

If God is a God of love, why would he send rebellious angels and rebellious people to hell forever?

This question is asked a lot. The Bible teaches that sinful angels and sinful people will be sent to **hell** for **eternal punishment**. But if God is a God of love why would he send them to hell and why would he send them there to be punished forever? Why not punish them in some other way or punish them for a short time? In order to answer this question we must go back to what the Bible teaches about sin and the character of God.

REBELLIOUS ANGELS

The Bible teaches that a group of angels (with Satan as their leader) rebelled against God (Ezekiel 28:11-19; Luke 10:18; 2 Corinthians 11:14; 1 Timothy 3:6; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Revelation 12:1-9). These fallen angels are now called demons or evil/unclean spirits (Matthew 8:16,28-29; 12:43-45; Luke 8:2; 2 Peter 2:4; Revelation 16:13-14). Hell was created specifically for these rebellious angels (Matthew 25:41). These rebellious angels do not have a chance to repent or change their ways. Their destiny has been determined by God - they will all be sent to hell. They are enemies of, and at war with, God and mankind (Genesis 3:1-15; Zechariah 3:1-2; Matthew 12:43-45; 13:24-30,36-43; Mark 5:1-20; John 8:44-45; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 6:10-20; 1 Peter 5:8-9; Revelation 12).

REBELLIOUS PEOPLE

Men and women were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-31; 5:1-2; 9:6) to have a loving relationship with him and to obey him (Ecclesiastes 12:13; Matthew 22:34-40; Acts 17:26-28; 1 Corinthians 8:6; 10:31; Colossians 3:17). However mankind's relationship with God was broken as a result of rebellion towards him, also known as sin (Genesis 2:15-17; 3; Isaiah 59:1-3; 64:6-7; Romans 3:23; 5:12-21). As a result of sin all people are spiritually dead, i.e. they are separated from God (Genesis 2:15-17; Romans 3:9-18,23; 6:23; Ephesians 2:1-5).

Unlike the rebellious angels, mankind **does** have a second chance.

GOD'S PLAN TO SAVE PEOPLE

The only way our relationship with God can be restored is if our sins are forgiven. Our sins have been forgiven through what Jesus Christ did for us - his sinless life, sacrificial death on the cross as our substitute, and bodily resurrection to conquer sin and death (Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Mark 10:45; Luke 23; 24; Romans 3:21-26; 4:22-25; 5; 1 Corinthians 15:1-23; 2 Corinthians 5:14-21; Colossians 1:15-23; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14; Hebrews 2:5-18; 7:23-28; 9:11-28; 1 Peter 2:21-25; 3:18).

In order for us to receive this forgiveness of our sins and have our relationship with God restored, we must sincerely repent of our sins and believe (or have faith) in the Lord Jesus Christ – to believe in who he claimed he was and in what he did for us (Mark 1:14-15; Luke 5:31-32; 24:45-47; John 3:16-18; 5:24; 6:35-40,47; 8:24; 11:25-27; 17:1-3; 20:30-31; Acts 2:37-38; 20:17-21; Romans 1:16-17; 3:21-26; 5:1; 6:23; 10:9-13; Hebrews 6:1; 1 John 4:15; 5:1-13). Once we make that decision our sins are forgiven, our relationship with God restored and we will have eternal life with God in heaven.

Our eternal destination of either heaven or hell is determined by our response to the Lord Jesus Christ (John 3:16,18,36; 5:24; 6:25-40). At the end of the age all people will appear before the throne of God for judgement. Those who do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ will be condemned to eternal conscious punishment in hell separated from the presence of God, but believers will be rewarded with eternal life in heaven with God (Daniel 12:1-2; Matthew 10:26-33; 25:31-46; Mark 9:42-48; John 5:22-29; 6:39-40; 14:1-7; Acts 24:15; Romans 8:20-23; 1 Corinthians 15:35-57; 2 Corinthians 4:13-14; 5:1-10; Philippians 3:20-21; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; Hebrews 9:27-28; 2 Peter 3:1-13; 1 John 3:2; Jude 6-7,14-15; Revelation 20:11-15; 21; 22:1-5).

HELL

Hell is where sin is punished. Hell is described in many ways:

- A place of punishment (Matthew 25:46; Jude 7,13; Revelation 14:9-11; 20:10)
- A lake of fire (Matthew 3:10, 12; 13:30,40-42,49-50; 18:8-9; 25:41; Mark 9:43-48; Luke 3:17; Jude 7; Revelation 14:9-10; 19:20; 20:10,14-15; 21:8)
- A place of darkness (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 13)
- A place of worms (Mark 9:47-48)
- Contains sulfur - a bad smelling substance (Revelation 14:9-10; 19:20; 20:10; 21:8)
- People will weep and gnash their teeth (Matthew 8:12; 13:42,49-50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28)
- Everlasting/Forever (Matthew 18:8; 25:41,46; Mark 9:42-48; Luke 3:17; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Jude 7,13; Revelation 14:9-11; 20:10)

Whether or not you believe that hell will be a place of real fire, sulfur and worms is not important. What's important is that God is showing us that hell is a terrible place and everybody should avoid it! The above descriptions of hell show you how much God hates sin. Sin is a serious issue. Sin is rebellion towards God and must be dealt with by a holy God.

The above verses also show us that punishment in hell will be **forever**. They are:

And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.

*It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the **eternal** fire.*
(Matthew 18:8)

*“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.*

*And these will go away into **eternal** punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*
(Matthew 25:41,46)

*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. ...‘where their worm **does not die** and the fire is **not quenched.**’*
(Mark 9:42-48)

*His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with **unquenchable** fire.*
(Luke 3:17)

*They will suffer the punishment of **eternal** destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,*
(2 Thessalonians 1:9)

*...just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural desire, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of **eternal** fire. ...wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved **forever.***
(Jude 7,13)

*And the smoke of their torment goes up **forever and ever**, and **they have no rest, day or night**, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.”*
(Revelation 14:11)

*...and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night **forever and ever.***
(Revelation 20:10)

So the Bible is very clear about how God plans to punish sin in the after-life - it will be in an eternal hell. But why did God choose this method? One way of answering this question is to look at God's character.

GOD'S CHARACTER

The Bible tells us many things about God's character:

God is holy (Psalm 99:9; Revelation 4:8).

This means he is without sin. God doesn't sin (Psalm 92:15; James 1:13). Since God is holy, sin is repulsive to him; he hates sin. Sin is not part of his nature. Therefore sin cannot be in God's presence and he will not co-exist with sin. Therefore God must punish sin because he is holy.

God is righteous and just (Psalm 9:16; 11:7; 89:14; Romans 2:1-11; 3:21-26; Revelation 19:1-2).

This means that God is always right and his standards are the only right ones. God is never wrong. Since God is righteous and just, he will not co-exist with sin. Therefore God must punish sin because he is righteous and just.

God is a fair and just judge (Psalm 89:14; Isaiah 30:18; 1 Peter 2:23).

A judge determines the guilt or innocence of an individual and the reward or punishment an individual receives. The Bible tells us that God will judge all people (Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 20:11-15). Since God is a fair and just judge he will therefore reward those who are forgiven of sin and punish those who are guilty of sin.

God is love (Psalms 100:5; Romans 5:7-8; 1 John 3:16; 4:7-16).

If we want to know what true love is, we simply need to look at God because God is love (1 John 4:8,16). God's definition or standard of love is found in several parts of the Bible but can be summed up quite well in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 and 1 John 3:16.

*Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude.
It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;
it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.
Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
Love never ends.
(1 Corinthians 13:4-8)*

From the above definition of love we can see that love *does not rejoice at wrongdoing*. Therefore God's love hates sin. When people ask, "If God is a God of love why does he punish sin?" the simple answer is that he punishes sin **because** he is a God of love! Most people have a wrong understanding of what love means - they have their own definition of love. We need to look at God's standard of love and understand it.

Love punishes sin. Love doesn't accept sin. People may find it difficult that love involves punishment or hatred of something, but this is God's standard of love, not ours. Our definition of love is different to God's definition of love.

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son,
that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
(John 3:16)*

The above verse shows us that God loves the whole world and punishment of sin is part of that love.

Since God is holy, righteous, loving and a judge it is part of his nature to condemn sin and punish those who remain in sin. **If God will not punish sin he would not be holy, righteous, loving and a judge.**

MAN'S "SOLUTION" TO THE SIN PROBLEM

People who complain about God's punishment of sin in an eternal hell can't come up with a suitable alternative. Let's have a look at a few suggested alternatives and their problems.

Suggestion 1: God should forgive everybody whether or not they've repented and believe in Jesus Christ.

Problems with this suggestion:

- ▶ This suggestion has us setting the standards not God. However God is righteous and just - he sets the standard and rules. He determined that repentance and faith in Jesus Christ is the only thing for forgiveness of sin.
- ▶ This suggestion provides no incentive for people to do good on Earth and is no deterrent to sin. If we're all going to be forgiven anyway, what's the point of obeying God? We may as well do what we want!
- ▶ There is no justice in this suggestion. People who avoid justice in this life won't be held accountable in the after-life.

Suggestion 2: God should punish sinners in hell for a limited time only and then allow them to enter heaven.

Problem with this suggestion:

- ▶ Again, there is no incentive for people to do good on Earth and it's not a deterrent to sin. If we're all going to end up in heaven anyway, what's the point of obeying God? I may as well do what I want since we'll all get to heaven eventually.

Suggestion 3: God should punish people in hell for a limited time only and then annihilate them (i.e. completely remove their existence).

Problems with this suggestion:

- ▶ Again, there is no incentive for people to do good on Earth and it's not a deterrent to sin. If sinners won't be punished eternally they will have no reason to obey God here on Earth. They may as well do as they please on Earth since the punishment is only short term.
- ▶ This suggestion contradicts the Biblical teaching that life in the after-life is eternal whether that's eternal life in heaven or eternal death in hell.

So we can see that human attempts at trying to “improve” on God’s plan fail! God’s plan of eternal punishment in hell is the only acceptable form of punishment for sin of people who refuse to repent and believe in Jesus Christ to have their sins forgiven. It’s also the only form of punishment suitable for the angels who rebelled against God many years ago.

SUMMARY

- God has condemned all rebellious angels to eternal punishment in hell.
- God has condemned all unforgiven humans to eternal punishment in hell.
- Since God is holy, righteous, loving and a judge it is part of his nature to condemn sin and punish those who remain in sin.
- God punishes sin because he is a God of love.
- An eternal punishment in hell is the best way of dealing with sin.



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