

Theological Equipping Class

If God is loving, how can he send people to hell?

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A defeater belief?

- if A is true, then B can't be true: if hell is real, then God can't be loving.

Deficient Responses:

Deny God: atheism or agnosticism

Deny hell: universalism or annihilationism

Hell is a place of eternal conscious punishment for the wicked. (Grudem)

Underlying assumptions that give this question more emotional weight:

- a loving God would never send people to hell because hell is incompatible with the attribute of love
- a loving God necessarily loves all people in the exact same way
- God loves people more than anything else
- people don't deserve hell or hell is a bit of an overreaction

the overwhelming majority of our discomfort is owing to a failure to believe some fundamental truth about God or ourselves.

Defending three truths

1. God sends people to hell.
2. Hell is the proper judgment against sin.
3. God is loving and good.

God sends people to hell.

- *God doesn't send anyone to hell, we send ourselves?*
- CS Lewis
 - "It's not a question of God "sending" us to hell. In each of us there is something growing up which will of itself be hell unless it is nipped in the bud."
 - "There are 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*.'
- A hint of truth
- Bigger problems with this position
 - *The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and **throw them into the fiery furnace**. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 13:41–42)*
 - *And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was **thrown into** the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:15)*

Hell is the proper judgment against sin.

- Mankind deserves hell.
 - *as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known." "There is no fear of God before their eyes." (Romans 3:10–18)*
 - *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (Ephesians 2:1–3)*

- Is eternal conscious punishment a fitting penalty or is it cruel and unusual?
 - How can a finite sin receive an infinite punishment?
 - Is sin merely temporal?
 - How do we judge the severity of a crime?
 - What punishment could ever suffice for an infinite offense against an infinitely good and holy God?
 - Two options.
 - If hell is that horrific then sin must be equally horrific.
 - If hell is that bad, then God is harsh and cruel.
 - *But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. (Romans 2:5)*
 - "It is really a mercy to mankind that God in Scripture is so explicit about hell." J.I. Packer

God is loving and good.

- We always have to define biblical terms in biblical ways.
- What is love?

- God's love is discriminatory & particular.
 - *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* by D.A. Carson
 - Inter-trinitarian love
 - God's common love for all humanity
 - *But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matthew 5:44–45)*
 - Love for the elect
 - *As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."* (Romans 9:13)
 - Why God's electing love is good news
- An emphasis on the love of God must not be used to deemphasize His holiness or justice.
 - *The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."* (Exodus 34:6–7)
- Thought experiment: imagine that we find the doctrine of hell simply incompatible with love.
 - Result?

