

Does God Send Good People to Hell?

Many non-Christians reject the Christian message simply because of its exclusive claims. Unlike other religions, Christianity claims to be the only way to God.

When talking to people about the Christian message, the statement that often causes the most controversy is the statement that "unless you accept Christ as your savior and follow Him, you cannot have a relationship with God, and you will not experience eternity in heaven."

"I can't believe that God would send good people to hell!" is the typical response.

It isn't hard to understand this reaction.

3 IDEAS

When confronted with the claims of Christianity, the average person must reconcile 3 separate ideas.

Idea #1: Jesus is the only way to God.

Idea #2: God is a just (fair) God.

Idea #3: There are many good people who don't accept Christ.

For the average person, these 3 ideas cannot be adequately reconciled. If Jesus really is the only way, then it would appear that God isn't completely fair. For how can a fair and just God send "good" people to an eternity in hell?

If God really is fair, then we must deny that Jesus is the only way because we know many "good" people who don't accept Christ.

This, then, is the reason that many reject the exclusive claims of Christianity. They simply cannot believe that God could be fair and at the same time send "good" people to an eternity in hell.

On the surface this logic seems sound. However, there are two problems with this logic that we'll discuss.

PROBLEM #1:

The Definition of "Good"

The first problem is that this logic is based entirely on the premise that people are good. But is this premise

sound? Are people really good? How do we know if someone is a good person? What criteria do we use to determine if someone is "good"?

Just about everyone has his own definition of what it means to be good. Most people seem to include ideas such as being moral, being a good citizen and not hurting others.

AN INSUFFICIENT DEFINITION

The problem with most of the definitions that people use is that they are subjective rather than objective.

In other words, there is no standard reference to determine what good is. One person may think that being good is a matter of helping others.

Another person may think that being good is dependent on not hurting others.

Still others feel that you're a good person as long as you are sorry for the bad things you've done.

The question is, "which of these definitions is right?"

When talking with others, I often ask, "why do you think you'll make it into heaven?" The response that I hear most often is: "Because I'm a good person."

"How do you know you're good?" I reply.

"Because I haven't murdered anyone."

This response demonstrates that many people consider themselves to be good not because they have met some objective standard but rather because they compare themselves to other people whom they consider to be bad.

However, just because you haven't murdered someone doesn't mean that you are a good person. It simply means that you are not as bad as someone else is.

Let me illustrate it this way. I know very little about car repair. But I know more than my friend does. Does that make me a good mechanic?

No. It simply means that I'm not as bad of a mechanic as he might be. I'm still a bad mechanic; I'm just not as bad as he is.

The assumption that many people make is that God measures goodness on a curve; and when it comes to

deciding personal goodness, I find that most people somehow place themselves on the better half of the curve.

GOD'S DEFINITION OF "GOOD"

God doesn't determine goodness by comparing us to other people. Instead, God determines our goodness by comparing us to Himself.

The Bible clearly teaches that God alone is holy and righteous. Numerous verses could be cited as examples, among them: Psalm 34:8; 100:5; 135:3; Jeremiah 33:11, Nahum 1:7 and Revelation 15:4.

However, Luke 18:18-19 highlights the point when a young ruler approaches Jesus.

*18 And a certain ruler questioned Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 19 And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone."*¹

The point is clear: God **alone** is good. Since God alone is good, He should be our source of comparison when we are trying to determine whether or not we are good.

Yet most of us don't use God as the standard when determining our own goodness.

Instead, we tend to use other people as the standard.

The situation is analogous to a meeting in which Adolf Hitler, Saddam Hussein, Genghis Khan and Joseph Stalin are all in attendance.

Charles Manson walks in and after comparing his life to these other men, determines that he is a "good" person.

"After all", he says, "I only killed a few people. These guys were all ruthless dictators who murdered thousands."

When we compare ourselves to other "bad" people, we fool ourselves into believing that we ourselves are "good".

But when we compare ourselves with God, we fall miserably short of His standard of goodness.

This point is reiterated over and over and over again in the Bible. Psalm 143:2 says that *"in Thy sight no man living is righteous."*²

Likewise, Psalm 14:3 says, "There is no one who does good, not even one."³

Additionally, Ecclesiastes 7:20 indicates that "there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins."⁴

Many more verses could be shared, among them being 1 Kings 8:46, Job 4:17; 9:2; 25:4, Psalm 130:3 and Proverbs 20:9.

However, Romans 3:23 sums it up by saying, "all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard."⁵

Will God send good people to hell?

Absolutely not! The reason is because there is no one who is good.

Anyone who thinks that He is good and deserves to go to heaven is not operating under the same definition that God uses.

Sin is a very real problem. The Bible states that "the wages of sin is death".⁶ The word "death" actually means "separation". The idea is that the punishment for sin is to be separated from God for eternity.

Because of God's righteousness, we're not worthy to come into His presence. Sin must be paid for.

Jesus Christ made the only legitimate payment for sin. He died on a cross and suffered the punishment that we deserved to suffer for our own sin.

It is for this reason that Jesus Himself said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; No one comes to the Father, but through Me."⁷

This is why Christians claim that the only way to experience eternity with God is by accepting Jesus Christ as your savior.

Therefore, God doesn't send "good" people to hell, but instead allows "bad" people the opportunity to go to heaven.

PROBLEM #2:

Accepting Christ

The Bible is clear that the only reason that a person will be denied entrance into heaven is because they have rejected God.

Many people take issue with the Christian statement that "Christ is the only way."

The reason they take issue with this statement is because they don't want to be told that they are going to

hell. Why? It's because hell has such negative connotations.

Yet the Bible depicts heaven as a place for those who have a relationship with God and want to be with Him.

Why would someone who rejects God care about whether or not he spends eternity with Him?

Logically, it makes no sense for someone to reject Christ on earth and yet want to be with Him for eternity.

And yet those who are upset when Christians say "unless you accept Christ as your savior and follow Him, you cannot enter heaven" are basically saying that they want to be able to reject Christ on earth **AND** be with Him in heaven for eternity. This makes no sense.

In fact, the reason that most people are upset about the Christian's claim that "Christ is the only way" is not because they are afraid of being without Christ. If that were the main concern, they would not reject Christ in the first place.

The reason that people get so upset is because they do not like the idea of going to hell.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The bottom line is that hell is reserved for those who reject God. Essentially, God says that we each have a choice in this life. If we choose to follow God and enter into a relationship with Him while living in this life, then we get to enjoy that relationship by being with Him for eternity.

This is what heaven is: being with God for eternity.

However, if we choose to reject God and not pursue a relationship with Him in this life - then when we die, we get our wish and we will be separated from God for eternity.

This is what hell is: being apart from God for eternity.

WHERE ARE YOU AT?

Do you find it hard to believe that God would send "good" people to hell?

If so, what is your definition of good? What makes you think that your definition of good is the same definition that God uses?

If you're not sure where you came up with your definition, then try this experiment.

Take out a piece of paper and write down your definition of goodness.

After writing your definition, answer this question: What is the source of your information?

In other words, where did you come up with your definition of goodness? Did it come from God; did it come from someone else; or is it a definition that you made up yourself?

Since God is the one who determines entrance into heaven, doesn't it make sense for us to use His definition?

Are you upset when Christians say, "Christ is the only way?" If so, why?

Do you reject Christ now while expecting to spend eternity with Him in heaven?

For more information about a relationship with Christ and why Christians believe that Christ is the only way, check out the following website:

www.everystudent.com

ENDNOTES

¹ Luke 18:18-19, *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation, 1977).

² Psalm 143:2, *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation, 1977).

³ Psalm 14:3, *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation, 1977).

⁴ Ecclesiastes 7:20, *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation, 1977).

⁵ Romans 3:23, *The New Living Translation Bible*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996).

⁶ Romans 6:23, *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation, 1977).

⁷ John 14:6, *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation, 1977).