



One thing we are reminded of time and time again when reading Scripture is how loving God is. That he wants a relationship with all of us. So, if that's the case, how could he send people to a place of eternal torture if he really loves them? If they are good people otherwise - they love their neighbors, they don't break the law, they care for those in need - how can God be love yet send four billion people to a place, all 'coz they don't believe? This is a question [Christian musician Marty Sampson struggled with](#) and it caused him to walk away from Christianity. He's not alone.

The "How Can God..." Questions

Objections often arise that question God's motives and morality. How could a loving God command the Israelites to slaughter the Caananites? Why would an all-knowing God put the tree of Good and Evil in the garden of Eden knowing that Adam and Eve would eat from it? And, as is the subject of this article, how could a loving God send anyone to Hell? Here's the first problem with this challenge; all of these types of questions are attempting to judge God's moral character. But, they don't call into question God's *existence*. Now, maybe they question the qualities of God as described in the Old and New Testament, but they don't do anything to disprove the existence of an all-powerful, timeless, spaceless necessary creator of the universe. They just question his motives and methods.

The second problem that comes up with these questions is attempting to judge God's moral character. A fair question to this criticism is by what measuring stick do you judge God's actions? If God exists - that is to say a timeless, spaceless, immaterial, personal, all-powerful being - then his is the moral standard to which we must compare everything else. If God exists, he is the objective standard by which we judge right and wrong. Anything we come up with on our own is subjective and open to interpretation. If we think a measuring stick is inaccurate, the only way we can know is by using another measuring stick we know to be accurate to make the same measurement. But, if the God of the Christian Bible exists, there *is* no other measuring stick greater than *Him!* How can you use His measuring stick to judge Him if you think He doesn't exist? You can't. You have to have some sort of objective standard by which to measure Him and He *is* that standard!

What Do You Mean By "Loving"?

Remember, before we can give an answer, we have to establish some definitions. We have to figure out what the person means by what they are saying. For this question, the first thing we have to figure out is this; what do they mean by "loving".

As kids, what we *want* when we misbehave is for our parent to tell us something like



“awww, it’s OK. I know you tore down your little sister’s dollhouse that she saved up for and bought with her own money, but it’s OK. And, you don’t have to apologize or pay her back. I know it makes you uncomfortable and that’s just ‘your way’. And, Sally, you’re just going to have to forgive him and get on with your life.”

Now, if my Dad would have said that, it would have been great for *me*, but what about my sister? What about the victim? Did she get a loving response? Not hardly. What if we escalate this to a more serious crime. Should the victim of a rape and their rapist both get the same reward in the afterlife? What about Mother Theresa and Joseph Stalin? One spent her whole life in poverty caring for the homeless and the other oversaw a regime that killed over 6 million of its citizens. Should they end up in the same place?

When we think that a loving God should save everyone in the end, we leave out an important element of love and that is justice. Love can’t exist in the absence of judgment. In the example of me knocking over the dollhouse, my dad would not be showing love to my sister if he let me off scott free. My sister was wronged. And, the way that he would show love is to make sure she received justice in some way. He would also judge that what I did was wrong, make me apologize, and probably make me pay my sister back in some way for the damage I did. *That* would be a loving response. My sister would be getting justice and being restored, and I would be learning a lesson - both of which are acts of love.

What Do You Mean By “Send”?

The second idea we have to look at is the notion of God sending people to Hell. To use the example above, what will happen in the final judgment isn’t like my Dad sending me to my room; it’s more like me turning my back on my family and leaving to go it on my own. God isn’t sending us anywhere we do not want to be. Forcing us into a relationship with him would not be a loving thing to do. We have been given the gift of free will, and we can freely choose which way to go. Every choice - even the choice to follow Jesus - has consequences. God allows us to make our own decision on knowing him or not. God has given people enough signs and revelations (through nature and Scripture) to know that he exists. People can choose to ignore them or listen to them.

What Do You Mean By “Hell”?

In his original Instagram post, Marty didn’t say “Hell”; he called it “a place”. But, in this challenge, the place he is talking about is Hell. So, again we have to ask the question; what is Hell? Thanks largely to Dante’s *Inferno*, and hundreds of years of tradition afterward, we have this visualization of Hell as a place where we are held in shackles, whipped, and



tortured for all eternity; destined to push massive boulders uphill only to have them roll back down when we reach the top and have to do it all over again. But, nowhere in the Bible does it say that Hell is one big torture chamber. It is described as a place of torment, though. And there will be different levels of punishment. For some, they will simply feel torment because they got what they wanted. When God withdraws from them after judgment, their life will be full of torment because they will no longer feel His presence in their lives and they will be separated from their believing friends and family. Others that have committed greater offenses will be punished accordingly.

Why Do People Go To Hell?

So, what is it that people do that earns them a place in the Hot Seat for eternity? You may be surprised to know that people don't end up in Hell simply because they don't believe in Jesus. People go to hell because they have violated God's standards; not because they don't believe. God presented the Israelites with His standards - and they are high. If someone could keep those standards, they wouldn't need salvation like the rest of us. But, the problem is, no one can keep them. No one can earn their way into Heaven. That's where belief in Jesus comes in. Jesus is the *only person* who has ever led the perfect life; good enough to escape the torment of Hell. Belief in Him means we accept that He paid the price we deserve. No one deserves Heaven. We all have an account that is in *serious* arrears, and belief in Jesus means that the account is paid in full.

God loves us in a way greater than anyone will ever love us. And, He wants all of us to spend eternity with Him. But, if God continued to allow us to do the same bad things over and over without repercussions, that would not be an act of love. Laws without consequences are meaningless. That would not be just for the people who have been offended. Part of being loving is being just. And, even though God loves us so much that He has given us chance after chance after chance to come into a relationship with Him, He wants us to make our own choices. Including the choice not to be with Him. But, no action is without consequence. God has tried for over 6000 years to tell humanity the consequences of their actions. Just as any loving parent would do.