

QUANTOCK MINISTRIES

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*A Bible teaching and preaching ministry
for the Christian community*

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HOW CAN A LOVING GOD SEND PEOPLE TO HELL?

I am sure most Christians have had this question, or a variation of it, thrown at them at some time in their experience. Our very first reaction should be to find out the motivation behind the question. If the idea is just to attack the whole Christian position, then the answer should be short and to the point; we are not prepared to discuss issues like this with those who not only do not believe in God but do not want to believe in Him (Matthew 7 v 6 and 10 v 14). The very form of the question, seeking to juxtapose God's love and people being sent to hell, can appear to be deliberately provocative. No one has the right to put God in the dock and demand that He explains Himself.

If, alternatively, the questioner is earnestly trying to understand the mind of God then they must be prepared to allow us to avoid a simplistic response. To know the mind of the Almighty means we must first accept the great gulf between His viewpoint and ours (Isaiah 40 v 10 – 31 and Job 11 v 7 – 9). As evangelicals, in the light of scriptures such as these we must state firmly that we seek to bridge that gulf by accepting by faith that the Bible is God's Word – the true and complete revelation to us of His mind and heart. That means we simply believe exactly what we read there. Therefore, on this issue we understand seven basic facts that help us deal with this question.

1. He is an everlasting (eternal) God – Psalm 90 v 2, Isaiah 40 v 28

God, as a spirit (John 4 v 24), is beyond space and time, living in a dimension without beginning and ending. As He created us human beings as His companions, we too have an immortal spirit. We totally reject any notion that we are evolved animals, as we are made in God's image (Genesis 1 v 26) and have an eternal destiny (Ecclesiastes 3 v 11). Therefore, that destiny is of vital interest to us.

2. He is a loving God – John 3 v 16, Isaiah 47 v 4, Galatians 4 v 4 - 5

God expresses His love by having redemption as a defining characteristic – He is God the Redeemer. His desire to restore everything that has been broken and spoilt by our disobedience (original sin and personal sin) and by Satan's schemes (John 8 v 44) is paramount in world history (e.g., Matthew 11 v 28, Acts 3 v 19 – 21, 2 Peter 3 v 9, Revelation 21 v 5).

3. He is a Father God – Matthew 6 v 9, Ephesians 3 v 14 – 15

God did not create us to be puppets or clones. His design of human nature is replicated in the creation of all human beings by parents – the offspring is a self-contained being with their own personality, will and destiny. He wanted us for companionship on the basis that that is what we personally desire, and not because we are pre-programmed to do so automatically, having no alternative. Because of this, God, as Father, made Himself vulnerable in the same way as human parents do when they create a child. Just as children grow up to exercise their own freedom, often to the sadness or joy of their parents, so by giving us a free will God also knows sadness and joy in His relationship with each of us. Even in our maturity, God as Father has ensured we each retain a sense of responsibility, leading to accountability (Romans 3 v 19 and 14 v 10 – 12).

4. He is a just God – Genesis 18 v 25

Human parents try, but often fail, to be completely fair and just in their dealings with their own children. God's perfect justice is based on: a) His offer of forgiveness to everyone in each of the dispensations in history, and b) His total foreknowledge, as His eternal being transcends any limits of time. By His foreknowledge He knows exactly the response each person will make, and those throughout history who have never heard of God's offer of grace will be judged according to their response to the God-given light of their own conscience (Romans 2 v 14 – 15).

5. He is a holy (perfect) God – 1 Peter 1 v 15 - 16

God embodies within Himself the perfection that is the hallmark of everything He has made, including the whole universe. The intervention of Satan and the fall into sin (disobedience) of humanity, with the subsequent Curse, have spoilt that state of perfection (Romans 8 v 19 – 22). God's intended purpose for the eternal future of His creation is to restore that perfection (Revelation 21 v 27) and for all His creatures to share that restoration. This is the central purpose of redemption – restoring that which has been broken. The chance of redemption is universally offered but it is clear it can only apply to those who willingly accept that offer. The sad truth is that legions of fallen angels refused to accept the offer of redemption, plus multitudes of unwilling humans.

6. He is an honest God – Luke 16 v 22 – 31.

God would deny his design of human nature if He were to subvert the freedom of choice He has endowed it with. He would deny His own nature if He were not totally honest about the consequences of the choices that humans make. There is no possibility of ambivalence in the character of the God of the Bible.

7. He is a long-suffering God – 2 Peter 3 v 9b & 15a.

John Newton's hymn expresses it well: "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound". God's patience is immense – the Old Testament experience of Israel shows how many times He forgave them and gave them a new opportunity to return to their proper relationship with Him. In John 13 Judas had only been tempted to betray Jesus when the meal started (v2), and because of His foreknowledge the Lord gave yet another clear warning during the meal that someone would do it (v21 and 26a). But as the Lord extended his hand Judas had to physically take the bread, and it was not until he had done so that Satan entered into him (v27) – an eleventh-hour chance of repentance if ever there was one.

The sincere enquirer about God's ultimate right to send unrepentant humans to hell (Revelation 20 v 11 – 15) would do well to consider two questions:

- a) If as a parent your own much-loved child grows into adulthood and then commits a proven murder where would you stand on the legal system of justice taking its due course?
- b) What, then, would be your reaction if it were your much-loved child who had been murdered by a legally convicted third party, and justice was not taking its due course?

Each human being has just one life, and that life is the most precious thing anyone could ever receive. Everyone owes the Creator, who gave that life in the first place, total loyalty and thankfulness. The greatest crime any human can commit is to resist the Creator's claims, treat Him with utter contempt, and then completely ignore His gracious offer of forgiveness. That is, in effect, murdering the life the heavenly Father has given us and justice must then take its proper legal course.