

**The Leap of Doubt: Examining Seven Toughest Objections to God and Christianity**  
**Objection 5: “How could a good God send people to hell?”**  
**October 18, 2009 by Kevin Haah**



**I. Introduction**

Welcome to New City Church!

We are on a middle of a series called The Leap of Doubt; it's a series on 7 toughest questions and objections people have about God and Christianity.

Today's question is this: How could a good God send people to hell? If God is good and loving, he should forgive everyone or at least give them proportional punishment—maybe 20 years in hell with a possibility of parole in 10 years? How can the God of love eternally send people to hell?

So, a lot of people say they believe in the God of love but say that they reject the God of the Bible because he punishes and judges people and sends people to hell.

How do we respond to this?

In order to understand hell, (1) we have to understand God's holiness and justice, and (2) we have understand our freedom. And in order to understand God's love, we have to understand hell.

Note: Q&A at the end.

**II. First, in order to understand hell, you have to understand God's holiness and justice.**

In Isaiah 6:3, prophet Isaiah had a vision of the temple of God, not the earthly temple of but the heavenly temple. There were angels, in verse 3: **“And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”** In Leviticus 19:2 says: **“Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.”** There are so many passages in the Bible that describe God as holy.

Do you know what the word “holy” means? “Holy” means set apart, pure, and without any sin or evil. He is completely good, completely separated from evil.

The Bible also tells us that God is just. Romans 2:6-11 says:

**6God "will give to each person according to what he has done." [a] 7To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.**

8But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. 9There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; 10but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. 11For God does not show favoritism.

This passage tells us that under God's justice, we get what we deserve. If you do good, you get eternal life and if you follow evil, there is wrath and anger. It does not matter what background you came from. God is not going to show favoritism. I think the Bible is saying that "justice" is impartial; someday, there will be a judgment day of all of our actions; there is a standard; and there are consequences: reward or punishment. That's what justice is: impartial adjudications of all of our actions according to a standard resulting reward or punishment.

I think God's holiness and justice are intricately connected. God's presence is the ultimate prize. Being with God is the greatest reward. And because God is good, perfect, and holy, his justice functions as a gatekeeper to his holiness. If you are good, perfect, and holy, you will be allowed into his presence, and if you are not, you will be separated from his presence. That's the measure of ultimate justice. Are we going to be with God or are we going to be separated from God?

The Bible describes the presence of God—being with God—as eternal life, everlasting life, glorious life, new heaven and new earth, the Kingdom of God, or heaven. Kingdom of God or Heaven is the place where God is the King, and we worship his glory and majesty. There is no pain, no tears, no violence, no hatred, but it is overflowing with love, joy, peace, and beauty. It is like that because God is there. The radiance of His glory is indescribable.

And the Bible describes the place of separation from God as hell. In Greek, it is this word, gehenna, which was a valley where the city dump was located. It was a place where there was fire, smoke, and worms lived. Jesus used all kinds of metaphors to describe hell--this spiritual gehenna, a garbage dump, where there is fire that is never quenched, where there is gnashing and weeping, lake of fire, a place of torment, death, darkness, perishing, destruction. The bottom line is this: hell is a pretty bad place. It is worse than anything we can imagine.

I am not going to try to give you a detailed picture of hell. The Bible just does not give us a clear picture. On the one hand, it describes it as a lake of fire, and on the other hand, it describes it as darkness. On the one hand, it describes it as a place where fire is never quenched, and on the other hand, it is described as a place of death and destruction. I don't think it was the

intent of God to tell us exactly what hell is like but that it is worse than anything you can imagine.

He wants us to know that he is holy and just. There are real consequences to our sins. It is called separation from God. Bible tells us that sin separates us from the presence of God, which is the source of all joy, all love, all wisdom, all good things. And we were created to be in the presence of God. If we are in his presence, we will thrive, we will flourish, and we will experience joy, peace, love etc. We are separated from his presence totally, that would be hell. Because the presence of God is sooo awesome, hell, the total lost of his presence, is so bad.

Right now, we experience what theologians call common grace. Matthew 5:44 says: **“he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”** Even though our sins have separated us from God, we do experience a lot of good, whether or not we are in his presence. We see beauty, we see love, we see joy; but we also see hate, destruction, greed, darkness. Right now, we are not technically in hell yet because we do experience God’s common grace. However, the Bible tells us that there will be a day of judgment.

When Paul was talking to the Greek philosophers in Athens, he said, in Acts 17:30-31:

**“In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.”**

This is sometimes called the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment is revealed. It is all over the Bible. There are consequences to your action. God is holy and just and he has set a day when he will judge everyone according to his righteous justice. I know this is kind of scary to some of you, but it totally makes sense. We see evil, injustice, abuse, torture, hate, greed, selfishness, and all kinds of violence. God is saying that all who do injustice and evil must face justice. They must be punished. God is saying all who sin must pay the consequences of their sins.

Some of you have a problem with the idea of judgment. But, if you experienced injustice, if you were violated against, if you were raped and tortured, if your family member was murdered, then you hold on dearly to the God of justice. God said, **“vengeance is mine. I will repay.”** Then, God told us to forgive and love our enemies. It’s interesting that the only way we would love our enemies is if we believed in the God of justice.

The biggest reward is to be in the presence of God, who is the source of all joy, love, beauty. And so, the biggest punishment is to be separated from the presence of God forever, and that is hell.

### **III. In order to understand hell, you have to understand our freedom.**

The Bible tells us that we were created in the image of God. We were created to have fellowship with God, to live in the presence of God, to have a relationship with God, and enjoy the love, joy and peace that come from His presence.

However, being created in his image also means we were created as free beings. You can't have a love relationship with someone unless they have the freedom to not have that relationship with you. If you trap them in your house, and force them to love you, that's not love. Because God wanted to have a love relationship with us, he created free beings. We are not moral puppets. We have real freedom. We have the freedom to be in his presence or the leave his presence and go our separate way.

So, in Romans 1:24, it says, God **“gave them up to their desires.”** All God does in the end with people is to give them what they most want, including freedom from Himself. C.S. Lewis said, “hell is the great monument to human freedom.” So, God allows us to leave His presence, which is to enter hell, but he does not want us to leave his presence. However, if we sin, we leave his presence and become separate.

1 Peter 3:9 says: **“[God] is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”** God does not want anyone to go to hell. So, in essence, God does not send us to hell, we choose to go to hell. If anyone goes to hell, then, this is against God's will. It is simply wrong to say that God is somehow taking delight in people's pain. Ezekiel 18:23 says clearly: **“I take no delight in the destruction of the wicked.”**

I think in some ways, hell is like an alcoholic who thinks he will be happier with his bottle than with his family. He is in torment for his choice. He is miserable. But, he continues to choose the bottle over his family, and his torment and misery is of his own choosing. Many of you know what addiction looks like.

We are also addicted to selfishness, and we will not accept God, but live our own self-addicted lives. We miss out on what life was really about. And we end up in gehenna—hell. A place of misery. And the trajectory of our little misery we experience now going on for eternity is what hell is about.

#### IV. In order to understand God's love, we have to understand the reality of hell

It's a pretty miserable state that human kind is in. We have all walked away from God. We have been separated from God. Romans 3:10-12:

10As it is written:

"There is no one righteous, not even one;

11there is no one who understands,  
no one who seeks God.

12All have turned away,  
they have together become worthless;  
there is no one who does good,  
not even one."

All of us have walked away from God, and that is the highway to hell. You might say, I am not so bad, but take your sins and multiply that by eternity, and it becomes hell. All joy, love, beauty will be sucked out completely.

It's interesting that according to a 2003 research, 64% of Americans expect to go to heaven when they die, but less than 1% think they might go to hell. It's interesting that most people believe in hell but they expect to go there. The Bible says that more of us are in danger of hell than you think. Essentially, hell has already started in our hearts, in our lives already when we separate ourselves from God. If you choose to that, you will face the consequences of your decision for the rest of eternity.

Now, is the solution to work ourselves out of our sins? Is it to start obeying God and do good and earn our salvation from hell? No, the Bible tells us that we have all sinned and fell short of the glory of God.

We are the addict that is trapped in our sins, whether it be drugs or selfishness. We are trapped in our own hell and we will end up in hell if we are not rescued, if we are not saved.

But, the Bible tells us that God loves us. In John 3:16: Jesus said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." God decided to do something about it. So, he sent his son Jesus, to come and die on the cross for our sins. Going on to verse 17: "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

2 Corinthians 5:21: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

You can only understand the depth of God’s love for us when we realize the reality of hell.

Martin Llyod-Jones:

If someone told you that they were at your house and someone came by and presented a bill; so, they paid it. You would not know how to respond until you found out how much he paid. If it is just a postage due, you say thanks. If it was the IRS for the last 20 years of back taxes, you have a completely a different response. You might fall on his feet and kiss his feet. You don’t know how much God loves you until you believe in hell. What he did to save you. What he experienced for you. He descended into hell. My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? The greater the closeness, the greater the loss. He experience agony, isolation, infinitely greater. He took it on himself. Why? He loves you. Unless you believe in hell, you’ll never know how much he cares.

Ironically, by getting rid of hell, they are trying to make God more loving, but they have made a God who cares, but not love in a powerful way that transforms me. Remember, there is a problem in our heart that is addicted. The only way the power is going to come to overcome that addiction is to experience the fullness of his love.