

Vacation Bible School and the Doctrine of Hell

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Vacation Bible School (VBS) was nearly upon us, and the children's ministry workers had gathered for a final preparatory meeting. Anticipation filled the room as we eagerly awaited the opportunity to minister to the precious little souls that the Lord would send our way. Thankfully, we would be using curriculum that faithfully proclaimed the Gospel.

The meeting was progressing well until a "pillar" in the church suggested that we "avoid speaking about hell and judgment and those types of things and instead focus on the love of God." This is a common sentiment and desire in the church these days, which is only heightened when the audience is primarily children. "We don't want to frighten the children with such a scary subject as hell, do we?" Actually, yes, we do. I'm not suggesting that you turn your VBS into a haunted house. I am pleading with you, though, not to shy away from teaching children the whole counsel of God, including the Bible's teaching on sin and eternal condemnation.



Why is it so important to include the doctrine of hell in our VBS lessons? Consider what Jesus said about the Holy Spirit in John 16:8: "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment." The Holy Spirit plays a vital role in personal salvation. Specifically, John 16 says He not only makes people aware of their sinfulness and of their absolute need of Christ's righteousness, but also awakens them to the coming judgment. Jesus then clarified the Spirit's work of pressing home to the conscience the reality of judgment when He said in verse 11 that the Holy Spirit convicts people "concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged."

What is Jesus saying about the Spirit's work in convicting people concerning judgment? We read in 1 John 5:19, "The whole world lies in the power of the evil one," which means that anyone who is not "in Christ" is under the power of Satan (cf. 2 Tim. 2:26). Again, John 16:11 says "the ruler of this world has been judged." In other words, Satan stands condemned, and all who remain under the "ruler of this world"

will face eternal judgment along with him (cf. Rev. 20:10, 15). Jesus' point is to say that the Holy Spirit convicts people that hell is their future if they reject Christ and are left in their sins. Therefore, conviction about judgment is a necessary element in the salvation of anyone, *including a child*.

Here's the implication for VBS: Teaching about the wrath of God against those who reject Christ *is not optional* if we want to cooperate with the Holy Spirit who always presses this important truth upon the conscience of those whom God saves. If we are sincerely concerned about the souls of children, we will not only tell them about the love of God and our wonderful Savior, but also about the hell sinners will endure for eternity if they do not repent and put their faith in Christ. The truth is, a child will only see Christ and the cross as precious if he first understands that on the cross Jesus was delivering sinners from judgment.

When talking about hell, use the same imagery as Jesus (cf. Matt. 13:40-42; Mark 9:43-48). Let me illustrate: Recently, my daughter asked, "Daddy, what's hell?" I said something like this:

Katie, that is a wonderful question! Hell is a place where people go forever and ever once they die if they did not turn away from their sins and trust in Jesus Christ. Hell is a place where people will be "away from the presence of the Lord" (2 Thess. 1:9), only experiencing God's wrath and never His Love. Jesus said there will be weeping in hell, which means it will be a place of sadness at all times. There will be no laughter in hell, no giggles, no dads tickling their little girls. Jesus also described hell as a place where people will "gnash their teeth," meaning it will be a place of anger. There will be no friends in hell.

I went on to explain how glorious Jesus is because He took the wrath of God in the place of every sinner who will trust in Him.

Do you want the children God has put into your life to trust in and love Jesus Christ? Then warn them often about hell. This vital doctrine is one that will drive children to the Savior, and therefore, one we would be foolish to avoid.

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