

WHY I AM NOT A CHRISTIAN

#1 Christianity is Judgemental – Sin & Hell

This series is all about looking at some of the top reasons that people have for rejecting Christianity. These can often be serious and thoughtful criticisms and it is likely that we have all struggled with some of the issues at one time or another. These growth group studies (and sermons) are about tough issues, but ultimately they're about helping each of us to grow as followers of Jesus.

Do you think 'Christianity is Judgemental – Sin & Hell' deserves to be on this list of criticisms that people have? What makes this topic so hard ?

When people try to explain the reason for people's bad behaviour, what are the contributing factors that are usually spoken about?

Judgement at the Beginning

Read Genesis 3:1-7

This part of human history has traditionally been given the title, 'The Fall' – the moment when sin became a part of the perfect world God had created. In what ways do you think this first sin is a pattern for understanding all sin that has followed?



If you had the opportunity to explain to someone the reason for people's bad behaviour, how could the bible assist you in giving an answer?

Read Genesis 3:8-24

In the creation account, we begin to learn about God, but in Genesis 3 what else do we learn about God?

As a consequence of The Fall – how would you describe the relationship between God and humankind?

Judgement in the Old & New Testament

In one of the kid's bibles in the Swann household, an introduction is given with these words *"...there is a vast difference between the harsh and sometimes warlike world of some of the books of the Old Testament and the love and forgiveness we see in the life of Jesus."*

Do you think there is any truth in this statement?

In the Old Testament, God does indeed judge. He judged Adam and Eve and from then on in history his moral revulsion continues against people's hearts of rebellion. God judges the nations around Israel, and in keeping with his ongoing warnings (Deuteronomy 30:11-20), he eventually brings a terrible judgement upon the nation of Israel, the nation he chose to be his own. God's judgement was in very physical terms, but there are passages that show that there is even more at stake than just being thrown out of the land or death.



Read God's promises in Isaiah 66:24 and Daniel 12:1-3. What do we learn about God's judgement from these passages?

To say that the Old Testament is all about a judging God and then that the New Testament and Jesus are all about love and forgiveness is to misunderstand both parts of the bible. So let's now have a look at the New Testament. With the imagery of hell the New Testament gives us, how is it described? You could split up into 3 groups to do this exercise.

| Verses | How is Judgement Described? |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 2 Peter 2:17 | |
| Mark 9:48; Revelation 20:10; 21:8 | |
| Matthew 8:12; 13:42; 22:13; 24:51 | |

How do you react to this? What is hard about what's said about hell?

Hell is undeniably awful. We are right to recoil from it. Yet at the same time, it is clearly what God teaches. Jesus himself spoke about hell more times than anyone else in the New Testament. Since Jesus believed in hell, it should be part of our thinking as well. And remember that Jesus was the most humble, the most giving and loving person who ever stood on this planet. And he accepted the fact of everlasting consequences for sin.

There is another feature of God's judgement on sin that's very important to understand. It comes through in a number of passages. What is the common element in these verses?

| Verses | How is Judgement Described? |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Genesis 3, Isaiah 59:2; Matthew 25:40-41; 2 Thessalonians 1:9 | |

As we struggle with God's word about hell, is there anything else we can say to help each other?

The Cross & Judgement

If we want to understand the horror of sin and the way God judges sinners, then we need to understand what happened to Jesus on the cross. With his own Son, we see how God responds to those who have rebelled against him.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:3; 1 Peter 3:18. In your own words, why did Jesus die?

Jesus died for our sin. He was our 'substitute'. From Genesis 3 onwards this has always been God's plan. God willed it to make a way possible to be just and yet also 'justify' the sinner who puts his trust in him (Romans 3:25-26). Jesus was judged in our place, so that mercy could flow to us.

When we look at that moment when Jesus was crucified for us, there was torment and pain, and there was darkness (two features of hell that we saw above). But there is something altogether worse that Jesus went through. Read Matthew 27:45-46. In the words that Jesus cries out, what does this tell us about what Jesus experienced?

In the passages that we looked at above - Genesis 3, Isaiah 59:2; Matthew 25:40-41; and 2 Thessalonians 1:9, we learnt that to experience God's holy judgement is to experience *separation* from God. That is what Jesus went through for us. He substituted himself for us to bear the full effect of God's wrath on us. He experienced abandonment, exclusion, *separation*. That is how completely Jesus identified with sinners. He went through hell for us.

If we don't properly come to grips with sin and hell, how do you think Jesus' purpose on earth can be misunderstood?

What should our response be to the reality of Jesus dying for our sin and being judged in our place?