

A Loving God and Hell
August 27, 2017

One of the common complaints against belief in Christianity is the following question.
Why would a loving God send people to hell?

Maybe someone has asked this of you as you have tried to share Jesus. This is the question I want to answer this morning. The word hell as a place name comes from pagan sources and was applied to the lake of fire that we read of in the book of Revelation.

Revelation 20:11-15 (NIV) Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Why would a loving God send people to the lake of fire? This morning, for the sake of simplicity, I will use the name hell instead of lake of fire. The assumptions within that question could also apply to other similar questions. I will begin with those and the similarity will become clearer in a moment.

Why would a loving parent punish a child? Why would a loving school principal expel a student from school? Why would a loving employer fire an employee? Why would a loving army general take away an officer's command? Why would a loving judge send someone to jail? All of these questions are essentially the same question. The only difference is the context.

The first assumption in the question is the kind of love involved. The question implies that this love is a permissive, easy going love. It is a love that overlooks whatever a person does wrong and yet gives them whatever they want.

Let me illustrate. I never liked saying no to my sons. When they asked me for something I always wanted to be the nice dad and say, "Sure, you can have that, you can do that, you can go there." I wanted to be the nice dad, the easy going dad, the permissive dad.

Saying yes was the easy thing to do. I knew if I said no that they might start complaining and doing things I might have to punish them for. Saying no is harder than saying yes. That is why some parents say yes most of the time. It is just easier for them, though it is not better for the child. Parents, this is a sin. The good parent says no when it is appropriate to do so.

So, why would a loving parent punish a child? To be a good parent. A good parent's goal is not the momentary comfort or happiness of his or her child. The good parent's goal is that the child grow up to become a self-supporting, mature, responsible, self-disciplined, and law-abiding adult. Good parents accomplish this by teaching the child to be self-disciplined, to have respect for authority, that we can't have everything we want, and that hard work brings great rewards.

A good parent does what is best for the child, not what is easy for the parent.

The love required to be a good parent is tough love. Parenting is hard work. It requires a lot of a parent. The greatest love a parent can have for a child is tough love. It is not the kind of permissive love that lets the child do whatever he or she wants without suffering any negative consequences. That kind of love results in a terrible, spoiled, adult child who thinks the world owes him or her a pleasant life. Such people end up miserable in the end, with broken marriages, dysfunctional families, and worse.

Part of me wanted to be the cool dad. But a bigger part of me wanted to be a good dad. When it was bedtime and they asked to stay up a little later, I might do that once in a while. But I knew it was not good for them to stay up later every night and become sleep deprived. That wasn't the kind of dad they needed. So I ended up saying no a lot.

Why would a loving school principal expel a student from school? Because the principal also loves the other students who are there to learn. The principal must provide a safe, orderly learning environment for all the students, not just the one who wants to disrupt things.

Why would a loving employer fire an employee? Because the employer recognizes the other issues involved such as getting the work done, on time, by all the employees, so that everyone can get paid.

How can a loving general strip an officer of his command? Because the general recognizes the importance of maintaining discipline in the army where soldiers obey orders. Otherwise the army will fail to carry out its mission.

How can a loving judge send someone to jail? Because the judge recognizes a responsibility to the rest of the citizens to punish criminals and try to provide a safe and peaceful society.

In each situation mentioned we see a great love, a tough love, a just love that does not overlook wrong. We see a love that is balanced by other concerns.

Well the same is true of God. God IS loving.

1 John 4:16 (NIV) "God is love..."

God is so loving that John simply writes, "God is love." If you want to know what love is like, look at God.

But that is not His only attribute. God is also good. Jeremiah encourages us to...

Jeremiah 33:11 (NIV) "Give thanks to the LORD Almighty, for the LORD is good..."

God being good means that He always does what is best for us, like a good parent always does what is best for the child. A good general always does what is best for the mission. A good judge always does what is best for the community.

In addition to being good, God is also just.

Isaiah 30:18 (NIV) ... the LORD is a God of justice.

Justice is giving people what they deserve. God gives people what they deserve.

That makes Him better than us. We don't always give people what they deserve, whether that be something good or something bad. When it comes to justice we are inconsistent. When others have sinned against us we want justice. But when we have sinned against others, we want them to just overlook our sin.

And many people want the same in their relationship with God. They want God to just overlook their sin, even if they deserve to go to hell. They want to live their lives any way they want, even ignoring God if they want, and still go to heaven. But God, who is good and just, would be neither if He ignored our sin. Such a God would be a worse parent than we are. Such a God would not be worthy of our worship.

Justice demands that crimes be paid for. Justice also demands that sin be paid for. Sin is crime committed against God. God must punish sin or He would not be just.

So the original question assumes that God have a poor kind of love towards us. But everything the Bible tells us about God shows the opposite. God has the best kind of love for us. And that love is balanced by both His goodness and justness.

The second assumption is the degree of sin involved. The questions assumes that our sins are not so bad. The questioner has little understanding of the amount of his sin and the seriousness of his sin.

Every day we wake up in the presence of God. God is everywhere, not just in heaven, not just at church. God is in your bedroom, your bathroom, your TV room. You wake up every day in the presence of God. Do you act like He is not there? In your behavior, your thinking, your words, your actions, do you act as if He is not with you? Would you behave differently than you normally do if Jesus was physically in the room? If so, then you are living as if there is no God. Think how often you do this and you get some idea of the amount of your sin.

Think of the seriousness of that sin. You are dishonoring the creator of the universe. You are insulting the KING of kings and LORD of lords. You should feel terrible.

Yet the person asking the main question feels little if any shame, embarrassment, or guilt over their sins. Their heart has become calloused and unfeeling towards the honor of God as creator and judge.

God is a million times greater than any president or king or prime minister. How should God respond to someone who fails to show proper respect to God? Should God just overlook such sin? Of course not. That would not be right.

Hell is so awful because our sin is so awful. Yet we make light of it, excuse it, rationalize it, ignore it, and hope God will just overlook it. But that would not be right. And God always does what is right.

Why would a loving God send anyone to hell? A better question is why would God not send EVERYONE to hell? That is a truer picture of reality. That is a truer picture of God, and of us.

Fortunately there is hope for us. Yes, God IS loving, good, and just. God is also merciful. We see the mercy of God in the fact that He provides a path to pardon. He is loving. In His mercy He sent Jesus to die for our sins. Believing on Jesus puts you on the favored list.

Revelation 20:15 (NIV) If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

While this verse is written from the negative point of view, there is a positive point of view. There is the possibility of getting your name in the book of life. This shows the mercy of God. God provided us a savior. He saves us from the penalty of our sins. The penalty of our sins is the lake of fire.

If you put your faith in Jesus' death as the full payment for all of your sins, receiving Jesus as savior, and turn your life over to Him, receiving Jesus as lord, your name will be added to the book of life.

God does not want to send anyone to the lake of fire. He wants to save everyone, even you. And He will if you will receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord. He invites you to do so today.