

# Hell: how can a loving God send people to hell?

## Hell and the Skeptic

1. **Feel the weight of Hell.**
2. **What are the objecting to?**

How might someone express their objection to hell?

The collision of Christianity and current culture.

3. **Address any caricatures.**

Biblical metaphors of hell: *fire, darkness, separation, gnashing of teeth, being cast out*. But these are not metaphors of something *less* terrible. Hell itself is not a metaphor

## Hell and the Character of God

What has the character of God got to do with hell?

*Ask: 'how do you know that God is the way you say he is?' Most people's view of God is a projection of their own minds: it's how they want God to be.*

But God is more holy, and we are more sinful than we can imagine. A gulf exists between us. Hell is this gulf continuing for all eternity: 2 Thess 1:9

## Hell and Justice

A secular friend may say 'I believe in a God of love'.

*Ask: where do we get the idea of God being a God of love from?*

The only place you find it is the Bible. But the Bible also tells us God is a God of justice.

Current movements for justice tell us justice matters to people. But justice demands judgment, about right and wrong.

*Ask: if God does not judge, do people get away with injustice? How will injustice be put right?*

Consider Revelation 21:8. Ask, *according to your world-view*, what will happen to murderers, paedophiles, fat-cat bankers etc if there is no final judgement?

**They have a longing for justice that their world-view cannot meet.**

Consider how the doctrine of hell and final judgement can stop injustice in this life, or the cycle of violence and revenge that flows from injustice. If you think you have to get justice and vengeance *in this life* you'll try and get it. It's only a robust belief in *eternal* punishment - that God will take vengeance - that can stop the cycle.

## Hell and Love

Ps 145:17-20: The combination of love and judgement. See also Ex 34:6-7. What the skeptic might want to separate (love and justice), God brings together in himself.

Anger is not the opposite of love, hate is. And hate ends in indifference: doesn't care about the other.

*Ask: do you ever feel angry at injustice or at harm done to another?*

Christianity teaches that God is both the ultimate lover and the ultimate judge. His wrath is his settled opposition to the cancer eating away at humanity.

*Ask: Is it really loving to think that all injustices will be swept under the carpet of eternity?*

## **Hell and The Making of All Things New**

The great hope of Christianity is that Christ will return and bring about the New Heavens and the New Earth, that everything will be made new.

*Ask: How will things ultimately be made right in the world? Do you have a hope for that?*

Miroslav Volf: 'evil must be separated from good, and darkness from the light. These are the causes of violence and they must be removed if a world of peace is to be established.'

*Ask: how does secularism go about that? Who decides what is to be removed etc?*

Help them see that their worldview cannot sustain their deepest hopes.

## **Hell and Personal Freedom**

*Ask: The Bible says we're morally responsible individuals. Do you agree with that?*

Probably yes. But we also accept that there are consequences in this life for freely chosen decisions. Selfishness and self-absorption *now* can lead to envy, jealousy, anger, frustration, anxiety, paranoia etc *now*. What if those were to carry on for all eternity in never ending, deepening reality?

Rom 1:18, 'For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.' And that wrath is being revealed by: Rom 1:24 - 'God gave them up...' to their desires. Hell and the wrath of God are already breaking in, and breaking in by God giving people what they want.

*Ask: what if Hell is God continuing to give people what they want for all eternity?*

They don't want him now, they want to be free of him, so in hell that 'freedom' from God continues - free from his beauty, and truth, love, grace, justice, protection, kindness. That would be never-ending torment (Is 66:24; Luke 16:24-31.)

*Ask: if, as the Bible says, heaven is the enjoyment and worship of God forever, and hell is you getting what you want - worship of self - forever - which do you want? Are you sure about the implications of your choice?*

## **Hell and Christ**

There is no one more loving, compassionate, or just than Christ. Yet he also believed in and taught the reality of hell: 'the fiery furnace', the place where there will be 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' (Matt 13:42). An 'unquenchable fire' (Mark 9:43). Being 'cast out' from the presence of the king (Lk 13:27-28) and as 'being in torment' (Luke 16:23).

*Ask: do we think we know better than Jesus? Why?*

Consider the *Garden of Gethsemane and the Cross*. Why was Jesus so distressed before the cross? It wasn't just the fear of the physical pain. It was the prospect of drinking the cup of God's wrath, so we don't have to.

'Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.' (Jn 3:36)

We can argue about hell but, ultimately, what we all need is Christ. That's the great hope of the gospel: hell need not be our destiny.

'I am the resurrection and the life... whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?' (John 11:25-26)

**Sources:** *The Reason for God*, Keller; *Surviving Religion 101*, Kruger; *Confronting Christianity*, McLaughlin