

How Can a Loving God Send Anyone to Hell?

Introduction: *(Adapted from a series of lessons by Ethan Longhenry)*

- A. A difficult and challenging subject for believer and unbeliever alike; for many, a reason given to doubt God
 - 1. Many have their own concept of how God must be; hell and eternal punishment does not fit their view
 - 3. Their preconception leads to doubt

I. UNDERSTANDING "HELL" AND "LOVING"

- A. Hell is described in different ways in Scripture
 - 1. Gehenna: the Valley of Hinnom near Jerusalem, place where garbage was burned; place where worm does not die, fire unquenched; demonstrates hell as unpleasant location
 - a. Matt. 5:22, 29, 10:28; Mark 9:43-49
 - 2. The Outer Darkness: demonstration of complete separation from God; place of weeping and gnashing of teeth, indicating great torture, misery
 - a. Matt. 8:12, 22:13
 - 3. Hell is vengeance upon unbelievers, those disobedient to Gospel, suffering eternal destruction away from God and His power
 - a. 2Thes. 1:8-9
 - 4. Hell is the second death, a lake of fire and sulfur, a place of perpetual torment - Rev. 20:10, 14-15
 - 5. It is also clear who will be sent there: those who do not believe in God, do not obey Gospel of Jesus Christ; those who have done evil; those involved in sin without repentance
 - a. Rom. 2:5-10; Gal. 5:19-21; 2Thes. 1:6-9; Rev. 20:12-15
 - 6. How could a loving God send anyone there?
- B. What does the questioner mean by "loving"?
 - 1. 1Cor. 13:6 - Love cannot rejoice with unrighteousness
 - 2. Heb. 12:5-11 - True love is demonstrated through discipline
 - 3. Love seeks the best interests of the one loved
- C. If God loves everyone, how could hell be in the best interest of anyone?

II. CONSIDER THE QUESTION

- A. If we adjust the question slightly, perhaps the answer will be more evident
- B. How can a loving God send Adolf Hitler to hell? Joseph Stalin, Sadam Hussain, and Osama bin Laden?
 - 1. After all, God loves them too, right? - John 3:16
- C. For most people, the idea of terribly sinful people being in hell does not pose much difficulty. Why is that?

III. A SENSE OF JUSTICE

- A. The reason why people have little difficulty with the concept of Adolf Hitler being in hell is because everyone recognizes that he has sinned greatly

1. After all, he caused the death of at least tens of millions of people and the suffering of countless more
 2. How could such a person be rewarded for that type of behavior? He deserves eternal punishment for what he has done
- B. Justice: "The virtue which consists in giving to everyone what is his due" (Webster's)
1. If wrongdoing goes unpunished, it both cheapens doing what is right and encourages further wrongdoing
 2. Psalm 33:5; Isa. 61:8
- C. God cannot allow unrepentant sin to go unpunished and yet love justice
1. Rom. 2:5-6, 11, 12:19
- D. A source of hope for the oppressed, downtrodden: God's righteous judgment against those who oppress
1. 2Thes. 1:6; Rev. 6:9-11

IV. HARMONIZING LOVE, JUSTICE, AND GRACE

- A. Some believe that eternal punishment is too severe a penalty for temporal sin; in their minds; to them it is not really justice, because they appear to be getting more than their due
1. Others have difficulty with the idea that God would save some who sinned rather grievously yet repented, while those who sinned less terribly without repentance would be condemned; a repentant serial killer being saved while one of his or her victims might be hell bound
 2. Many more certainly can understand why hell would be for those really bad sinners, but cannot imagine themselves or their friends and associates who are not that bad going there
- B. Sin is sin; distinctions are generated by human opinion
1. Gal. 5:19-22; 1Cor. 6:9-10 - murder, adultery, stealing are on the same level as rivalries, sectarianism, outbursts of anger, lying
 2. Showing partiality, not doing the good seen as sin - James 2:9, 4:17
 3. Therefore, sin is transgression against God's purposes
 - a. James 2:9; 1John 3:4
 4. All sin is as much transgression as any other sin
 5. Any who sin fall under the same sentence of condemnation
 - a. Isa. 59:1-2; Rom. 3:9-23
 6. Thus, it does not matter if we murdered, raped, or lied, or had an outburst of anger, or simply failed to show proper love to one another; in so doing, we transgress God's will, and without repentance, will reap the eternal consequences
- C. God's Justice vs. God's Mercy
1. We also must remember that according to God's sense of justice, we all deserve condemnation for our sins - Rom. 6:23
 2. Yet God has shown us grace and mercy by providing the payment for our sin through the blood of Jesus Christ
 - a. Rom. 3:24, 5:6-9; Eph. 2:4-6; Titus 3:3-5

3. That sacrifice satisfies God's justice, but only if we accept the terms of that sacrifice: obedience to the Son and to God's purposes
 - a. Rom. 6:17-22; 2Thes. 1:6-9; 1Peter 1:22
 4. Therefore, we must remember that the fact that anyone is redeemed from the sentence of hell is a sign of God's great grace and mercy toward us; we do not deserve it
 5. The question is not how can a loving God send anyone to hell; it is none of us deserves to go to heaven, so what has a loving God done to help us avoid hell and go to heaven?
- D. God's ways are greater than ours
1. It is also essential for us to remember that we are the creation, God is the Creator - Isa. 55:8-9; Rom. 9:19-21
 2. Thus, even if things may not seem right or just or fair to us, we must keep it in mind that God's perspective is greater than our own, and the creation is not going to have the understanding that the Creator has
- E. If God is a God of justice, and He declares it just, who are we to say that it is unjust? - Ez. 18:29-32
1. The question has radically changed: it is not why is a loving God sending sinners to hell; it is why are sinners choosing to go to hell? Is God going to oppose their choice to go there?
 2. Does anyone complain about the idea of receiving eternal blessings that are clearly over the top as a reward for earthly obedience?
 - a. Rom. 8:17-18 - Fellow heirs with Jesus. Has anything we have done in this world measured up to what He has done?
 - b. Rev. 21:22 - Have we worked enough and been righteous enough for such a place?
- F. There is no sin beyond forgiveness - 1Tim. 1:12-16
1. All have received the chance to come to the knowledge of God and will be judged justly at the Judgment - Rom. 1:19-20
 2. While this may offend your sense of fairness, you need to understand that no one promised life would be fair as judged by an arbitrary human standard of fairness
- G. There is no passage of Scripture that gives the idea that everyone will be saved, that good people will be saved by their own merit, or that there is somehow some last-minute exemption clause for the majority of people
1. Jesus acknowledged that the majority will not be redeemed
 - a. Matt. 7:13-14
 2. Let no one be deceived: hell is not just for terrible sinners; it is for every unrepentant sinner, believer or unbeliever
 - a. Matt. 7:19-21; 1Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Heb. 10:26-31
 3. It is only thanks to His grace and mercy that any are saved!
 4. Some will be saved, but not by their own merit, but because they believed in God and obeyed Him
 5. Despite human definitions and opinions, God considers all unrighteousness (and the lack of doing righteousness) to be sin, and all who continue in such paths without repentance will be hell bound