



Tough Questions From Christian Teens

Is Hell Just?

By

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We are answering *Tough Questions From Christian Teens* in our special series. With so many Christian teenagers walking away from their childhood belief in Jesus Christ, we adults need to be prepared to answer their questions 'before' they walk away.

We also need to LOVE those teens deeply. Anything we say in response to their questions that comes from a position or emotion that's separated from *agape* love is doomed for failure (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). Love and truth, grace and truth. As the Apostle John wrote in his Gospel account – "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." Why did Jesus come from Heaven to bring the Gospel to the people on earth? God loved them (John 3:16).

We recently answered a question about whether Hell is 'fair.' We move now to a question of whether Hell is 'just.'

“Hell – the fairness of infinite punishment and binary justice: Perhaps because of my pride or immaturity, my sense of morality does not see infinite punishment as proper justice (hell being infinite because it is eternal.) It would seem more just for God simply to unmake sinners or to punish them on a sin by sin bases. God’s Justice is binary in that it does not work on such a basis; any sin is punishable by infinite pain. Now, I realize that saying what God should do is meaningless since God made right and wrong and should and shouldn’t and these concepts have only subjective meaning without Him, but I do wonder why God gave me a conscience that can be easily confused. Essentially my question is this: How is Hell Just?”

Great question!

I agree with you that the idea of right and wrong is subjective without God. That idea will help us answer your questions.

We looked previously at the question of whether Hell is fair, so let’s dive into whether it’s also just.

We often think of things in light of them being just or unjust, but on what basis can we determine justice? Is justice absolute or relative? Who would have the authority to determine?

That brings us to God as Judge. The Bible reveals that God is Just –

“Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; Mercy and truth go before Your face.” Psalm 89:14

God’s justice speaks to one of His moral attributes. Justice and righteousness often go together when we think of God.

“He is the Rock, His work is perfect; For all His ways are justice, A God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright is He.” Deuteronomy 32:4

“For the word of the Lord is right, And all His work is done in truth. He loves righteousness and justice; The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.” Psalm 33:4-5

“The Lord executes righteousness And justice for all who are oppressed.” Psalm 103:6

“The Lord is exalted, for He dwells on high; He has filled Zion with justice and righteousness.” Isaiah 33:5

“The Lord is righteous in her midst, He will do no unrighteousness. Every morning He brings His justice to light; He never fails, But the unjust knows no shame.” Zephaniah 3:5

It's important to note that God is always just and never unjust – “ For all His ways are justice, A God of truth and without injustice.” That means everything God does, including what He does with judging people for their sins, is just and not unjust.

I think it's difficult for humans to understand God and His ways. He know things we cannot know. He understands things we cannot understand. He can see things we cannot see. This is how God explained that to Isaiah the prophet –

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,’ says the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.” Isaiah 55:8-9

Think about that for a moment. God's ‘ways’ are higher than our ways “as the heavens are higher than the earth.” Wow! When we think about the massive distance between the earth and the far reaches of the universe, we begin to see there is no possible way we could ever understand God's ways.

We are fortunate that God reveals much about His thinking, but it still leaves us wondering sometimes because of our severe limitations in understanding God.

I don't think God is telling us not to wonder or question His ways because we see God answering people's questions about His ways throughout history. God wants us to understand all that we can understand, but it is also good for us to know that there are some things we may never understand completely this side of Heaven.

I have been studying God's Word for almost 50 years and am still asking questions, still seeking understanding. I am pleased to say that God is gracious to reveal more and more to me as I continue in His Word, but there's no way in a lifetime on earth that we could plumb the depths of God's knowledge or understanding. He does encourage us to keep learning, which is why we keep asking questions and searching for answers.

As for the idea of whether hell is just or not, we remember that God created hell for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). Hell became a destination for people after Adam disobeyed God –

“The wicked shall be turned into hell, And all the nations that forget God.” Psalm 9:17

That answers the question about who goes to hell – the devil, his angels, the wicked, and all the nations that forget God. We see that finalized in Revelation 20 –

“And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the

Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”

So, is hell just? I think so because of how God has dealt with the issue of wickedness and forgetting God (sin). God is loving and merciful. He forgives sin and cleanses people from what keeps them separated from God –

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9

One of the amazing things God does is take sinful, unrighteous people and makes them righteous. That’s what God did for Abraham –

“And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.” Genesis 15:6

The Apostle Paul referred to that in his letter to the Romans –

“What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say?

‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.” Romans 4:1-4

If God had not stepped in with a plan to save when Adam and Eve disobeyed Him, none of us could be saved. We would all be headed for hell after death. Thankfully, God did have a plan and sent His Son to bring salvation to us.

You asked about the fairness of infinite punishment because it’s eternal. Many Christians are asking that question today and have for centuries. The only way to know for sure is to carefully look at how God addresses the issue of punishment for the wicked (unsaved sinners).

That God will punish the wicked is clear –

“I will punish the world for its evil, And the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, And will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.” Isaiah 13:11

Daniel the prophet wrote this about how long the punishment of the wicked will last –

“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.”
Daniel 12:2

Jesus, who is the Judge of the world, said punishment of the wicked will last forever –

“Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” Matthew 25:45-46

Paul wrote this about eternal punishment of the wicked. He called it “everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord –

“We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe,

because our testimony among you was believed.” 2 Thessalonians 1:3-10

I think it's clear from these and many other verses in the Bible that punishment of the wicked will last forever. Some Christians disagree with that understanding, but I point them back to the clear read of Scripture.

The next area of disagreement is with whether Hell is really a “lake of fire,” even though that's what we find in Revelation 20. Satan will be there. The beast and false prophet will be there. Satan's angels and demons will be there. And according to Scripture so will everyone whose name is not written in the Book of Life – “And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” (Revelation 20:15)

Daniel says Hell will be a place of shame and everlasting contempt. Jesus said Hell will be a place of everlasting punishment. Paul wrote that Hell will be everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.

Hell appears to be an eternal destination.

You mentioned that it would seem more just for God simply to ‘unmake’ sinners or to punish them on a ‘sin by sin’ basis. Let's look at that.

God does remake sinners when they obey His Word and believe on His Son. Here's what Jesus said about it –

“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

God will give everlasting life to people who believe in Jesus and they will not perish. The idea of perishing comes from the idea of their going to Hell after death and judgment. They won't end up in Hell if they believe in Jesus for eternal life.

Paul wrote that believers are being renewed every day, even as they wear out physically –

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.” 2

Corinthians 4:16

God will remake believers spiritually and physically to continue through eternity –

“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O Death, where is your sting? O

Hades, where is your victory?’ The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Corinthians 15:51-56

That’s a total ‘remake’ of sinners on God’s part. He renews us day by day as we grow in Christ and will complete His ‘remake’ when we are raised from the dead.

As for God punishing unbelievers on a sin-by-sin basis, let’s consider how that might work. We hear the words of Jesus who said –

“For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. or I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:18-20

Based on what Jesus said about breaking the least of the commandments, how would He judge sins individually? If breaking the smallest command means no one can enter the Kingdom of Heaven, then it would seem the judgment for each sin would be the same – no entrance to the Kingdom of Heaven. Each of our sins would equal the same punishment – little ones and big ones. Why? Because God’s justice demands it. That also means the location of eternal justice (Hell) would also be just.

You asked about God giving you a conscience that can be easily confused. We have a conscience because we're made in the image and likeness of God. That's one of the things that make us different from other creatures God made. As for why we can be easily confused, I think that comes from what happened when Adam sinned. Before Adam sinned the Bible says he and his wife "were not ashamed." (Genesis 2:25) After Adam sinned the Bible says he and his wife saw they were naked (shame), covered themselves, then hid themselves from God (as if you could hide from God). God asked Adam, "where are you?" God knew where Adam was physically. His question went deeper than just Adam's physical location. It also went to Adam's spiritual, mental and emotional condition. Adam's condition would say a lot about the future condition of all who would be born on the earth. Adam said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself." God then asked this –

"And He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?' Then the man said, 'The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.'" Genesis 3:11-13

Adam expressed fear and shame. That came from his conscience. It also demonstrates that from that day to this the human conscience has been damaged because of Adam's sin.

We get confused, we're afraid, we're anxious, etc. It's understandable given how Adam's sin has come forward to impact us thousands of years later. That makes what God did for us through Jesus Christ even more special. We can experience the renewing of our minds today and we'll be fully restored in Heaven.

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