

## Motivated to Be Thankful

Recently we spent an entire Sunday morning Bible class studying the justice of God. We discussed sin and its consequences, including the eternal consequences of suffering in the fires of hell. Very little was said in this session about the mercy of God. That was dealt with in ensuing classes. For an entire 45 minute class period we focused on the fact that God will judge and will punish the disobedient. It was uncomfortable and just plain frightening. Paul wrote, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Hebrews 10:31). It is a subject rarely addressed in our "progressive" age. The idea that God will consign the disobedient to eternal damnation is repugnant to many. "I can't believe a loving God would send someone to hell," is the emotion-based rather than Bible-based argument that some make in objection to this truth.

During the class, as we considered just a handful of the many scriptures that treat the subject of God's justice, it struck me that, while the subject was terrifying, it also served as an impetus for gratitude. The fact of the matter is that while hell exists, we don't have to go there! Through the blood of Christ and our obedience to His Gospel, we can avoid hell entirely (Romans 3:24-25; Ephesians 1:7; I Peter 1:18-19; I John 1:7). I was further impressed with the fact that the more we know of God's punishment for sin, the more we appreciate salvation.

Consider carefully this brief parable of Jesus: "There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both." (Luke 7:41,42). He then asked, "Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?" The response was obvious. "I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most." (verse 43). This parable is not about money nor is it about levels of sin. It's about one's recognition of his or her sinfulness and their appreciation for forgiveness.

We must preach about, teach about and study God's Word about sin and its consequences in the eternal fires of hell. We must be like the apostle Paul who said, "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." (Acts 20:27). Those who deny the full impact of the Bible's teaching on hell are guilty of cheapening the grace of God. They devalue the sacrifice of Jesus. Yes, hell is a terrible topic to consider, but if we don't have an understanding of what God saves us FROM, how can we appreciate how magnificent His mercy IS? If we don't grasp the depths of the horrors of sin, how can we recognize the incredible love shown by Jesus in His coming to earth and dying to save us from sin?

Hell is a place of "everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matthew 25:41). To argue that hell is not real is to argue that the devil and his angels are not real. The punishment in hell is everlasting. "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." (Matthew 25:46). The same Greek word is used in this verse to describe both punishment and life eternal. One is just as eternal and everlasting as the other. If punishment is not everlasting, then neither is life eternal. If hell is not eternal suffering, then heaven is not everlasting peace and reward.

How terrible are our sins! How horrible is hell! Read what the Bible teaches about hell. Let it sink in deeply. Imagine the "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 25:30). Let it cause you to shake in your boots and then, if you're a faithful child of God, stop to give "thanks unto God for his unspeakable gift" (II Corinthians 9:15), His indescribable gift we know as Jesus Christ. If you are not a faithful Christian, may thoughts of eternity spur you to obedience.

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