

Where will you be sitting in eternity, smoking or non-smoking?

Over the years most of us have squirmed under a harsh message delivered by a human Evangelist or hellfire preacher. Fists clenched and pounding the pulpit you are told, in no uncertain terms, that you are going to hell-- "*wide is the path that leads to destruction but narrow is the way to eternal life and few there be that find it.*" Are YOU one of those who never darken a church door in fear of being yelled at? Were you hurt in the past by a harsh and insensitive preacher who attempted to scare hell out of his listeners? If you are, you are not alone.



Most of us are quite aware that God does not approve of so many of the things we think about, watch or do. We simply do not respond well to a big stick!

So, **does God carry a big stick?** Is He the hard taskmaster that those hellfire preachers warn us about? Is His message "Turn or Burn?" Let's have a look into the Bible, the book that God wrote for us and see what He Himself has to say.

In the first days of Genesis, we find God desiring to walk with His created people in the paradise garden He had made for them. Sadly, Adam and Eve and subsequently their children, rejected that sweet intimacy in favor of disobedience. As time continued, we discover this loving Creator still blessing and reaching out to His creation, but the more He tried the more they deliberately turned their back on Him.

Then, finally, we see God in tears, and His book tells us, "*Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth.*" Our sinful ways had sadly but effectively driven our loving Creator away from us. From that point on, we see God retreating to heaven but continuing through the ages to reach out with miracles and blessings to any who would acknowledge Him.

He tell us, "*For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.*"

Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me and I will listen to you. You will find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.”

The earth, God tells us, has a limited lifespan and will eventually burn with a fervent heat. The problem is that each of us has a spirit that will live on eternally, left here on earth, or with God in heaven. So that we have a choice in where we end up, God in His infinite wisdom devised a plan that would become the greatest sacrifice that mankind would ever know. He thought, surely His people would then turn and recognize His love for them. *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”*

*I wonder if so many of our well meaning hellfire preachers have, like the rest of us mortals, missed the mark when it comes to the delivery of the most important message that mankind will ever need to hear. **Yes** hell is real and it is approaching quickly. **Yes** we should be quick to make the most important decision of our lives. But **NO** ..God does not force anyone to follow Him but gently and lovingly calls us without pounding the pulpit or raising His voice.*

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