The BIG QUESTIONS about Christianity
How can God be good and send people to Hell?
11-28-10
Scripture Reading – Matthew 25:31-46

How can God be good and send people to Hell? Before we try and answer that question, I want to take a few minutes to lay a foundation by looking at three truths that pertain to it, all of which are clearly taught in the Bible

Three foundational truths that the Bible CLEARLY teaches

1) <u>God is good</u>
   a. **Psalms 25:8 (ESV)**
      [8] Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.
   b. **Psalms 34:8 (ESV)**
      [8] Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!
   c. **Psalms 86:5 (ESV)**
      [5] For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.
   d. **Psalms 119:68 (ESV)**
      [68] You are good and do good; teach me your statutes.
   e. **Psalms 136:1 (ESV)**
      [1] Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

2) <u>God sends people to Hell</u>

   a. **Matthew 25:31-46 (ESV)**
      31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, *and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats*. 33 And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world…*41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for*

*the devil and his angels…*46 *And these will go away into eternal punishment,* but the righteous into eternal life."

b. **Matthew 10:28 (ESV)**
28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. *Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*

3) <u>Whatever Hell is, *it is AWFUL,* and you don't want to go there</u>

a. Theologians disagree on exactly what Hell is because they disagree on how literally to take the Biblical language used to describe it.
    i. The Bible describes it as an eternal fire where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched and where people are in constant anguish in the flame.

b. Whatever the case may (literal of figurative), it is clear that the Biblical authors used *the most graphic and terrible language they could think of* to describe it. *Thus, whatever Hell is, it is awful and you don't want to go there.*

    i. Pastor and author, John Piper said he has *never seen nor heard a depiction of Hell that is overdone*, and he doesn't think it is possible to produce one. In other words, he thinks it is *IMPOSSIBLE to overstate the horror of Hell.* I think he's right.

c. Just listen to how the Bible describes it, and note as we go that most of these descriptions come from Jesus himself.

    i. Hell is to be feared more than being murdered or maimed
        1. **Matthew 10:28 (ESV)**
        28 And *do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.* Rather fear him

who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

2. **Mark 9:43-48 (ESV)**
   43 And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. *It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell*, *to the unquenchable fire.* 44 45 And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. *It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell*. 46 47 And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. *It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell*, *48* '*where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.*'

ii. Hell is torturous

1. **Matthew 8:12 (ESV)**
   [12] while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the *outer darkness*. In that place there will be *weeping and gnashing of teeth*."
2. **Matthew 13:42 (ESV)**
   [42] and throw them into the *fiery furnace*. In that place there will be *weeping and gnashing of teeth*.
3. **Matthew 24:51 (ESV)**
   [51] …*cut him in pieces* and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be *weeping and gnashing of teeth*.
4. **2 Thessalonians 1:9 (ESV)**
   9 They will *suffer the punishment* of eternal destruction,…
5. **Revelation 14:10-11 (ESV)**
   [10] …he will be *tormented* with fire and sulfur…[11] And the smoke of their *torment* goes up forever and ever, and they have *no rest, day or night*…
6. **Luke 16:23-24 (ESV)**
   23 and in Hades, *being in torment*, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. 24 And he called

out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, *for I am in anguish* in this flame.'

iii. Hell is eternal

1. **Matthew 25:41-46 (ESV)**
   41 …'Depart from me, you cursed, into *the eternal fire* prepared for the devil and his angels…46 And these will go away into *eternal punishment*, but the righteous into *eternal life.*"
2. **2 Thessalonians 1:9 (ESV)**
   [9] They will suffer the punishment of *eternal destruction*, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,
3. **Revelation 14:11 (ESV)**
   [11] And the smoke of their torment goes up *forever and ever*,…

iv. Worst of all, Hell is eternal separation from *the goodness of God,* and thus us it is the exact opposite of Heaven

1. Note that I said eternal separation for the *goodness of God* not eternal separation from the *presence of God.* The Bible teaches throughout that God is omnipresent and Rev 14:10 makes it clear that Hell is no exception.
   a. **Revelation 14:10 (ESV)**
      [10] he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels *and in the presence of the Lamb.*

2. But in another sense the Bible teaches that God *will not be present* in Hell.

a. **Matthew 25:41 (ESV)**
[41] "…'*Depart from me,* you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.
b. **2 Thessalonians 1:9 (ESV)**
[9] They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, *away from the presence of the Lord* and from the glory of his might,
c. So though in one sense God *will be present in Hell* (for the purpose of judgment), in another sense He won't be, and I think that sense is for the purpose of blessing and relationship.

3. Thus Hell is the exact opposite of Heaven
   a. **Matthew 25:46 (ESV)**
   [46] And these will go away into *eternal punishment*, but the righteous into *eternal life*."

Recapping the three foundational truths…
1) God is good
2) God send people to hell
3) Whatever Hell is, *it is AWFUL*, and you don't want to go there

So how can God be good and send people to Hell?

When we think about God being good we think primarily about His compassion, mercy, grace, and forgiveness. That's why we're so troubled by Hell. What we tend to forget is that part of what makes God good is His holiness, righteousness, and justice as well.

1) <u>Part of what makes God good is His holiness, righteousness, and justice</u>
   a. God is holy
      i. **Isaiah 6:3 (ESV)**
      [3] And one called to another and said: "*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts*; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

ii. **1 John 1:5 (ESV)**
[5] …God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

iii. Because God is holy, He hates sin

iv. Because God is holy, He and sin don't mix
    1. Israel and Mount Sinai, High Priest and Most Holy Place, Uzzah and the Ark

v. Because God is holy, He is not about to allow unredeemed sinners into Heaven
    1. **Revelation 21:8 (ESV)**
    [8] But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."
    2. **Revelation 21:27 (ESV)**
    [27] But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.
    3. **Revelation 22:14-15 (ESV)**
    [14] Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. [15] Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

b. God is righteous and just
    i. **Psalms 145:17 (ESV)**
    [17] The Lord is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works.
    ii. **Psalms 111:7 (ESV)**
    [7] The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy;
    iii. Because God is righteous and just He cannot allow our sins to go unpunished. He said from the beginning of the Bible and throughout that

the wages of sin is death. If he were to cease to execute the punishment He clearly laid out then He would cease to be righteous and just. And if He ceased to be righteous and just then He would cease to be good. Therefore, although He does not wish to see anyone perish but everyone come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9), He has no choice but to send those who don't turn to Him to Hell. His holiness, righteousness, and justice demands it.

Most people get this, but *what we question is whether or not Hell is a fair punishment for our sins,* which brings me to the next point.

2) <u>Hell is the ultimate reflection of the seriousness of our sin</u>

   a. One way to look at Hell would be that God isn't good. Another way to look at Hell would be *that we aren't.*

   b. I had this realization a few years ago and it totally transformed my view of both Hell and sin.

   c. *If God is good, and righteous, and just, as the Bible teaches throughout, and if Hell is as real, and eternal, and terrible as it seems to be, then our sin must be WAY WORSE than we think.*

   d. I think Hell is the ultimate proof that we are TOTALLY blind to the seriousness of our sin.

   e. Though no illustration can even come close to describing the seriousness of our sin, but here are few Biblical ones that have helped me.
      i. Rebellious child
      ii. Adulterous wife
      iii. Ungrateful pot

   f. Thus Hell is not challenge to the goodness of God. Hell is challenge to our screwed up view of our sin.

3) <u>Hell is the ultimate warning to turn from our sin and to turn to God</u>

a. The OT is full of promises of blessing for following God and warnings of curse for not following God
    i. Blessings – Abundant crops, fertility, peace, power, and prosperity
    ii. Curses – Famine, drought, sickness, war, and exile

b. The NT is full of the same only the stakes are raised
    i. Blessings – Heaven
    ii. Curse – Hell

c. God's purpose for both blessings and curses is to motivate us to turn to Him, but for some reason He seems to spend a lot more time warning us of curses than promising us blessings.
    i. Lev 26 and Dt 28
    ii. Jeremiah
    iii. Mt 5-7
    iv. Jesus

d. If God's primary motivational tool is to warn us of curses, and Hell is the ultimate curse that He wants to warn us of, *how can we completely leave it out of our Gospel presentations* as many do today?

It is both unbiblical and unloving not to warn people about Hell, but we must do more than that if we want them to turn toward God…

4) <u>Hell is the ultimate reminder of just how much God loves us</u>

If any of you have ever doubted God's love for you, *even for a second*, please listen to what I'm about to tell you.

a. **John 3:16 (NIV)**
[16] "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.

    i. Even from a purely human perspective this is a BIG DEAL.

1. **Romans 5:7 (NIV)**
   [7] *Very rarely* will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone *might possibly* dare to die.

ii. It becomes an EVEN BIGGER DEAL when you realize who it was done for.
   1. **Romans 5:8 (NIV)**
      [8] But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: *While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

iii. It becomes EVEN BIGGER DEAL STILL when you realize who it was who did it.

   1. **Philippians 2:5-8 (ESV)**
      [5] Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, [8] he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross._

iv. And it becomes AN ENORMOUS DEAL when you realize what exactly was done.

   1. **Isaiah 53:5-6 (NIV)**
      [5] But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. [6] We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

v. Why was Jesus in such anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before He went to the cross? Why did He cry out on the cross “My God,

my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46) What does it mean that Jesus was “crushed for our iniquities” that “the punishment that brought us peace was upon him” and that “the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all”? 1 John tells us.

1. **1 John 4:10 (ESV)**
   10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but *that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*_
2. Propitiation = Wrath absorber or appeaser

vi. Over the course of His 33 short years on earth, and especially during his final three hours on the cross, Jesus took *eternity in Hell* for all who will ever trust in Him.

We must resist the temptation to reject, ignore, or twist the doctrine of Hell.

Here’s why…

- The Bible clearly teaches it
- It helps us understand the holiness, righteousness, and justice of God as well as the seriousness of our sin against Him
- It is the ultimate warning to turn form our sin and to turn to God
- It is the ultimate reminder of just how much God loves us