: one cannot get rid of it without tearing the New Testament to tatters. We cannot repudiate Hell without altogether repudiating Christ. (*A Matter of Eternity*, 86)

[see John Piper's blog:

http://www.desiringgod.org/Blog/1300_Pinnock_and_Sayers_on_Hell/]

2. Jesus Christ taught more about hell than anyone else in the Bible

3. the following is a listing of Jesus' statements about hell

Matthew 5:22 Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca, 'is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Matthew 5:29-30 If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and

throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Matthew 8:11-12 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. ¹² But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Matthew 10:28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

[the Parable of the Wheat and Weeds] Matthew 13:41-42 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. ⁴² They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

[the Parable of the Good and Bad Fish] Matthew 13:49-50 This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 18:8-9 If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. ⁹ And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.

[the Parable of the Wedding Banquet] Matthew 22:13-14 Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹⁴ "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

Matthew 23:15 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.

Matthew 23:33 "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?

[the Faithful or Unfaithful Servant] Matthew 24:50-51 The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. ⁵¹ He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 25:41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

Matthew 25:46 *"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."*

Mark 9:43-49 *If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. ⁴⁴ ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. ⁴⁶ ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸ where "'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.' ⁴⁹ Everyone will be salted with fire.*

Luke 12:5 *But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.*

Luke 13:23-28 *Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, ²⁴ "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. ²⁵ Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.' "But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.' ²⁶ "Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' ²⁷ "But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!' ²⁸ "There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out.*

[The Rich Man and Lazarus] Luke 16:23-24 *In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'*

E. Scriptural Descriptions

1. the purpose: punishment for sin... both sins of commission and of omission

Revelation 21:8 *But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars-- their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."*

Romans 2:5-6 *But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶ God "will give to each person according to what he has done."*

Romans 2:12 *All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law.*

Colossians 3:5-6 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

Note sin of omission in Sheep and the Goats:

Matthew 25:41-42 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink

2. the percentages: the majority of the human race

Matthew 7:13-14 "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

3. The timing: after the Great White Throne Judgment

Revelation 20:11-12 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.

4. The Lake of Fire

Revelation 20:14-15 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵ If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Matthew 13:42 They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Mark 9:47-48 hell, ⁴⁸ where "'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'

Revelation 14:10-11 he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. ¹¹ And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever.

5. Tophet/Gehenna

Isaiah 30:33 Topheth has long been prepared; it has been made ready for the king. Its fire pit has been made deep and wide, with an abundance of fire and wood; the breath of the LORD, like a stream of burning sulfur, sets it ablaze.

a. Tophet, also known as Gehenna, was a real place near Jerusalem

- b. It was a small valley south-southwest of Jerusalem
- c. There the wicked people of Judah, led by evil kings like Ahaz (2 Chronicles 28:3) and Manasseh (2 Chronicles 33:6), sacrificed their own children to Molech, burning them in a fire there
- d. Tophet became associated with judgment and slaughter, and the Prophet Jeremiah said it would be filled with dead bodies as a judgment from God

Jeremiah 7:31-32 They have built the high places of Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in the fire-- something I did not command, nor did it enter my mind. ³² So beware, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when people will no longer call it Topheth or the Valley of Ben Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter, for they will bury the dead in Topheth until there is no more room.

- e. In Christ's day, Gehenna was used as a garbage pit, constantly burning the refuse and dead animals of the city
- f. Jesus picked up on this image as a picture of hell

Matthew 5:22 anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. [Greek = gehenna]

6. shut out from God's presence

2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power

7. excluded from heaven

Matthew 8:12 But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Matthew 22:13 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Matthew 25:11-12 Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' ¹² "But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.'

Matthew 25:30 And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Luke 13:28 "There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out.

Revelation 22:14-15 "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. ¹⁵ Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

8. A conscious punishment

Luke 16:23-24 In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

9. a place of great torment

Luke 16:23 In hell, where he was in torment,

Luke 16:25 ... you are in agony.

Luke 16:28 for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

Revelation 14:11 the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever.

10. eternal punishment

Matthew 25:46 "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Mark 9:43 ...hell, where the fire never goes out.

Revelation 14:11 And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night

11. destruction

2 Thessalonians 1:9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction

12. eternal regret

Matthew 13:50 there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Luke 16:25 "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.

13. utter darkness

Exodus 10:21 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness will spread over Egypt-- darkness that can be felt."

2 Peter 2:17 Blackest darkness is reserved for them.

Matthew 22:13 cast him into the outer darkness.

14. Christ directly observing

Revelation 14:10 He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb.

Christ is not squeamish or embarrassed about what He'd doing to the damned... neither are the holy angels

F. Refuting the Foolish Statement: God Doesn't Send Anyone to Hell

1. this statement is made by evangelicals who affirm the doctrine of hell, but who try to separate it from God
2. they say "God doesn't actually send anyone to hell; rather they go their of their own free will; for all their lives they have chosen to go their separate ways from God, and now He is merely giving them what they have always chosen."
3. this view makes human choice the final determiner, as though God were somehow powerless to overturn human will
4. the fact of the matter is, people never choose hell... as rebellious idolaters, they choose their own earthly pleasures
5. on Judgment Day, when the issues of heaven and hell are clear, people will be terrified of hell and be screaming not to be sent there; no one will choose it
6. Christ Himself will dispatch His angels to bind them and cast them into the Lake of Fire... many verse speak of this action on Christ's part

Matthew 8:12 But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Matthew 22:13 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Matthew 25:30 And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

7. as we've seen, Christ isn't embarrassed or ashamed to do this... it is simple justice at this point

G. Refuting Annihilationism

1. definition

J.I. Packer: Annihilationism = a view that holds that unsaved souls will cease to exist after death

2. universalists

- a. taught that Christ's atonement was effective for all the human race
- b. therefore no one would be in hell
- c. the beginning of theological liberalism in the U.S. (Harvard)

3. cults teach this: Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists

4. recently, some evangelicals have embraced it

- a. John Stott's defense of Annihilationism caused shockwaves in the evangelical world
- b. Four central lines of defense
 - i) Somewhat eccentric word study on the Greek word translated "eternal", especially in Matthew 25:46 not necessarily meaning "endless"
 - ii) The usual sense of destruction is of something being acted upon until it ceases to exist; they argue that the idea of the immortality of the soul is an import from Greek (Platonic) philosophy
 - iii) The idea of eternal punishment for finite acts done in time seems disproportionate, out of place for a God of justice

Stott: I question whether 'eternal conscious torment' is compatible with the biblical revelation of divine justice, unless perhaps (as has been argued) the impenitence of the lost also continues throughout eternity.

- iv) the saints' joy in heaven would be marred by knowing that some continue under merited retribution

5. Refuting it

- a. It's hard to get past the parallel construction of Matthew 25:46

Matthew 25:46 "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

In this passage, the destruction of hell is "as eternal" as the life of heaven

- b. The "destruction" mentioned in the Bible is clearly said to be eternal, a destruction that goes on and on

2 Thessalonians 1:9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction

- c. Though the sin against God is done in finite life and in time, yet it is of infinite weight since God Himself is an infinite being
- d. Saints in heaven will not suffer along with the damned

J.I. Packer: 'The fourth argument is that the saints' joy in heaven would be marred by knowing that some continue under merited retribution. But this cannot be said of God, as if the expressing of His holiness in retribution hurts Him more than it hurts the offenders; and since in heaven Christians will be like God in character, loving what He loves and taking joy in all His self-manifestation, including the manifestation of His justice (in which indeed the saints in Scripture take joy already in this world), there is no reason to think that their eternal joy will be impaired in this way...

[http://www.the-highway.com/annihilationism_Packer.html]

So the saints will not spend eternity missing loved ones or longing for lost people that never made it

Psalm 139:21-22 Do I not hate them, O LORD, who hate You? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? ²² I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies.

H. Application of this Doctrine

1. personal fear and motive for repentance
2. motive for personal holiness
3. sorrow for the lost
4. zeal in evangelism and prayer
5. trusting in the justice of God