

## When we think of hell, many of us cry, 'But God, that's not fair!'

I'm going to take my superior Western ways and go and tell those Asians that they are wrong.'

When I say I work for a Christian charity that's bad enough. When I mention it's a Christian *Mission*, however hard I try and explain what we actually do, it seems all people hear, especially non-Christians, is the self-righteous claim that I think I am better than everyone else and need to go round telling people so.

When spirituality is hip and being 'PC' is the new black, the claim that Jesus is the *way*, the *truth* and the *life* and no one gets to God except through him is pretty controversial.

Christians today may be plagued by embarrassment and doubt at Jesus' exclusive claims, but we need to know how serious God is about hell and who goes there.

Fortunately books like *God, That's Not Fair* by Dick Dowsett help give a clear answer to the questions we have about hell.

'Imagine,' writes Dick, 'someone has just been told he has cancer. He could opt to live in a pretend world where cancer does not exist. He might *feel* better by denying the truth, but he would not be better. His hope really lies in accepting the diagnosis and undergoing appropriate treatment.

'According to the Bible, the majority of people are 'on the road to destruction' – terminally ill with the most desperate disease. 98 per cent of the people in Asia are a write-off, and they make up half the world's population. If that is true, then

desperate treatment is urgently needed.'

When we think of hell, many of us cry, 'But God, that's not fair!' Although as Christians we acknowledge our sin and God's perfection, we still have trouble understanding why our holy God cannot have sinners like us anywhere near him.

But, as Dick reminds us, 'In Old Testament times, when people could not conceive of a God who would do this or that, the reply was: "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9).

'In other words, human hunches do not give us right answers about God. We cannot learn how God would behave by looking at the way nice people do things. If we want to know what God thinks of the unbeliever, then God has got to tell us.

'When you became a Christian, you were not merely affirming that Jesus was a pretty good guy, but that he is God and knows what he is talking about.'

Paul, the young man in *God, That's Not Fair*, speaks for many when he asks, 'Don't all religions lead to God?' or says 'it's downright bad manners to try and persuade people to change their religion'.

'Many Christians in Britain,' writes Dick, 'do not believe that the majority of people will not be saved. Many argue that the "good Muslim" is acceptable to God, that there is a second chance for those who have never heard the gospel. Some simply do not believe in hell.

'Others keep in it their Creed only to deny it in their practice, reducing mission to social work with a Christian smile.

'The question is not whether a sincere Buddhist is likely to be saved but how can a man be made right

with God?'

It is not that everything taught in all the other religions is totally wrong, but that there is only one way to be saved from sin. The answer, Dick reminds us, is in Hebrews 9:22: 'Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness'.

'The only shed blood which really deals with the problem,' he says, 'is the blood of Jesus. It might be easy to look at God's intolerance of other religions and picture him as some sort of vindictive old man in the sky who says, "You do it my way or you're damned".'

'But in fact God would be only just and right to condemn us all eternally. The reason for intolerance about other religions is rooted in his compassion. He is fundamentally opposed to other religions *because they do not work*. There is no other Good News. There isn't any other message that brings salvation.'

If Christianity is the truth, he argues, then people from other faiths have got it wrong and their religions don't work. However zealously they might follow their faith, it cannot bring them into a right relationship with our holy God. Until they acknowledge this and follow Christ they are lost.

'It is complicated and hard to put this message over in a way that sounds both loving and respectful,' concludes Dick, 'but it is our responsibility to do it if we would honour Jesus and care for the lost.'

• Rebecca Brooker

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Extracts taken from *God, That's Not Fair*, revised and reprinted this month, £6.99 plus £1.00 P&P. To order, visit [www.omf.org.uk/books](http://www.omf.org.uk/books)

