

A LOVING GOD AND HELL?
Fourth in a Series: “God on Trial –The Case for Christianity”
September 30, 2018 –I Peter 4: 1-6
The Church of the Covenant

It is strange to think that secular humanity places God on Trial. That a fallen world hurls charges against the Almighty. Shakes its fist at heaven. Remonstrates against the Holy, Holy, Holy God. And yet that is what the world does and that is what we do from time to time. Today we consider the charge as this –“God if You are so loving then why is there a hell that You consign people to for eternity?” “Can’t You just abolish it with a snap of Your fingers and have everyone go to heaven?” The fact that there is a hell is proof positive that God cannot be loving, so the world would say...

If I may define hell simply I would say it is **separation from God for all eternity**. Utter and absolute separation from the source of all that is good and forever. Infinity is a long time to be apart from everything good in life. But to understand hell I think one needs to understand the nature of God. God is completely and utterly HOLY. God is set apart and wholly other. His holiness is at the heart of who He is. He is the extreme opposite of anything fallen or sinful, evil or corrupt. He is HOLY. And He is not just HOLY He is thrice Holy. He is *Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!* (Revelation 4:8) And the very nature of holiness is that it cannot be in the presence of UN-holiness. It is incompatible like fire and water. It cannot blend together at all, like oil and water. Our fallen nature cannot stand in the presence of a Holy, Holy, Holy God. Were this sanctuary completely dark and there was no light in it at all, there would be perfect darkness. But light the smallest match and the entire space would be illumined by that one tiny match. Light and darkness cannot be in the same room. The one casts the other out. It is impossible for darkness to exist in the presence of light in the same way that the tiniest sin within cannot stand in the presence of a Holy God. Oh, I’m a basically good person –that’s not it. Oh, I’m better than that drug addict over there –that’s not it. Oh, I’ve done a lot of good in my life –that’s not it. It doesn’t matter if you’re 85% good and 15% fallen, or 99% good and 1% fallen. It doesn’t matter if you only ever did one teeny, tiny little sin once 25 years ago, it means you are not holy. You are not perfectly set apart from the rest of us. *“All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23)...the perfection of God...the holiness of God. ALL, not just some; everyone who has walked the face of this earth is not HOLY...with the exception of one man, Jesus Christ, who could walk in holiness though He was also in the flesh, only because He was both God and Man. So there’s nothing personal in all this. It is just the very nature of the holiness of God and the very nature of humankind; each is utterly incompatible with the other. A human life no matter how well-lived upon death becomes separated from God. God alone is HOLY. We are not. It is our fallen nature and our free will and bad choices that consign us to hell, not God...You’re putting the wrong person on trial...There’s nothing personal about this. Its our choice, not God’s.

But an aspect of God’s holiness IS His profound love. It is God’s desire that not even one should perish. *“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. God sent the Son into the world...that the world might be saved”* (John 3: 16) That’s what the Bible says. But saved in a particular unique way –through His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. God doesn’t want people to go to hell, doesn’t want them to perish, doesn’t want them to be separated from Him for eternity and so has provided a particular way for them NOT TO PERISH and to go to heaven and to be in His presence forever. Jesus says, *“I am the way...no one comes to the Father but by me.”* (John 14:6)

So Jesus storms the very gates of hell itself to retrieve you from your own sin and fallenness. Not because He hates us but precisely because He loves us and is a perfect expression of the love of God. Jesus is God in the flesh. When Jesus hangs on the cross and dies for you He is storming the gates of hell to rescue the perishing. He suffers and dies to demonstrate His great love for you. His blood is shed so you may be covered in that perfect blood when we stand in the presence of a HOLY, HOLY, HOLY God. In that day God sees Jesus’ perfection and not our fallenness. Jesus alone can reconcile God’s holiness with our unholiness.

HE does this; we cannot do it on our own and apart from Him. He is perfect and He is Holy and He provides the perfect sacrifice and dies the perfect death that we might never taste of the second death of utter, absolute separation from the love of God. If that's not love, what is? Is the cross not the evidence that demands a verdict with your life?????

Our scripture from I Peter is such an interesting piece of scripture. It says: *"For this is why the gospel was preached even to the dead, that though judged in the flesh like men, they might live in the spirit like God."* (I Peter 4: 6) The gospel was proclaimed even to the dead. Jesus dies on the cross on Good Friday and is raised from the dead on Easter. He is gone for three days. The Apostles Creed, the most ancient and authoritative of creeds, says "He descended into hell". The gates of hell could not even prevail against the Son of God. And what did Jesus do when He descended into hell for three days? Did He Facebook and sip tea? No way; His very character would have demanded He preach the gospel to the perishing even in hell itself. The GOSPEL the Good News was preached even to the dead, to all those from the beginning to the end of time who separated themselves from the love of God. Jesus went to the cross, He went to hell in this life, O and even in death He went to the very gates of hell to proclaim that no one needs to go to hell if they but turn and repent and believe in Him. That's what Jesus was doing for three days...that not even one might perish but that all might have eternal life in Him. If that's not love, what is????? But you know something? Some people even in hell will still reject Him. I don't need you Jesus because I'm still a basically good person. I'm not ready to decide, I still haven't got this all figured out yet (Been here 10,000 years but I'm still trying to figure it out). I'm sorry Jesus this doesn't fit with my philosophy of God. I'm still angry at God that everything didn't go according to my plan in my life. Whatever, and people will still decide to remain separate from God rather than respond to Jesus when He comes to preach the gospel to the dead...Because people consign themselves to hell, not the loving God. Dude, figure it out today. Don't wait 10,000 years, please...

Every saint as they prepare to face their end pretty much also faces a moment when they doubt their salvation and their eternal destination. I've been a pastor now for 35 years and I can attest to that. My own dear sweet Mother a couple of days before she died asked her son and her pastor, "Am I okay or will my sin keep me from God?" Instead of trying to argue to her that somehow my Mother is a good person instead I just asked her a series of questions –"Mother, do you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?" Yes. Do you believe He went to the cross for you, Mother? Yes. Do you believe that you are saved and have eternal life because of what Jesus has done for you, through grace by faith? Yes. Do you believe that through Jesus all your sins have been washed away? Yes. And then I said, and I have no idea why I said it quite this way, then I said, "Well, Mother, then you are good to go." And she said, "Yes, I am good to go." Yes, Mother through Jesus you are good to go. What a SAVIOR! What a LORD!

This series is "God on Trial" but one day we'll be on trial. We will stand before the judgment seat before Jesus who is "the judge of the quick and the dead". But the beautiful thing about it is this. Yes, it is Jesus who is our judge. And by the way, it is Jesus who is our advocate; you might say, it is Jesus who is our lawyer and our attorney, pleading our case. And it is Jesus who has already paid our penalty for us. He suffered and died to give us eternal life. Jesus is judge and attorney and penalty, all rolled into one. Your honor, Jesus, we stand today needing a Savior and Lord...

So the only question remaining is –So, are you good to go? Amen and Amen.

By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!

I am indebted to the book, Case for Faith, by Lee Strobel, for the underlying arguments in this sermon.