

How Could A Loving God Send Someone To Hell?

A. Knowing the Challenge

1. In order to discuss the topic of Hell, we really need to broaden our discussion:
 - a. Is there anything after this life?
 - b. Does the soul live on after death? If not, then what's the purpose in debating Hell?
 - c. Likewise, if we discuss Hell, shouldn't we also talk about whether heaven exists?
 - d. Finally, we need to discuss what determines where one goes after death and why
2. What the world thinks:
 - a. Some believe this life is all there is and there's nothing more—they might claim something like, "There is no proof—scientific or otherwise—that there's an afterlife"
 - b. Others believe we are simply re-incarnated after we die and become something else
 - c. Most people, however, believe in the concept of heaven and hell but their ideas vary:
 - 1) Some question, or challenge the idea, that a loving God would create Hell and send people there
 - 2) Some claim that hell is a made up concept simply to scare people into believing in God
 - 3) Many who believe in a Heaven and Hell believe that good people go to Heaven and bad people go to Hell
 - 4) Some believe that everyone goes to Heaven
 - 5) There are some "Christians" that believe that unbelievers are simply annihilated at death (their soul is destroyed) and that the idea of eternal suffering is not Biblical—popular within some emergent circles; Jay Bell, "Love Wins"

B. Knowing the Truth

1. The Bible teaches that after this life there is either eternal punishment or eternal life:
 - a. Mathew 25:46: **"These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."**
 - b. John 3:36: **"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."**
 - c. John 5:24: **"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life."**
 - d. 1st Thessalonians 1:9: **"These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,"**
 - e. In fact, the phrase "eternal life" (or related phrases) is used over fifty times in the NT alone
2. Is there any evidence of life after death? Essentially, the bible is a history book and it provides historical evidence of life after death:
 - a. The resurrection of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15)—one of the most well-documented events in history:
 - 1) The empty tomb
 - 2) His appearance to the Apostles and over 500 followers after His resurrection
 - 3) The radical change in the lives of the disciples and the establishment of the Church

- b. Samuel's appearance to Saul at En Dor (1st Samuel 28)
 - c. Moses and Elijah's appearance to Jesus and the Disciples at the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36)
 - d. John's future historical vision of the saints in Heaven (Revelation 7:9-14)
3. The Bible uses a number of terms to describe where the soul goes after death:
- a. Old Testament:
 - 1) Heaven:
 - a) The abode of God, the angels and other supernatural beings (Psalm 11:4; 1 Kings 22:19, Isaiah 6:1)
 - b) The OT indicates that the final or eternal resting place of the righteous is in the presence of God, but isn't clear if that happened immediately upon death or at some future time (Psalm 23:6; 73:24-25)
 - 2) Sheol:
 - a) A general reference to the underworld where both the righteous and the unrighteous go after they die (The wicked: Psalm 9:17; 31:17; David prayed that God would not "abandon" (lit. leave him there) in Psalm 16:10)
 - b) It appears Jesus was referring to Sheol in Luke 16:19-31 which suggests that Sheol was divided into two parts: a place of comfort and rest for the righteous as they waited for their final and eternal entrance into God's presences (called Abraham's bosom) and a place of torment for the wicked where they waited for their final judgment and condemnation (called Hades)
 - c) As such, it was a temporary place
 - d) This might be what Daniel referred to in Daniel 12:2 when he wrote of those who "sleep in the dust of the earth": **"Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt."**
 - b. New Testament Terms:
 - 1) Heaven: same as in the OT
 - 2) Paradise:
 - a) Used three times in the NT (Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 12:4; Revelation 2:7)
 - b) Refers to heaven, God's abode
 - 3) Hell:
 - a) In most English Bibles, the word "hell" only appears in the New Testament and is most often a translation of the Greek word *geena* (or Gehenna)
 - Gehenna was a valley south of Jerusalem
 - It is the place where the ancient Israelites sacrificed their children by passing them through the fire as an offering to Molech, the Canaanite god (2 Chronicles 28:3; Jeremiah 7:31; 19:2-6)
 - In Jesus's day, it was a sewage filled trash heap where Jerusalem burned it's waste and garbage
 - In the New Testament, this word is never used literally, but rather symbolically to represent a place of judgment (Matthew 5:22; 23:33), fire (5:29-30), destruction (Matthew 10:28), and even a source of wickedness (James 3:6)

- b) In one instance, 2 Peter 2:4, “Hell” is translated from the Greek word tartaroo (or Tartaros) which refers to the place where the dead went when they were condemned
 - 4) Hades:
 - a) Greek term for the underworld or place where the dead go when they die (Revelation 6:8; 20:13)
 - b) Some equate it with Sheol in the OT, but that is unlikely because it’s always a place of torment in the NT (Luke 16:23-26) and opposite heaven (Matthew 11:23)
 - c) Hades and those in Hades ultimately get tossed into the Lake of Fire for all eternity (Revelation 20:14)
 - 5) Lake of Fire:
 - a) Mentioned in Revelation 19:20, 20:10, 14-15
 - b) According to Jesus, it was prepared for Satan and his angels as a place of everlasting torment and punishment, but the wicked will also be sent there upon their final judgment (Matthew 25:41)
 - c) This happens at the end of time when the Beast, False Prophet, Death and Hades are all thrown into the Lake of Fire
- 4. What does the Bible say happens after death?
 - a. In the OT, when people died they all went to Sheol—the righteous to Abraham’s bosom to await the resurrection of Jesus, while the unrighteous went to Hades to await their final judgment (Luke 16:22-23)
 - b. When Jesus rose from the dead, many (all??) of the OT saints were resurrected, appeared in Jerusalem for a time and then departed to be with Jesus (Matthew 27:50-53)
 - c. When Christians die, they go to be with Jesus in Paradise (Luke 23:43; Philippians 1:23)
 - d. When He returns, those in Paradise with Christ will return with Him and be reunited with their resurrected bodies, and living saints will be raptured and have their bodies changed into their spiritual bodies (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18)
 - e. At the end of time, God will re-create this present world (“new heavens and new earth”) where saints will live eternally with Jesus (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1): NOTE: though “heaven” is singular in Revelation 21:1 it is plural in 2 Peter 3:13 and likely refers to the universe, not God’s abode
 - f. So, it’s not technical correct to say that believers go to heaven and unbelievers go to Hell for all eternity. Rather, believers go to be with Jesus and will live with Him eternally first in Paradise and then on a new Earth, while unbelievers spend eternity in the Lake of Fire
- 5. So, what determines where someone goes after death?
 - a. The Bible declares that every person is a sinner and that no one is righteous on their own (Romans 3:10; 23): **“as it is written, “THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”**
 - b. God is righteous and therefore must judge sin (Ezekiel 33:11): **“Say to them, ‘As I live!’ declares the Lord GOD, ‘I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?’”**
 - 1) God does not enjoy judging sin or sending anyone to Hell or the Lake of Fire
 - 2) He judges because He is righteous (does what is right)

- 3) Doing what is right means that He judges sin because otherwise no one would ever turn away from evil and ALL would die in their sin
- 4) So, He judges sin so that some might turn from their sin to Him and live

Dad correcting my rebellion—he didn't take any pleasure in it. He did it so I would turn from my rebellion

- c. But, God is also merciful and therefore He has provided a way to forgive sin and pay the penalty for that sin at His own cost:
 - 1) Romans 6:23: **"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."**
 - 2) Romans 3:24: **"being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;"**
 - d. Those that accept the free gift receive mercy, forgiveness and eternal life with God, while those that reject the free gift must face the penalty of an eternity in the Lake of Fire (John 3:36): **"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."**
6. So, to answer our question, How can a loving God send someone to Hell (lit. eternal punishment)?
- a. By nature every man, woman and child is a sinner who rebels against God and His righteous standards
 - b. Because God is righteous, He must judge that sin
 - c. But, because He is also loving, He not only disciplines us to lead us to repentance, but He also made a way for us to be saved from judgment through the Gospel and offers this salvation as a free gift of His grace
 - d. This is why it's so important to turn any discussion of Hell or eternal punishment into a discussion about the love, mercy and grace of God and the Gospel.

C. Knowing How to Respond

S. Hell is just imaginary and doesn't exist.

A. Do you believe heaven exists? If so, why not Hell? The Bible talks about both.

Q. Why would God create Hell?

A. The Bible says that God created Hell for Satan and his demons (Matthew 25:41). Unfortunately, because mankind followed Satan into sin, we face the same eternal consequences he does unless we turn from our sin and accept God's gift of forgiveness and eternal life in Jesus.

Q. How can a loving God condemn anyone to Hell?

A. Let me ask you a question. If someone breaks the law and is guilty of a crime, should he face a penalty? For instance, if a drunk driver kills someone, I think we can agree that he should go to prison, right? Well, what if the judge lets him off the hook and doesn't send him to prison? Would you consider that the right thing to do? Would he be a righteous judge? It's no different with God. The Bible says that we are all sinners meaning that we all break God's laws, and He has to judge that sin because He is righteous. He can't just let us off the hook because that wouldn't be right. You

know what, though? The Bible says that God doesn't take pleasure in judging sin (Ezekiel 33:11), but does it to get us to turn from our sin back to Him. If He didn't judge sin, we wouldn't take it seriously and we would never understand or know how serious it is, and would just keep sinning. So, He does it because He loves us and wants us to return to Him. Do you want to know something else? God offers forgiveness for our sin so that we can avoid the penalty.

- S. The Bible never says that people go to Hell for eternity. It teaches that the soul of the wicked is destroyed.
- A. If it's true that the soul of the wicked gets destroyed after death, rather than spending eternity in the Lake of Fire, how do you explain Jesus's words in Matthew 25:46: **"These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."** If we take this verse at face value it says that some will go on into eternal life with Jesus but others will face eternal punishment. If their soul is destroyed, the punishment cannot be eternal because it ends. Also, what about John's words in Revelation 14:11? He stated that the torment will last forever and ever and there will be no rest from it day or night. This is also the case when Jesus described the Lake of Fire in Matthew 13:42 He says it will be a place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. These are clearly descriptions of ongoing torment. Even Jude describes it as **"the punishment of eternal fire"** (Jude 1:7) not destruction by eternal fire.