

Love Wins, but Love Also Warns

“Love wins.”

It was the name of Rob Bell’s poorly conceived book about hell and future judgment, and it was the content of President Obama’s tweet after the Supreme Court ruled to redefine marriage.

Love wins.

Understood rightly, it is gloriously true.

Love won on the cross, when God sent His Son to die for the sins of the world, repaying our evil deeds with the supreme act of sacrificial love.

Love wins every hour of every day, as that same divine love breaks hard hearts and melts cold hearts and transforms the worst of sinners into the best of saints.

Love will win in the end, as forever and ever, the Father’s family will enjoy His incredible goodness in a world without sin and suffering.

But love also warns. In fact, love that does not warn is not love at all.

The parent who doesn’t warn a chain-smoking child about the dangers of nicotine is not a loving parent.

The doctor who doesn’t warn a morbidly obese patient about the dangers of overeating is not a loving doctor.

The preacher who doesn’t warn his straying flock about the dangers of spiritual compromise is not a loving pastor.

Love warns, and it warns loudly and clearly—but that does not

mean harshly or with an angry, self-righteous spirit.

Love warns with tears.

Love warns with brokenness.

Love warns with longsuffering.

Love warns.

That's why Jesus wept in public as He warned Jerusalem about the terrible judgment that was at the door (Luke 19:41-45).

That's why Jeremiah wept in secret when the nation refused to hear his warnings of impending disaster (Jer. 13:17).

That's why Paul said to the elders of Ephesus, "For I know that after my departure, dreadful wolves will enter among you, not sparing the flock. Even from among you men will arise speaking perverse things, to draw the disciples away after them. Therefore watch, remembering that for three years night and day I did not cease to warn everyone with tears" (Acts 20:29-31).

When is the last time we warned someone with tears? When is the last time we cared enough to weep for them in private?

May God break our hearts with the things that break His heart. May the Lord shatter our indifference.

In the words of the book of Proverbs, "Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. ... He who rebukes a man will find more favor afterward than he who flatters with the tongue" (Prov. 27:5-6; 28:23).

We are not called to tickle people's ears and make them feel good. We are called to speak the truth in love, to have hearts of compassion and backbones of steel, to emulate the true prophets not the false prophets, to do the right thing rather

than the convenient thing.

Oh that God would deliver us from a crippling, compromising, man-pleasing mentality!

In your life or ministry, do you really want to be surrounded by a bunch of Yes-men who tell you what you want to hear rather than what you need to hear? Do you really want to work with a bunch of carnal prophets who say, "All is well, all is well," when nothing is well (Jer. 6:14)? Then do the same for others and save them from disaster and self-destruction by warning them when they are on the wrong path.

Paul's final exhortation to Timothy rings as true today as—if not even more true than—the day it was written: "Preach the word, be ready in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with all patience and teaching. For the time will come when people will not endure sound doctrine, but they will gather to themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires, having itching ears, and they will turn their ears away from the truth and turn to myths" (2 Tim. 4:2-4).

As Richard Baxter said many years ago, "If their houses were on fire, thou wouldst run and help them; and wilt thou not help them when their souls are almost at the fire of hell?"

That's why the saintly Robert Murray M'Cheyne exclaimed, "Oh! If we had more love to you, we would tell you more about hell. They do not love you who do not warn you, poor hell-deserving sinners. Oh! Remember that love warns."

It is true that love is patient and kind and is not irritable or rude (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

It is true that love does no harm to its neighbor (Rom. 13:10).

And it is true that, rightly understood, love wins.

But love wins because love warns, and if we walk in true love

for God and our neighbor, we will warn.

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