

Is God Schizophrenic?

Ken Eckerty

Ask any Christian why they believe God will torment people forever, and you'll usually get the response, "God loves all men, but He is also just." While it is certainly true that God is both love and justice, modern theology perverts both of these wonderful attributes of God by creating a dualistic natured god—a god incapable of loving and executing His justice at the same time.

The Bible declares in I John 4:8 that "God is love." When the Apostle John was thinking of a perfect phrase to describe God's love, notice he didn't say, "God is loving." All of us know that God does loving acts, but to John, this description was insufficient to describe the depths and perfection of the love of God. Humans are capable of showing love, but God is much more than man. John was saying that God is more than just loving deeds. He "is" love. In other words, the very essence (or character) of God "is love." He is always love – 24/7. In every circumstance and in every place, "God is love." There is no time, ever, when God is not love. Do you believe this? The Bible gives us a beautiful description of God's love in I Corinthians 13.

"Love is patient and kind. Love knows neither envy nor jealousy. Love is not forward and self-assertive, nor boastful and conceited. Love does not behave unbecomingly, nor seek to aggrandize (boast of greatness) itself, nor blaze out in passionate anger, nor brood over wrongs. It finds no pleasure in injustice done to others, but joyfully sides with the truth. It knows how to be silent. It is full of trust, full of hope, full of patient endurance."

When reading the above passage, try this: every time the word "love" is used, take it out and replace it with the word "God." Since God "is" love, God is also patient and kind. He is also not envious or jealous. He is not forward and self-assertive, nor boastful and conceited. He does not behave unbecomingly, nor seeks to make His name great at the expense of others. He does not blaze out in passionate, uncontrolled anger, nor broods over wrongs.

Let us now look at the doctrine of eternal torment in the light of the great truth concerning God's great love. If it is true that God is always love (and He is!), how do we then explain the doctrine of eternal torment? One hard-line reformer, Jonathan Edwards wrote, "Hell is God's perfect hatred without love." Edwards knew that the doctrine of never-ending punishments was incompatible with God's love, which is why he had to remove any suggestion that God's love could reach into the lowest "hell." But how can this be? If God can do nothing apart from His love, how do we explain the fact that God supposedly torments most of His creation for

all eternity for no apparent purpose? If God's punishments never end, then what purpose do they hold for the offender – what betterment to the sinner? If there is no intent on correcting the behavior of the offender, then the only purpose this punishment could serve would be to either satisfy God's own sense of justice or to teach the poor sinner an "eternal" lesson. And in either case, this would be a selfish act because God would be thinking solely of Himself. God could not have the best interest of the sinner at heart if His punishments continued without end. Isn't love being concerned for the welfare of another? I Corinthians 13:5 says, "*Love (God) seeks not its (His) own things.*" The very essence of love is the idea that it is purely unselfish – it seeks not its own. If God acts in a manner prescribed by the majority of the Church by torturing most of His creation forever – with no thought whatsoever of rehabilitation for the sinner – how then can this be love? As an earthly father, no matter how bad and rebellious my children act, I could never punish them simply out of anger and vengeance – for to do so would be selfish and unloving. And if I did, could it be said that I truly loved my children? If I inflict severe pain on my children simply to teach them a lesson, with absolutely no intent on correcting their behavior, what kind of father would I be? And what kind of Father would God be if He acted in this same manner? God would not be a loving God if He acted thus toward most of His created beings. Does an earthly parent have more capacity to love than God? What loving parent on the face of the earth would ever do (to their own children) the kinds of horrors that Christians ascribe to God? Isn't God's love far greater than the love that earthly parents have for their own children? The idea of "eternal" hell shows that we believe in a god who acts simply to satisfy his own need for justice and revenge. And if this is the case, then God is NOT love, at least to the great majority of those He torments "eternally."

If the Bible is true when it says that God is love – then God must love at all times – not just in this short lifespan He gives us. Didn't Jesus Himself tell us to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44)? Didn't Paul teach us that if our enemies hunger and thirst, we should give them food and drink (Romans 12:20)? Does this only apply to a man's short lifespan on the earth? Does God's love stop after a man dies?

An acquaintance of mine tried to defend the doctrine of "eternal" torment by saying that "God only loves in memory – not physically." I'm not even sure what that is supposed to mean. Where is that in the Bible? Doesn't the apostle John tell us to "... *love not in word only, but in deed and truth*" (I John 3:18)? How can God only love in memory, and not in deeds?

Some justify the lie of "eternal" torment by saying that "God's ways are higher than ours." In other words, "God can do whatever He pleases and it is not our business to question God." God can certainly do whatsoever He pleases to whomever He pleases. However, in anything God does, He cannot contradict His own Word. If God commands us to love and forgive "*seventy times seven*" and show love to our most hated enemy, then God must do the same. God will never expect us to do something that He Himself isn't willing to do. If God tells us to keep on forgiving, then God will also keep forgiving – even after this life is over.

In order to get around the irrefutable fact that God "is" always love, theologians have invented what I like to call the "Doctrine of Schizophrenia." They teach that "God is love, but He is also judgment, and therefore, God must forever turn His back on the unrepentant sinner." Without admitting it, Christians actually agree with the words of Jonathan Edwards who, in

order to justify an “eternal” hell, had to separate God’s judgment from His love. To Jonathan Edwards, “hell” was the absence of the love of God. In actuality, Edwards’ view of “hell” is quite correct if the Bible teaches never-ending punishments. The hypocrisy of this “schizoid” theology pits one side of God against the other instead of seeing that God’s judgments work “hand in glove” with His love in order to accomplish His purposes. Modern theology can’t admit that the doctrine of “eternal” torment makes God into someone who cannot love after a man dies. At least Jonathan Edwards had the honesty (and guts) to admit what he really believed. To those reading this who believe in the doctrine of never-ending punishments – can you admit that there will come a time when God can no longer love?

The modern church embraces two gods – a god of love, and a god of judgment. This god of love can only love those who “accept” him in this life. But if a man is unfortunate enough to die at a young age without Christ, or he is born in a Muslim country, or he rejects Christianity based on the hypocrisy of so-called Christians, or he simply isn’t “smart” enough to choose Christ over the thousands of sects and religions each claiming to be Truth – then look out! This god of love transforms himself into a god of judgment. No longer can this god love. No longer can he reach out to his enemies. No longer can he show any mercy or respond to the cries of those who are lost. Most of Christendom believes that this god of judgment throws most of his creation into eternal flames and then turns his back on them despite their screaming, and their cries for mercy. And this god of justice will continue to turn a deaf ear to all those people whom he created – forever and ever.

What an ugly, and hideous theology we have devised! Some men, like St. Augustine, actually claim that those who are sentenced to this never-ending torture chamber will actually be content to stay in that state for all eternity, and because of their contentment in “hell,” God won’t have to show His love mercy and love.

And, of course, there is always the great theology of John Calvin who believed little innocent babies would also be tossed into the tormenting flames because they had the misfortune of being born with a sin nature.

To believe in the doctrine of “eternal” torment, one must believe one of two things about God’s love. Either God stops loving those whom He throws in the lake of fire, or “eternal” torment is, in fact, God’s love in action. If you believe the former, then God IS NOT love to the men He tortures; in essence you deny I John 4:8. If you believe the latter, you have changed the beautiful love of God into a sick and twisted thing – a thought so repulsive it is not even worthy of any additional discussion.

My dear friend, can you not see what a terrible lie this is? Do you really believe that God has two different personalities – one moment He acts out of love, and the next He is vengeful wrath showing no mercy and love whatsoever? Thank goodness, this is not the God of the Bible! Do we not see that God is always love? The Scriptures declare that His mercy endures forever (Psalms 136), His anger is but for a moment (Psalms 30:5), He will not cast off forever (Lamentations 3:31), He retains not His anger forever, but delights in mercy (Micah 7:18), His tender mercies are above all His works (including His judgments) (Psalms 145:9), His love never fails (I Corinthians 13:8), and above all, He is love (I John 4:8)!

To understand all the passages in the Bible that relate to God's judgments, wrath, and vengeance, we must view everything God does in the light of His love. If we understand that God does nothing apart from His love, then we understand that His judgments are but a means to bring us back to Himself (Psalms 99:8; Isaiah 4:4; 26:9). Man is incapable of being both love and justice at the same time, but the True God is both perfect love and perfect justice – at the same time! God is perfect holiness, and as such, He must deal with sin. But He is also perfect love, so anything God does must demonstrate both. We cannot separate God's justice from His love otherwise we create a schizophrenic god with two very different and contradictory personalities.

And while the majority of the Church believes that God has two different personalities, we have a better testimony in the Scriptures.

“God's love will never fail!” (I Corinthians 13:8).

“Abides these three: faith, hope, and love; but the greatest is love.” (I Corinthians 13:13).

We can trust that the true God of the Bible is the *“Savior of all men”* (I Timothy 4:10) and that His judgments are righteous altogether.

May all of us come to know the wondrous love that God has for ALL men – now and unto the ages of ages – and beyond!

Taken from the *Bible Student's Notebook™*, a weekly Bible study publication available in two formats (electronic and printed)

www.BibleStudentsNotebook.com

Study Shelf, PO Box 265, Windber, PA 15963
1-800-784-6010 / www.StudyShelf.com

B I B L E S T U D E N T ' S P R E S S™
W i n d b e r , P e n n s y l v a n i a

