Devotion #248

**Teach Them to Love**

**John 3:16 (NASB)** *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”*

From time to time it comes to my attention that there are people who don’t like church life or more specifically Baptist church life. The reason they say is because too often they feel like what is taught is not to love but just to tell people they are going to hell. I remember a lady who was in an elderly-care facility where who told me she started out as a Baptist but she was too scared to keep going back because the sermons scared her into thinking she was going to hell. That’s just one of many examples over the years.

As a Baptist preacher I can say that it is never my intention to make anyone feel that way, but I must say the truth is, anyone who rejects Christ as Lord will certainly end up in eternal hell. That is clear throughout Scripture. (Matthew 35:41;3:10; 7:19, Luke 3:9; Revelation 20:15) However, and this is a big however, the whole reason Jesus came to earth was to keep people from going to hell. Yes, it is true, our holy, infinite, perfect God will not allow any person into heaven who sins. But, because He loves us, He made a way for us to be forgiven of our sins so we can be with Him in heaven when we die. The message of the Gospel - the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus - was for the very purpose of rescuing anyone who will surrender their lives to Him. Listen again to our verse for today. God so loved! How much did He love? He loved so much that He sacrificed His own Son so that we would have eternal life with Him. So, yes the message of the Baptist church is and should be the message of any Bible-believing church that there is a dreadful consequence to pay for living a life of sin, but the message of God is also that He loves you and wants to rescue you from eternal damnation. (Colossians 1:13)

How wonderful it is to know that our God loves us as much as He does. So, it’s not God who is the problem. The problem is two-fold. First, people don’t understand the message of God because they either don’t want to hear the truth or they have been taught incorrectly. Secondly, mankind loves his sin and darkness because sin is fun and pleasurable. But God made a way for man to be taken out of his sin, not to be perfect in this life, but a way for the debt of sin to be paid to be perfect in heaven one day. Just like when we out for dinner. Someone at our table will pay the bill. It may not be you or me, maybe someone will pick up the tab, but someone will pay the bill. In the same way, Jesus paid our bill that we owe to God. And by doing so, we are free to live life enjoying Him and all His blessings, while at the same time living obediently to all He requires of us. Again, He knows we will never be able to do that perfectly, so He has a lot of grace and mercy to help us through the times we mess up.

So, if you have been taught that you are going to hell and that’s all you have heard in your church life, I would seriously encourage you to listen to that. Why? Because we are all on our way to hell the moment we are born. Why? Because we are all sinners. (Romans 3:23) But God came to give us hope by surrendering our lives to Him. Do you see the love of God in all that? Do you see how He took it upon Himself to help us so that we wouldn’t be separated from Him forever? Don’t ever think that God is only a God of judgment and one who delights in sending people to hell, He doesn’t. He longs to save people. And just to be clear, He doesn’t send anyone to hell. People make that choice. People have the opportunity, like anyone else, to surrender their lives to Him. So truthfully, God is not to blame. He made us to enjoy Him forever. It is we who are the problem.

For those who know the truth, whomever you encounter today, would you do all you can to express God’s love to them? It is no doubt that God is using you to show others that He is a loving God - just, holy, perfect - and a God who will not tolerate sin. Share this good news with someone today!