

MAIN POINT

The Bible tells us God is love. But it also describes God as sovereign, righteous, just, and holy. These attributes overlap quite a bit. God's sovereignty means He has the moral right and absolute power to control what He chooses. His righteousness means he is morally pure. His justness means He is perfectly ethical in his judgements. His holiness means that He is transcendently separate from His creation. These attributes of God help us understand how He relates to people; both those who seek him and those who choose to rebel against him.

INTRODUCTION

We are in the middle of our series at The Heights looking at heaven and hell. In this lesson, we will be considering the question, "Why do people go to hell?"

Describe a time when someone you didn't know wronged you. What makes what that person did "wrong"?

Ultimately, where does our sense of right and wrong come from?

How do you think an atheist would answer this question?

For many people in this postmodern, post-truth culture, morality is relative. You may have heard the claim, "That might be true for you, but it's not true for me." Subjective truth argues that it's not possible to say something is always true for all people. However, as Christians, we know universal truth has been revealed in God's word. This knowledge is based on the character of God. God cannot lie, Jesus is the truth, and God's word is truth. Because God is perfectly righteous and holy, He is our moral absolute.

UNDERSTANDING

I. THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

To start to answer the question, "Why do people go to hell?", we need to consider some attributes of God.

HAVE VOLUNTEERS READ PSALM 33:5 AND PSALM 36:5-7

What attributes of God are mentioned in these verses?

God is loving, faithful, righteous, and just. Many people are willing to believe God is faithful and loving. But in these verses, we see that God is also righteous and just.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ISAIAH 6:1-4.

What does this passage tell us about the character of God?

What is significant about the angels repeating "holy" three times?

In these verses, we see God's overwhelming holiness. The repetition of "holy" in this passage gives force and weight to the statement. God is not just holy; He is holy, holy, holy!

II. THE SPIRITUAL CONDITION OF PEOPLE

A second question to consider when answering the question, "Why do people go to hell?" is, how do we measure up against God's holiness?

HAVE VOLUNTEERS READ JER. 17:9; ECCLESIASTES 7:20; ROM. 7:18-19; AND ROM. 6:23.

How do we as people measure up to God’s perfect holiness?

III. HOW GOD, WHO IS HOLY, RIGHTEOUS, AND JUST, DEALS WITH SINFUL PEOPLE

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PSALM 7:11

How is God described in this verse?

God is a righteous judge who feels anger or indignation against the wicked.

How is a righteous judge required to respond when a defendant has been found guilty?

If a judge routinely lets convicted murderers walk away without any sentencing, that could be considered as “nice”, but it certainly would not be the responsible action of a righteous judge.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ISAIAH 6:5.

What do you suppose Isaiah meant when he said, “Woe to me, I am ruined”?

The Hebrew word for “woe” is “oy”, which is a passionate cry of grief or despair. And the word for “ruined” is “dama” (pronounced daw-mam’), which means to be undone (like coming apart at the seams), or to be destroyed. So we are completely helpless as sinful people before holy, just, righteous God.

“I don’t feel like believing in hell. And yet I do.... for now I attribute the discrepancy to an underdeveloped sense of justice on my part. God is perfect. And I joyfully submit to a God whose ways are much, much higher than mine.” Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle, “Erasing Hell”

IV. HOW GOD’S HOLINESS AND JUSTNESS MESH WITH HIS LOVE AND MERCY

A final question to consider is, how does God’s love and mercy fit with his role as righteous judge?

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ISAIAH 6:6-8.

How does Isaiah’s response change when God intervenes in his life in verses 6-8?

The hot coal used by the angel may have been taken from the bronze alter of burnt offering, which symbolizes Christ’s sacrifice for us. This instantly changes Isaiah from a man woefully pronouncing God’s judgment on himself to a forgiven, restored man eagerly volunteering for service to God.

What does this passage teach us about the effects of God’s holiness on sinful people?

What does this passage teach us about the effects of God’s grace on sinful people?

“There is a pattern here, a pattern repeated in history. God appears, people quake in terror, God forgives and heals. God sends. From brokenness to mission is the human pattern.” R. C. Sproul, “The Holiness of God”

Holiness literally means separateness or set-apartness. It is natural for people to become gripped by their own sinfulness in the presence of holy God. God wants us to recognize our desperate need for Him. And just like He cleansed and restored Isaiah, when we accept Him, His grace will make us holy as He is holy.

“Hell is the backdrop that reveals the profound and unbelievable grace of the cross. It brings to light the enormity of our sin and therefore portrays the undeserved favor of God in full color. Christ freely chose to bear the wrath that I deserve so that I can experience life in the presence of God.” Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle, “Erasing Hell”

V. CONCLUSION TO THE QUESTION: WHY DO PEOPLE GO TO HELL?

HAVE VOLUNTEERS READ ISAIAH 6:6-8; ROMANS 5:8; HEB. 2:3; AND HEB. 10:26-27.

The questions we have been considering are foundational to the gospel message. When Christ died on the cross, he paid our death penalty for us, meeting God’s righteous requirement for justice while making a way for us as sinful people to have our relationship with Him to be restored. Some people believe all roads lead to heaven; but don’t be fooled. We are very blessed that a holy God--whose very nature as a righteous judge requires him to condemn sin--made even one way back to Him, at great cost to Himself. If we choose to reject the sacrifice of God’s only Son Jesus, “no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God” (Heb. 10:26).

APPLICATION

VI. HOW WE ARE TO LIVE AS CHRISTIANS IN LIGHT OF GOD’S HOLINESS

HAVE VOLUNTEERS READ LEVITICUS 11:42-45, AND 1 PETER 1:15-16.

What was the overarching command God gave to Israel in these verses in Leviticus?

What part of God’s character does He base His command to be holy?

We see from Col. 2:17 and Heb. 10:1 that the Old Testament Law is a shadow, and the reality is Christ. We also saw from the verses in 1 Peter that the command to be holy is also given to the church. Although the dietary restrictions given in God’s covenant with Israel don’t apply to the church, how do they provide a spiritual picture of the overall command to be holy, as God is holy?

The holiness of God describes His purity and separateness from His creation. And since He is holy, He calls His people to be holy. He is calling His people to separate themselves from the ways of this world. These dietary laws provide a picture that God’s people are to be distinct from all the people of the world.

If you are not sure whether you are going to heaven, talk to your study leader.

Where might you have become too casual in your understanding of God, taking His love and grace for granted, while forgetting about his divine power, authority, and holiness?

Why might it actually be a hindrance to those who don’t know Christ when we try to soften the message of salvation by emphasizing God’s love while removing hell and God’s holiness and judgement from the equation?

One application will be to commit to focus more on God and His holiness during our time of group worship during our Sunday morning services. Another application might be to include a time of praise in your prayer time, rather than jump right into your requests.

PRAYER

Our God and Father, we praise you your holiness, justness, righteousness, purity, and glory. May your name be kept holy. We thank you for making us holy in your sight through the blood of Jesus Christ. Help us to take your command to be holy seriously, and we pray we would continue to grow in holiness through the sanctifying work of your Holy Spirit.

COMMENTARY

ISAIAH 6:1-7

6:1-13 Most prophets record a time when God called them to their ministry. Moses received God's call at the burning bush (Ex 3). Jeremiah heard God tell him that he had been chosen from the womb to deliver a message of judgment and salvation to the nations (Jer 1:4-10). Ezekiel experienced an incredible vision while he was in exile in Babylon (Ezek 1:4-3:27). Isaiah received his commissioning vision in the temple, but in his vision the temple was transformed into the throne room of heaven itself.

6:1 King Uzziah (called "Azariah" in 2Ki 15:3) died about 740 b.c. He had been a relatively good king, and did "what was right in the Lord's sight" (2Ki 15:3), though he did not remove the high places. God also blessed Uzziah's reign with prosperity and military success. His death, coupled with the rise of Assyria, created great uncertainty in Judah. Note that God is so great that His robe (the Hb suggests just the seam of His robe) filled the temple.

6:2 The seraphim were angelic creatures of great power and importance. Their name means "burning ones," and the implication of fire evokes thoughts of danger and mystery. Covering their eyes shielded them from the brilliance of the divine glory. Covering their feet (possibly used here as a euphemism) may have been a posture of submission.

6:3 The word holy spoken three times is emphatic or superlative and points to God's otherness. He is completely separated from anything profane or sinful. His sovereignty is underlined by the fact that His glory filled the whole earth.

6:5 In the presence of such holiness, Isaiah felt the weight of his own sinfulness. He feared for himself because he knew that God did not tolerate uncleanness in His presence.

6:6-7 God prepared Isaiah by cleansing his lips, the instrument by which he would execute his prophetic task. He did this symbolically by having one of His seraphim touch the prophet's lips with a burning coal. Fire can purify (Num 31:22-23), and this burning coal was taken from the altar where sacrifices were offered to atone for sin (1Ch 6:49).

LEVITICUS 11:42-45

This chapter includes two separate listings of clean and unclean creatures (vv. 1-23; vv. 41-45); the identity of many of the animals is uncertain. Although there may have been some hygienic benefit derived from keeping the food laws, the prohibited creatures were not consistently unhealthy for human consumption. More likely, these laws reflected the distinctive types at creation (Gen 1:26) and thereby taught the Israelites that there was an ordained pattern of conformity. The instructions showed the Israelites that they must conform to their creation as a holy people, avoiding assimilation with their pagan neighbors by adopting their domestic habits.

The food laws that once separated the Israelites and the nations are not binding on modern believers (Ac 10:11-16; Col 2:16), but the underlying principle remains true: all that a Christian does must be for the glory of God (1Co 10:31). Consecrated Christian living arises from the inner person who is redeemed, not from physical things (Mk 7:18-23; Rm 14:17-18). Christians must exercise spiritual maturity in choosing food and drink (Rm 14; 1Co 8; 10:23) and in associating with others (1Co 5:11; 2Co 6:14).

1 PETER 1:13-15

The grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ refers to the culmination of God's redemptive activity in Jesus that will occur at His return (v. 5). The phrase former ignorance means "without knowledge of God" and suggests that the recipients of this letter were mostly Gentiles who, before coming to Christ, practiced pagan religions.