

Safford Church of Christ

3888 S Hwy 191, Safford, AZ 85546

17 May 2015

Topics

A.M. Bible Class:

Jesus sentenced to be crucified (John 19)

A.M. Lesson:

The supremacy of Christ (Colossians 1:15-23)

P.M. Lesson:

The narrow and the wide gates (Matthew 7:13-14)

Wednesday:

Transformation by the renewing of the mind
(Romans 12)

Pulpit Evangelist

Ken Knowlton: 428-3494

Elders

Greg Briggs: 428-8756

John Cunningham: 428-0895

Sunday Bible Class	10:00 A.M.
Sunday Morning Worship	11:00 A.M.
Sunday Evening Worship	6:30 P.M.
Wednesday Evening Class	6:30 P.M.
Thursday Ladies Bible Class	11:00 A.M.

*I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD!" Psalm 122:2
Please silence your cell phones and other electronic devices.*

Love, God and Hell

M. W. Bassford

<http://hisexcellentword.blogspot.com>

One of the most common rhetorical questions that skeptics ask of Christians is, "If God is so loving, then how can He condemn the sinner to everlasting torment in hell?" On its face, this question has some merit. After all, hell as presented in Scripture is a truly terrible place where, in the words of Isaiah, "Their worm will not die, and their fire will not be quenched." The imperfections of my spirit are legion, yet I can't think of a single person I would want to see in hell. How, then, could a loving God consign most of mankind to a place of eternal suffering?

The problem with the question is that it places the blame on exactly the wrong set of shoulders. Not one single sinner will end up in hell because God didn't love him. Instead, every sinner will be there because he/she didn't love God.

God's love for mankind is proclaimed in numerous ways. He reveals Himself in the beauty and grandeur of the physical creation. He sends sunshine and rain on the just and on the unjust alike, not because He has to, but because He wants to. He reveals Himself in His word, in the story of

His faithful dealings with His often faithless people.

Most of all, God proclaims His love for us in His Son. In Christ, we see the fullness of deity revealed. The nature of Jesus explains the nature of God Himself: His power, His holiness, and especially His love.

That love finds its highest expression in the gracious self-sacrifice of Christ for the undeserving sinner.

After that, what more could God do to reach out to His alienated creation? What greater proof of His love could He offer?

The sinner, though, has remained a sinner because he has encountered the love of God and remained unmoved. He surveys God's physical handiwork yet does not honor God nor give thanks. He accepts God's providential blessings yet remains ungrateful and wicked. He has the opportunity to search the Scriptures, yet he either chooses to remain ignorant or does not respond to hearing with faith. Most of all, the sinner rejects the invitation to come to know God through Christ, and he dismisses the cross as insignificant.

Honestly, what is God supposed to do with somebody like that? God has done all He could do to reach out to the sinner in the love, and the sinner has steadfastly refused each entreaty. He has remained a sinner precisely because he wants

nothing to do with God.

Heaven is where God is, and I love God and want to be with Him. Indeed, heaven is heaven to me because God is there.

What, then, of the unrepentant sinner who has spent his life insistently having nothing to do with God? Heaven for someone like that wouldn't be an eternity of bliss. It would be an eternity of misery. Heaven would, in fact, resemble Sartre's vision of hell in *No Exit*: being trapped forever with someone you despise. Perhaps we should ask instead, "How could a loving God condemn the sinner to heaven?"

If the sinner cannot spend eternity with God (and indeed does not want to), then he must spend eternity apart from God. There's no third way. Consider, for instance, Paul's description of hell in 2 Thessalonians 1:9, as "eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power." It has to be that way. Those who reject God also reject His nearness and His blessings. Just as we don't (or shouldn't, at least) continually force ourselves on those who don't want anything to do with us, eventually God gives up too.

That final surrender has dramatic consequences. After all, every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above. If we owe every good thing we have to God, His final withdrawal from our lives means that nothing good is left in those lives either.

Absolute zero isn't the complete presence of cold. It is simply the complete absence of heat. Hell doesn't need some added suffering in order to be hell. It only needs the complete absence of God.

Is such a place wretched and miserable beyond our ability to comprehend? Certainly. All of us have spent our lives immersed in the kindness of God, and the withdrawal of His grace from us does not bear contemplating. However, those who find themselves in the midst of such suffering cannot blame God. They can only blame themselves.

News:

Hattie Hedrick update?

The Martins are out of town.

Louella Briggs is out of town.

The Cunninghams are out of town.

Fellowship meal today—after worship services.

5th Sunday contribution is coming up on May 31. The "worthy cause" will be the India missions.

Ben and Jackie Mereness will be here on May 31.

Prayer List:

Joy Gibson—cancer treatments

Tatyana Knowlton—macular degeneration

Ken Cocke—back and shoulder pains

Janet Radar—nursing home

H.L. Boling—general health and complications from leukemia, grief comfort

Mike Cavasos—constant pain, foot surgeries

Sandy Cavasos—degenerative disk disease

Nic and Ani Self—health and personal needs

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