

What Does the Bible Teach About God's Love and Wrath?

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

- A. Is God loving or wrathful? The short answer is Yes.
 - 1. The question actually creates the logical fallacy of false dilemma; i.e. Have you stopped beating your wife?
 - 2. God is not loving **OR** wrathful; He is loving **AND** wrathful. If He were not both, He would cease to be God.
- B. We are often afraid to talk about the wrath and justice of God.
 - 1. "Most preachers ... today treat the biblical doctrine of the wrath of God very much as the Victorians treated sex. It is there, but it must never be alluded to because it is in an undefined way shameful. ... God is love; therefore we must not associate him with wrath. God is love; therefore he is indefinitely tolerant." (Tony Lane, *Theological Essays on the Love of God*; Eerdmans Pub.)
- C. What is written?
 - 1. Gen. 6:5-8 - In the most ancient of times, God was angry with sin and loving toward the righteous.
 - 2. Ex. 34:6-7 - When delivering His law to Moses, He prefaced it by identifying Himself as loving and angry.
 - 3. John 15:2 - Jesus illustrated it with the account of the vinedresser.
 - 4. Rom. 11:22 - Paul outlined this duality of the Divine toward the faithful and the fallen.
 - 5. Bible students down through the centuries have known this to be true.
 - a. "The whole course of history shows that the God of providence and the severe Jehovah of the Hebrews are one and the same." (J. W. von Goethe, *Maximen und Reflexionen* no. 1304, 1907)
- D. We can only conclude from the scriptures that God is loving and wrathful.
 - 1. If we have difficulty reconciling those two Divine attributes, the disconnect lies with us and not what is revealed.
 - 2. Let's change our understanding of this issue by changing our perspective on the question:
 - a. How are love and wrath capable of dwelling together in a complementary fashion in God?
 - b. How does reconciling the two together enable us to better know God, and by extension better know ourselves?
 - c. How will it enhance our own capacity to become more like God, and more effective in His service?

I. DEFINING THE DILEMMA

- A. Our sense of fairness is offended.
 - 1. How can a loving God send anyone to hell? Or, what if someone never hears the Gospel? Or, how can God allow people He claims to love to suffer pain or loss?

2. Those questions are generated by carefully emphasizing some facts and purposefully ignoring other relevant matters.
- B. Our understanding of love is disrupted.
 1. We think that infinite love mandates infinite tolerance.
 2. We measure God's love by our own definition of ideal love.
- C. Our view of grace and mercy is violated.
 1. We think that Almighty means above the law. An all-powerful God should be able to overlook whatever He wants to ignore.
 2. We have defined justice by our own limited and culturally influenced experiences and reasoning.
- D. We don't understand what we are talking about - Job 42:3
 1. We are three year olds, who, when told it is time for bed, protest, "That's not fair!"
 2. We create the dilemma by mistakenly believing that a loving God cannot be wrathful at times.
 3. Conflict exists because we do not understand God, or love, or wrath.

II. DEFINING DEITY

- A. God is God, and God is loving and wrathful.
 1. He is loving - John 3:16; 1John 4:16
 2. He is wrathful - Heb. 12:28-29
- B. To many, God is either a loving teddy bear type God that loves everyone and would never show anger, OR He is an angry God just waiting to fly off the handle when anyone steps out of line.
 1. What we fail to realize is that God is love (1John 4:8) and that a function of that love is that He is ***passionately opposed*** (wrathful) toward the things that cause His creation harm.
 2. He is passionately opposed to us destroying ourselves and others.
- C. Often overlooked in this discussion is the fact that God is holy, and He wills that humankind be holy as well.
 1. Isa. 6:3; Lev. 19:2; 1Peter 2:9
 2. Because God is love, He wants to have a relationship with us; but, because He is holy, there are some things He must do. He must:
 - a. Tell us about our sins,
 - b. Tell us not to sin,
 - c. Warn us of His Judgment on sins and sinners,
 - d. Judge and discipline us to keep us from sins,
 - e. Call us to repentance, and to trust His faithful love and forgiveness when we have repented of our sins.
- D. In order to stay focused on the wrath of God and these unpleasant consequences, we must deliberately overlook: that He sent His Holy Son to die in our place and take the punishment and wrath of God as our substitute to make us His holy people - Heb. 10:10, 14

III. DESCRIBING THE DEVOTED LOVE OF GOD

- A. 1John 4:8-10 - God is love; love is His defining characteristic.

1. God is the first cause of love; no one loved before God or taught Him how to love; He loved us without cause or merit from us.
- B. God has proven His love in a perfect and absolute way.
 1. Rom. 5:8 - He loved us while we were in sin in an unlovable condition.
 2. Rom. 4:7-8 - He loved us enough to remove the barrier between Him in His holiness and us in the pollution of our sins.
 - a. Our sins and God's holiness form a barrier between us that neither of us can cross.
 - b. God, in His great love for us, created the means of abolishing that barrier through the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ.
 - c. He loves us so much that He did not withhold the life of His only begotten Son to bring us close to Him.
 - d. Eph. 2:1, 3-6
- C. Don't ever doubt the unfathomable love of God!
 1. It is the Adversary that gets us to thinking that the wrath of God somehow casts a shadow over the love of God.
 2. Let me assure you with no fear of being contradicted: there are 34 distinct attributes of God described in scripture. Of all of them, the love of God will be the last one that we will grasp and understand. I believe it is beyond the capacity of the finite mind of man to fully know. We can only accept it by faith and fall down in awe before so great a loving God!

IV. DELINEATING THE DELIBERATE WRATH OF GOD

- A. "One evangelical cliché has it that 'God hates the sin but loves the sinner.' There is a small element of truth in these words: God has nothing but hate for the sin, but this cannot be said with respect to how God sees all sinners. Nevertheless the cliché is false on the face of it, and should be abandoned. Fourteen times in the first fifty psalms alone, the psalmists state that God hates the sinner, that His wrath is on the liar, and so forth. In the Bible the wrath of God rests on both the sin (Rom. 1:18–23) and the sinner (1:24–32; 2:5; John 3:36)." (D. A. Carson, *Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*)
 1. In our way of thinking, love and wrath are mutually exclusive; normally we do not think that a wrathful person is loving.
 2. But God's wrath is not an implacable blind rage. However emotional it may be, it is an entirely reasonable and willed response to offenses against those whom He loves and against His holiness.
- B. Biblical truths about the wrath of God: (Joseph Scheumann)
 1. God's wrath is just. It is in proportion to human sinfulness - Rom. 2:5
 - a. "God's wrath in the Bible is never the capricious, self-indulgent, irritable, morally ignoble thing that human anger so often is. It is, instead, a right and necessary reaction to objective moral evil" (J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 151).
 2. God's wrath is to be feared.
 - a. God's wrath is to be feared because all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God - Rom. 3:23

- b. God's wrath is to be feared because we are justly condemned sinners apart from Christ - Rom. 5:1
 - c. God's wrath is to be feared because He is powerful enough to do what He promises - Jer. 32:17
 - d. God's wrath is to be feared because God promises eternal punishment apart from Christ - Matt. 25:46
- 3. God's wrath is His love in action against sin. This may seem counter-intuitive, but consider:
 - a. "God's wrath is a function of his love. In order for God to be loving, He needs to be just. If God looked lovingly at human sin, He wouldn't be loving. Instead, He looks wrathfully at human sin, which is the loving thing to do."
 - b. Illustration: Imagine if your grandmother was beaten to death by a group of thugs. The gang of men is brought before a Judge, and they plead guilty. The Judge looks lovingly at the men, and he says, "You boys look really sorry for what you did. I'll give you 20 hours of community service. Case closed..." Imagine the horror you would feel! If that Judge didn't sentence the men with appropriate punishment, you couldn't respect that Judge.
 - c. In the same way, if God didn't judge human sin, we wouldn't be able to respect, love, or worship Him.
 - d. Clearly, evil exists. There is no doubt about that. But, who is responsible for it? Someone is responsible for sin. If God doesn't hold humans who commit the sins responsible, then that must mean that He is responsible for it. God has never sinned (Hab. 1:3; Jas. 1:13). While certain sins make our stomachs turn, every sin affects God.
 - e. One of the reasons that we do not understand the wrath of God is that we do not understand the severity of sin." (Evidence Unseen, 2019)
- 4. God's wrath is satisfied in Christ. In saving us from His own wrath, God has done what we could not do; He has done what we did not deserve.
 - a. 1Tim. 1:15; Rom. 3:24-26
 - b. "And can it be that I should gain
 An interest in the Saviour's blood?
 Died he for me, who caused his pain!
 For me, who him to death pursued?
 Amazing love! How can it be
 That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?" (Charles Wesley)
- C. God's wrath is as trustworthy as His love. God's wrath versus human wrath:
 - 1. God is omniscient, so He sees all of our sin and knows it completely.
 - a. We are finite and subjective in our judgment, so we don't always reason fairly.
 - 2. God knows our thoughts and hearts intimately.
 - a. We cannot discern the heart, so we often judge people without knowing or understanding enough.

3. God has never sinned, so all sin is abhorrent to Him.
 - a. We are beset with sin, so sin often doesn't appear that bad to us. Like being nose blind in a foul smell for too long, we tend not to notice how bad sin really is.
4. God is patient in His wrath. He waits, allowing people to change.
 - a. 2Peter 3:9; Gen. 15:13-16; Rom. 1:18, 2:5-6
 - b. We often react in haste with people for their sins, especially when it bothers us.
5. God is personally affected when we sin against anyone, because they are made in His image and are the objects of His love (Prov. 14:31; Psalm 51:4; Acts 9:4; Matt. 25:31-46; Mark 2:1-13).
 - a. We are often unconcerned for the disadvantaged victims of sin if they are not friends or family.
6. The greatest difference? God has supplied an unstoppable means of escaping His wrath - 1John 2:1-2

In Christ Alone

And on the cross as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied,
For every sin on him was laid;
Here in the death of Christ I live.

Conclusion:

A. No, the question is not the love or the wrath of God, but rather the love and the wrath of God; both are part of His Glorious Being. However, we encounter them depending on which side of God we are standing. Just as the daughter who has chosen to stand on my right side will hold my right hand, and my daughter that has chosen to stand on my left side will hold my left hand, so it is that if we chose to abide in God's love, we will experience His love, and if we have chosen to incur His wrath, we will experience His wrath. It is the same God; the only variable is where we have chosen to stand with respect to Him.

B. Where have you chosen to stand?

1. In God's love - John 15:9-10
2. In God's wrath - Heb. 2:2-3