

WHAT IS HELL?

by Christopher Morgan & Robert Peterson

TO THE GROUP LEADER: This resource is designed to help you lead others to better understand one of the “Basics of the Faith” booklets published by P&R. The numbers in brackets indicate the page number in the booklet. Below each question is an answer based on what the author presents, or advice on how to discuss the question. You have the freedom to adapt the questions to best fit your group.

A good teaching technique is to distribute the questions to the group and have them write down how they would answer BEFORE reading the booklet. After reading, members can refine their answers based on their reading. As a group, members can discuss their views to affirm or modify what they wrote.

1. Would a loving God really send good people to hell? If so, why would He do that? (5-6)
This is a good discussion starter, as it is a good way to feel out where each in the group stands on this subject. Don't let it get into an argument, and don't spend a lot of time on this as it will develop as you go along.
2. Perhaps this is a better question to answer: How could a perfect, holy, just, and good God *not* send *good* people to hell? Read John 6:44 and Romans 5:6-10 before you answer. (6-10)
This is more the reality than the first question. This question puts God, and not man, at the center of the issue. When Adam sinned, it was a personal offense against God. Adam found God to be no longer able to satisfy all his needs, so he offended God by seeking to find other gods who can satisfy. This could not be tolerated by God as it violates the purpose for which He created man.
3. Read Romans 3:9-20, noting the word *all* in vs.9. Now look again at the two questions above. What needs to be understood about those we called “good?” (9)
Before a holy and just God, no one can ever be considered good. Our sin has prevented that from being true.
4. Would hell be punishment or reward? (10-14)
In reality, it is both. It is God's punishment for the rebellion man brought about by his sin from the beginning. He refused to acknowledge God for who He is or give Him thanks. (Read Romans 1:18-23.) But it is also a reward in the respect that people are given what they wanted – a life without God's interference.
5. The Bible describes those who go to hell as *perishing* and being *destroyed*. What does that mean? (14-15)
Have someone read aloud the middle paragraph on page 15. Emphasize the quote at the end.
6. Have you ever been told, “Get out of my sight. I never want to see your face again?” How did you feel? (15-17)
Give anyone a chance to share how he/she felt. If no one has, ask them how they think someone would feel. Then point out this is what God will do at that final judgment as He banishes unbelievers from His glorious presence.
7. What was the worst suffering you have ever had to endure? How long did it last? (17-18)
After you get some brief answers to this question, have them read several of the Bible passages in this section, emphasizing the severity and the length of this suffering. Also, don't let them forget this didn't come from a mean God, but from what they deserve, as did we.

8. How long will people suffer in hell? (18-20)

This is perhaps the hardest question for many to accept. We don't *want* to think of people suffering for eternity, but we need to help the group look at this from God's viewpoint. God only does that which is right and that which is best – He is capable of nothing less. God is the One who created; He is the One who set the rules and standards in place; and only He has the right to make this kind of a judgment call. Therefore, in the light of how sin is a personal offence to God, He does only what is right – He gives what is deserved.

9. Think this through: If there is no hell, how different will heaven be with believers and unbelievers there? (20-30)

Spend some time on this. Their view of heaven should be quite different if there is no hell. It will be no more than what life is like here.

10. If there is no hell, what would have to change about your understanding of God? (20-30)

If there is no hell, then God is not just because He does not deal with sin. It also means He is not holy because He allows sin. He is not good, because He permits evil to thrive. All of God's perfect attributes would change, including being perfect.

After going through these questions, read the text and fill in the answers in preparation for class, noting other questions you might have. [By the way, if you do have any other questions about what you read, write them down here so you remember them at class time.]

APPLICATION

There *is* a heaven and there *is* a hell. This should make a massive difference in the way we live our lives and the way we look at and deal with those around us – our friends, and even our family. If you *really* believe in hell, what needs to change in your life beginning right now? What needs to change in your prayer life? What needs to change regarding your plans to meet with those who need Christ? What will you change starting **right now**? (31-34)

For Further Study

Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment, Robert A. Peterson. P&R, 1995.

Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God, Jonathan Edwards. (The updated version is by John J. Fanella.) P&R, 1996.

The Problem of Good: When the World Seems Fine Without God, D. Marion Clark, ed. P&R, 2014.

Find this and more at www.pcabookstore.com.