

I'M JUST ASKING FOR A FRIEND

WHERE WE HAVE BEEN IN THIS SERIES?:

- How can we know God exists?
- Should we believe in miracles?
- How can you read the Bible literally?
- Aren't we better off without religion?
- How can you believe in God with all of the suffering in the world?
- Doesn't Christianity denigrate women?
- Doesn't Christianity crush diversity as it arrogantly claims to be the one faith?
- Isn't Christianity homophobic and transphobic?
- Next up.....

1

HOW COULD A LOVING GOD SEND PEOPLE TO HELL?

How do we approach answering a question as difficult to answer and as troubling as this?

- Recognize that the doctrine of hell is considered by many to be the "weak-link" in the Christian world view
- Punt?....but we can't.... we need to be prepared to give a reason for our hope 1 Peter 3:15
- So, we prepare....but how?
 - Establish your Christian worldview...that which is rock solid....our foundation
 - Dissect the question into manageable chunks
 - Take it a piece at a time

2

HOW COULD A LOVING GOD SEND PEOPLE TO HELL?

Setting a Foundation:

- Christianity is based on divine revelation, not human ideology. 2 Tim 3:16
- Scripture, read as the appropriate literature, is inerrant. 1 John 4:6
- God's creation was perfect, and humans introduced sin that had both human and cosmic implications. Genesis 1:31; 1 Timothy 4:4
- God gives humans free will. Created in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27), we resemble our Creator in our capacity to display such qualities as love and justice. And, like our Creator, we have free will.
- Christ calls men to repent and is gracious. Matthew 4:17; Luke 5:32; Ex. 33:19
- God is just and merciful...with consequences either way. Romans 2:6-16; 9:15-16
- God wants all people to repent and no one to perish 2 Peter 3:9; Matt. 18:14
- The doctrine of hell is from divine revelation; not negotiable as unbearable is it might be.

3

HOW COULD A LOVING GOD SEND PEOPLE TO HELL?

Dissecting the question begs for more questions:

- **Those that will be discussed now:**
 - What are some of the attributes of God's love to begin with?
 - What is hell?
 - If God doesn't send people to hell, then how do they get there.....?
 - And, what about children....can they end up in hell?
 - Why are people punished infinitely for finite crimes?
 - How can we be joyful in heaven knowing the suffering that is going on in hell?
- **Those that you can choose from to discuss in your breakout groups:**
 - How has the doctrine of hell been a stumbling block for you as a spiritual seeker or a believer in Christianity?
 - Can we accept the consequence of hell even if we dislike it or it seems repugnant?
 - Why are people punished infinitely for finite crimes?
 - How do you think heaven and hell can begin in this life?
 - Is a belief in free will irrational if one does not believe in hell?
 - Is hell due more to God's love that to justice?

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HOW COULD A LOVING GOD SEND PEOPLE TO HELL?

What are some attributes of God's love?

- He is love 1 John 4:7-8
- Incomprehensible...infinite; *"The world staggers before its task of even describing the reality (of God's love)"* R.C. Sproul
- Forgiving 1John 2:1
- Includes discipline and consequences. Romans 6:23
- Can be known. 1 John 4:16
- Wants all people to repent and no one to perish 2 Peter 3:9
- Merciful and long-suffering John 3:16
- A righteous judge with justice as a component of love; justice is a form that love takes. Romans 2:2-16.

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HOW COULD A LOVING GOD SEND PEOPLE TO HELL?

So...what is hell?

- Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) *Divine Comedy* –Middle Ages
 - *Nine circles within the inner earth*
 - Guides to take you through the circles; different people confined to different circles
 - The dwelling place of Satan
 - "Abandon all hope ye who enter here."
 - No exit...unlike purgatory
- Be careful that you get too descriptive, or you might get called out on it! When certain Paris theologians wrote about hell, Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536) is said to have remarked that they had evidently been there themselves to know it so well

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HOW COULD A LOVING GOD SEND PEOPLE TO HELL?

So...what is hell?

- A doctrine that is attacked for being barbaric
- “..shut out from the presence of the Lord...” 2 Thess 1:9
 - Without relationships
 - Without love, acceptance and affection
 - Without joy
 - Without peace
 - Without beauty
 - A place void of all that God is
 - “...into the darkness...” Matthew 22:13
- God giving some people what they have asked for – self-centered narcissism; people who for all of eternity want to be the center of the universe
- A place that exists because God respects freedom of choice
- Eternal conscious suffering and torment, not eternal conscious torture or painful in the sense that Dante describes physically burning eternally in a fire
- Matthew 11:20-24 People will be sentenced according to their deeds

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HOW COULD A LOVING GOD SEND PEOPLE TO HELL?

So...what is hell? Described by metaphors throughout scripture

- Contextual reading of scripture can lead to the conclusion of hell as fire, or a lake of fire
 - Jewish literature uses ‘fire’ as a metaphor. “...mountains of fire” Apoc. Abram. 18:3; “...rivers of fire..” Enoch 17:5)
 - God as a consuming fire Deut. 4:24; Hebrews 12:29
 - Christ’s eyes are like a blazing fire Revelation 1:14
 - This is the second death, the lake of fire Revelation 20:14
 - Hell is described as both fire and yet dark Matt: 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; 2 Peter 2:17
- Mark 9:48: “...where the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched.”
 - A metaphor used by Jesus to say that hell was a disgusting place of animal refuse outside of the city.
- The debates continue what hell really is.

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HOW COULD A LOVING GOD SEND PEOPLE TO HELL?

So...what is hell?

- Punishment

“Any human soul that freely refuses the one Source of all life and joy must find death and misery as its inevitable punishment”
Kreeft and Tacelli from *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*.

“Though our Lord often speaks of hell as a sentence inflicted by a tribunal, he also says elsewhere that the judgement consists in the very fact that men prefer darkness to light, and that not he, but his “word” judges’ men (Jn 3:19, 12:48” C.S. Lewis

- Pain

- *“If love is supreme joy, then lovelessness must be supreme pain”*
Kreeft and Tacelli

- *“Hell is the suffering of being unable to love”* Fyodor Dostoevsky

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HOW COULD A LOVING GOD SEND PEOPLE TO HELL?

So...what is hell?

- Privation, or deprivation from God from Kreeft and Tacelli

- Deprivation from God brings about the punishment and pain of hell
- The deprivation of all joy and love; God is the ultimate source of joy
- We shut God out, He doesn't shut us out – captured in “The Light of the World” by William Hunt to represent, allegorically, Revelation 3:20



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HOW COULD A LOVING GOD SEND PEOPLE TO HELL?

What if we dropped the belief of hell? (From Handbook of Christian Apologetics, Kreeft and Tacelli)

- Life's choices no longer make an infinite difference
- No free will or no need for free will...puppets?
- If there is no hell, then absolute morality is problematic
- No, hell then no Jesus as Savior...Jesus becomes a teacher, prophet or guru
- Religious indifference...recall all missionaries...apologize for the martyrs....and we have wasted passion, energy, time and life itself
- Jesus Christ can then be labeled a liar...his sacrificial death really was unnecessary
- No reason to believe in the doctrine of God's love

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HOW COULD A LOVING GOD SEND PEOPLE TO HELL?

So...what happens after death and before the second coming of Christ?

- The intermediate state prior to the final resurrection
 - The provincial but continued existence of the soul without the body: Matthew 10:28; Revelation 6:9; Luke 23:46; Jesus' remarks on the cross – Luke 23:42, 43; Philipians 1:20-24; Ecc 12:7
 - Separate 'experiences' for the righteous and the wicked: The parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Luke 16:19-31; Rom. 8:23
 - For the unrighteous it is Hades, a 'holding place' until final judgment: Rev. 1:18; 6:8; 20:13-14
 - For the righteous the spirit, 'the breath of life', returns to God: Ecc: 12:7; James 2:26; Job 27:3; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil 1:23
 - With the Lord for the righteous: 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil 1:23
 - The soul has shed its body: 2 Cor 5:3-4; 2 Cor 5:6-8
 - Progressive revelation as we move from the OT to the NT

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HOW COULD A LOVING GOD SEND PEOPLE TO HELL?

The 'final' state, after the resurrection of the body.

- Resurrection of the righteous has a physical body, 'similar' to Jesus Christ's body: 1 John 3:2; 1 Cor 15:38-56; Matthew 13:43
- A celestial or glorified body

- Resurrection of the body of the unrighteous person– circumstantial
 - Daniel 12:2 – They suffer shame and everlasting contempt
 - Matthew 10:28 Possibly not meaning annihilation but wasted or demolished, a ruined condition
 - Romans 8:23 There is no bodily redemption for the unrighteous; probably not meaning annihilated but being contrasted to the celestial and glorified resurrected body of the righteous.
 - Susceptible to physical pain? Luke 16:27-28 Lazarus and the rich man

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HOW COULD A LOVING GOD SEND PEOPLE TO HELL?

If God doesn't send people to hell, then how do they get there.....?

- God did not create evil (Genesis 1:31), but he allowed the possibility of evil through giving us freedom to choose (Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Mark 1:14-15; James 1:14-15)
- We were offered a 'gift': Romans 5:8; John 3:16; Romans 15:13; Galatians 3:26
- We were given fair warning if we rejected that 'gift': Mark 16:16; John 12:48, 3:18; Romans 1:18; Romans 6:23

.....then, people get there by their own choices..their free will

It is not so much a matter of 'being sent to hell' as it is of people making the choices that are provided to them and saying they prefer another life of self-centeredness instead of a life with the Lord

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HOW COULD A LOVING GOD SEND PEOPLE TO HELL?

And, what about children...can they end up in hell? The Bible is not explicit on the answer to this questions, however, consider:

- *"In the afterlife, our personalities reflect an adult situation anyway, so we can say for sure that there will be no children in hell."* J.P. Moreland
- *"No one will go to hell simply because all they needed was little more time and they died prematurely."* J.P. Moreland
- *"The Bible uses children as figures of speech for salvation, never for damnation."* J.P. Moreland
- The age of accountability defense: 1 Samuel 3:7 *"Now Samuel did not know the Lord, nor had the word of the Lord yet been revealed to him."*
- The age of accountability 'conviction': II Kings 24:8 *"Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became King...and he did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father had done."*

The one who judges is Jesus Christ and he will always make the right decision.

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HOW COULD A LOVING GOD SEND PEOPLE TO HELL?

Why are people punished infinitely for finite crimes...why shouldn't punishment fit the crime?

- Hell is not eternal constant torture but is eternal constant suffering.
- The 'crime' issue is not about burglary, drug dealing or even murder.
 - *"The issue is about mocking, dishonoring and refusing to love the person that we owe absolutely everything to, which is our Creator, God himself."* J.P. Moreland
 - *"The sin is saying 'I couldn't care less about what you put me here to do. I couldn't care less about your values or your Son's death for me. I'm going to ignore all of that' – that's the ultimate sin. And the only punishment worth of that is the ultimate punishment, which is everlasting separation from God."* J.P. Moreland
- Sin breaks the relationship between us and God!
- Sin breaks ourself – something that was made for eternity and God's purpose is broken
- The ultimate sin- leads to the ultimate punishment

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HOW COULD A LOVING GOD SEND PEOPLE TO HELL?

How can we be joyful in heaven knowing the suffering that is going on in hell?
(From Handbook of Christian Apologetics Kreeft and Tacelli)

- Revelation 21:4 God *“will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more.”*
- Matthew 7:23 The parable of the lost sheep *“I never knew you.”* In a sense the damned have lost their true reality..in the outer darkness, not in heaven.
- Luke 16:26 Heaven and hell are not parallel-you can't go from one to the other.
- C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, The reality of hell will not be able to erase the joys of heaven.
- *“The heaven-cleansed eyes of the blessed in heaven do not see, love and mourn (those in hell). The heaven-cleansed eyes of the blessed will see forever as Jesus' disciples saw for a moment on the Mount of Transfiguration-that is, they will see reality as it really is, unclouded by earthly shadows (and the past).”*
Kreeft and Tacelli

Therefore, it is imperative for us to help those we love to find Jesus and accept him as their Savior.

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HOW COULD A LOVING GOD SEND PEOPLE TO HELL?

From C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*,:

“In all our discussions of hell we should keep steadily before our eyes the possible damnation, not of our enemies nor our friends...but of ourselves. This ('discussion') is not about your wife, or son, nor about Nero or Judas Iscariot; it is about you and me.....”

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