

Does God's sense of justice trump His loving and forgiving nature?

When debating with evangelical Christians about the nature of God, both sides begin by agreeing that God is Love, except for the hardcore Calvinists. But when asked why a God of love would consign the majority of the human race to eternal banishment, and unending pain and anguish, in a place called Hell, the response is always the same. God is love, but He is also just. Because He is just, sin must be punished. God loves everyone, but must satisfy the demands of His justice and consign people to everlasting Hell if they don't repent of their sins and accept His offer of Salvation by Grace through Christ.

On the surface, this line of reasoning seems perfectly acceptable to most evangelical Christians. The problem lies in the area of semantics. Exactly what is meant by the words love and justice? Is love just a emotion, or is it more than that? When you ask these same evangelicals how they would define the word love, most of them would point out that true Godly, agape, love involves more than just feelings or sympathy. It has an active component. Just as faith without works is useless and artificial, love is also meaningless unless it is expressed. Unexpressed love is nothing more than an empty emotion. Jesus said that if we love Him we will keep his commandments. Our actions demonstrate the genuineness of our love. When we love someone in a selfish, self-gratifying manner, we do not call that love. A better name for that emotion would be lust or desire. True love has as its primary focus the needs of the loved one, not the lover. So it is with God. His actions demonstrate the genuineness of His love. It is not about us having to love God and enter into relationship with Him. It is about God first loving us and then entering into a loving relationship with us. We start out as the objects of God's love, before we are able to return that love. God's love is focused on us, not Himself. His love for us is unconditional. Christ died for us while we were still sinners. It is the Shepherd who seeks out and finds the sheep, not the other way around.

It is ridiculous to argue that God's love and forgiveness are somehow trumped by His sense of justice. Every definition of the word justice that I have ever seen involves punishments that are fair and equitable. A fair and just penalty would be proportional to the crime and have as its purpose the rehabilitation of the offender. How can God justly impose an infinite punishment on temporal sins and offer no further opportunity for repentance and rehabilitation? If a human judge imposed a cruel and inhumane punishment for a trivial offense, we would not call that justice. And we certainly would not believe the judge if he were to try to convince us that he was motivated by love for the offender.

If it is unloving for a human being to inflict cruel and inhumane punishments, it would be equally unloving for God to do the same. If human parents are able to love their children unconditionally, why is it not possible God to do the same? If we call people hypocrites who don't walk their talk, why do we not call God a hypocrite when He acts in the same unloving ways. Does God hold us to a higher standard of behavior than what He holds Himself to? Does God ask us to return good for evil, and then do just the opposite Himself? Of course not, and this is totally supported by the Scriptures.

God's love and justice are easily reconciled if we correctly define those terms. God's punishments are perfectly consistent with His loving desire that we eventually repent and receive His mercy and forgiveness. This is impossible for most evangelicals to believe, because they have placed an artificial time limit on God's love and forgiveness. Nowhere in the Scriptures is it said that repentance and restoration are not possible after death. Yes, it is appointed for a man once to die and after that face judgment, but not infinite torture in Hell. God's judgments are fair and equitable. All will be fully reconciled with God, through Christ, eventually. There is an abundance of Scriptural support for that.