

Is It Time for Hell-Fire Preaching Again?

We need a fresh wave of great awakeners—those who will unapologetically preach hell fire in today's dire end times.

To the shame of much of today's church there has been a firm and steadfast rejection of any truth that doesn't result in people feeling happy affection for God. While a core message of mine has to do with enjoyable and permeating intimacy with Jesus, I understand that it is not a mutually exclusive one. That teaching when it stands alone apart from the full counsel of God's Word produces a people who don't understand the fear of the Lord, the severity of their lifestyle decisions or the intensity and nearness of eternity. It results in an overly confident and casual church that presumes God's primary focus is our satisfaction as it forsakes the realities of holiness, standards, scriptural expectations, judgment and how those who are truly saved are hanging on to that position by a thread.

"If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Pet. 4:18).

This Christian culture of positivity depicts a God who is so enamored by us that judgment is contrary to his nature. The deception is that God so values us individually that our enjoyment in life is primary to him. This lie has fueled sanctioned perversion in the church through the "gay Christian" movement and the affirmation of homosexual marriage by many leading denominations.

I'll say it as clearly as I can: God is much more interested in the establishment of His name and His Word than He is in the feelings or desires of individuals, or even of entire regions. This is God's nature. This is love.

"...therefore, I will stretch out My hand against you and deliver you for destruction to the nations. And I will cut you off from the peoples and cause you to perish from the countries. I will destroy you. Then you shall know that I am the Lord" (Ezek. 25:7).

It's all about Him, not us.

In our narcissistic society, our theologies have become radically distorted from just a generation or two ago. We are so self-consumed that we have adopted an image of a god that is focused day and night on worshipping us instead of us, those who are as the scum of the earth, worshipping him.

"Being slandered, we encourage. We are made as the filth of the world, and are the refuse of all things to this day" (1 Cor. 4:13).

"For if someone thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself" (Gal. 6:3).

"For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that also the life of Jesus might be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then, death works in us, but life in you" (2 Cor. 4:11-12).

The Christian life is not to be about personal gain. A pursuit of supposed human rights has nearly destroyed our nation, and the same strategies are in the church. The right to slaughter unborn babies for the sake of personal convenience is a horrifying indictment on our nation—and it didn't seem that it could get any worse, until the recent admission by a Planned Parenthood leader who casually admitted to an even more sinister evil—selling body parts of murdered people.

Yes, we need hell fire preaching in the church again.

As people both in the church and in the world have been

focused on rights, pleasures and positions, evil has been advancing and God's righteous standards have been minimized or ridiculed as nonsense. Again, this is happening in the world *and* in the church. Churches today support both gay marriage and abortion. It's no longer shocking. It will forever be sickening.

We need a great awakening.

"The bow of God's wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready to string and justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow, and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood." –Jonathan Edwards

We have mistaken God as one who is always happy and passive, like that sweet grandfather who is forever handing out candy and hugs no matter how rebellious the child is. It's true that God is love, but we have attempted to define love via humanistic insight, through our own lens and our own longings for acceptance. It's also true that God is longsuffering, but only He knows how long his suffering will be. The full force of his wrath will be released one day, and many lesser though terrible judgments will come before that happens. God is a fearful force to behold and we have been self-centered and entitled presuming that approach will somehow draw us closer to his heart.

"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver; "don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you." – C.S. Lewis, The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe

"... the Hoods of God's vengeance have been withheld; but your guilt in the meantime is constantly increasing, and you are every day treasuring up more wrath ... If God should only

withdraw his hand from the floodgate, it would immediately fly open, and the fiery floods of fierceness and wrath of God, would rush forth with inconceivable fury.” –Jonathan Edwards

Zephaniah and the Coming Judgment

“I will utterly consume all things on the face of the earth, says the Lord; I will consume man and beast; I will consume the birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, and the stumbling blocks with the wicked. I will cut off man from the face of the land, says the Lord. I will stretch out my hand against Judah, and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. I will cut off from this place the remnant of Baal, and the name of the idolatrous priests along with the priests, and those who bow down on the roofs to the host of heaven; those who worship and swear oaths by the Lord and yet swear by Milcom; those who have turned back from following the Lord, who have not sought the Lord nor inquired of Him” (Zeph. 1:2-6).

The prophecy in Zephaniah is futuristic. It is yet to happen, most scholars believe. This has some serious implications. What this means is that God cannot be defined simply by the very real truth that He love, He is kind and He is patient. Also, the Old Testament God is very much the same as the New Testament God. His supposed Old Testament style end-time personality is front and center and undeniable in this passage.

There is a greater revelation of God’s nature that is not in contradiction whatsoever with His more “positive” or appealing side. He is and forever will be the very definition of love. We can and should run to Him and not from him as we trust Him fully. We must enjoy Him in a place of immersive intimacy. We should always be full of joy and abundant life—and sober and

troubled as He prepares to move on the earth.

After reading through the depiction of the coming judgment on the earth we may not so casually pray for a 'move of God' as we pursue revival in the land. When God moves in force we will experience His greatness—His great goodness and love as well as His great fierceness and wrath. Those who are truly His (which are much fewer than the number who profess to be his) are safe from that wrath—but not of His judgment!

God's wrath remains on the unredeemed. That is clear. However, at the crucifixion Jesus took God's wrath upon Himself in place of those who are legitimately His own. That being said, while we are free from wrath, judgment will absolutely visit us in the church—and it will visit us *first!*

"For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God, and if it begins first with us, what shall the end be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (1 Pet. 4:17).

Again, we need hell-fire preachers to emerge and announce to the church and the world the reality of their situation and the measure of God's wrath and judgment that is coming. Contrary to popular belief, a very real revelation of hell, of torment, of God's holiness and of our desperation and wickedness is needed to draw people to the Lover of their souls! A clear picture of Satan's rage, of God's standards, of eternity and of God's overwhelming passion for people will result in an honest evaluation of their condition. For some it will result in glorious salvation.

The prophecy in Zephaniah is true. It is coming. A loving, kind, tender God is actually going to manifest in some terrible and violent ways. Is this side of God repulsive to you? I encourage you to deal with it. You can't change God to squeeze into a Santa Clause suit. He won't fit. Satan will though. False gods and idols fit into whatever suit we will give them. They are more than willing to appeal to our fleshly

desires so as to trap us ... and then to destroy us.

Carefully read what follows and ask if that picture of God matches your own:

“At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are settled on their lees, who say in their heart, ‘The Lord will not do good, nor will He do evil.’ Their goods will be plundered, and their houses laid waste. Though they build houses, they will not inhabit them; though they plant vineyards, they will not drink from their wine” (Zeph. 1:12-18).

That’s hell-fire preaching. That’s a necessary message. It’s about what is yet to come. This is a revelation of God in the New Covenant. It reveals God’s nature to us afresh.

God, who is by definition love, will do what is necessary to preserve love.

A complacent people will result in a bitter day sound that announces the day of the Lord. That day is a day of wrath, distress, anguish, ruin, devastation, darkness, gloom, clouds and thick darkness. It’s also a day of a trumpet blast and a battle cry! God Himself will bring distress on mankind. It won’t be the enemy. The trouble won’t simply be the result of God lifting his protection over a nation. He will personally bring distress to mankind himself.

Blood shall be poured out because of His wrath. The fire of His jealousy will result in the earth being consumed suddenly—and all the inhabitants will experience a sudden end.

Those who are deeply intimate with Jesus will both celebrate and weep as a result of this news.

Those who are casual and expect God to satisfy them and focus on their happiness on the earth will reject Him—and many will actually declare that He is Satan when he moves contrary to

their fleshly expectations of how God should operate.

This, my friend, is the unforgivable sin of the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. The moment we attribute a move of God to a move of Satan we can know we have found trouble.

“‘Truly I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they speak. But he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal condemnation.’ For they said, ‘He has an unclean spirit’” (Mark 3:28-30).

The great falling away will be filled with formerly professing Christians who never missed a church service, who said their prayers and faithfully tithed and taught in Sunday School. Just as they did during the last days of Jesus on the earth, they will quickly shift from a lifestyle of crying out “Hosanna to the King of kings!” to “Crucify Him!”

The world needs to know this Jesus. The world needs to understand that God is fearful. Truly, as C.S. Lewis declared, He is not safe, but He is good. That revelation will result in a great harvest. Why? Because truth sets people free.

“Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you remain in My word, then you are truly My disciples. You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free’” (John 8:31-32). {eoa}

John Burton has been developing and leading ministries for over 20 years and is a sought-after teacher, prophetic messenger and revivalist. He has authored nine books, has appeared on Christian television and radio and directed one of the primary internships at the International House of Prayer (IHOP) in Kansas City. Additionally, he planted two churches, has initiated two city prayer movements and is currently directing a prayer- and revival-focused ministry school in

Detroit called theLab University. John also has a web- and graphic-design business and is continually developing new and exciting ventures. He and his beautiful wife, Amy, have five children and live in the Detroit area. He can be reached via his website at .