*‘Getting to know Pastor Joe’’ Columns #10*

**“The Relationship Between God's Love and the Reality of Hell"**

"How can God, who is love, send people to hell?" This is a common question posed by those who do not believe.

Because of this, there are those among us who call themselves Christians yet deny the existence of hell. Some say that rather than going to hell, evil people simply cease to exist after death. Others believe that instead of hell, evil people go to purgatory where they are given a chance for renewal.

However, Jesus never said that the wicked simply cease to exist after death or that they are given a chance for renewal. He spoke of hell where the wicked suffer eternal torment.

Heaven is a place governed by God's mercy, love, and forgiveness. Thus, when God rules our hearts, our hearts become like heaven. When He governs our homes, our homes become like heaven. When He guides our church, our church becomes like heaven. The heaven we go to after death is where the governance of God we experience in this world is perfected.

Similarly, hell is a place where the relationship with God is completely severed. Being entirely cut off from God's warmth, forgiveness, and mercy is undeniably painful. Even if this world is full of evil, it is still under God's grace. A state completely severed from this grace is what hell is. Those who have experienced deep despair in this world have tasted a bit of what hell is like. Hell is where such despair and pain are completed.

Although the Lord described hell as a place of fire, this is symbolic. He also described it as a cold and dark place (Matthew 22:13). Jesus meant that hell is a place of torment, like being thrown into a fiery furnace.

Therefore, it's not entirely accurate to say that God sends the wicked to hell. The wicked choose hell for themselves. God respected the choice of humans from the moment of creation. God cannot forcibly bring someone who hates or rejects Him during their life under His rule.

When you see people who refuse to turn to Jesus Christ even amidst excruciating pain, it reveals just how deep human hatred and disdain for God can be. When such people die, God cannot forcibly take them to heaven. The pain they would experience in heaven, because of their rejection of God, would be greater than the pain they would endure in hell. Hell is a place that those who reject God choose for themselves.