

HOW CAN A LOVING GOD SEND ANYONE TO HELL?

—by Peter Hammond

This is reality. The presupposition underlying the question of: nature of God and man. It portrays a lack of understanding of the

“How can a loving God send anyone to hell?” is a misunderstanding about the Holiness and justice of God and the sinfulness and depravity of man.

One of the common objections thrown at Christians can be summarised in these words: How can a loving God send anyone to hell? What about the Eskimos and Pygmies and other primitive, remote tribes who have never heard the Gospel? Would God condemn them just because they haven't believed in someone they have not yet heard of?

The short answer to that last emotionally laden question is: No! Of course nobody is going to be condemned for not believing in whom they have never heard. We are all judged according to the light that we have received.

General Revelation

“For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes...For the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.

For since the Creation of the world, His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His Eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God; they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened...” Rom 1:16-21

Everyone has the benefit of General Revelation in nature. We can see something of the Creator in His Creation. “The

Heavens declare the Glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork...” The existence of God is revealed and clearly perceived through the things that He has made. The invisible qualities of God can be understood by looking at the visible things of Creation.

In the light of this General Revelation, the whole world is without excuse if they



reject God. No one can claim ignorance of God as an excuse for refusing to honour Him, or to be grateful to Him. That is the main emphasis of Romans Chapter One. We all have the light of Creation and the light of our conscience.

Eternity in their hearts

Don Richardson documents in ‘Eternity in their Hearts’ how even the most primitive tribes, in the most remote regions of the

world, have basic understandings of the Creator, Creation, right and wrong and the need for Redemption.

Dreams, visions and encounters

In ‘More Than Dreams’ DVD we hear of Muslims who had no access to missionaries or formal evangelistic work. However, (no doubt in answer to the prayers of God's people) they came to great conviction of sin, and were confronted by the reality of Jesus Christ in vivid dreams. Their visions of the man with nail pierced hands and feet, with the spear thrust in His side, led them to seek Christian missionaries and the Scriptures and they came to full salvation. Even though all people have access to the light of Creation and conscience, the vast majority still live in rebellion to Almighty God.

People are rebellious

When we have been engaged in personal evangelism in the streets and in the market places, we sometimes come across those who say that they do not believe in the Bible, or in the Law of God, or in the Lord Jesus Christ. At this point, I normally ask them by what standard they live. Generally these people will present some high standards of ideal conduct, often a variation on the Golden Rule of Christ found in the Sermon on the Mount.

Then when I ask them if they have always lived up to these standards, they invariably answer: No! On no occasion have I ever found someone who dared to claim that they had never violated their own

standards! So, while all people have the light of Creation and conscience, no one ever lives up to this light. We need Special Revelation in Holy Scripture. The Bible is the Book of God's Words, just as Creation is the Book of God's Works. General Revelation leaves all men without excuse. We are guilty Law breakers.

The depravity of man

“As it is written: There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside...there is none who does good, no not one. Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practised deceit...whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.” Rom 3:10-18

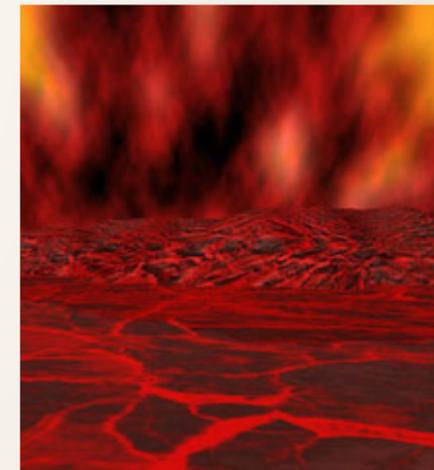
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The Holiness of God

Unfortunately, many Christian ministers have presented such a consistently unbalanced portrayal of the attributes of God that most people only think of God as merciful and loving. However, the angels in Heaven are singing: “Holy! Holy! Holy!” The

Holiness and the Justice of God demands that unrepentant murderers, blasphemers, rapists, thieves and liars be dealt with.

Perhaps we should turn the tables and ask our enquirer: What do you think God should do about unrepentant murderers? Persecutors of the Church? Marxist mass murderers? Terrorists? Wife beaters? Poachers? Rapists? Hate mongerers? Deceivers?



The wrath of God

How can a Holy and loving God not punish evil? God is a God of love and light. He is a God of mercy and a God of justice. God is Gracious, but He is also a God of wrath. *“...For great is the wrath of the Lord that has been aroused against us...” 2 Kings 22:13*

“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” John 3:36

“... but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the Truth, but obey unrighteousness – indignation and wrath.” Rom 2:8

But doesn't God love everyone equally?

Not only do most who question how God can send anyone to hell presuppose the goodness of man and fail to understand the Holiness and justice of God, but most tend to presuppose the egalitarian heresy expressed in these words: But doesn't God love everyone, equally?

The answer is clearly, No! The Bible is quite clear that there are actually many whom God hates. *“These six things the Lord hates, yes seven are an abomination to Him; a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren.” Prov 6:16-19*

The proud, liars, murderers, the wicked, those who rush to do evil, false witnesses and those who sow discord among brethren are among those who God declares that He hates.

Understanding the love of God

“The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate.” Prov 8:13

Of course: *“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.” John 3:16* »



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Common Grace

God does love the world in the sense that He sends Common Grace. He makes the sun shine on the righteous and on the unrighteous. He causes the rain to fall on the fields of the wicked and of the just. He loves the world so much that He came in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ and whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. Everyone has benefited because of the coming of Christ and all the tremendous blessings that have come from the Word of God and the work of God's Holy Spirit. Hospitals, schools, the abolition of slavery, the rule of law, Christian charity, missions and so much more have immeasurably improved the life of everyone on earth.

Egalitarianism is unbiblical

However, Common Grace does not mean that God loves everybody equally. Nothing in all of creation is equal. Pigeons are not equal to eagles and zebras are not equal to lions. No one is equal. Not in opportunity, nor in skills, nor in talents, nor in gifts. People are not equal in their abilities, in their energy, or in their motivation. Some people work hard and sacrifice much. Others squander their resources and energy in gambling and vices.

Secular humanist philosophers may wish that everyone be forced to be equal, but it has proven to be unworkable. As Winston Churchill declared: "Socialism could only work in Heaven, where it is not needed, or in hell, where they already have it."

Those who work hard are rewarded. Those who are unprofitable servants are cast into outer darkness. In the parable of

the talents (Luke 19:12-27), our Lord taught that He would generously reward those who were faithful and wise in serving Him, but the unproductive, He condemned. "For I say to you, that to everyone who has will be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him." Luke 19: 26



Freedom to fail or succeed

There is nothing egalitarian about the Bible. Equality before the Law is commanded (Num15:15-16). However no one can enforce equality of effort, nor equality of results.

In the Scriptures we read that Enoch walked with God and that Abraham was chosen to be the Father of God's people. Abraham is described as the friend of God. Moses spoke to God face to face. David was described as "a man after God's own heart". John, the Apostle, is described as "the disci-

ple whom Jesus loved". The Lord made it clear that there would be different degrees of judgement. He warned that it would be better for the evil cities of Sodom and Gomorrah than for Capernaum on the Day of Judgement. How could that be? Because, evil as Sodom and Gomorrah were, they never had a Bible. Nor did the Messiah walk their streets. However, Capernaum had the Lord Jesus Christ and His Apostles working miracles in their streets and yet they rejected His Grace and mercy.

The Day of Judgement

We will be judged according to the light that we have received. To whom much is given, much is required. To whom much more is given, much more is required. The Scriptures also make clear that there will be different degrees of rewards in Heaven.

"Each one's work will become clear for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." 1 Cor 3:13-15

What about the Eskimos and Pygmies?

So, back to the question of what about the Eskimos and Pygmies and other primitive, remote tribes that have never heard the Gospel? Actually there are many Pygmies in the Congo who have come to Christ. We've even had one at one of our Biblical Worldview Summits in Cape Town.

There are many millions of Christians

in the Congo. There are, in fact, many hundreds of times more Evangelical, Bible-believing Christians in the Congo than there are in Belgium, which once ruled this territory. If any one doubts the depravity of man they need to read David Livingstone's accounts of what central Africa was like prior to the advent of the Gospel, as well as Henry Morton Stanley's writings: 'Through the Dark Continent' (1878) and 'In Darkest Africa' (1890).

The reality of heathenism before the advent of the Gospel and civilisation is clearly portrayed in the works by these pioneer explorers. Treachery, cannibalism and slavery were rife. In village after village down the original heart of darkness, the Congo River, Stanley and his companions saw villages decorated with the skulls and bones of tens of thousands of victims of cannibalism.

All people know there is a God and that we are accountable to Him

There are no sincere, good people, earnestly seeking God, who will be condemned just because they haven't heard the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. God has plainly manifested His eternal power and being and character to every human being on the planet. Through General Revelation in Creation, and through their conscience, every human being knows that there is a God and that he is accountable to God. Yet every human being disobeys God. Jesus Christ came into a world that was already condemned, lost, on its way to hell. Christ came to redeem a world that was already guilty of rejecting the Creator and of violating His Holy Laws.

Study to show yourself approved

Karl Marx declared: "The first battlefield is the re-writing of history." Secular humanist textbooks and Hollywood films are trying to rearrange reality and discredit our Christian ancestors. We need to know the Word of God and we need to know the Works of God in history. Study to show yourself approved unto God and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason for the hope that is in you (1 Peter 3:15). ■

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