

HOW CAN A LOVING GOD SEND PEOPLE TO HELL?

“I doubt the existence of a judgmental God who requires blood to pacify his wrath,” said a frowning Hartmut, a graduate student from Germany. “Someone had to die before the Christian God would pardon us. But why can’t he just forgive? And then there’s all those places in the Old Testament where God commands that people be slaughtered.” “All that is troubling, I agree,” responded Josie, who worked for an art gallery in Soho. “But I have even more of a problem with the doctrine of hell. The only God that is believable to me is a God of love. The Bible’s God is no more than a primitive deity who must

It is not God’s desire to send people to hell

This is no doubt one of the biggest objections to the gospel that people in the west have and one that is often a challenge even for Christians because contrary to the way some people mischaracterize the church no true Christian that is living out there faith actually relishes in the idea of people going to hell. It is one of the most uncomfortable things to talk about. In fact, that is why we are always trying to share the gospel. We don’t want anyone to perish, that is not even God’s desire.

2 Peter 3:9 English Standard Version (ESV)

⁹The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you,^[a] not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

Objection: A God of Judgment Can’t Be a God of Love

In Christianity God is both a God of love and of justice. Many people struggle with this. They believe that a loving God can’t be a judging God. People often say “How can a God of love be also a God of filled with wrath and anger? If he is loving and perfect, he should forgive and accept everyone. He shouldn’t get angry.”

But even a very loving person gets angry when they see someone, they care about getting hurt or they see their friend doing something self-destructive. we are going to say something to our good friend because we care about them. We care about their lives. The opposite of love is not hate it is indifference. Indifference doesn’t care if that person destroys themselves. God is not indifferent.

His love for us and his hate for the destructiveness of sin is what brought him to the cross. God is not indifferent.

A God of love and mercy must also be a Just God.

When a judge pardons an unrepentant rapist without warrant, we don’t typically see this as an act of love, particularly when we consider the rights of the victim (and the safety of potential future victims). Mercy without justice is reckless, meaningless and dangerous. True love cares

enough to punish wrongdoing. For this reason, a God of love must also be a God of justice, recognizing, separating and punishing wrongdoers. Hell is the place where God's loving justice is realized and executed.

Objection: The belief in hell promotes violence. Not true.

If we believe that there is a God who dispenses final justice on the unrepentant and makes things right in the end then we are least likely to want to take that vengeance ourselves.

Scientific findings also support this

The study, appearing in the Public Library of Science journal *PLoS ONE*, found that criminal activity is higher in societies where people's religious beliefs contain a strong punitive component than in places where religious beliefs are more benevolent. A country where many more people believe in heaven than in hell, for example, is likely to have a much higher crime rate than one where these beliefs are about equal. The finding surfaced from a comprehensive analysis of 26 years of data involving 143,197 people in 67 countries.

Fighting against injustice and evil is fine but how can God send people to a place of eternal torment just because they don't believe in him?

The biggest problem we have with hell is based on a misunderstanding of human nature, the nature of evil and what hell actually is. We were created by God to have fellowship with him to be in his presence. Everything that is good comes from him. But to be completely out of his presence that would be hell. Even in this world those who don't follow him benefit from his presence in the world but imagine a place with no presence of God at all. We may think things are bad but we have never seen a place like that. That is hell.

Is the language of hell being literal or figurative? Most likely figurative but still descriptive of horrible conditions. Hell is known as the 2nd death in Revelation but is also described as everlasting. It is described as having flames but also as outer darkness. Which would seem to contradict each other unless we consider what they represent.

Fire represents the judgment of the wicked and total destruction it also represents unquenchable thirst- Fire utterly destroys everything it touches- people in this life set their lives on fire by their unrighteous actions and selfishness, self-centeredness bitterness, pride etc. if that is allowed to continue in a sense the destruction of one's soul starts on earth. Might that also continue on in hell?

Outer darkness represents isolation- that is from God and all that his presence brings but also from each other. In C.S. Lewis short novel "The great Divorce" he pictures hell as each person moving miles away from each other everyone self-absorbed and grumbling about their situation.

Weeping represents sorrow not unto repentance but a worldly grief.

Gnashing of teeth represents anger in hell they don't think they have done anything wrong. Aren't repentant. There is sorrow but only for their situation not towards realizing they are the ones that placed themselves there. Consider the attitude of the unrepentant in Rev 16:9

Jesus Gives us a glimpse of hell in a parable

Luke 16:19–31 (ESV)

The Rich Man and Lazarus

¹⁹ “There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²² The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, ²³ and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. ²⁴ And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ ²⁵ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ ²⁷ And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— ²⁸ for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ ²⁹ But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ ³⁰ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ ³¹ He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’ ”

What do we observe in this parable about the rich man?

1. He was in torment; he was among flames but obviously he could communicate
2. The land was parched which is the opposite of the pictures of heaven with the river of life
3. He wanted to be served by Lazarus. He did not grasp the situation he was in.
4. Even after his situation was explained to him there was no repentance or admittance of wrongdoing.
5. His appeal to have Lazarus come back from the dead to warn his brothers at first seems sincere until you realize that he is trying to justify himself, as if he did not have enough information to avoid hell. Jesus emphasized that he had Moses and the prophets. He had all he needed.
6. Even if someone should rise from the dead they will not believe. It is not for lack of information or seeing a miracle, it is because of a hardened heart that refuses to believe.

The denial and blame shifting of this one in hell is astonishing. He has no name only Rich Man because his whole identity was based on riches. And he continues trying to identify as such even in hell.

C.S. Lewis in his short story pictures a bus going from hell up to visit heaven but the passengers are so self-absorbed and busy grumbling and complaining and when they finally get there no one wants to be there. No one wants to stay. Even if they are given the choice. While this is a fictional account, I think he really hits the nail on the head that rather than hell being a place where God sends people it is a place where they choose to go themselves. They couldn't imagine spending any time in heaven being with the one they continually rejected while on earth. Hell isn't some eternal torture chamber invented by God rather it is a place of final separation from his presence and all that his presence provides. For those who would rather not be with him it is the ultimate freedom from God for eternity.

Divorcing God

Imagine if you will that you want to break with or divorce from your spouse but everything you own is in their name. But that was not how you perceived it. You felt you were entitled to enjoy and keep some things for yourself. But you get home to discover that is not reality. Everything is gone. With your spouse went everything that you thought belonged to you as well. But it was all hers. It's all gone and you have nothing left. This is how it is when we as human beings choose to divorce ourselves from our creator. In the final judgement he will leave us to our own wants and desires but he is taking with him everything that was his, everything that belonged to him into eternity. This includes all goodness and light and joy and love because those are all his. All satisfaction and enjoyment. All that is good belongs to him. So what is left is yours. That is darkness, isolation, weeping and the gnashing of teeth that comes from bitter anger. And for all eternity blame him and say it's all his fault. That he didn't give you enough information or do enough to make you realize what was coming. That is hell.