

Question

How can a God of love send anyone to hell?

Answer

The first thing we must understand is that hell is final judgment. It is the final curtain call in God's plan for his creation. It is his last and final act of justice that brings human history to a close. This final judgment is called "the second death" (Revelation 20:14). Remember Adam and Eve? God said to them, "The day you eat of it you shall die." Read the account in Genesis 3 and you will see what this "death" looked like. Their relationship with God died: they became spiritually dead. Death entered into all of creation and they were banished from God's presence. Physical death would come later.

Everybody descendant from Adam is born spiritually dead. We are dead in our sins (Ephesians 2:1). This is followed by physical death. The second death is judgment in hell. The second death will not occur until the end of the age.

We must understand that love and justice cannot be separated. How could a loving God allow the multitude of horrendous acts that have occurred on this planet go unpunished? The universal cry of the human heart that has existed in every corner of this earth, and for all time, is the cry for justice. It is part of our very being. How then could we not expect God to be just?

Abraham cried out to God as God was about to bring judgment upon the city of Sodom, "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right" (Genesis 18:25)? If you will read the remainder of the account you will find that an answer was given to Abraham that fully satisfied him. God is Just and his justice is absolutely perfect.

How would we choose to mete out justice? Perhaps we would start with the most wicked human beings of history. There have been many world leaders such as emperors, potentates, kings and dictators who have been responsible for the untold suffering and death of millions of people. Perhaps our justice should be focused on them.

Maybe we should lower the bar of justice so as not to leave out the multitude of mass murderers who have committed unspeakable acts. Although they have not been involved in political intrigue, they have exacted their own brand of murderous intrigue on their helpless victims. Let them face our judgment.

Why not move the bar a little lower to include people who have robbed and maimed, raped and pillaged innocent victims? Then we might want also to move the standard of justice to include ordinary criminals, abusers, neglectors and all the other social vandals of humanity. Soon, the question will have to arise, "Where will we draw the line?"

The answer is given in the Bible: “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). God’s justice demands that all are under condemnation. The very fact we all die is due to God’s judgment on sin. So, we actually live with God’s judgment everyday because all die. The very fact that death exists in our world should serve as a reminder that judgment on sin is a reality.

I know the answer to questions pertaining to love and justice can open the door to more questions, but let this answer at least begin to ease your mind that the “Judge of all the earth” will do right. To help you arrive at this place of trust, here’s another question to ponder: “Why should God bother to save anyone at all?” If God saved just one person per century he could still be lauded as being loving and merciful.

But, the fact is, God takes no pleasure in the death of anyone and wants all people to come to salvation. (see 2 Peter 3:9). God himself has paved the way to solving this problem by sending his Son to pay the just price for all people. Now the question becomes, who will bow to God’s will? Much more could be said on this topic. Let me end by quoting from two esteemed Christian writers.

*The center of salvation is the cross of Jesus. And the reason it is so easy to obtain salvation is because it cost so much. The cross is the point where God and sinful man merge with a crash and the way of life is opened – but the crash is on the heart of God.*³

*There will be only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, “Thy will be done,” and those to whom God says, “Thy will be done.”*⁴

³ Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited: 1935), 97.

⁴ C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: Collier Books: 1946), 72.