



WHY WOULD A LOVING GOD CREATE A PLACE LIKE HELL?

The idea anything as vile and repulsive as Hell could come from a good and loving God is a stumbling block for many people. In fact, claims related to Hell are enough for some to reject God altogether. How could a supposedly good God create such a place?

The answer here is directly connected to the nature of God. The God of the Bible is the perfect balance of *mercy* and *justice*. He is described as loving, gracious and merciful. At the same time, however, He is described as holy and just, hating sin and punishing sinners. While we might prefer to focus only on the *merciful* aspects of God's nature, doing so would completely ignore God's *just* nature.

Mercy Requires Justice.

Do you think that people who commit crimes and do evil things ought to be punished? If a judge pardons an unrepentant rapist without warrant, we don't typically see this as an act of love, particularly when we consider the rights of the victim (and the safety of potential future victims). Mercy without justice is reckless, meaningless and dangerous. True love cares enough to punish wrongdoing. For this reason, a God of love must also be a God of justice, recognizing, separating and punishing wrongdoers, and not allowing injustice to go unpunished. Hell is the place where God's loving justice is realized and executed.

Freedom Requires Consequence

True love cannot be coerced. Humans must have freedom in order to love, and this includes the freedom to reject God altogether. Those who do not want to love God must be allowed to reject Him without coercion. Those who don't want to be in God's presence must be allowed to separate themselves from Him if their "free will" is to be respected. God's love requires the provision of human freedom, and human "free will" necessitates a consequence. A loving God offers a path to *relationship* but the possibility of *judgment* should we refuse this relationship. One without the other is meaningless. Hell is the place where humans who freely reject God experience the consequences of their choice.

Contrary to usual misconceptions, Hell is never described in the Bible as a place of active *torture* at the hands of God or His agents, but rather as a state of *torment*, a place of separation from God, coming as the result of a choice on the part of the person who finds himself/herself there. There is a difference between *torture* and *torment*. I can be *continually tormented* over a bad decision I made in the past, without being *actively tortured* by anyone.

Victory Requires Punishment

All of us struggle to understand why evil exists in the world. If there is an all-powerful and all-loving God, why doesn't He conquer and punish evil? Well, He will eventually be victorious. God has provided a mechanism through which evil will be permanently conquered and punished in the next life. Hell is the place where an all-loving and all-powerful God will ultimately defeat and punish evil.

The paradox of God's love and justice necessitates the existence of Hell. God's love does not compel Him to eliminate the necessary punishment and consequence for sin, but instead compels

Him to offer us a way to avoid this consequence altogether. By offering forgiveness through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross (who took our punishment), God demonstrated His love for us. The loving God who created a place like Hell has provided us with a way to avoid it.

The question is not “Why would a loving God send people to Hell?” but rather: “Why would anyone choose Hell over a loving God?”

Adapted from J. Wallace's Cold Case Christianity