

Does God really love us? If it is yes, why does he punish his beloved?

Thank you for writing such provocative questions.

God has given his unconditional love to all people through his son Jesus Christ. However, he conditioned that love on belief in His son Jesus Christ. John 3:16 reads: "16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Sinners who reject Christ will receive eternal death. They have rejected the Father and turned to their father the devil. Jesus himself told people of his day who believed on him but would not obey him that they were of their father the devil. In John 8:31-32, Jesus spoke to Jews who believed on him: "31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'" In the discussion following, Jesus made it clear that they rejected the father and chose to follow their father the devil. John 8:42-46 reads:

42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. 43 Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. 44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. 45 Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me!

When people reject God and Jesus Christ, they die spiritually, according to Rom 6:23: "3 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

However, when people accept and obey God, they receive the full measure of God and His love. Eph 3:17-19 teaches:

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

The full measure of God's love makes His children more than conquerors and unable to be separated from the love of God. Rom 8:37-39 reads:

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Once people obey God and receive His love and, therefore, escape the destiny of the spiritually dead. God treats them as his children that they may remain faithful, not returning to a life of sin and death. Heb 12:5-11 teaches:

5 And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons:

"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline,  
and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,  
6 because the Lord disciplines those he loves,  
and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? 8 If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes

discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. 9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! 10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

God is righteous to require people to obey him and to remain faithful in order to be saved. If people sin, they will die, according to Rom 8:13-17:

13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, 14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

People, who obey God, avoid the pain of eternal judgment. If you are not a child of God, His plan for you is in Gal 3:26-29:

26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Even though you obey the gospel and clothe yourself in Christ, a return to sin will once again put your soul in jeopardy of being lost. Peter wrote in 2 Peter 2:19-22:

19 They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity – for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. 20 If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. 21 It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them.

People must stay faithful to the Father and the Lord Jesus as John wrote in Rev 2:10: “Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

However, should one fall a loving God and Father provide a way of escape. The escape from sin for children of God found in 1 John 1:8-10:

8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

I pray that if you have not obeyed the gospel that you will obey by believing on Jesus as the son of a loving Father, repent of your sins, confess Christ before men, and be buried with him in baptism to rise and walk in newness of life.

You will find people in the church of Christ willing to assist you in obeying God.

In Christ,

Jim Wilsford

