

Questions
June 23, 2013

We Christians teach that our God, the God of the Bible, Yahweh is His name, is a God of love. We tell people that He loves us so much that He sent His Son to die in our place, for our sins, to pay the penalty for our sins, so we can be forgiven our sins and receive eternal life.

Yet we also warn people that there is a day of judgment coming when every person in history will stand before God and give an account of himself, how he has lived his life, how he has behaved towards others, and most importantly, what his attitude towards God has been. And all people will be found worthy of hell. While heaven sounds totally wonderful, Hell sounds totally awful.

So we have this bad new/good news message we are bringing to the world. It is a world of sin. Yet it is a world of people who are blind to their sin. Since they are as good as most other people they think most people are good and not deserving of hell. And to imply that they do deserve hell is offensive to them. They question the existence of both a loving God and hell.

So it is logical for people to ask the following question. **How can a loving God send anyone to hell?** Maybe your friend or relative or co-worker asked you that. Maybe you've heard others say that. Maybe you have even thought it yourself. How can a loving God send anyone to hell?

That is a loaded question. It is loaded because it makes assumptions about the word loving, God, and sin, that are not true. Once we get to the truth of those words, we will have the answer to the question.

First of all, the question implies the word loving to mean only giving pleasant things to those who are loved.

Let me illustrate this point by speaking of loving parents. Most of us in this room have raised children and hope to be labeled as loving parents. Some here have not been parents, but all here have experienced being raised by someone, usually parents. So we all have a concept of what loving parents should be and do.

So, do loving parents only give their children pleasant things? No. It is true that we give many pleasant things to our children. We give them toys and clothes we think they will like. We take them to the playground and movies and for ice cream and such.

But a loving parent is not one who always gives only pleasant things. A loving parent is one who always does what is best for the child. So we also give them fruits and vegetables. We also take them to the doctor for their immunization shots and for medical exams and medicines which the children may not particularly like. When I was three I had to spend some days in the hospital, separated from my parents in order to save my life. I did not like being separated from my parents. I did not like the smells of the hospital. Sometimes I smell something unpleasant that reminds me of a smell in that hospital room, and I can picture that room again. I did not like that experience, but it was the loving thing for my parents to let me be there. It saved my life.

A loving God, sometimes provides things we don't really want, because He knows it is for our good. Is He less loving because He does this? No. In fact, He is more loving.

Parents also, because they are loving, withhold things the child very much wants. Weren't you all loving parents? But you didn't get that pony she asked for? You didn't get him the BB rifle when he was five like he wanted? I hope not. Did you give them cake and ice cream for supper most nights? If you did, don't tell anyone.

We don't believe that loving means giving only what the other wants or only pleasant things. Such a parent certainly is not a wise parent.

Neither does a loving God. God will not give us whatever we want because He knows that some things we want are not good for us. He gives us some things that are good for us that we definitely don't want.

Both a loving parent and a loving God use both discipline and punishment to train us how to be obedient, responsible, respect authority. This is so we turn out to be good, responsible, law-abiding citizens. This is so we don't end up in jail.

A loving parent... sometimes... even has to use tough love. This is never to punish, but always to call the child to repentance and responsibility. This may involve an adult child, forcing the child out of the home as a residence.

In Matthew 18 we see Jesus calling for tough love towards members of a church who fail to admit sin and repent. Such action is hard to do, often unpopular, and doesn't always gain the desired outcome. But it is the right thing,... the loving thing... to do, though it doesn't feel loving to anyone involved.

We need to have a right definition of the word loving. I believe the question implies a watered down definition, one that no parent would be proud to wear, and one that does not fit God.

So when people raise that objection to you, ask them what they mean by the word loving. Then offer them a clearer definition of the word.

Secondly, the question implies that God is one dimensional. It implies that God is loving more than any other characteristic we might give Him.

The question makes it sound as if God is only loving and nothing else of note. Yet we learn from other writings in the Bible that God is good. We learn from the Biblical writings that God is faithful. We learn that God is compassionate. We learn that God is wise. We learn that God is kind. We learn that God is just. These other qualities of God are not outweighed by Him being loving. Instead, all of them are true of God in a perfect sense. God is not just faithful, but completely faithful. God is not just good, but completely good. God is not just wise, but perfectly wise. God is not just a little bit, but perfectly just. We can count, completely, on God being perfect in these qualities.

While we may think of God as a good and loving heavenly Father, in His justness we should think of Him as a perfect judge. We don't usually use the word loving to describe judges. Rather we want our judges to be just. It is good if they also have compassion,

first for the victim of crimes and then also for the criminal, especially a first offender. But first and foremost they must be just.

We do not want a judge to give a harsher punishment than is deserved. Nor do we want a judge to give less than is deserved. A just judge gives only punishment that is fair and appropriate to the crime.

The same must be true of God, if He is truly just, and I believe He is. God is just. God does not overlook anyone's crime. God does not overlook any sin. God is just, and treats everyone impartially according to how they have lived their lives.

God does not send anyone to hell who does not deserve it. In addition He does send to hell those who do deserve it. That's what justice demands. We would expect no less of God. So as a just judge, God must send those to Hell who deserve to be there.

This brings us to our third problem with the question. **The third assumption in the question is that there is no sin worthy of hell.**

It is clear in the Biblical writings that hell is a real place, a place of punishment. It is certainly an unpleasant place, though exactly what kind of punishment is given is unclear. There are plenty of warnings about seeking the alternative offered by God.

Most people think of themselves as mostly good, and so cannot imagine deserving hell. Most people are living a lie when it comes to sin. Most people are in denial about how much they sin against God every day. That is true of you and me too.

In our country, in every country, murder is a crime. In many places, killing a police officer receives a harsher penalty than killing someone else. Why? Because in a very real way, the police officer stands in for all of us. He represents the greater authority of all of us, not just one of us. So it is a greater crime to kill a police officer. It would be a greater crime to kill a judge, or a senator, or a governor.

When it comes to the President of the United States, even a threat against the president is a crime. You may have meant it only as a joke, but it is not treated that way by the Department of Justice. It is a very serious matter.

The greater position of the one harmed, the greater the level of the crime. With that same understanding then, it is a much greater sin to disrespect God than it is to disrespect your neighbor. And this is our chief sin.

With this idea in mind, go with me to Genesis one. The word Genesis is Hebrew and means "in the beginning".

Genesis 1:1 (NIV) In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

What kind of being, If I can use that word, could do this? What kind of being would have the power and knowledge needed to create the heavens and the earth? It would be someone very much different from us, beyond us in every way. One word that carries that meaning of difference from us is holy. The creator of the heavens and the earth is holy. Even qualities we have that are similar to God are imperfect, whereas He

is perfection. This being is different from us. This being is unique. We use the word Holy to describe such a being. Only God is holy.

Only God is holy. Only God has the knowledge and wisdom and power to create the heavens and the earth. **God deserves that we fully acknowledgment, respect, honor, give thanks to, and obey Him.**

To fail to do this is the greatest sin because God is the greatest being in the universe. This is exactly what all mankind has done, failed to give glory to God as we should.

Romans 1:18-25 (NIV) The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth (about God) by their wickedness,¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-- His eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles...

²⁵ They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator...

Mankind has failed to live every moment of every day in the truth of God, acknowledging God for Who He is, failing to show Him the proper respect, honor, thanks, and obedience. Paul summarizes us this way a little further in his letter.

Romans 3:23 (NIV) ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,...

Every person has failed to give God the glory He rightly deserves as the creator of the heavens and the earth. And this is no little sin. Because of who God is, this sin, a sin which is not once a day, but all day, every day, this sin is the biggest sin anyone is guilty of. And everyone is guilty of it.

This sin, because it is against the Holy God, is a thousand times worse than any sin we commit against another person.

Yet how little we think this sin to be. We are so steeped in this sin that we consider it nothing. We are so proud of the goodness in ourselves in our treatment of each other and what little recognition we DO make of God that we think little of this sin. Such is the guilt of hiding the truth from ourselves and each other.

And while this is the worst of our sins, it is certainly not the only one. The rest of our sins, those against each other, just compound this sin.

So, on the Day of Judgment, when we stand before the Holy God, the depth and extent of our sins will be revealed. We will know in those moments that we are utterly lost. We

will know that we deserve hell. No one will go to hell thinking, "I don't deserve this." No one will go to Hell thinking, "This isn't fair."

No one will be sent to hell who does not deserve to be there... We all deserve to be there. We ALL deserve to be there.

How can a loving, just God send anyone to hell? How can He not? Just as we expect a human judge to send those to life in prison, or execution who truly deserve it, so we should expect a holy and just God to do right by all men and give them what their sin deserves.

God doesn't send anyone to hell who doesn't deserve it. God IS just.

But God is also merciful. Oh, how wonderful is that word, mercy. Mercy means something you don't deserve. None of us deserve mercy, but God showed us mercy anyway. He cannot, as a just God, simply forgive sin. Sin must be atoned for.

So in His mighty wisdom and power, God sent His Son to become man, fully God and fully man, perfect, and holy, and without sin, to make atonement for our sin. Jesus paid the consequence of our sins with His death on the cross. God who is perfectly just is also perfectly merciful. He showed us His love and mercy by sending us a Savior.

I urge you to believe in Jesus today. I urge you to trust in Him as your Savior. God's promise is that we can escape hell this one way.

Don't hide from the truth about God any longer. Don't hide from the truth about your sin any longer. Admit your sin to God. Admit your need for a Savior.

Receive Jesus as your Savior. Turn your life over to Him as your Lord. And you will be forgiven of your sins and saved from hell which you deserve.