



*Tough Questions From Christian Teens*

# *Is Hell Fair?*

By

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We are answering tough questions from Christian teenagers – and I do mean TOUGH. Those are the kinds of questions we like because they are often the questions that don't get answered. That's one of the reasons teens give for why they quit attending church or why they walked away from their Christian beliefs.

We recently dealt with questions about whether God is evil.

We now move to the question of hell — is it fair?

“How can we have free will to accept Jesus and be predestined? How can Hell be fair if the forgiveness of sins is offered on any grounds except the free willed repentance of sinners?”

Great questions! I hope my answer to your earlier question about ‘free will’ was helpful. If not, let me know and we’ll look at it more deeply.

Let’s break down your question into different sections to see what we can learn together.

## Accepting Jesus

First, the idea of ‘accepting’ Jesus. Some people think it’s wrong to use the word ‘accept’ for the salvation experience, so let’s see what we can learn from the New Testament.

There are several Greek words translated ‘accept’ or ‘receive.’ One means ‘take, receive, accept, welcome.’ The Apostle Paul used the word when he wrote, “For if who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!” (2 Corinthians 11:4). Paul used the word in the context of accepting a different gospel. Jesus used the same word when He said, “He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” (Matthew 10:40) The context was Jesus sending the 12 apostles out to preach the Gospel. Jesus was saying that people who received,

accepted, welcomed the apostles and their message was in a real sense welcoming Christ, because Jesus is the Message of the Gospel.

Another Greek word translated 'accept' means 'to make room, advance, hold.' Jesus used the word when He said, "All cannot accept this saying, but only those to who it has been given." (Matthew 19:11). The Apostle Peter used the word in his second letter – "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9) The word 'come' is the translation of the Greek word sometimes translated 'accept.'

Another Greek word translated 'accept' means 'receive, get, take, lay hold of.' Jesus used the word when He said, "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." (Matthew 7:8)

I think that what we 'accept' when it comes to Jesus is His Message, His Gospel, and His Gift of eternal life. We can welcome Him or not. The best biblical word to use for how we respond to the Gospel's message about Christ is probably to say we 'believe.' Here are a couple of examples:

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." Acts 16:31

“... if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Romans 10:9-10

## Predestination

Now to predestination. The Greek word means ‘to predetermine, foreordain.’ It comes from the root idea of ‘establishing boundaries, limits.’ Paul is the primary user of the word in the New Testament. One example is in Romans 8:28-30 –

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”

Another example is in Ephesians 1 –

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself,

according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.” Ephesians 1:3-6

“In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.” Ephesians 1:11

As we look at Paul’s usage of the word ‘predestined,’ we get some sense of how we should understand its impact on our lives. This is something God does, so we need to look it from His perspective. Look again at what Paul says God does –

1. For whom He foreknew,
2. He also predestined
3. to be conformed to the image of His Son,
4. that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.
5. Moreover whom He predestined,
6. these He also called;
7. whom He called,
8. these He also justified;
9. and whom He justified,
10. these He also glorified.

Predestination follows God’s foreknowledge. Foreknowledge in the Greek means ‘know beforehand.’ Predestination in the Greek means ‘foreordain.’

So, we see that God predestines based on His knowing beforehand. God knows beforehand based on His Omniscience.

God knows everything from eternity. God's objective is that His children would be 'conformed' (having same or similar form) to the 'image' (likeness) of His Son, Jesus.

God 'calls' (summons, invites by name) those He predestined. God 'justified' (declared righteous) those He called. God 'glorified' (placed value, honored) those He justified.

That is a wonderful explanation of how God works out in time and space what He has done in eternity. God foreknew from eternity. God predestined from eternity. God calls people in time and space and justifies and glorifies in time and space.

God's foreknowledge and predestination don't rob people of their free will. We see examples of God giving people choices throughout the Bible. Some of those people responded to God positively, some responded negatively. God gave them a choice. God knew from eternity what decision they would make, but He didn't rob them of their free will.

As difficult as that may appear, predestination and free will work together in the plan of God and people. Remember also the context – "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." The call of God is according to

His eternal purpose, which is to conform us to the image of His Son. God invites, people decide.

## Hell and Fairness

The next part of your question is, “How can Hell be fair if the forgiveness of sins is offered on any grounds except the free willed repentance of sinners?”

Hell is a real place. Some theologians think it's deep inside the earth where it's extremely hot. Some think it's in some space outside the planet Earth, maybe on the other side of the universe, possibly a super black hole; some think hell may be outside this universe or in a spiritual dimension not impacted by material location.

Wherever hell is, it is real. How do we know it's real?

Jesus mentioned 'hell' several times. Here are a few examples –

“But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ Shall be in danger of hell fire.” (Matthew 5:22)

“If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.” Matthew 5:29

“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Matthew 10:28

The Greek word translated ‘hell’ is ‘*geenna*.’ It’s a transliteration of the Hebrew word, *Gēhinnōm*, “the valley of Hinnom.’ It’s a real valley that is located west and south of Jerusalem. It’s also a name for the final place of punishment of the ungodly.

The actual location has a pretty ugly past. It was where children were sacrificed to the idol-god Moloch until King Josiah abolished the practice thousands of years ago. It was later used to burn garbage and trash and the bodies of animals and unburied criminals who had been executed. Not a place most of us would want to visit – less live there.

One of the best known verses about why God created hell is in Matthew 25:41 where Jesus was talking with His disciples about what would happen at the end of the age –

“Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”

Interesting. God prepared hell as an everlasting fire for the devil and his angels. Jesus also spoke about God being able to destroy both soul and body in hell. That pointed to the human side of being cast into hell.

We see in Revelation that after God judges the dead according to their works, He will cast Death and Hades into the lake of fire along with anyone not found Written in the Book of Life. (Revelation 20:13-15).

Hell is a real place where the devil and his angels and anyone not found written in the Book of Life are placed.

The next part of your question concerns the fairness of hell. That question goes to God's eternal design and intent. God designed a world where He would give humans free will to choose. God designed a world where humans would be faced with difficult choices. The first choice was whether they would obey God's command. They chose to disobey. God gave Cain the choice to obey His command. He chose to disobey. To a great degree, that has been humanity's choice throughout history.

God had something else in mind. That's why when the human race was overrun with wickedness, God was gracious toward Noah and did a restart with humanity. God gave the human race another chance to use their free will to choose to obey Him. The human race failed again and God started something new with an idol worshipper named Abram.

What we see in the Bible is humanity's inability to do what's right in God's sight. The fact that God is gracious and saves anyone is probably not 'fair' when we think of it from a human perspective, but He keeps being gracious to disobedient humans.

One way to understand God's gracious behavior (love, grace, mercy) is to view it this way. People receive what they don't deserve and do receive what they don't deserve. In light of that, can we say God is being 'unfair' when He judges people who reject the good news of His Kingdom?

God designed His eternal plan with the intent of glorifying His Son, Who would glorify His Father by finishing the work the Father had sent Him to do. How does Jesus view His glorification? He prayed to His Father on the night of His arrest –

“Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”

John 17:1-5

What was the 'work' God the Father sent God the Son to do? According to the Apostle John it was to 'destroy the works of the devil.'(1 John 3:8). What were the 'works' of the devil? To bring sin and death into the world. Jesus' death on the Cross and His resurrection from the dead destroy sin and death, the works of the devil.

Jesus wants people to live forever with Him in Heaven. However, people who reject that offer will live elsewhere – hell or the lake of fire by identification. Jesus told His disciples to take His message of love, grace, mercy and forgiveness to the ends of the earth – to every people group. That's what the Church has been doing for almost 2,000 years – taking the Gospel to the world.

Hell seems fair given what humanity has done to God. What does not seem fair to God is how He predestined those whom He foreknew even though what He foreknew was our sinfulness and ungodliness.

“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Romans 5:6-8

I hope that helps answer your question. If not, let me know what you think and we'll go deeper.

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