

***“How can a loving God send people to hell? Such a vindictive god is a primitive deity of the ancient world who requires punishment to appease his wrath. He should have merely forgiven the world without punishing it. Requiring Jesus to die to take away the punishment of hell is equivalent to divine child abuse. I only accept a God of love, not of justice.”***

# Introduction

From what you know, heard, or experienced why is this objection of hell so personal and offensive for so many today?

# What is Love?

In his book *Reason for God*, Dr. Timothy Keller describes being questioned by a woman who said the very concept of a judging God was offensive. He said: *“Why aren’t you offended by the idea of a forgiving God?” “I respectfully urge you to consider your cultural location when you find the Christian teaching about hell offensive.”* (p.74)

What’s Keller’s point?

Behind this objection is the hidden premise about the nature of love.

1. Define love as the objection sees it (as most 21st century Americans would).
2. Define love as Jesus does in Mark 10:17-22:

***Mark 10:17-22***

*17 As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” 18 “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. 19 You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.’” 20 “Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.” 21* ***Jesus looked at him and loved him.*** *“One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” 22 At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.*

**Forgiveness with No Punishment?**

Think about Amber Guyger’s trial. Imagine if the judge said, “Even though you are guilty, I simply forgive you with no punishment.”

1. What would the public reaction be like?
2. What would be the ramifications if we operated society like this objection wants?
3. Why is this objection a shallow view of God? (See Romans 5:7-8)

***Romans 5:7-8***

*7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

**A vengeful God makes vengeful followers?**

Most secularists assume believing in a vengeful God who sends people to hell will lead believers of such a God to be vengeful and violent themselves.

1. Use the following quote and passages to prove that the opposite is true.

*“If God were not angry at injustice and deception and did not make a final end to violence—that God would not be worthy of worship… The only means of prohibiting all recourse to violence by ourselves is to insist that violence is legitimate only when it comes from God… My thesis that the practice of non-violence requires a belief in divine vengeance will be unpopular with many…in the West. [But] it takes the quiet of a suburban home for the birth of the thesis that human non-violence [results from the belief in] God’s refusal to judged. In a sun-scorched land, soaked in the blood of the innocent, it will invariably die.”*

*-Miroslav Volf, Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*

**Matthew 26:51-53**

51 With that, one of Jesus’ companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. 52 “Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. 53 Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?

**2 Thessalonians 1:3-11**

3 We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing. 4 Therefore, among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. 5 All this is evidence that God’s judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. 6 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might 10 on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you. 11 With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith.

**What is Hell?**

**Romans 1:21-25**

21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. 24 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. 25 They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen…

**2 Thessalonians 1:9**

9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.

**Luke 16:19-31**

19 “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 20 At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21 and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 “The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24 So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’ 25 “But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’ 27 “He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, 28 for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ 29 “Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’ 30 “ ‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ 31 “He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’ ”

1. C.S. Lewis, a former atheist, wrote, “There are only two kinds of people—those who say ‘Thy will be done’ to God or those to whom God in the end says, ‘Thy will be done.” Why is hell, “the greatest monument to human freedom,” as Lewis call it? (*The Problem of Pain* p.116)

**Justice & Love at the Cross**

**Matthew 27:45-46**

45 From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. 46 About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).

1. Defend this statement: “If you deny hell, you must also deny the fullness of God’s love.” (See article “The Importance of Hell” of addition thoughts.)

**Conclusion**

Practice how you would answer this objection to Christianity.

**“The Importance of Hell”**

Selections from Timothy Keller’s Blog3

3 http://www.timothykeller.com/blog/2008/8/1/the-importance-of-hell.

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There are plenty of people today who don't believe in the Bible's teaching on everlasting punishment, even those who do find it an unreal and a remote concept.

In 2003 a research group discovered 64% of Americans expect to go to heaven when they die, but less than 1% think they might go to hell. Not only are there plenty of people today who don't believe in the Bible's teaching on everlasting punishment, even those who do find it an unreal and a remote concept. Nevertheless, it is a very important part of the Christian faith, for several reasons. ...

**1. It is important because Jesus taught about it more than all other Biblical authors put together.** Jesus speaks of "eternal fire and punishment" as the final abode of the angels and human beings who have rejected God (Matthew 25:41,46) He says that those who give into sin will be in danger of the "fire of hell" (Matthew 5:22; 18:8-9.) The word Jesus uses for 'hell' is Gehenna, a valley in which piles of garbage were daily burned as well as the corpses of those without families who could bury them. In Mark 9:43 Jesus speaks of a person going to "hell [gehenna], where 'their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.' " Jesus is referring to the maggots that live in the corpses on the garbage heap. When all the flesh is consumed, the maggots die. Jesus is saying, however, that the spiritual decomposition of hell never ends, and that is why 'their worm does not die.'

If Jesus, the Lord of Love and Author of Grace spoke about hell more often, and in a more vivid, blood-curdling manner than anyone else, it must be a crucial truth. In Matthew 10:28 Jesus says, "Do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell." He is speaking to disciples, some of whom will eventually be tortured, sawn in half, flayed and burned alive. Yet, he says, that is a picnic compared to hell. Clearly, for Jesus hell was a real place, since he said that after judgment day people would experience it in their bodies. Hell is a place not only of physical but also of spiritual misery.

Jesus constantly depicted hell as painful fire and "outer darkness" (Matt 25:30; cf. Jude 6,7,13,) a place of unimaginably terrible misery and unhappiness. If Jesus, the Lord of Love and Author of Grace spoke about hell more often, and in a more vivid, blood-curdling manner than anyone else, it must be a crucial truth. …

**4. The doctrine of hell is important because it is the only way to know how much Jesus loved us and how much he did for us.** In Matthew 10:28 Jesus says that no physical destruction can be compared with the spiritual destruction of hell, of losing the presence of God. But this is exactly what happened to Jesus on the cross-he was forsaken by the Father (Matthew 27:46.) In Luke 16:24 the rich man in hell is desperately thirsty (v.24) and on the cross Jesus said "I thirst" (John 19:28.) The water of life, the presence of God, was taken

from him. The point is this. Unless we come to grips with this "terrible" doctrine, we will never even begin to understand the depths of what Jesus did for us on the cross. His body was being destroyed in the worst possible way, but that was a flea bite compared to what was happening to his soul. When he cried out that his God had forsaken him he was experiencing hell itself. But consider--if our debt for sin is so great that it is never paid off there, but our hell stretches on for eternity, then what are we to conclude from the fact that Jesus said the payment was "finished" (John 19:30) after only three hours? We learn that what he felt on the cross was far worse and deeper than all of our deserved hells put together.

And this makes emotional sense when we consider the relationship he lost. If a mild acquaintance denounces you and rejects you--that hurts. If a good friend does the same--that hurts far worse. However, if your spouse walks out on you saying, "I never want to see you again," that is far more devastating still. The longer, deeper, and more intimate the relationship, the more tortuous is any separation. But the Son's relationship with the Father was beginningless and infinitely greater than the most intimate and passionate human relationship. When Jesus was cut off from God he went into the deepest pit and most powerful furnace, beyond all imagining. He experienced the full wrath of the Father. And he did it voluntarily, for us.

Fairly often I meet people who say, "I have a personal relationship with a loving God, and yet I don't believe in Jesus Christ at all." Why, I ask? "My God is too loving to pour out infinite suffering on anyone for sin." But this shows a deep misunderstanding of both God and the cross. On the cross, God HIMSELF, incarnated as Jesus, took the punishment. He didn't visit it on a third party, however willing.

So the question becomes: what did it cost your kind of god to love us and embrace us? What did he endure in order to receive us? Where did this god agonize, cry out, and where were his nails and thorns? The only answer is: "I don't think that was necessary." But then ironically, in our effort to make God more loving, we have made him less loving. His love, in the end, needed to take no action. It was sentimentality, not love at all. The worship of a god like this will be at most impersonal, cognitive, and ethical. There will be no joyful self-abandonment, no humble boldness, no constant sense of wonder. We could not sing to him "love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all." Only through the cross could our separation from God be removed, and we will spend all eternity loving and praising God for what he has done (Rev 5:9-14.)

And if Jesus did not experience hell itself for us, then we ourselves are devalued. In Isaiah, we are told, "The results of his suffering he shall see, and shall be satisfied" (Isaiah 53:11). This is a stupendous thought. Jesus suffered infinitely more than any human soul in eternal hell, yet he looks at us and says, "It was worth it." What could make us feel more loved and valued than that? The Savior presented in the gospel waded through hell itself rather than lose us, and no other savior ever depicted has loved us at such a cost.