



# How Could A Loving God Condemn Anyone To Hell?

DISCOVERING GOD'S WORD BIBLE STUDY SERIES

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How could a loving God condemn anyone to Hell? This question is commonly considered by those who are skeptics of God – as well as by the devoutly religious and the professing “Christian.” Many seem to have a great degree of difficulty reconciling what the Bible teaches about God’s love, grace, and mercy – and what it teaches about God’s wrath and vengeance. For some, this has even led them to the belief that God will simply not condemn anyone to Hell (or that He will only condemn a very few to eternal punishment in Hell). But, what does the Bible say in response to this question? Let’s consider.

## **God Is A Loving God**

Let me begin by acknowledging the fact that God absolutely is a loving God. As you read the Scriptures, there can be no question about God’s characteristic of love. In fact, every page of the Bible that you turn reveals more about God’s love for mankind!

In the context of teaching about the need to demonstrate brotherly love among Christian brothers and sisters, John writes, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:7-11). “God is love.” His actions are motivated by this characteristic – so much so that we must have this characteristic in us if we want to please Him!

Particularly, God has demonstrated this love toward us in giving His one and only Son to be the sacrifice for the sins of the world! John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” So, God did not desire for us to perish as the result of our sins. Now, He could have just left us to

experience the consequences of our sins – and He would have been completely fair for doing so. However, God went above and beyond this whenever He provided His one and only Son as the sacrifice so that we could be saved from our sins! Why did He do this? Because He knew the consequences of dying in sin and He did not want anyone to “perish” (spend eternity in Hell fire). Instead, He wanted everyone to be saved!

Romans 5:6-11 also demonstrates that Jesus Christ died for the “ungodly” (those who were living contrary to God’s ways) – when we could not save ourselves (“when we were still without strength”). Verse 8 says that God “demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Now, having the opportunity to be saved from the consequences of our sins through Jesus Christ, we can be saved from the wrath of God and be reconciled to Him!

Yes, God wants to save everyone and give everyone eternal life in Heaven (1 Timothy 2:4). He desires this so much that He has given His only Son to die the cruel death upon the cross! And, God desires all mankind to be saved so much that He is patiently enduring the wrongs that mankind continues to do to Him on a daily basis, giving everyone the opportunity to repent before He sends His Son to destroy the world and bring on the Day of Judgment (2 Peter 3:9-10).

### **God Is A Severe God**

God has done everything within His power to save mankind (outside of taking away our free will to choose between right and wrong for ourselves). I believe that we often put our focus in the wrong area. Instead of asking, “How could a loving God punish people for doing ‘X’?,” we should be asking, “How could people do ‘X’ against a loving God?”! You see, God has told us that He loves us – and He has warned us about His severity and the wrath that He will show toward those who fail to obey Him. How, then, is it God’s fault when we choose to disobey Him?

God is a severe God. He has told us that He is. Consider Romans 11:22: “Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.” God has shown His goodness to everyone. For instance, Titus 2:11 says that “the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.” However, it is our responsibility to “continue in His goodness.” We can choose to live in ways that are not pleasing to Him and be “cut off” – and experience His severity.

Specifically, God has warned us that His severity will manifest itself in the form of eternal punishment in Hell to those who do not obey His commandments. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 says that God will take vengeance in flaming fire upon those who “do not know God” and upon those “who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He says that these individuals will “be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” whenever Jesus returns.

In addition to this general statement of warning those who fail to obey the gospel of Jesus Christ, God has given very specific warnings about sin. Romans 6:23 says that the wages (what

we deserve) of sin (violating God's laws) is death – spiritual death. Particularly, Revelation 21:8 says that those who are cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and liars will have their “part” in the “lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” Other passages like 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and Galatians 5:19-21 demonstrate some specific sinful activity that will cause us to miss out on eternal life in Heaven.

### **God Will Fairly Punish His Enemies**

God is both a loving and a severe God. The Scriptures (even the New Testament) clearly demonstrate and warn that both are characteristics of God. But, how will this loving God decide who He will punish and who He will save? Will it be based on favoritism? Will He be biased toward a particular group of people?

Romans 2:5-6 gives us the answer. The passage teaches that God's judgment will be righteous (fair). Furthermore, it says that God “will render to each one according to His deeds.” God will evaluate each individual on the basis of what he/she did during his/her lifetime (compared to what He has instructed in His law) – and give back to each one accordingly. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

Then, take a moment to consider what Romans 2:7-11 goes on to teach concerning the righteous judgment of this loving God who will simply give back to each one according to his/her deeds: “eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness — indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God.”

Notice carefully (from this text) that the differing outcomes are not dependent upon God's actions (though we are all dependent upon the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for salvation). Instead, notice that the differing outcomes are dependent upon our choices – either to live lives seeking to do good and have eternal life or to live lives that are self-seeking and rebellious toward the ways of God. There is “no partiality” with God. He will simply render (give back) to each one according to his/her deeds.

Realize, then, that God has told us about these things ahead of His Judgment – and He has revealed the standard we will be judged by. He has told us that we will be judged by the things He has revealed in His word. Jesus said as much in John 12:48: “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him — the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.” Paul said that even the secrets of men would be judged by the gospel God revealed through Him (Romans 2:16). In the Judgment Day scene portrayed in Revelation 20:11-15, God reveals that all mankind will be “judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books” (the books containing the law of God).

Therefore, God has given us everything that we need to know in order to live our lives acceptable to Him. When we read the words of God (contained in the New Testament), we can understand what the will of the Lord is (see Ephesians 3:3-5 and Ephesians 5:17). 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says that God's word is able to completely equip us to do all the good things God wants us to be doing. Furthermore, 2 Peter 1:3 says that God (according to His divine power) has "given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness." That is, He has given us everything we need to know to be pleasing to Him and be given eternal life in Heaven! However, we must be diligent to study and apply His word so that we can know what His will is and live our lives accordingly!

So, God will fairly judge each one for how he/she has lived on this earth – and reward or punish each one accordingly. On that Day of Judgment, God will save those who have found forgiveness of their sins through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and obedience to the gospel of Christ. However, those who are found to be the enemies of God (those who have lived in sin and rebelled against the laws of God) will be punished with everlasting destruction, even though God loves them and *wants* to save them. God's righteous nature simply demands that He punish those who live their lives for unrighteousness!

## **Conclusion**

God wants to save all mankind (1 Timothy 2:4). He has demonstrated His love toward all mankind by sending Jesus Christ to die on the cross. However, He will not save anyone against their will. He gives everyone the opportunity to live for Him and be saved eternally, while warning that He will eternally punish those who live for themselves.

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