

HOW COULD A LOVING GOD CONDEMN ANYONE TO HELL?

As many people consider the character of God, two characteristics sometimes seem to be in conflict. These are God's love (1 John 4:8) and God's wrath (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10). To some, it is unthinkable that God could be loving, gracious, and merciful yet condemn the people He has created to an eternity in Hell. However, these characteristics are not in conflict with one another. Let's consider some Scriptures to answer this question.

1 JOHN 1:5-7

Before considering God's love or severity, you must first appreciate God's holiness and righteousness. Scriptures plainly demonstrate that there is no evil in God. He is entirely devoted to everything pure and right (Revelation 4:8; Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 11:7; 92:15; 145:17). He is Light, with no shadow of darkness in Him at all! Consequently, God hates and cannot be in fellowship with darkness (evil, unrighteousness; Psalm 5:4-6; 45:7; Habakkuk 1:13). After all, if God could accept and be in fellowship with darkness, He could no longer be Light! This is why the Scriptures consistently present sin (breaking God's law) as separating people from God (spiritual death; Isaiah 59:1-2; Romans 6:23; James 1:14-15). Ultimately, God has prepared Hell as the place where those who rebel in unrighteousness will be eternally separated from Him (Matthew 25:41; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; Revelation 21:8).

ROMANS 2:5-11

Although some people speak as though God will "send" people to Hell, this passage demonstrates the righteousness of God in His judgment (Psalm 9:7-8; 96:10, 13). Instead, people store up wrath for themselves by the way they choose to live. God will simply judge the righteousness or unrighteousness of people with fairness. And He has declared the outcome of each course, so there are no excuses or surprises (Romans 1:18-21). Those who live in unrighteousness will experience God's wrath and anger, while those who live in righteousness will experience God's glory, honor, and peace (Matthew 25:31-46). Remember, a righteous God cannot be in fellowship with unrighteousness!

JOHN 3:14-18

Sometimes people have trouble harmonizing God's love and wrath because they misunderstand what His love means. For some, God's love means that He tolerates or approves of whatever choices they make in life. However, this is never how the Bible presents God's love! Instead,

as in this passage, God's love involves His sacrificial action on behalf of others. Namely, He gave His own Son to die on the cross so those who had become unrighteous in sin could be saved from experiencing His wrath (Romans 5:6-11)! Still, notice how this passage demonstrates that we have a choice in the matter of where we spend eternity. Those who reject Jesus and continue living in the darkness will be condemned and spend eternity in Hell, despite God's love (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10; Hebrews 5:9)!

1 TIMOTHY 2:3-4

While God is a loving God who will (in His righteousness) condemn the unrighteous to Hell, He takes no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked (Ezekiel 18:23; 33:11). On one occasion, Jesus even wept when He thought about a future destruction people would experience (Luke 19:41-44). He knew they did not have to experience that terrible fate and wanted to gather them as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but they were unwilling. So, they would face the consequences (Matthew 23:37-39). Similarly, God desires to save every person from the consequences of their rebellion and unrighteousness (John 6:40). He has sacrificed deeply to accomplish this. However, the response is left up to each person!

2 PETER 3:9-10

Although the righteous and loving God must demonstrate His wrath on unrighteousness, the Scriptures give many examples of God patiently giving people the opportunity to repent (Genesis 15:13-16; Jonah 3-4; 1 Peter 3:19-20). God could condemn people to Hell the moment they commit unrighteousness. Yet, He patiently suffers the evils people do against Him. He does this because He does not desire anyone to perish in their sin! Rather, He wants everyone to come to repentance.

CONCLUSION

God is holy and righteous and cannot approve of evil, view it favorably, or be in fellowship with evil. As a righteous God, He will judge everyone fairly, condemning unrighteousness and rewarding righteousness. Because God loves, He has given His Son to provide everyone an opportunity to be saved. Therefore, whether someone is saved or condemned is ultimately determined by how each person lives, while God desires everyone to repent and be saved!