

"Answering Objections to the Bible's Teaching on Hell"

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by Charlie H. Campbell

Tonight we want to take up a doctrine of the Christian faith that has drawn lots of fire from the critics. The doctrine of hell, and the everlasting punishment of the wicked. The Bible makes it absolutely clear that the unrighteous will spend eternity separated from God in a place of conscious torment. Despite hell's unpopularity these days, there are numerous references in the New Testament that warn of hell and the judgment that await the unrighteous.

The Bible describes "hell" as a place of...

--outer darkness (Matthew 25:30)

--weeping (Matthew 8:12)

--wailing (Matthew 13:42)

--gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13:50)

--flames (Luke 16:24)

--everlasting fire (Matthew 25:46)

--a furnace of fire (Matthew 13:42)

--separation from the righteous (Matthew 25:46)

--eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 1:9)

--torment (Luke 16:23)

--everlasting punishment (Matthew 25:46)

--and as the lake of fire burning with brimstone (Revelation 19:20)

The Bible seems to exhaust the human language describing just how awful of a place hell will be. Who said these things about hell? Peter? No. Luke? No. All but two of these descriptions I just read to you were uttered by Jesus Himself. Jesus had more to say about hell than He did about heaven!

In spite of the Bible's clarity on this issue, Satan has deceived millions of people into believing a variety of other softer options. Satan, "the father of lies" (John 8:44) never ceases to take advantage of those who are willing to lay aside Biblical revelation for something that is more palatable.

- Many today, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, believe in annihilationism. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that God will annihilate the unrighteous, and that the unrighteous will simply just cease to exist.

- The Hindus, the Hare Krishna's, and those who hold to the teachings of the New Age Religion believe in reincarnation.

- Buddhism points people to a state of nirvana, which literally means a "blowing out." This is described as a permanent, transcendent state of being with no suffering.

- The Mormon Church also denies the Biblical teaching on hell, and teaches that all, even the worst of sinners will find a place in the lower levels of heaven.[1]

- And many others today, even in some Christian circles, are beginning to believe in what is called Universalism. Universalism is the belief that through the death of Christ all will eventually be saved!

All of these views share a common idea or lie behind them: "There's no need to really worry about what awaits you or the others after death."

Not only have many people rejected the Biblical teaching on hell (opting for a softer view) they are posing some difficult questions, and raising some challenging objections about the issue. Questions and objections that we as ambassadors of Christ, should be prepared to answer.

So I'd like to spend the rest of our time this evening considering some of these questions and objections and then offer a thoughtful, Biblical response to each one of them.

The first objection is this...

1. "A God of love would never send anybody to hell."

Isn't it interesting that everybody thinks that God is so loving? Where does mankind get the idea that God loves the whole world, including sinners?

--The Buddhist scriptures, the Tripitaka? No.

--The Hindu Vedas? No.

--The Qur'an? No.

Answer: The idea of a loving God that permeates our culture comes from the Bible.

It is the Bible alone [2], among religious literature, that presents God as gracious, loving, merciful and forgiving of sinners.

People get their idea that God is loving from the very same book that teaches us about hell! And it's important to point

this out to people who raise this objection: The Bible, that reveals that God is loving, reveals that God is also HOLY and JUST.[3] Because God is loving, He is just.

And because He is just, adulterers, murderers, thieves, liars, fornicators, idolaters, etc. must be punished. Think of a judge down here at the local court that let rapists, child molesters, drug dealers, and thieves go. That would be an unloving act against humanity wouldn't it?

Think of the parents who might let their kids run around the neighborhood hurting other kids, stealing, and so on with no repercussions, no penalties, no punishment! The loving thing for these parents to do would be to punish their children. A loving judge, a loving parent, condemns the law breaker justly in order to love his neighbors.[4]

The same is true of God. It would be unloving for God to let sinners go on into eternity with no ramifications for the evil things they did in this life. It's important to remind people of that.

So, will God judge sinners and punish them? Yes. Why? Because He is loving. He is just. But it's also important to remind the person who raises this objection ("A God of love would never send anybody to hell.") how God has, in His love, taken the punishment for mankind's sins upon Himself, that we might be freely, and justly be forgiven.

A second objection is this:

2. "God will not send good people to hell."

Many people who believe in hell's existence, and who even believe others are going there, have deceived themselves into thinking that God will not send them there.

Why? Well, they reason, "I'm a good person."

So let me ask you a question. Will God send good people to hell? The answer is, no. God will not send good people to hell. God sends sinners to hell.

Here's the thing that we need to communicate to people who think that good people will go to heaven: According to the Bible there are no good people. The Bible says we are all sinners!!

--Jesus Himself said in Luke 18:19, "No one is good but One, that is, God."

--Romans 3:10 says, "There is none righteous, no, not one;"

--Isaiah 53:6 says, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way."

--Jesus even referred to His disciples as being "evil": "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Luke 11:13)

On man's scale a person might appear pretty good, but according to the Word of God, the Bible, each one of us, in our natural state is an unrighteous, evil person. Those are the people that deserve to end up in hell. Sinners. People like you and me (before we were born again). And those are the people, if they reject God's offer of forgiveness, who will end up there.

A third, and somewhat related, objection/question is this:

3. "Why would God have created us, if He knew in advance that so many people would be eternally lost?"

That seems to be a reasonable question. Let me ask you this. Did God know, before He created the world, that many would freely reject Him, and end up eternally separated from Him? Yes.

God is omniscient. His foreknowledge is perfect. So then, why did He create us, even knowing in advance that many would be lost?

I believe the simplest answer is this: Just as the Lord knew many would reject Him, the opposite is also true; He also knew that many would freely receive Him and enjoy eternity with Him.

Apparently, even knowing that many would reject Him and end up in hell, He felt it worth it, so that we who would receive Him, could have fellowship with Him, and Him with us.

Why should God have not created humans, just because some would refuse to submit their lives to Him? That would allow evil to triumph over good. One wouldn't refuse to start a family because he realizes that some of his descendants will reject the gospel and end up in hell. Why? Because he knows that many will not.

I realize that by having kids, I am becoming the trunk, if you will, to a large family tree, if the Lord should tarry [illustration on whiteboard].

I realize that it is very likely that some of these descendants of mine will reject the gospel. Do I then refuse to have a family because these will suffer? No. Why? Because many of my descendants (Lord willing) will not suffer in hell and will get to enjoy the glories of heaven forever! And those who do suffer will end up in hell of their own free accord. By me fathering (or grandfathering, etc) them, I am not in any way forcing them to go to hell. They, like all, will have the option to receive God's mercy and forgiveness. So I'm not going to withhold the blessings of eternity from my children and other descendants, because of the evil actions of others.

This is also true with God. He knew that many would reject Him, but He also knew that many would receive Him.[5]

A fourth, and somewhat related, question is this:

4. "Why didn't God just create a world in which no one would end up in hell?"

This is also a popular question. To prevent hell, and the judgment that must be meted out against unrepentant, unrighteous sinners, God would have had to create a world in which sin would not take place.

As we've already noted, sin demands punishment. To prevent sin from occurring, God would have had to create people without free will, a world in which everybody must do only that which pleases God.

A world like that would have been a world full of robots, rocks and trees.

That would have been a meaningless world for God. In order for a genuine loving relationship to exist between God and people, people must be free. Free to love Him, or free to hate Him. But with freedom comes the possibility of evil. And evil necessitates God's punishment. The truth of the matter is that God created the best of all possible worlds.

Ask people today on the street if they would like to live their lives in accord with all of God's holy demands. Well, of course the answer on the streets will be "No." The majority of people in the world want to move freely about, from one unholy pursuit to another.

God has given mankind the very world that mankind wants to live in. A world in which they are truly free. What they don't like is the thought that there will be serious consequences for what they do with their freedom!

A fifth objection that has been raised regarding the Bible's teaching on hell is this:

5. "It is unfair for God to send people to hell just because they've never heard of Christ."

Is it true that people are going to hell just because they have never heard of Christ? No. People go to hell because they are sinners. It is true that some of the people that will end up in hell have never heard of Christ. But that is not why they will end up there. A person will end up in hell for having retreated from, or having ignored the light that God has revealed to them. We touched on this in a previous class, but it bears repeating here.

The Bible teaches us that God has revealed Himself to all of creation in two ways:

A. Creation. (Romans 1:20, Acts 14:17, Ps. 19:1-4)

Romans 1:19-20 says, "...that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. [How has God made it evident to them?] 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse."

Acts 14:17 says, "Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."

B. Conscience. (Romans 2:14-15)

Romans 2:15 says, "[The Gentiles] show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness..."

All of mankind can know, through an examination of creation and their own conscience, that God exists and that they have failed to live up to His laws written in their hearts. And if they respond to the light of creation and their own conscience, God will give more light. He will? Yes.

Hebrews 11:6 says God, "is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." Jesus said, "...seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7). God said, "And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13, also see Acts 10:35). He may send a missionary (e.g. Acts 10 with Peter being sent to Cornelius) or send them a Bible (Psalm 119:130). He may give them a vision (e.g. Daniel chapters 2, 7) or send an angel (Rev. 14:6).

For God to give more light to the hard-hearted, to those whom He knows will only continue to be unresponsive to the light He reveals to them, would only result in their greater guilt and condemnation. Why? Greater light brings about greater responsibility.

In addition to God's witness in creation, and conscience, the Bible says that God has placed each person in a specific place in time and geographic location that he or she might be more prone to call upon the name of the Lord.

Turn to Acts, Chapter 17.

Acts 17:26-27 Paul said to the men of Athens...

26 And He [God] has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings,

STOP.

Every person, Paul says, has been placed in a specific time in history and a specific location geographically.

WHY?

27 so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us."

If a person will simply call out to Lord, He is not far from anybody.

So, a person will not go to hell because of some historical or geographical misfortune, which somehow prevented them from hearing about Christ. Those who will go to hell will have first rejected the light of God's revelation in creation and their conscience.

Q. How clear is the light of creation? Answer? Clear enough that nobody who rejects God will have an excuse (Romans 1:20).

When you add in the testimony of a man's conscience, these two witnesses (creation and conscience) alone should cause men everywhere to recognize their guilt before God, repent, seek His mercy, and forgiveness. "He is not far from each one" (Acts 17:27). If they will "grope for Him" (v.27) they will "find Him."

A sixth objection to the Bible's teaching on hell is this:

6. "Why does hell have to be so severe?"

The critic says, "Gnashing of teeth (Matt 13:50), outer darkness (Matt 25:30), flames (Luke 16:24), everlasting fire (Matthew 25:46)? Why does hell have to be so bad? Why will hell be so severe?"

Some might say, "Well, hell was originally prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41). That's why it's so severe!" I'm not sure that is a very good answer. Jesus did say that He would one day say to the unrighteous, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). But God, being omniscient, knew ahead of time that hell was also the place where He would send human persons who would reject Him.

Why is hell so severe? Here are three reasons.

A. Hell is a place of separation from God.

2 Thessalonians 1:9 says, "And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power."

When man chooses to separate himself from God (Isaiah 59:1-2) and God finally gives him over to the desire of His heart and finally allows him to have his way, and to be left alone, the consequences, by default, are going to be severe!!!! Why?

The Bible teaches (e.g., James 1:17) that God is the sole source of all that is good, all that brings joy, and comfort.

James 1:17 says, "Every [not most, but "every"] good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning."

Hell is a place of separation from the very source of...

--all that is good,

--all that would cause joy, and

--all that would bring comfort.

Remove all that is good, all that would cause joy, or bring comfort and you're going have an utterly miserable place!

Is separation from God too severe for the sinner? No. Remember God is absolutely just and fair. If hell is where sinners end up, its punishment must fit the crime. I believe the only reason hell may seem too extreme is because mankind does not understand how extremely wicked, nor how sinful he is!!!

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) argued that if a person had a true spiritual awareness, he would not be amazed at hell's severity, but at his own depravity!!! [6]

Regarding the severity of hell, Peter Kreeft wisely said in his Handbook of Christian Apologetics: "Hell's punishment [separation from God] fits sin's crime because sin is to separate oneself from God. The punishment [separation from God] fits the crime because the punishment is the crime." [7]

The punishment (hell) will fit the crime. In fact, in the end, all will receive what they actually chose in this life, either to be with God or to be without Him. If a person chooses all their lives, to say "I want nothing to do with You God," God will honor that decision.

If a person prefers to be by himself without God, he shall, in the end, have his preference. C.S. Lewis rightly pointed out that there are only two kinds of people-those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, "Thy will be done!" [8]

He also said, "I believe that the damned are, in one sense, successful rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the inside." [9] Separation from God is not simply a sentence that is handed down out of the blue on judgment day. It is the end of a path that is chosen, to some degree, in this life right here and now, day by day. [10]

There are 2 more reasons why I think God purposely designed hell to be severe.

B. Hell's severity causes sinners to seek Him.

The possibility that hell is real causes many people to consider God. If the Bible taught that hell was something let's say "lukewarm," or less severe, or that the soul was just annihilated upon death, many millions would choose to just eat, drink and be merry in this life.

And millions would never experience the joys of knowing God in this life, or the glorious future that God has in store for those who love Him.

C. The severity of hell brings about a saner, safer world.

The evil that takes place in the world is already bad enough, but we can rest assured that sin would run far more rampant if there were not a universal fear of punishment in the afterlife.

The thought that hell might exist restrains a good amount of the evil that would be taking place.

Think of how crime would escalate if our police departments shut down and there were no longer any fear of punishment for crimes committed.

When a person goes to jail in America, they get three meals a day. They get to study, work out, watch TV, work on a college degree in some places. And sadly, many of our criminals return to their previous evil lifestyles upon release.

In many Islamic countries, thieves lose a hand for stealing. There aren't a lot of thieves in those countries. Fear of punishment restrains evil and leads to a safer, saner world. It's been said that without a fear of divine retribution mankind would create hell on earth.

And so we can thank God that hell is as severe as it is. It caused us to seek Him, and it brings about a safer, saner world.

A seventh question that has been raised is this...

7. "Why doesn't God give people a second chance after death, or seek to reform sinners in some form of temporary purgatory?"

The Catholic teaching on purgatory is an unbiblical, heretical teaching that comes to us from the Apocrypha, a collection of un-inspired writings that were rejected by the early church.

As for giving people a second chance, the truth of the matter is this: God is giving people a second chance right now. And a third chance, and a fourth chance. God, on a daily basis, continues to patiently offer people chances to repent.

When a person dies it will be too late. Hebrews 9:27 says, "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment."

Why doesn't God seek to reform sinners, after death in some form of temporary purgatory?

A. God has tried to reform people.

The time of reformation is called "life."

For the lifetime of the individual, God's Spirit patiently (2 Peter 3:9)...

--strives with them, (Genesis 6:3)

--convicts them of their sin, (John 16:8)

--reminds them of God's righteousness, (John 16:8)

--warns them of coming judgment, (Acts 24:25)

--testifies to them through creation, (Romans 1:20)

--sends them messengers with the good news of salvation (Romans 10:15)

When they finally die, the reformation process is over. Those in hell will be those who are unrepentant.

A eighth objection that has been raised against the Bible's teaching regarding Hell is this:

8. "It seems unjust that God would give out the same punishment to everybody."

Some believe that eternity in hell would be unjust because that would mean that your ordinary unbeliever ends up getting the same punishment as Adolph Hitler. To them seems unfair, or unjust.

Q. Is God going to indiscriminately throw all of the unsaved into hell to suffer the exact same judgment?

A. No.

Revelation chapter 20:12-13 says that every unsaved person is going to be resurrected to stand before God to be judged for their works before they are cast into the lake of fire (20:15).

This judgment of each individual's works or deeds seems to suggest that a person will receive a greater condemnation or judgment based on what they have done.

This lines up with what Jesus said in Mark 12:40, where He stated that the Scribes of His day would "receive greater condemnation" than others.

In Matthew 11:22, Jesus said that there would be a "more tolerable" judgment that would come to the people of Tyre and Sidon than those who lived in Chorazin and Bethsaida (also see Luke 12:47-4 and 20:47).

Separation from God in the hell ("the lake of fire," Rev. 20: 15) will be horrible for everybody who goes there, but it will be worse for others.

What will a "greater condemnation result" in? I don't know for sure. Perhaps some will suffer a greater degree of separation, isolation, emptiness, and regret.[11]

A ninth objection or concern regarding the Bible's teaching on hell is this:

9. "I could never be happy in heaven knowing that my loved ones are in hell."

The thought of being apart from one's family members and those you love for eternity is quite a heartbreaking thought. But in heaven we will find out, and God assures us of this in His word, that we will be full of joy. God promises us that there will be "fullness of joy" in His presence (Ps.16:11)

Revelation 21:4 tells us, "He [God] shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

I like to point out to the person who has this concern...

"If there are people you love so deeply that you cannot see how you could possibly be happy forever without them, then one of the jobs God may have put you on earth for is to do everything you can to help them come to their senses and turn to God.

"If God, in His providence, has arranged this love and closeness between you, then perhaps God has placed this burden on your heart so that you will work with Him to lift it, to solve it, to see that person or those persons come to repentance, and salvation.[12]

"If you are concerned about your loved one's that won't be in heaven, the most irrational thing you could do if you are truly concerned about those on the outside is to remain outside yourself." (C.S. Lewis)

ABOUT CHARLIE CAMPBELL

Charlie Campbell is the Director of The Always Be Ready Apologetics Ministry, the author of One Minute Answers to Skeptics' Top Forty Questions , and a popular guest speaker at churches around the United States on issues related to the defense of the Christian faith. His teachings and resources have been endorsed by Dr. Norman Geisler, Charles Colson, Chuck Smith, Nancy Leigh DeMoss, Jeremy Camp, and Brian Brodersen. He resides in southern California with his wife and four children.

BOOKING:

If you would like to inquire about having Charlie Campbell teach at your church, conference, Christian school, or retreat please click [here](#) for further details.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

For additional resources, including notes, audio messages, and DVDs, that will help you always be ready to defend the faith (1 Peter 3:15) check out www.AlwaysBeReady.com

NOTES

1. John A Widtsoe, a Mormon Apostle, in his book: Joseph Smith-Seeker After Truth, p.177-178, 1951. Also see Doctrine and Covenants 76: 82-86.

2. The Qur'an does teach that Allah is loving and merciful, but it plainly says that Allah only loves the righteous. For more on what the Qur'an teaches about Allah see our study on Islam at www.AlwaysBeReady.com

3. For example Isaiah 6:3 says of the Lord, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" Psalm 7:11 says "God is a just judge."

4. For more on this, see Peter Kreeft, Handbook of Christian Apologetics, p. 292

5. Norman Geisler has a different response to this question that is worth reading. See p. 314 in the Baker Encyclopedia of Apologetics.

6. Norman Geisler, Baker Encyclopedia of Apologetics, p.311

7. Peter Kreeft, Handbook of Christian Apologetics, p. 300

8. Mentioned in Paul Copan's book, True for You But Not for Me, p. 129.

9. C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain, (1962), p.27.

10. Inspired by what J.P. Moreland said in The Case for Faith by Lee Strobel, p. 178.

11. See Lee Strobel's interview on hell with J.P Moreland, The Case for Faith, p. 180.

12. I believe I got this idea or wording from Peter Kreeft in Handbook of Christian Apologetics.

