

Why I Pray There is a Hell

At a very young age, most of us recognize that there are many miscarriages of justice in our world. Innocent people are unfairly accused of acts for which they had no part. Others are victims of horrific crimes. Many are born into privilege while others mire in poverty. Some never know hunger, while others never know a satisfied stomach. Life is neither fair nor rational.

It takes faith to believe that God is good and just, because the world that He created is certainly not. One of the obstacles to faith is the injustice that we witness all around us. Agnostics and atheists will point to the travesties of life as evidence that God does not exist, is not good, or is in some way distant.

If we were to assess the character of God based on the evidence of this world, it would be a God that is cruel, biased, unfeeling, unjust, and possibly even powerless. We want to believe in a perfect, moral God, yet, there is so much injustice in His creation.

Most people believe that our lives here on Earth are just part of the story. Throughout history, mankind has believed in some type of heaven and hell. We believe that in an afterlife we will finally see the true character of God. The good, the just, the decent, and the oppressed will finally receive their reward there.

Most people believe in some type of heavenly reward. Fewer believe in a hell.

There are some good arguments against hell from a human perspective. How could any of us enjoy heaven knowing that a loved one suffers in a fiery pit of torment? How could a just God torture someone for all eternity, because of a brief lifetime of sinfulness or faithlessness?

I believe that too many of us are rigid in our concept of hell. In Dante's classic "The Inferno", hell is grouped into categories of suffering – the greater the sin, the more severe the punishment. Perhaps a fallen loved one will not be tormented for all eternity. Perhaps it will be a brief, tolerable punishment. Perhaps after such punishment, the soul goes nowhere but simply dies forever. Or, perhaps, after a period, the sinful soul will also attain one of the lower rungs of Heaven.

No one knows how punishment will be delivered in an afterlife, but if we believe in a just God, then we must accept that it will be administered justly.

Nevertheless, some punishment must be administered for God to be good. Think about some of the most evil men in history: Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, and Mao. They were responsible for the brutal murder of hundreds of millions of people. Would a good and just God simply ignore their egregious atrocities? Would He ignore the cries of their victims?

In fact, I believe that both Heaven and Hell are an integral part of a just God. We already know that justice does not exist on Earth. What if it is also absent in an afterlife? If injustice persists there, I believe faith will be shaken there also.

What would we think of an Earthly judge, who allows murderers, rapists, or terrorists to walk free without punishment? Ironically, many believers who oppose the death penalty do so on the argument that it is up to God to judge and punish the perpetrator, and not man. What if God also does not punish? What would that reveal about His nature?

Heaven without a hell – or an afterlife with rewards, but without punishment – is not the product of a wise God. It is an afterlife that speaks poorly of God's judgement.

In the book of Revelations, the martyrs cry out for God to avenge their bloodshed. I pray there is a hell to punish their slayers. For the sake of the oppressed, the murdered, and for victims everywhere, I pray their transgressors are appropriately disciplined. I pray there is a hell for all those who deserve such punishment. Because, without hell, God's character is greatly diminished.

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