

## Love and Hell

A discussion with Bill Fortenberry

Many atheists challenge the concept that a God of love would send people to Hell. I present two arguments against this challenge: first, that God does not send anyone to Hell and second, that the existence of Hell is not at all incompatible with the Bible's definition of love as recorded in Romans 13:10.

**Simon:** Explain again how, if someone you loved rejected you, you would torture them without mercy, content that their screaming and thrashing was well deserved.

Pah, I laugh at your notions of love.

It is quite clear that you don't know what love is.

**Bill:** Actually its more like allowing someone you love to make their own decision. God loves you so much that He Himself payed the full penalty of sin(1). He payed the price for every single person to go to heaven(2), but He also loves you so much as an individual that He will not force you to accept that payment(3). Instead, He pleads with you constantly through both compassion and fear to accept His sacrifice(4). Those who go to Hell do so because they choose not to go to heaven(5).

(1) I John 4:10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Romans 5:8 - But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

I Peter 2:24 - Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

(2) Romans 5:18 - Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.

Hebrews 2:9 - But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

I John 2:2 - And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

(3) Deuteronomy 30:19 - I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:

(4) Proverbs 1:22-33 - How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the

prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.

Jude 1:22-23 - And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

(5) John 3:17-20 - For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

Hebrews 2:3 - How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;

John 12:46-48 - I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.

Mark 16:16 - He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

**Simon:** LOL, why is being tortured an option in the first place?

That's like me saying, "You've got the choice to give me all your money. Just trust me, I won't spend it. I'll invest it for you and you'll make loads more. But, if you choose not to give me your money, I'll send people round to your house to torture you."

And if you want some proof of what I can do, I am happy to give you the names of some people I already invested for.

Obviously you can't speak to them, but they have written about their experiences in this book.

**Bill:** Your question could be likened to a man who has jumped out of a burning plane wondering why falling is even an option. There is nothing wrong with the question per se, but he would be tragically foolish if he refused to use the parachute until he knew the answer.

The Bible is very clear in stating that hell was never intended for the punishment of humans(1) and that God does not want to send a single person to that place of torture(2). However, it is also clear that the only other choice is heaven(3) and that God will not force anyone to join Him there(4). All of those who wish to enter heaven may do so(5): all we have to do is accept Jesus' sacrifice for our sins(6). Those who do not wish to enter heaven will be permitted to enter a hell that was never intended for them(7).

(1) Matthew 25:41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

(2) Ezekiel 33:11 Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

II Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to

us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

(3) Matthew 25:34-46 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: ... Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: ... And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

(4) Hebrews 2:3 How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;

Hebrews 12:25 See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven:

(5) Revelation 22:17 And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

(6) John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Romans 10:9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

(7)I John 5:12 He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

Revelation 20:15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

**Simon:** I don't want to enter hell.

Do I have to go?

(Plus, WHY did God make it the only other option? WHY? That's really a very important thing to know)

Ok, so, like I've said, I don't want to go to hell - unfortunately, I can't make myself believe in Jesus. Where does that leave us?

Does God want to help me out on this one?

Also, obviously hell was intended for humans, otherwise God would have made somewhere else to go. He did design every single thing in reality - if there was something going on that he was not happy with, he could choose to change it.

If he doesn't think we should be sent to hell, in that we don't deserve it, he should change it.

Since he hasn't changed it, he obviously thinks that not believing in Jesus (something you cannot make yourself do if you simply don't) is a crime big enough to be tortured in hell forever.

I am fascinated how you will excuse God ANYTHING at all though.

You have made the assumption that God is good because he says he is. Therefore anything immoral he does is also good. Hmmm.

**Bill:** You do not have to go to hell.

Hell is simply a place set aside by God for those angels who did not want to be in His presence: it is a place where His presence cannot be felt(1). Therefore, since God is life, Hell must be a place of death(2); since God is light, Hell must be a place of darkness(3); since God is peace, Hell must be a place of turmoil(4), and since God is health, Hell must be a place of pain(5). You do not have to go to Hell, but if you refuse to spend eternity with God, then the only other option must be a place without Him - a place called Hell(6).

God does not want you to be in such a place, so He provided a way to avoid it through the sacrifice of Christ. All you have to do is choose to accept that sacrifice. If you adamantly persist in your choice to reject that sacrifice, then God will allow you to spend eternity away from Him in Hell.

(1) Matthew 25:41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

Psalm 5:4 For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee.

Psalm 140:13 Surely the righteous shall give thanks unto thy name: the upright shall dwell in thy presence.

(2) John 1:4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

John 11:25 Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

John 14:6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

(3) I John 1:5 This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

John 8:12 Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

John 12:36 While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light.

(4) Philippians 4:9 Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

I Corinthians 14:33 For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

(5) Psalm 42:11 Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.

Psalm 147:3 He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.

(6) John 3:18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

John 12:48 He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.

**Simon:** So how do I make myself believe again? And why, if God doesn't want people to go there (doesn't feel that they deserve it) do they go there? Has he no power to change it?

**Bill:** You are correct. If God didn't like the fact that men were condemned to go to Hell, then it would certainly be within His power to change that fact, and that is precisely what He did.

Adam's sin in the garden condemned every human being to an eternal death in Hell(1), but God changed that condemnation through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ(2). No longer now must men be forced into an eternity in Hell(3). Now, each individual may freely choose to go to heaven by believing on Jesus Christ and accepting His payment for their sins(4). All you have to do is choose to believe and accept(5).

(1) Romans 5:12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

(2) I Corinthians 15:21-22 For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

(3) Deuteronomy 30:19 I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:

Isaiah 1:18 Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

(4) Acts 16:31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,

Isaiah 45:22 Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.

(5) Romans 10:9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

Romans 10:13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

**Simon:** But he does feel that anyone who doesn't believe in Jesus deserves eternal torture?

How do I make myself believe in Jesus again?

It's all about whether you think people deserve to be tortured eternally for not believing in Jesus. I get the feeling that you don't want to commit to an answer.

Is it because you know my next question will be to ask you to justify it?

**Bill:** It is not the absence of a belief in Jesus that causes you to deserve Hell: that is just the path that you are taking to get there. The reason you deserve Hell is that you have sinned against the God who created you - as have all men.

Exodus 20:3 Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

Exodus 20:4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth:

Exodus 20:7 Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

Exodus 20:8 Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Exodus 20:12 Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

Exodus 20:13 Thou shalt not kill.

Exodus 20:14 Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Exodus 20:15 Thou shalt not steal.

Exodus 20:16 Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

Exodus 20:17 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

Romans 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Revelation 21:8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

**Simon:** Ok, so which particular crimes do you think deserve eternal torture then?

And can you justify the punishment for any given crime? These are finite crimes we're talking about, aren't they?

Let's also examine this... if we have lived identical lives except for the fact that you believe in Jesus and I don't, then your god has made the arbitrary decision that this belief will grant you eternal bliss and me eternal torment. Doesn't that strike you as at all odd? Does it seem like justice considering we have both committed the same sins? Again, I'll ask you, how do I force myself to believe in Jesus? If pressed (threatened) could you believe in Allah and Mohammed?

It all seems... silly.

I want to know why you think finite crimes deserve infinite punishment... if you can explain it, that would be great.

Also look again at my original post. The only difference here is that one believes in Jesus and the other doesn't. God loves us both. Our sins are the same - the only thing that makes me deserve torture is that I 'rejected' Jesus - and by rejected, I mean that I couldn't make myself believe in him.

I could pretend but that probably wouldn't help, would it?

**Bill:** Yes, our finite crimes are deserving of infinite punishment, but there is no injustice in this, for it is balanced by the offer of infinite life and happiness through a similarly finite decision(1). As you have said, the only

difference between those going to heaven and those going to hell is their belief in Jesus Christ(2). If you desire to believe and find that you cannot, then there is still hope, for faith can be obtained through studying the Scriptures(3).

(1) John 6:47 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.

John 5:24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

(2) John 3:18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

I John 5:12 He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

Mark 16:16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

(3) Romans 10:17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

John 20:31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

**Simon:** Actually, I always quite liked that idea of balancing the infinite torture against the infinite punishment\*\*\* It sort of works for me until I start to wonder if there actually is a point where the guy who slept with someone outside of marriage had maybe, you know, had enough torture, whether he actually DESERVED anymore? I'm not saying that God is bad for offering eternal happiness for a finite action but I wouldn't say it is necessarily justified - you might have a hard time justifying why you DESERVED it.

I wouldn't say that the Judge who sentences someone, not for their crimes, but for certain magic words they say in his court room was exactly just - especially if his sentences were the extremes of being tortured for life or being released and made King of the World.

But I suppose it does highlight quite nicely one of the great comedy things about God - he can be Jesus, meek and mild, or he can be the god who strikes down babies. Consistent he is not.

As to the scriptures, regrettably they don't help me... once you start looking at them as just words written by men, it all falls into place and it's hard to see how they could possibly be divinely inspired.

(\*\*\*Also, the actual belief in Jesus wouldn't be finite as you would continue to believe in Jesus whilst in heaven - unless you stopped? If you rebelled, then I'm presuming you would go to hell?)

**Bill:** Oh I certainly do not deserve eternal happiness. I deserve Hell just as much as you do, for I have also violated God's law(1). Nevertheless, God loves us so much that He has offered to give us that happiness which we could never deserve(2). He is our just Judge who offers full pardon to everyone who enters His court(3). All we have to do is accept that offer.

By the way, it would be rather difficult for one to stop believing in Jesus while in His presence, but even if it could be done, that would not undo God's pardon(4).

(1) Romans 3:10 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:

Romans 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

(2) Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

John 5:24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

John 10:28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

(3) Isaiah 1:18 Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

Isaiah 44:22 I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.

Romans 5:20-21 Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

(4) II Timothy 2:13 If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.

I Thessalonians 5:24 Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.

Titus 1:2 In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;

**Simon:** So... if you don't deserve eternal bliss, does a non-believer deserve eternal punishment? I still can't see any justification for it. You still seem to be saying that we should face eternal punishment for finite crimes, despite admitting we don't deserve eternal bliss for finite belief?

As to accepting the pardon, as you couldn't stop believing in Jesus being in his presence, I can't just make myself believe in him from here. Now, if I am telling the truth, based on that, do you think I deserve eternal torture?

Also, will the people in hell believe in Jesus?

**Bill:** Our finite sins caused us to become separated from the presence of God, and there was no amount of effort that we could put forth in order to overcome that separation. Our separation from God was destined to be permanent because we lack the ability to be good enough for His presence. But God, in His mercy and love for us, provided a way through the cross of Christ to make up for our lack. Hell is no longer necessary. Those who choose to be apart from God for all eternity will be granted that decision, and those who choose to be with Him for all eternity will be granted their decision as well. Which one will you choose?

You claim that you cannot believe in Jesus, and I have told you that you can obtain that ability through studying the Bible. The act of studying the Bible does not require you to believe anything at all, and it is something that you are clearly capable of doing. Your refusal to do so indicates that it is not your inability to believe in Jesus that is the issue, but rather your unwillingness to believe in Him. All of those who are unwilling to believe on Jesus Christ and accept His payment for their sins will be cast into Hell. Will you repent today and turn to Him for the salvation that He so freely offers?

How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; But ye have



set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.

**Simon:** "Our finite sins caused us to become separated from the presence of God, and there was no amount of effort that we could put forth in order to overcome that separation."

No, I get that, but couldn't God just "make it ok"?

"Our separation from God was destined to be permanent because we lack the ability to be good enough for His presence. But God, in His mercy and love for us, provided a way through the cross of Christ to make up for our lack."

Sure, ok, but why does it have to be through the cross? Can't God just forgive us anyway? Or maybe send us all to hell for a bit until we've "paid" for our crimes, then do whatever he was going to do to us so we could get into heaven through Jesus?

"Hell is no longer necessary."

Hell wasn't necessary in the first place. God is God. He made reality. He can make that reality and the rules in it whatever he wants, he could say that hell is not necessary forever.

"Those who choose to be apart from God for all eternity will be granted that decision"

It's not an informed decision though, is it? I am not lying to you when I say I see no evidence for God, let alone YOUR particular God.

"...and those who choose to be with Him for all eternity will be granted their decision as well. Which one will you choose?"

It seems that most people choose based on their culture because the best religions are very good at sucking peoples' minds into a routine that goes round and round and round, reinforcing itself when it meets opposition. Generally, once you're in it, you're in it. I'm not saying that's 100% the case but you must admit that it is true in the main - which means that, statistically, you must think that a lot of people in Muslim countries are "willingly ignorant"

"You claim that you cannot believe in Jesus, and I have told you that you can obtain that ability through studying the Bible. The act of studying the Bible does not require you to believe anything at all, and it is something that you are clearly capable of doing."

I used to be a Christian, I used to study the Bible - unfortunately it is pretty meaningless when I read it now. I can actually see all the faults in it, the stories make no sense, the plots are full of holes and the characters are unrealistic. When I think of what a book inspired by the creator of the universe might look

like, the Bible is so singularly unimpressive, it truly reveals its lowly origins.

“Your refusal to do so indicates that it is not your inability to believe in Jesus that is the issue, but rather your unwillingness to believe in Him.”

I actually do read the Bible all the time. As for Jesus, I do believe that he had an historical counterpart, but I have no more reason to believe that he did the things written in the Bible than I do to believe that Mohammed split the moon. I hate to break it to you, but there isn't any more evidence for Christianity than there is for Islam. You both use exactly the same arguments for your religions, none of which are convincing if you're trying to believe based on evidence. When I first started investigating Islam as a possible alternative to my fallen Christianity, I thought that they had much less firm foundations for belief than I used to have for being a Christian. It did make me smile to find out that, all that time, both Christians (including me) and Muslims had been accusing each other of being blind to the truth when really, they were both making claims based on about the same amount of evidence.

“All of those who are unwilling to believe on Jesus Christ and accept His payment for their sins will be cast into Hell.”

If he really wanted me to believe in me, wouldn't he just show me enough evidence for me to believe? I mean, I don't want to go to hell, heaven sure sounds better, so I will happily take what is offered – but you see, neither of those places is real to me right now. If I threatened you with being cast into the Fires of Mount Doom, would you start believing in Gandalf? I would be worried if you did. Surely God doesn't reward credulity?

Will you repent today and turn to Him for the salvation that He so freely offers?"

Is that a trick question? Sure, I can pretend to believe in Jesus, I can't make myself do it though.

**Bill:** You seem to be saying that God is somehow wrong for not making things the way that you think that they should have been made. You recognize that if He is God, then He should be able to establish things in whatever manner He chooses, but then you condemn Him for not choosing to do so in the way that you would have done things. That seems rather petty. By what right do you claim this authority over your Creator?

In reality, God as the Creator chose to establish the world on certain laws. Attempts to defy those laws will always produce certain negative results in a direct cause and effect relationship. One of those cause and effect relationships is that sin produces death in Hell. You can certainly argue as much as you want that Hell is unnecessary, but you could make the same argument against gravity. God certainly had it within His power to make a world without gravity, and if He had done so, then we would never have to worry about people falling from high ledges. Should we therefore accuse God of making a bad law simply because we can perceive of an alternative, or should we rather conform to the laws which He chose to establish?

You make the same accusation against the Bible. You reject it because it is not what you think that "a book inspired by the creator of the universe might look like." This is the same "God didn't do it the way I wanted Him to do it" argument that you used against Hell. Let me ask you this, what if I wanted God to do things one way, and you wanted Him to do them a different way? Whose way should God conform to? It is not the Creator's responsibility to please His creations, but rather the opposite.

Now we come to your claims about the evidence. I spoke at great length with an atheist last night who made the

same argument that you are making about the evidence for God. He offered the suggestion that God could have written some magnificent book of gold to convince men of the truth, but he admitted that men could still believe that an alien race had written that book instead of God. I suggested that perhaps God could have carved His claim of existence on the surface of the moon, but once again we concluded that men would just assume that we had been visited by aliens. I even suggested that perhaps God could come down to earth and prove that He is God by raising people from the dead and doing great miracles, but he recognized that even this would not have been enough to overcome the skepticism of those who do not want to believe in God. What kind of evidence do you think would overcome your skepticism?

As you can see, your reasons for rejecting God all boil down to the simple fact that God isn't doing things the way that you think they should be done. Are you really so stubborn that you would spend eternity in Hell rather than concede that God's way might be better than yours?

**Simon:** "You seem to be saying that God is somehow wrong for not making things the way that you think that they should have been made. You recognize that if He is God, then He should be able to establish things in whatever manner He chooses, but then you condemn Him for not choosing to do so in the way that you would have done things. That seems rather petty. By what right do you claim this authority over your Creator?"

Well, no actually, that's not the case at all. If God is God he is more than welcome to do whatever he wants. My argument is that you are using the wrong word to describe him. You say that he IS LOVE. Well, then we have a very different definition of the word LOVE. In no other context do Christians use the word LOVE in this way, at least not that I have ever come across. That, in essence is my argument. God might exist or not, but you and the Bible describe him incredibly badly. And by the way, you just totally caved in to a despot there.

"In reality, God as the Creator chose to establish the world on certain laws"

Yes.

"Attempts to defy those laws will always produce certain negative results in a direct cause and effect relationship. One of those cause and effect relationships is that sin produces death in Hell"

Yes, well then stop using the word LOVE or else redefine it to include a being who would allow someone to suffer eternal torture. I would NOT allow that, not even for the worst criminal, and I am only partly loving.

"You can certainly argue as much as you want that Hell is unnecessary, but you could make the same argument against gravity. God certainly had it within His power to make a world without gravity, and if He had done so, then we would never have to worry about people falling from high ledges. Should we therefore accuse God of making a bad law simply because we can perceive of an alternative, or should we rather conform to the laws which He chose to establish?"

You make a very good point against yourself here – it was certainly within God's power to NOT have living beings killed in falls from a great height. He obviously didn't see a problem with people and animals being killed in this way, so he made gravity as we see it today.

"You make the same accusation against the Bible. You reject it because it is not what you think that "a

book inspired by the creator of the universe might look like." This is the same "God didn't do it the way I wanted Him to do it" argument that you used against Hell."

No, I'm just unimpressed by the Bible. If I was to accept the Bible as divine, I would also have to accept the Quran as divine. To me, the works of Shakespeare are of better quality. It is completely subjective, but wouldn't God have thought of that already and made the Bible subjectively the best book to everyone, ever? If not, why not? Couldn't he do it? Or didn't he care to? In which case, you have a serious point to answer.

"Let me ask you this, what if I wanted God to do things one way, and you wanted Him to do them a different way? Whose way should God conform to? It is not the Creator's responsibility to please His creations, but rather the opposite. "

God can do whatever he pleases – however, you define him in a certain way. We would need to stop using certain words in the way we do to make him conform to them.

"Now we come to your claims about the evidence. I spoke at great length with an atheist last night who made the same argument that you are making about the evidence for God. He offered the suggestion that God could have written some magnificent book of gold to convince men of the truth, but he admitted that men could still believe that an alien race had written that book instead of God. I suggested that perhaps God could have carved His claim of existence on the surface of the moon, but once again we concluded that men would just assume that we had been visited by aliens. I even suggested that perhaps God could come down to earth and prove that He is God by raising people from the dead and doing great miracles, but he recognized that even this would not have been enough to overcome the skepticism of those who do not want to believe in God. What kind of evidence do you think would overcome your skepticism?"

That, my friend, is a very good question. You will have often heard it said that extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence. I think I would be happy with a personal experience. Sure, I wouldn't be 100% certain of it, but then I am not 100% certain that I didn't just start to exist 5 minutes ago with all my memories implanted. It's not an uncertainty that is worth thinking about. And, if you're honest, you would have to admit the same as well.

"As you can see, your reasons for rejecting God all boil down to the simple fact that God isn't doing things the way that you think they should be done."

Nope, he can do what he wants. But let's change our language in that case.

"Are you really so stubborn that you would spend eternity in Hell rather than concede that God's way might be better than yours?"

Well, you're making the claim that God is of the most perfect morals. What scale do you measure him on? He could be an evil god. I really don't want to go to hell, so no, I'm not that stubborn. You're just expecting me to believe in one of the most poorly written characters I've ever come across.

**Bill:** Are you saying that to be loving God must force people to go to a place that they do not want to go to?

**Simon:** Not at all I, for example, would love to go to heaven, it is only that my brain seems incapable of believing in Jesus. I know a lot of people like that. If I want to go to heaven, and I don't want to go to hell, can I go, even if I don't... believe in Jesus? You've already told me "no" so in effect, you are saying that your loving god IS sending me somewhere I don't want to go.

In fact, I bet if you asked people if they want to go to heaven and hell, they would probably all say heaven, even if they don't believe in them as real places. If someone did prefer hell over heaven, they are probably insane and I would hope that a loving god would cure their illness and then check their answer again.

Of course, this is all presuming that the only possible two options are endless heaven or endless hell, which obviously they're not - we are talking about a god, after all - he can change the system if he wants and dispense with the endless torture, possibly making it finite with a chance of redemption, or getting rid of it completely and sending people to a third place - always giving them the option to join the others in heaven if they are sorry.

Here's the thing, you're acting like this is actually a choice that people are making when they have all the necessary information. I've told you before that I can't make myself believe, given the evidence I have right now. It gets even more messed up when you think that Satan is allowed to run around and deceive people into following false religions. Since both Muslims and Christians (a lot of them anyway) think this is the case, how can anyone be sure that they are not the ones who are deceived and the other guys are right? Couldn't god at least not torture people who legitimately wanted to worship him in the right way but were fooled by Satan into thinking they had the right religion? Those people definitely didnt want to go to hell, they were trying to be on God's side.

So anyway, we still have an issue with saying God is Love, unless we change the meaning of the word. Your question seems to me to say that you would allow a member of your family, or a friend, that you loved to get messed up on drugs or alcohol just because they wanted to.

**Bill:** God has the right to create the world in any manner that He chooses(1). He chose for the world to operate under the law that sin must be punished with death(2). He cannot be faulted for this because that decision was well within His rights as the Creator. Our sin is punishable with death and justly so.

Nevertheless, God loved us so much that He laid our sins upon His own Son and allowed Him to die in our place(3). As a God of love, He fulfilled the law for us in His own body(4). Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends, but God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us(5).

(1) Romans 9:20 Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?

Isaiah 45:9 Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands?

(2) Ezekiel 18:4 Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

(3) I John 4:10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

I Peter 2:24 Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

I Peter 3:18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:

(4) Romans 13:10 Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

(5) John 15:13; Romans 5:8

I John 3:16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us:

**Simon:** "God has the right to create the world in any manner that He chooses"

I'm not denying that - my point is that we must change our definition of the word "love" to make it apply to him.

"He chose for the world to operate under the law that sin must be punished with death"

And also being tortured? Plus, how many sins has a baby committed?

"He cannot be faulted for this because that decision was well within His rights as the Creator"

Yes, if you accept that might makes right.

"Our sin is punishable with death and justly so."

Can you demonstrate that it is just? We cannot automatically assume that God acts in the most just way.

"Nevertheless, God loved us so much that He laid our sins upon His own Son and allowed Him to die in our place"

So you think that torture is loving?

"As a God of love, He fulfilled the law for us in His own body"

His law, his choice. He could have not done this and just forgiven us anyway.

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends, but God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"

Is he actually dead then? No, he's not. What an empty, unnecessary gesture - followed by a reluctance to make things clear, therefore dooming billions of willing followers to eternal torture.

**Bill:** I have two questions about your recent comments.

First: you said that God's right to decide that sin must be punished by death is only true if we accept that might makes right. While I disagree with this conclusion, I am very curious as to whether you think that might should not make right? If you believe that it is wrong for the strong to rule over the weak, then I would be interested in hearing why you believe that to be wrong.

Second: you claimed that Christ's sacrifice is empty because of His resurrection from the dead. Does that mean that you would accept His sacrifice for you sins if He had not risen from the dead?

**Simon:** First: Let's take a simple situation of might does not make right:

Rape.

Do you need me to tell you why it is wrong for you to rape someone?  
Do you need your Bible to tell you?

Sometimes might makes the right decisions - but it is not by virtue of the fact that the decision comes from a position of power that it is right.

Second: It's not that I don't accept it because it's empty - I don't accept it because I don't believe in it. To me, Christianity is just another crazy cult. This is not a joke. I don't secretly believe in God but pretend otherwise. If I suddenly started believing, my life would pretty much carry on as it does now, except I'd be going to heaven afterwards. There is no motivation for me to fool myself.

If Jesus had actually stayed dead, it would still have been pointless because he could have quite easily dispensed with any more blood sacrifices... sure, it might have been a sacrifice more worthy of the name, but it still would have been as arbitrary... and he could still have just forgiven us by appearing in front of each of us and asking us in plainly spoken language if we accepted his hand. That would have been much more effective than showing himself to a tiny minority and expecting everyone else to take it on faith, against competing religions that also ask you take things on faith, and with Satan running around just to add to the mix.

When I think of it like that, with a stated goal that the sacrifice was to save people, I can't think of anything more incompetently executed.

**Bill:** Yes, actually. I would very much like to hear you tell me why rape is wrong. I believe that it is wrong because it is a direct violation of God's Law. But if there is no God, then why should it be wrong for one random assemblage of chemicals to do something to another random assemblage of chemicals?

**Simon:** I recognise that I wouldn't like to be raped so I can also see that others don't like to be raped.

Your bible is really the only thing stopping you from raping people? How do you know your bible is asking you to do the right thing? Would you have murdered babies?

And also, what is the law in the bible against raping a single, unmarried, unbetrothed girl in the bible?

There is that one law where she has to marry her rapist (if you accept that interpretation) but is there another one?

Also, are you arguing that if we made a sentient computer, it should have no rights?

My moral code, as subjective as it is, is based on reducing suffering and increasing happiness. What is yours based on?

**Bill:** But isn't rape just "an evolutionary byproduct of the intense sexual desires of human males and the sexual choosiness of human females"(1)?

Aren't rapists "biologically propelled to rape as an evolutionarily adaptive means of mating and reproducing"(1)?

How can you say that it is wrong if it is just the product of evolution? For that matter how can you say that suffering of any kind is wrong when suffering itself is a very necessary component of evolution which serves to weed out the unfit? By limiting suffering, are you not hindering the work of evolution?

(1) Criminal Behavior, Jacqueline B. Helfgott, Sage Publications 2008 pg. 53-56

**Simon:** It's an interesting assertion to be sure but there are a lot of questions to be considered.

If it is a by-product, as JBH says, then so is every thing else we do. If you're arguing that allowing rape is necessary to the "survival" of our species, then you must also argue that playing the piano is necessary to the survival of our species. We also have many other by-products that are not advantageous in this sense.

However, just to address the other side (in case she got her terms mixed up) if it is a specific adaption then why are so many rape victims below or above the age of reproduction, or even (in male-on-male or female-on-female rape) not of the right sex to reproduce with the rapist.

Plus, do we envision that the sort of people who rape are "most fit" for reproduction, overall, for the species? Probably not.

Strictly speaking, suffering is not necessary for evolution to occur, no. It is, of course, something that is frequently connected with evolutionary events but that is not to say that suffering is "good" or "necessary" in and of itself.

But please also remember that we are a cooperative species. My only point of reference for wanting to reduce suffering and increasing happiness is the recognition that I don't like suffering and I like happiness. I have spoken to other people about this and they seem to agree with me about not liking suffering and liking happiness. We could probably use this communication to try and figure out the best way of approaching situations and with an eye to this goal. I would also argue that suffering and happiness are key factors in moral decisions because otherwise we would have moral responsibilities towards bricks.

**Bill:** Why shouldn't we have moral responsibilities to bricks? According to the theory of evolution, they are just as much a composition of chemicals as we are. And why should suffering be wrong? You claim that it is not necessary for evolution, but that doesn't explain why it is wrong?

You also claim that you do not like suffering, but is everything that you don't like wrong? If evolution were true, wouldn't your preferences be just a random firing of neurons within a brain composed of a random assemblage of chemicals? What if my random assemblage of chemicals produces a random firing of neurons which tells me that suffering is good? Does that make it right for me to inflict suffering on others?



**Simon:** Again, I am just saying why I feel that, which is entirely subjective. However, I have a number of corroborative reports from other people who also say that they prefer happiness over suffering. We have made social contracts with an aim to increasing happiness and decreasing suffering.

As far as I am aware, bricks are unaware of happiness or suffering. If we come across evidence that they experience such things, then we will have to rethink our moral umbrella, much as we have done with animals and, latterly, plants.

If you believe suffering is good and I believe the complete opposite, then it is likely that one or other of us is mentally ill. Since illness is an aberration, we could presume that the minority are the ones who are ill and we could act accordingly, within our resources, to protect all parties. If it turned out that I was in the minority, it would be likely that I was the mentally ill one. You, of course, would be arguing that suffering is good, so you wouldn't really be calling it suffering, you would be calling it happiness. Again, the majority would be happy with their "suffering" (which to them is happiness) and I am locked in a mental asylum as the rest of you destroy yourselves. I can't see that society lasting long.

Of course, there are certain constraints to the scenario, given what we know about brain chemistry and our reactions to certain situations, how different experiences make us feel etc. It's interesting to explore it though.

These ideas will open up the more we come to know about neuroscience.

**Bill:** Ah, I get it. Anyone who disagrees with you is mentally ill. That's an excellent worldview to have. That way you can always conclude that your opponent is just unstable, and you never have to think about his position.

**Simon:** Why are you trying to mischaracterise what I'm saying?

We were talking specifically about whether people enjoyed happiness and disliked suffering.

Obviously someone who is an aberration by believing the opposite in this sense IS already termed mentally ill in our society.

Likewise, if I was an aberration in a society that enjoyed suffering but disliked happiness, I would be mentally ill - I would not be normal in their society - but I have already stated that I don't think such a society would last very long.

Please don't try to mischaracterise what I am saying anymore. I'm actually quite disappointed in you. You haven't even attempted to address any of my questions, you've just been throwing your own at me. It's very rude, you know.

Your bible is really the only thing stopping you from raping people?

How do you know your bible is asking you to do the right thing?

Would you have murdered babies?

...

Also, are you arguing that if we made a sentient computer, it should have no rights?

My moral code, as subjective as it is, is based on reducing suffering and increasing happiness. What is yours based on?

Can you demonstrate that it [death for sin] is just? We cannot automatically assume that God acts in the most just way.

Are you just taking "God is Love" on assertion? What are you measuring him against?

Where else do we use the word love for a being that allows/uses torture?

We should probably have your definition of love and loving as well, at this point...

Take your time, I know that's a lot of questions, you don't have to address them all at once.

**Bill:** I'm not ignoring your questions; they just all have basically the same answer. If you really want me to answer each of them individually, however, then I am more than willing to comply.

- 1) I'm not trying to mischaracterize you; I'm just pointing out the flaws in your reasoning. But if there is no God, then why would it be wrong to mischaracterize someone?
- 2) Yes, the Bible is really the only thing keeping me from doing many things that it labels as sin. But if there is no God, then why does it matter if I follow the Bible or not?
- 3) No, I would not have murdered babies, nor has God ever asked anyone to. Murder is defined as the unlawful, intentional taking of a human life, and all of the commands that God gave for the taking of lives were listed in the law as lawful exceptions. However, if evolution were true, then what would be wrong with murder of any sort? Are carnivores somehow wrong for eating babies?
- 4) A sentient computer would only have rights if those rights were inherent to the presence of sentience, but if evolution were true, then why would a random assemblage of chemicals that produces sentience have any more rights than a random assemblage of chemicals that does not produce sentience?
- 5) My moral code is based on the Bible. You say that yours is based on reducing suffering and increasing happiness, if evolution is true, then why should happiness be preferred above suffering? Why should one type of chemical reaction in your brain be considered morally superior to another?
- 6) Yes, death for sin is just because it is the penalty demanded by the Law of God. If evolution were true, however, then why should any death be considered unjust? Is it wrong for sodium bicarbonate to react with hydrochloric acid?
- 7) Yes, we can conclude that God acts in the most just way because His nature is the standard of justice. However, if there were no absolute standard of justice, then how could anything that God does be said to be unjust?
- 8) God's love is demonstrated by His fulfilling of the Law which is the definition of love given in the Bible. If there is no God, then how can anything be reliably measured by any standard?
- 9) I'm sure that I could come up with several uses of the word "love" to describe someone who allows and even uses pain. For example, a loving parent might allow a stubborn child to experience the pain of touching a hot stove so that the child could learn from his pain what he refused to learn from instruction.

A loving coach might use the pain of physical exhaustion to increase the stamina and endurance of his team, etc, etc, etc... However, if evolution is true, then why would there be anything morally wrong with pain in the first place, and if there is nothing morally wrong with pain, then how could it be contrary to the moral concept of love?

**Simon:** 1) I'm not trying to mischaracterize you; I'm just pointing out the flaws in your reasoning. But if there is no God, then why would it be wrong to mischaracterize someone?

No, you are mischaracterising my argument. We were talking specifically about reversing happiness / suffering in someone's mind. You tried to make it seem as if I was applying that to anyone who disagreed with my arguments. It's wrong to do this to someone because I wouldn't like it and we have reached a social consensus that others don't like it either. DO you like it when people do that to you? I'll wait until you check your Bible to see if you are supposed to like it or not.

2) Yes, the Bible is really the only thing keeping me from doing many things that it labels as sin. But if there is no God, then why does it matter if I follow the Bible or not?

So, let me get this straight, if you didn't believe in God, you would be happy going out and raping people? You would be comfortable with that and see nothing wrong with it? If there is no God, you're basically following the fossilised morality of some nasty little tribes that committed genocide back in the day. Plus, dogmatically following ANYTHING man made is always a bad thing. New understanding always comes along, allowing us to revise our morality. For example, our prison systems have all changed dramatically. Why is that do you think?

3) No, I would not have murdered babies, nor has God ever asked anyone to. Murder is defined as the unlawful, intentional taking of a human life, and all of the commands that God gave for the taking of lives were listed in the law as lawful exceptions. However, if evolution were true, then what would be wrong with murder of any sort? Are carnivores somehow wrong for eating babies?

It would be unlawful today. We know better than your god, I think. So, let me just ask, if you were transported back then and joined the genocidal army, would you kill the babies just because God asked it? It's wrong to do this to someone because I wouldn't like it and we have reached a social consensus that others don't like it either. Other animals aren't included in our subjective human morality... except in the Bible where they frequently executed animals for bizarre reasons (or no reason at all)

4) A sentient computer would only have rights if those rights were inherent to the presence of sentience, but if evolution were true, then why would a random assemblage of chemicals that produces sentience have any more rights than a random assemblage of chemicals that does not produce sentience?

Because morality is about sentient things, unless you want to demonstrate that non-sentient things have the same cares?

5) My moral code is based on the Bible. You say that yours is based on reducing suffering and increasing happiness, if evolution is true, then why should happiness be preferred above suffering? Why should one type of chemical reaction in your brain be considered morally superior to another?

For the simple reason that I prefer it. And, talking to other people, they prefer it as well. So, we make our social contracts based on empathy and hope that we have found the solution that leads to the least suffering and the most happiness.

6) Yes, death for sin is just because it is the penalty demanded by the Law of God. If evolution were true, however, then why should any death be considered unjust? Is it wrong for sodium bicarbonate to react with hydrochloric acid?

How do you know the Law of God is Just? I don't know why you're trying to say that non-sentience is the same as sentience?

Just ask yourself these questions:

- 1) If god didn't exist, would you cease to feel pain?
- 2) Do you like pain?
- 3) Would you be bothered if someone was inflicting pain on you?
- 4) Would you rather they didn't inflict pain on you?

Once you can demonstrate that non-sentient things can "feel" pain, then we can talk.

7) Yes, we can conclude that God acts in the most just way because His nature is the standard of justice. However, if there were no absolute standard of justice, then how could anything that God does be said to be unjust?

No, we can't conclude that – how do we KNOW he's the most just? You're just making an assertion. He appears to be a monster. We can call him unjust by measuring him against the standards we have today. You probably think countries that stone women to death are barbaric. It's funny how you don't pull your god up for that when he ordered it back in the day.

8) God's love is demonstrated by His fulfilling of the Law which is the definition of love given in the Bible. If there is no God, then how can anything be reliably measured by any standard?

We just have to muddle along with our subjective standards, based on an increased knowledge of the way brains, mental illnesses, nature/nurture development etc work.

I've never seen it in a dictionary that love means torturing someone who rejects you... I guess our definition has changed to cut out the baby killing, slavery, genocide, killing homosexuals and all the other abominable things that happen in the Bible.

9) I'm sure that I could come up with several uses of the word "love" to describe someone who allows and even uses pain. For example, a loving parent might allow a stubborn child to experience the pain of touching a hot stove so that the child could learn from his pain what he refused to learn from instruction. A loving coach might use the pain of physical exhaustion to increase the stamina and endurance of his team, etc, etc, etc... However, if evolution is true, then why would there be anything morally wrong with pain in the first place, and if there is nothing morally wrong with pain, then how could it be contrary to the moral concept of love?

None of those things are actually torture, although letting the kid touch the hot stove might be termed child abuse and they might lose their child to the state since they clearly aren't able to look after them effectively.

I don't think there is anything morally wrong with pain – pain is just a consequence. However, certain ways of inflicting pain we have agreed are not moral. The only time you ever excuse them is when your god did it. Funny that.

And by the way, EVOLUTION is not ATHEISM. And we didn't get your definition of love yet.

From my point of view, everyone is working off their own subjective morality. You might claim that, because you believe in a god, your morality is objective - well, what about fundamentalist Muslims... is their morality objective as well? Two objective moral codes that conflict? No, it's subjective based on which god you've decided is the "real" version. Anyway, I think there are moral objective truths out there to be known but it's not likely we will ever find them until we can learn more about the brain, pain, happiness, etc. That's why I think we need to divorce ourselves from the "immovable" morality of gods and concentrate on what actually matters to people in general - increased happiness and reduced suffering... you'll probably ask me why that is what matters... it matters to me, it matters to the people I talk to... and, if you're honest, it matters to you I'll bet.

**Bill:** Have you noticed the order in which your standard of morality is written? You have consistently defined what is right as being first and foremost that which you want, then secondly as that which society agrees on, and lastly that which you think that I secretly believe as well. Why should you come first? Why not put my preferences above yours, and why should the wishes of society matter at all? Is society always right? What about cases in which one society comes to a consensus on the need to eliminate another society?

By the way...

- 1) The Golden Rule ("Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." - Matthew 19:19) is a Christian concept. It cannot be logically developed from an atheistic world view because atheism offers no inherent reason for love to be preferred above any other emotion.
- 2) If dogmatically following anything manmade is a bad idea, then isn't it a bad idea to dogmatically follow the manmade concept that social consensus is the standard for all moral decisions? For that matter wasn't it man who decided that it is a bad thing to dogmatically follow anything made by man? The claim is self refuting. If we are not to dogmatically follow anything made by man, then we cannot dogmatically follow the rule that we cannot dogmatically follow anything made by man.
- 3) If it is not wrong for animals to kill babies, then it cannot be wrong for humans to do so if evolution is true and humans are just animals.
- 4) If morality were contingent upon the feelings of the individual being acted upon, then it would be immoral for carnivores to eat meat, for it is evident that every living thing would rather continue to live than die.
- 5) I doubt that you have personally talked to enough people to personally verify that there is a true societal consensus preferring happiness over suffering. You are simply projecting your own personal preferences upon others just as you have done in claiming that I secretly agree with you even though I refuse to admit it.
- 6) I can think of several instances in which I would prefer pain to the absence of pain. For example, I would definitely prefer the presence of pain over pleasure if I accidentally set my hand down on a hot stove.
- 7) If God's very nature is the standard of justice, then everything that He does must be just. No one has the ability to act outside of their nature, for the moment that they do so, they would indicate that action to be within their nature.

Also... It seems likely that the societies which stone women to death have reached a social consensus that those deaths are justified. Thus the stoning of women can only be condemned if you presuppose some higher standard of morality than that of social consensus.

- 8) If morality is dependent upon social consensus, then you cannot condemn the things which are recorded in the Bible unless you can first demonstrate that the societies which did those things had a consensus against them.
- 9) If pain is not morally wrong, then you cannot bring a moral condemnation against God for allowing it, and it cannot be contrasted with love which is solely a moral concept.

I did not equate evolution with atheism. I attempted to use the two terms very precisely without any unnecessary overlap.

My definition of love is the same as that presented by the Bible in Romans 13:10 - "Love is the fulfilling of the Law."

- 10) Islam and Christianity both have objective moral codes. Their differences stem from the fact that they are founded on two very different objects - the Koran and the Bible.

**Simon:** You'll have to wait for my reply as I am out and about on my phone today. You've made some interesting points though.

**Bill:** No problem. I certainly have no room to complain about delays. :-)

**Simon:** I'll answer these bit by bit if that's ok ? :) I'm in a very boring meeting so will get through some.

1) Love is more conducive to happiness. Do you feel better when you are loved or hated? I prefer being loved. Love breeds more love. That in itself is a very good reason to love each other.

2) We don't need to dogmatically follow it - if you can persuade me of an alternative, I am happy with it.

3) I think it comes down to the reasons for doing something. We excuse an animal its behaviour because it acts according to its nature. We also do the same for mentally ill people, now that we understand more about it. They are incarcerated, sure, but it is less about punishment and more about safety. Anyone else we deem responsible for their actions and we expect people to act in accordance to the social contracts that help our society function. They are far from perfect though - but that is another topic :)

4) You make a very good point for becoming vegetarian and that is indeed what they argue without reference to the Bible. Other animals aren't judged in this way though.

5) You prefer suffering to happiness? You are a very strange person :)

I haven't spoken to everyone, true, but it does seem to me that the majority agree with me, hence the prevalence of laws and agencies set up to try and make more happiness. I'm trying to think of a law that enforces suffering, although I am not denying that there might be one.

6) Yes, pain is useful sometimes, but is down to why or how we are experiencing it. I don't think you addressed the points on this one.

7) But we don't know that God is just... That's the problem.

As far as countries that use stoning, it's largely guided by religion, it's not really done to increase happiness and reduce suffering. Most countries have abandoned these horrible punishments. It is unlikely that their society has the same degree of happiness as ours has. I can't demonstrate this obviously, but would you disagree? Do you think the citizens in those countries are as happy as we are? There is a good case we could make that they should abandon the practice but they are unlikely to do so because they are brainwashed into thinking their god told them that this is the best way. Religion can make even good people do bad things.

On the flip side, I'm happy for them to demonstrate to me that stoning is the way forward, I'm not claiming that our society is definitely better than theirs, it's all about being open minded and testing these things.

8) It's about more than social consensus, it's also about happiness and suffering - that's the key. We realise that it is important, otherwise we'd torture prisoners and execute them in horrible ways. All we need to do to move on this is to admit to each other that we prefer happiness over suffering. I know you say you don't, but that's ok, you can live somewhere else.

9) But we're not just talking about pain... We're talking about torture.

For love, would you agree with this definition as well:

1. A deep, tender, ineffable feeling of affection and solicitude toward a person, such as that arising from kinship, recognition of attractive qualities, or a sense of underlying oneness.

10) Are they both right?

So basically, I guess it just comes down to whether or not you think torture is loving or not.

That is the question:

Do you think torture is loving?

I'd have to go with no. I have an aversion to torturing my loved ones. That is my subjective feeling, no more than that. Is it also your subjective feeling?

**Bill:** So... is it possible to incarcerate the mentally ill and still love them?

**Simon:** Yes, we have limited resources and limited solutions. If we could fix them, we would. We try to do so, most are beyond our powers so we have to keep them out of the way in order to protect other innocent people. It's not their fault and we wish there was another way... But for now, there isn't... It's very sad :(

So do you think torture is loving? Is there anything your loved ones could do, or neglect to do, including not loving you or not believing you about something, that would make you torture them?

**Bill:** Okay. Let me make sure I'm understanding you properly. As I see it, you believe that everyone should conform to the decree of society that happiness is to be preferred above suffering. Those who do not conform to that decree are mentally ill and should either leave society of their own volition or risk being forced out of society through incarceration, and all of this is fully compatible with your concept of love. Am I missing anything?

**Simon:** Actually, you've just described what happens in our society today.

Did you want to answer the questions as well?

**Bill:** I have every intention of answering your questions. I just want to make sure that I understand your position first. Is the scenario I just described an accurate representation of your position?

**Simon:** Well, not entirely. No one would be forced to leave or incarcerated unless they actually broke the laws which are necessary to hold a society together. They should also have every opportunity to state their case as to why their way is better. Also, this state of affairs is only the case due to our lack of resources and ability to help those people - it is necessary to protect the majority in society from being killed/tortured/raped/stolen from etc, but any incarceration should be mainly about rehabilitation and safety, not retribution.

And it's not really a decree, it just appears to be human nature to not want to be killed/tortured/raped/stolen from etc.

**Bill:** I see. So then why does it bother you that those who break a law which is necessary for the fellowship of God with men will be prevented from participating in that fellowship unless they are rehabilitated through the acceptance of Jesus Christ's sacrifice?

**Simon:** You don't see any difference between torturing someone for eternity for disbelieving in you with no hope of redemption, and locking someone up for the safety of themselves and others, in the hopes that you will one day be able to help them become a valued member of society again?

And what sort of rehabilitation is believing in Jesus? It's completely arbitrary. You could quite easily carry on sinning after 'finding' Jesus (many people do) so it doesn't really count for much. Plus, what sort of insane god would hide themselves away if the only hope of redemption was through believing in an event 2 thousand years ago that we don't have enough evidence for (that's why it's a faith issue)? If he's trying to help, why not just reveal himself and those who want to can join him? We have no idea whether he even exists at this point, let alone which form to believe in. Plus, he's let some sort of deceiver run amok, making it harder for us to find him, even if we genuinely want to (those poor Muslims)

Now, what this is really about is if you think torture is loving, as per the questions above.

You might as well admit that you will forgive your god any action, including genocide, and still think that he is loving, even though you can't possibly give a reason why you think he is.

You take it on faith, in the same way as you take his entire existence on faith.

If that's the case - and I might be wrong - then I have to wonder why you decided on the Christian version of God in particular.

But please, that was as aside, we can talk about it another time - I'd far rather you addressed my questions on love and torture.

**Bill:** If the Bible is true and God actually did create everything including us, then that means that He is the one who made us into sentient creatures. Now, as you have already stated, there are certain rights that are inherent to sentience. They are rights which cannot be denied without first denying our sentience. One of these rights is that of a free will. Every sentient creature is free to make his own choices, and although men will occasionally give in to force or persuasion and comply with the choice of someone else, yet even that compliance must be freely chosen. Freedom of choice is an inherent right which cannot be denied except at the expense of sentience itself.

Since freedom of choice is an inherent attribute of sentience, it would therefore have been necessary for God to provide opportunities for choices in order to create sentient creatures. Therefore, in order to make life available to men, He had to offer them the choice of the opposite. In order to offer fellowship with Himself, He had to provide for our estrangement. In order to offer Heaven, He had to offer Hell. Had He done any less, we would not be the sentient creatures that we are. Sentience demands the possibility of negative outcomes.

The question, then, of whether a loving God would create negative outcomes can be answered by asking its inverse. Would a loving God refuse to create positive outcomes? We know the answer to this question is no because love is never indifferent but rather always seeks the betterment of its recipients. Therefore, if God had really loved His sentient creations, then He would indeed have created the possibility for negative outcomes in order that He might bless them with the positives. The case could be made that our sentience actually requires a positive outcome to be balanced by an inversely proportional negative. In which case, the severity of the negative would be an inverse measurement of the strength of God's love. By this standard, the infinite negative of Hell would be a sure indicator of God's infinite love



which is verified by His provision of an equal and opposite positive outcome in heaven.

It is therefore quite possible and even probable that a loving God would create Hell as the necessary negative alternative to the choice of Heaven to be presented to His sentient creatures. As I stated at the beginning of this conversation, God has made Heaven available to you, but He will not force you to go there. You must choose to accept His gift or reject it. You have already admitted that you are currently rejecting that gift, and you have admitted to doing so with full knowledge of the consequences. God could allow you to go to Hell at this very moment, and your fate would be fully justified. The fact that He is still offering you opportunities to change your decision is a sure indication of His love not just for mankind as a whole but for you as an individual.

**Simon:** So, your answer is that, yes, torture is loving.

Plus, I disagree that you have to have hell in order to heaven. You about heaven and annihilation instead? It's still not ideal because you're making the choice for an eternal existence based on a single condition: Belief in Jesus.... and, to be honest, it's NOT a choice.

Just so we're clear, can you please answer whether or not you think that torture is loving and also whether or not you could force yourself to believe in something that you think is ridiculous?

By the way, I am still open minded on the existence of free will - I've heard good arguments for and against and I haven't yet decided.

**Bill:** There is no inconsistency between God being love as defined as the fulfilling of the Law (Romans 13:10) and God permitting eternal torment in Hell. As I stated in my first comment, God does not force anyone to go to Hell. He paid the full price for the salvation of every single human being thus fulfilling the requirements of the Law, but He will not force anyone to go to Heaven. He created us as sentient creatures with the ability to choose our own fate, and He, as a righteous God, cannot deny us that right. Therefore, He has plainly revealed in His Word that all those who believe in Him and accept His payment for their sins will be permitted into Heaven while those who do not will have to spend eternity in Hell.

You are quite capable of choosing to believe in Jesus Christ in spite of your claims to the contrary. You claim that you do not have enough evidence to believe, but the human mind has been proven time and again to have an amazing propensity for believing things in spite of the evidence. Belief is simply a matter of choice, and your very indecision about the existence of free will is a clear indicator that you are capable of freely choosing for yourself what you will and will not believe.

**Simon:** I can claim to believe in Jesus... but I actually don't. Honestly, I tried that for a while losing my faith... I really thought I could just pretend, but it's actually just like pretending you're in love with someone. It's not real and it totally shows.

From your reply, I can only think that you have a different meaning of the word love than I do. Your love allows you to torture someone as long as you've warned them what their actions will bring, mine doesn't. That's ok for you to have a different definition of love to me, as long as we are aware of it.

My indecision on free will is a result of the fact that my brain doesn't have enough information to make a choice either way.

And, for the record, I'm not choosing torture. I'm choosing something else. Is there something else?

So I've made it clear to God I don't want to be tortured, I wonder if he will listen to me or if he will just torture me anyway? Also, he presumably knows I can't just believe in Jesus...

**Bill:** Don't you see? The very fact that you believe that your brain could make a choice about the existence of free will if it were given enough evidence is in itself a belief that you have a free will to make that choice in the first place. You have thus repudiated your own argument by expressing a belief in something for which you do not have sufficient evidence.

**Simon:** I don't know if my brain makes a choice as such... it just reacts to inputs based on its current setting, which is itself a combination of genetics and experience. I'd be keen to find out what allows us to actually have free will. I certainly have the illusion of free will... but do I actually have it, that's the question that haunts me?

From what you were saying before, am I right in thinking that you could become a Muslim tomorrow, a believing Muslim, if you wanted to then?

I'm curious as to why you think I can make myself believe in Jesus when it seems to me that the vast majority of Christians claim personal experience as one of their main "evidences" (if not the only one) for Christianity (same for Muslims etc, making the whole thing farcical)... have I just happened to meet a lot of theists who have had a personal experience?

**Bill:** Belief is not based on evidence. I could choose to believe in Islam at any moment just as easily as you could choose to believe that you do not have a free will. The great thing about God, however, is that He promised never to forsake those who believe on Him and accept His salvation even if they later change their mind and desert Him. "If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself." (II Timothy 2:13)