

“Why Is There a Hell?”

I was in a discussion about heaven and hell. My agnostic friend looks at free will and states that if God truly loves all humans unconditionally, then that kind of negates any concept of hell.

I know from a Biblical and Christian standard you can lay down the facts but is there an earthly standard/concept that can explain why there is in fact hell and heaven? Or can you not separate the two—Christianity—heaven and hell—and does the freewill factor have anything to do with it?

I think your friend's understanding of God is skewed. I was really helped by the way C.S. Lewis explained heaven and hell. A prominent disciple of his, Peter Kreeft, wrote this on his website (www.peterkreeft.com/topics/hell.htm):

Heaven and hell may be the very same objective place – namely God's love, experienced oppositely by opposite souls, just as the same opera or rock concert can be heavenly for you and hellish for the reluctant guest at your side. The fires of hell may be made of the very love of God, experienced as torture by those who hate him: the very light of God's truth, hated and fled from in vain by those who love darkness. Imagine a man in hell—no, a ghost—endlessly chasing his own shadow, as the light of God shines endlessly behind him. If he would only turn and face the light, he would be saved. But he refuses to—forever.

Dr. Kreeft (one of my favorite authors) also says this in the same essay:

Hell follows from two other doctrines: heaven and free will. If there is a heaven, there can be a not-heaven. And if there is free will, we can act on it and abuse it. Those who deny hell must also deny either heaven (as does Western

secularism) or free will (as does Eastern pantheism).

You might want to check out this essay to help you think through the issue of hell.

Blessings,

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“A ‘Just Right’ Planet?”

Sue:

I enjoyed reading your article entitled [“Evidence for God’s Existence”](#) on probe.org. I found it to provide interesting insight.

I found your comments regarding a “just right” earth particularly intriguing. You stated that our “just right” planet is clear evidence that it was created by “a loving God.” As someone who has witnessed the fury of mother nature more than once, I am compelled to ask – do you include volcanic eruptions, floods, tidal waves, and earthquakes in this “just right” view of God’s creation of the earth?

I find it very hard to believe that this planet we live on is as “just right” as you portray. I have seen massive landslides that buried charities, churches, and brothels side by side without regard. I have seen so many God-fearing people struck by flood and other natural disasters that I cannot help but fail to understand how the earth can be so “just right.” Think about how many innocent children suffered for days, even weeks in immense pain and agony, buried under rubble in an

earthquake, before finally dying. Are such tragedies really part of a “just right” design?

I recently read a research paper from the American Oceanographic Institute regarding some really cool bacteria – they live 2 miles deep in the ocean near hot thermal vents in the ocean floor where no light has ever penetrated. The water temperature there reaches 800 degrees or more and contains highly toxic and poisonous chemicals (well – to humans at least). These conditions are not so different than you might find on other planets in our solar system. I know that one day we will land spacecraft on other planets and find, in the most hostile environment imaginable, living organisms thriving in places we never thought possible.

Like you, I marvel at the intricacies of the world (and universe) we live in – it truly is a wondrous place. William Paley is well-known for his “watchmaker” theory – he, too, marveled at our universe and was so overwhelmed at its complexity that he said that someone MUST have engineered it – for it could not possibly exist without a designer.

I offer you this challenge, then – let’s apply Mr. Paley’s own logic to God himself. Surely you will agree that God himself is far more complex and intricate than the universe is. By Mr. Paley’s logic, something so complex MUST have a creator. Therefore, someone or something MUST have created God, since such complexity cannot exist without a designer. I submit that Mr. Paley is simply a victim of someone in need of a reason – we all want to have a reason. Some of us can accept the fact that we don’t yet know where the universe came from. Others, like Mr. Paley, are so desperate to explain things that they will simply make something else up which is immune from question to explain that which they cannot.

I say these things not to inflame you or attack you. I simply seek knowledge, thought, and interaction with people of differing viewpoints than my own. Perhaps one day I will come

to agree, perhaps not. But I find that speaking to everyone I can, becoming their friend, and agreeing to disagree to be very fulfilling in my life.

Hopefully you will take a few minutes to talk with me and we will both go our ways with a little more knowledge and insight than we started with.

I have received quite a few e-mails from people who disagreed with me in this article, but none that were as gentle and reasonable and sweet-tempered as yours! It says something about your character, methinks. . . . <smile>

Two answers. First of all, concerning the horrific destruction that gets unleashed in nature: according to the Bible, which gives us information we couldn't know otherwise because it's information from "outside the box," this world is in a state very different from the one God originally created. After sin entered the world courtesy of the first human beings, the whole world was plunged into a state of corruption, decay and destruction that spawned natural disasters like hurricanes, tornadoes, floods and droughts. (And then you add the HUMAN disasters that are a result of moral corruption and decay that spawned atrocities like the Holocaust and Sept. 11!—But that's another story.)

At the risk of belaboring the point, allow me to offer an illustration. My sister-in-law is an extraordinarily gifted cake decorator in Chicago, and I live in Dallas. She wanted to share one of her creations with me, and was told by a mentor that if she packed a cake with the right precautions, she could FedEx it to me and it would arrive intact. Apparently, the folks at FedEx didn't know that, and when I opened the box it was a mess of crumbs and broken sugar flowers. It still tasted wonderful, and evidence abounded for its original beauty and glory, but it got ruined between Chicago and Dallas. Her heart sank when she learned what had happened to it, not only because of the waste but because her hopes for

pleasing me with the cake's original condition were dashed. I think it's an illustration of how it grieved God for His beautiful earth to be ruined by the mishandling of the people into whose hands He had placed His creation to be good stewards, because their sin caused all manner of destruction not only between people but also on the earth itself. The fact that the cake was ruined after it left my sister's hands didn't detract one bit from the gifted design and skill that went into creating it in the first place. I still contend that God's design is "just right," even though the world doesn't function as perfectly as it did when He first created it.

Secondly, concerning the idea that someone or something must have created God: as you move backward in discerning cause and effect, there must eventually be an Uncaused Cause in order for anything to exist at all. At some point there has to be something or someone who has always existed who is responsible for causing other things to come into existence, because nothing comes into existence on its own. Thus, at some point there had to be an Ultimate Causer (or Ultimate Cause) that has always been here. Because if you can go "beyond God," so to speak, to a time when there was nothing and no one in existence, then there would be no way for God to come into existence without a cause. There MUST be an Uncaused Cause.

Hope this helps you to understand where I'm coming from!

Most respectfully and cordially,

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“How Do You Develop an Apologetics Ministry Within a Church?”

First off I want to commend you on your approach to defending and sharing the truth and love of the Gospel, as you show respect for others, without backing off from your discovery and communication of truth. It is very refreshing to see! I have two questions.

First, do you have any suggestions for ways to develop an apologetics ministry within the church? Second, I am considering pursuing a more focused apologetics/evangelistic ministry path, apart from working inside a church. I am definitely considering pursuing a Masters, or possibly Doctorate, degree. Are there any schools (Christian or secular) or degree programs that you would recommend with my ministry goal in mind? Also, are there any career paths that you would suggest for that type of pursuit, i.e. professor of philosophy at a secular university, speaker, or working at Probe Ministries? Thank you for your time. And again, I appreciate your ministry and your respectful approach to it.

Thank you for your kind letter and we are pleased that you have found our site both encouraging and helpful.

There are several suggestions about starting an apologetics ministry through the church, but it must be a two-pronged approach. Christians must be schooled or trained to some degree in apologetics and there must be regular opportunity to encounter non-Christians in a non-threatening manner. A simple reading group can be arranged for Christians to read helpful apologetics-oriented books like Lee Strobel's *Case for Christ* and *Case for Faith*. You could schedule a Probe Mind Games Conference and offer the Basic Defense Track. (Click on the

“Mind Games Conference” button on our home page for information.) For the most part, Christians today not only do not really know *what* they believe, they certainly don’t know *why*. To encounter non-Christians, you could host a regular film night or reading group. These groups would watch or read secular movies and books which raise worldview or ethical issues. With a mixed group, Christians can begin to hear what non-Christians really believe and think and begin to interact with them just by stating opinions. This can be enjoyable and non-intimidating. A moderator needs to be skilled in not letting some people dominate the discussion or get preachy.

There are a couple of Christian universities and seminaries that offer programs in apologetics. I believe that Trinity International University (www.tiu.edu) in Deerfield, Illinois offers such a program. Biola University (www.biola.edu) in Los Angeles also contains the Talbot School of Theology which offers apologetics and worldview-related programs through Professors John Mark Reynolds and J. P. Moreland. Southern Evangelical Seminary (www.ses.edu) in South Carolina is heavily geared towards apologetics. Famed apologist Norm Geisler is its president. Denver Seminary (www.denverseminary.edu) offers a degree in apologetics. I also know that Bryan College (www.bryan.edu) in Dayton, Tennessee utilizes worldview heavily in their undergraduate programs but I don’t know if they have a graduate program that specializes in apologetics.

Ray Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“Did the Girl Raised from the Dead Get a Second Chance for Salvation?”

How do you explain the situation represented in Matthew 9:18-25, of the little girl being raised after dying?

While He was saying these things to them, a synagogue official came and bowed down before Him, and said, “My daughter has just died; but come and lay Your hand on her, and she will live.” Jesus got up and {began} to follow him, and so did His disciples. And a woman who had been suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years, came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His cloak; for she was saying to herself, “If I only touch His garment, I will get well.” But Jesus turning and seeing her said, “Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you well.” At once the woman was made well. When Jesus came into the official’s house, and saw the flute-players and the crowd in noisy disorder, He said, “Leave; for the girl has not died, but is asleep.” And they began laughing at Him. But when the crowd had been sent out, He entered and took her by the hand, and the girl got up.

My question is this: If if she was unsaved, did this girl get a second chance at salvation? If yes, how does this fit in with knowing that “it is appointed for man once to die and after this the judgment”? Secondly, if she was saved, was she allowed to share about the glory of heaven? If not saved, how could she be brought back from Hell?

You ask some interesting and important questions, but I’m honestly not sure that either I, or anyone else, can give you any definitive answers. I will say that the doctrine of a second chance is almost always understood in the sense of a “second chance” for salvation AFTER death (sometimes even

after judgment), but PRIOR to the eternal state (which is, by definition, both permanent and eternal). Thus, strictly speaking, the case of the little girl in Matthew 9 may not have any direct relevance to this doctrine. This is at least highly probable for three very good reasons:

1. Scripture nowhere clearly affirms the doctrine of a second chance for salvation after death.
2. The little girl's death was only temporary. The Father knew all along that His Son would shortly raise her.
3. The little girl did not go before God for final judgment at this time.

The doctrine of the "intermediate state" (i.e. between death and resurrection) is debated among theologians. Most evangelicals believe that after death the immaterial part of a person goes either to a temporary place of punishment called Hades, or a temporary place of peace in the presence of the Lord called Paradise (see Luke 16:19-31; 23:43). After the resurrection and final judgment the entire person will then go to their eternal destiny (either the Lake of Fire or the new heavens and the new earth – See Revelation 20:11-21:8). Since this little girl did not enter her eternal destiny, she could not have shared about Heaven or Hell as we commonly think of them. But could she have shared about either Hades or Paradise?

The difficulty with answering such questions is twofold: 1. The Bible simply doesn't tell us whether or not the girl was saved, nor what her conscious experience (if any) was like between physical death and resuscitation. Thus, anyone trying to answer such questions will be speculating with no clear Scriptural support for this special event. 2. The case is clearly an exceptional one and thus, by definition, does not fit within the general doctrine of what happens to a person after death. Most people who die are not subsequently brought back to a natural mode of physical human existence in this world. The case is an exception, and therefore will not

necessarily fit all the rules. Needless to say, the Father knew (even before the little girl died) that His Son would raise her from the dead. Therefore, the usual things which happen to a person after death need not necessarily apply in this case. The Lord had no intention that she remain dead at that time! And finally, after restoring the little girl to life, we simply aren't told whether she was allowed to share her experiences between death and resuscitation, whether or not she had any conscious experiences at all to share, or if she did, whether or not she even remembered them.

My own opinion is that, as Christians, we have an ethical obligation to honestly tell people when we've run up against the limits of our knowledge. Thus, in explaining this passage to someone, I would say much of what I've said above, but I would honestly tell them that the Bible doesn't always satisfy our curiosity about such matters. Sometimes the questions we bring to the Bible simply aren't answered there. In such cases, we must humbly confess our ignorance and rest in the knowledge of God's omniscience. God knows the whole, whereas we know only a part.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

“Did the OT Jews Expect a Divine Messiah?”

Did the Jews, prior to Jesus, expect the Messiah to be divine, i.e. God Himself? Everything I can find seems to indicate that they expected him to be divinely appointed, divinely

empowered, with divine authority, with kingly authority and priestly authority but I don't see that necessarily the same as God Himself. Two passages could result in that expectation perhaps: Psalm 110:1 and Isa 7:14.

I was wondering this because of the people's response to Jesus, especially as He started to make clear His divine association with God the Father.

You ask a great question. It does not appear that the Jewish people anticipated a truly divine Messiah. Messiah means "anointed one" – and the Jewish people did see such people as being closely connected with God in some way (e.g. as a representative of God, empowered by His Spirit, etc.).

Over time, the Jewish concept of Messiah evolved to include a royal, prophetic, and priestly function. In the intertestamental period, particularly in the Psalms of Solomon, Messiah is regarded as a warrior-prince who would throw off the yoke of Rome and establish a Jewish kingdom. This is probably why Jesus is sometimes reluctant to identify himself as the Messiah in the Gospels.

However, when one reads the OT Messianic texts (like Ps. 110; etc.) in light of NT teachings, it becomes clear that it is quite possible to understand the OT conception of Messiah as being both human and divine. It may not have been clear to the OT Jewish people, but it does become clear in light of NT revelation. Indeed, I think Jesus makes this very point about Ps. 110 in Matt. 22:41-46.

Hope this helps a bit.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

Probe Ministries

“What Does It Mean to be Filled With the Spirit?”

I need some clarification! What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit? I believe that it happens at the point of salvation, but many times in scripture it talks about people who are “full of the Spirit.” Is this filling a one time deal or something that can happen many times. I know that in Old Testament times the Spirit came and went upon certain people. But in our times (and since Pentecost), how would you explain this. Thanks so much for your time, wisdom, and ministry.

The best explanation I have seen (and which has worked for me experientially for many years) is that being filled with the Spirit means yielding to Him (the Holy Spirit) in full dependence so that we are out of the way and He can do His thing through us and in us. The verb tense in Ephesians 5:18 means “be continually being filled,” so it’s not a one-time event. It’s an ongoing discipline of submission.

I love the analogy of taking a hard, dried-up sponge and plunging it into a sink full of water. The sponge softens and soaks up the water until it is super-saturated. It is “filled with” water, right? But of course, a sponge can’t choose to jump into the sink like we can choose to open ourselves to the filling and empowering of the Holy Spirit. And this choice is a matter of will, not of emotion; the difference between operating in the flesh (our own power apart from God) and being filled with the Spirit is a simple choice to ask, “Holy Spirit, please fill me” with a submissive, humble heart. It doesn’t LOOK any different to someone else and it usually doesn’t FEEL any different to us, but it’s a real event. It can happen many times throughout the day. (I have shared this

concept with my MOPS [Mothers of Preschoolers] group, and suggested they draw a line in the carpet with their shoe or draw an imaginary line across the kitchen floor, and step across the line to signify that they are moving from self-dependence to Christ-dependence and filling. One girl told me, "Sue, you should see my house! There are lines all OVER the place!")

The problem is that we default to the flesh; we keep gravitating toward doing things on our own and either rebelling against God or passively ignoring Him. We wake up "reset" to the flesh every morning. ☐ So we need to be filled again and again and again. Sort of like eating. We need to do it again and again and again! ☐

I hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

"What Do You Say When People Call Christians Hypocrites?"

I was just wondering... when people call Christians hypocrites, what is a good response? Isn't everyone a hypocrite in one way or another? I mean, I TRY not to be one, but like all humans, I mess up. Thankfully I am a Christian and have God's forgiveness. What is a quick reply that I can give people who accuse me of hypocrisy?

That is a tough accusation, for sure. Too bad it's so often accurate.

I would agree with the person that many Christians are indeed

hypocrites, and it saddens God greatly. But you might remark that the church is supposed to be a hospital for sick people, not a museum for perfect people.

Sometimes, the “Christians are hypocrites” charge is nothing but a smokescreen, which is why I would ask if they have any personal experience with it, or if it’s just something they’ve heard and they’re using it to keep distance between themselves and Christians. Or, more accurately, between themselves and God.

If someone were to make that comment to me, I would respond with, “Is that something you’ve just heard, or have you had a personal experience with someone in a church who hurt you?” I’d try to find out the heart of the matter. Sometimes people just need for someone to know and acknowledge that they were hurt by a Christian who brought dishonor to the name of Christ, and they would appreciate a compassionate and regretful response. I have been able to say, “I am so sorry you had to experience that. So is God.”

I would also ask, in humility, “Have I done anything to make you see hypocrisy in me that I need to ask forgiveness for?” And then be prepared to LISTEN to the answer!

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“Is There Salvation After

Death?"

I have a question that I hope you can help me with. I have a friend that believes that salvation can happen after physical death. He says that he believes that Christ is the way to the Father but that can happen after death. Is there any scripture that says that salvation, through believing in Jesus Christ, must happen before physical death?

Thanks for your question. Hebrews 9:27 states that it is appointed to man to die once and then the judgment. This indicates that after death, there is the judgment, and there is no mention of a second chance. In Jesus' parables of the kingdom, judgment follows after death. One example is Luke 16, Lazarus and the rich man. Immediately after they died, Lazarus was taken to Abraham's bosom and the rich man to hell. Even in hell the rich man saw that he was wrong and sorry for his sin but could not change his outcome. I am sure if he had a second chance, he would not have been there. Parables like these indicate there is no second chance. Finally, we are saved by faith. Faith is defined in Hebrews 11:1 as "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Saving faith is exercised while on earth. When we are face to face with the Lord, we will no longer be exercising any kind of faith; we will see as 1 Corinthians states, "face to face." So all scripture indicates judgment after death. The burden is on those who say there is a second chance after death. Where are the verses to uphold that view?

Thanks for your question. I hope this helps.

Patrick Zukeran
Probe Ministries

“How Is It Just for God to Put Our Sins on Jesus?”

How is it just for God to put someone's sins on Jesus, making them sinless? I have heard the analogy of a judge fining someone, and then paying the fine on their behalf; but sin is surely really, really bad, and no court would allow a judge to die instead of a criminal who had been given the death sentence.

After talking through the gospel with friends, this seems to be a big sticking point. How can a murderer seemingly get away with what he's done and go to heaven, while Johnny Average gets punished—solely on the basis of whether he accepts Jesus? It is loving on God's part to give everyone the chance of salvation, and it is just for him to punish unrepentant sinners, but how is it *just* for God to forgive a repentant sinner, who though repentant still sins?

I think you might be confusing “just” with “fair.”

Justice is about making sure that someone pays the penalty for a wrongdoing. Fairness is about treating people appropriately and right.

It is *just* for God to insist that someone pay the penalty for sin. It wasn't *fair* for Jesus to pay that penalty Himself, because that's about grace, not justice. Someone has said that justice is getting what we deserve, mercy is not getting what we deserve, and grace is getting what we don't deserve. I find those distinctions very helpful.

It is just for God to forgive a repentant sinner who continues to sin (that would be all of us!) because all of our sins, those committed before salvation and all those committed after salvation, were all paid for at the cross. Maybe I can help with the “sticking point” with a very simple word picture: we

are all standing at the bottom of the waterfall of God's love and grace. Those who refuse to turn to God in trustful dependence, receiving His forgiveness and salvation, have their cups upside down and therefore can't receive what God is pouring out on them. Those who have trusted Christ have turned their cups right side up, and can receive what God is offering.

One of the most amazing truths about the gospel is that our sins are transferred to Jesus, who paid for them at the cross, and His righteousness is transferred to us. It is the most absurdly unfair transaction in the history of all creation, but it's true. Love does things like that.

Hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries

“Why Did Jesus Have to Go to Hell After He Died?”

At a family picnic, my niece asked a very good question that had us all puzzled.

When reciting the Apostolic Creed, we say “...and suffered under Pontius Pilate...was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day He rose again and ascended into heaven.” My niece asked, “Why did Jesus have to go through hell too...what was the point of that? Didn't Jesus defy the devil right here on earth ... why did he have to go through hell upon death?”

I am embarrassed to have to write and ask you (and yes, I am even more embarrassed to go to my pastor and look him in the eye and ask him directly...because I feel I “should” know this answer. I guess I was sleeping somewhere along the line...I’ve been searching in my Bible and Bible commentary, but cannot find a “real” answer.) Thanks for your help!

Great question! There is still a lot of discussion about what that phrase meant to those who inserted it into the Creed, and what it means today.

First, we need to make a distinction between the Apostles’ Creed and scripture. Scripture is inspired; the creed, while based on scripture, is not. Secondly, you may be surprised to learn (as was I) that the Apostles’ Creed does not date back to the time of the apostles, but was a “work in progress,” developing gradually from about A.D. 200 to 750. Before 650, the phrase “descended into hell” only appeared in one version of the creed, in 390, written by a man who understood it to mean simply that Christ was buried—He “descended into the grave.” (Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, p. 174)

In defending this part of the creed, these scriptures have been offered:

*Acts 2:31 (KJV) He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that **his soul was not left in hell**, neither his flesh did see corruption.*

The problem is that the Greek word translated in the KJV “hell” is actually “Hades,” which means “the place of the dead.” The word that definitively refers to hell, “gehenna,” isn’t used here.

*1 Pet 3:18-19 For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and **made proclamation to the spirits***

now in prison...

The context indicates that the “spirits in prison” may have been disobedient demons from Noah’s time, to whom Jesus went and made proclamation—what, we’re not told. The Greek word for preached means “proclaimed,” not evangelized. This may well indicate that He visited the demons in their holding cells after His death, but that’s not the same thing as experiencing hell after His death.

When we look at what the scripture says about where Jesus went after his death, what we see is:

1. He told the thief on the cross, “Today you will be with me in paradise.” After His death, Jesus knew He would be in heaven and see the repentant and newly converted thief there.
2. Some of His last words on the cross were, “It is finished.” He had already suffered hell—separation from his Father—while hanging on the cross. His work was over and so was the torment of being under the Father’s wrath and alienation.
3. Just before dying, He said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit,” indicating that He expected the Father to receive Him when he died.

There is clearly a mystery here, in view of the 1 Peter passage, and I don’t think any of us will figure it out this side of heaven.

So, what I would say to your niece is, “Jesus didn’t have to go to hell, and He didn’t suffer anymore in hell (or any other place) after He died, but it seems that He visited it to make a point to the demons there.”

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin

