

The Fatal Mistake of Pastors Who Don't Preach About Hell

At first glance you'd probably think I'm resistant to change.

I don't drink Starbucks coffee. I'm still not used to women having tattoos. I'm not getting an earring any time soon. And my wife says I still have the same haircut I had when I was in fifth grade. I assume she thinks that's a bad thing.

By all appearances, you'd think I'm someone that wants to keep things just the way they are. But I'm not. I love change. I love the thrill of staying current, or even staying one step ahead. I love anticipating trends. I'm usually not too concerned with running with the pack.

But there is one change that troubles me: It's the lack of talk about hell by pastors.

I'm not troubled by who is going to hell. Unfortunately for Boston Red Sox fans, this is one thing we all agree upon.

I'm troubled by the lack of talk about, writing about, preaching about, and deeply held conviction regarding the reality of hell by pastors today.

Why is this happening?

We Pastors Want To Appear Compassionate And Inclusive

When my daughters were in elementary school, their school put on an annual holiday musical program. Every year I stood there with our camcorder and joked with my wife that it should be renamed _____ to, _____ "The Christmas/Hanukkah/Kwanzaa/Buddhist/Skeptic/Hindu/Catholic/Keep-Everyone-From-Being-Offended Holiday Special."

As a public school, the lengths to which they are willing to

include everyone's traditions and beliefs appears comical, but should be applauded. However, when that same spirit infiltrates the church, it must be cast out. Accommodation in the kingdom of Jesus is always the first sign of betrayal.

Too often we want to appear more moral than God. Too often in outreach-focused churches we feel the need to acquiesce to the avalanche of pluralistic pressure to back off of this key doctrine. However, I tell senior pastors that I coach that if you really love people, at some point you'll compassionately tell them the truth, even if you risk having them walk out your church doors.

As important as being compassionate and inclusive are in the context of a growing church, the overriding virtue that should be held up is faithfulness – both to Scripture and the God who breathed it.

We Pastors Have Strayed From Sound Doctrine

Two years after leaving graduate school, I came to the realization that I really didn't believe in hell any more. I was too smart to believe in hell. Three years sitting under the gentle but consistent pressure of doctrinally questionable professors quietly eroded my convictions on this key teaching. Like so many church leaders I've met over the years, I bought into the lie that I could serve the God of the Bible but not believe in the entire Bible.

During a long retreat at a local monastery I performed an exhaustive word study of the phrase "false doctrine" in the New Testament. When I was finished the Holy Spirit did a number on me. I felt convicted, as I should have. I felt awful, as I should have. I came to the conclusion that I was a liar, as I should have. I dropped to my knees in tears. I repented before God of my duplicity.

I rushed home and called together my Leadership Team, repented, and asked for their forgiveness as well. That Sunday

I stood before my congregation and wept, asking for their forgiveness. It was a turning point in my calling before God.

Over and over again, we are warned that church leaders must hold to the deep truths of the faith. Hell is one of those deep truths, albeit unpopular. Over and over again, we are warned not to be drawn away by unsound doctrine. With pain in his voice that came from years of heading off church train wrecks, Paul pleaded in his final words to Timothy to preach the Word, every last bit of it, regardless of how unpopular it became.

I'm pretty sure that exhortation still stands.

As a senior pastor, why or why don't you preach about hell to your church? {eo}

Brian Jones is the founding Senior Pastor at Christ's Church of the Valley . Connect with Brian at [brianjonesblog.com](#) or on Twitter @brianjonesblog.

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