

God's Wrath.

- ◆ Mankind rejected God's invitation to live in relationship with Him and instead choose to live independently of God.
- ◆ This created a painful rift or separation in the relationship between God and humanity.
- ◆ The decision resulted in a lot of unnecessary pain and suffering as humanity descended into such a state of depravity and wickedness that God had to take the drastic step of practically annihilating mankind with the Flood.

As this would seem to be an extreme decision for God to take, it wouldn't be right to leave this sorry situation without saying something about the wrath of God.

- ◆ It is similar stories like the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah and other accounts in the Old Testament that give people the impression God is just waiting for us to step out of line so he can zap us.
- ◆ From a human perspective it would seem His wrath was unjustified and God is acting from a vindictive desire to get even, to pay back and even destroy those opposed to Him.
- ◆ This and other misleading concepts have developed over the centuries that can give a misrepresentation of the true nature of God.
- ◆ There is the subject of hell where many people, including Christians, continue to view God as this harsh judge who hates sinners and can't wait to punish them for their wrongdoing.
- ◆ When some natural disaster or calamity occurs some misguided televangelists claim God is punishing that particular city or nation because of its wickedness.
- ◆ Then there is the "good cop, bad cop" routine where God the Father is so angry with sinners; He had to send Jesus to clean up humanity so He could accept us.
- ◆ Jesus is there to placate the Father's wrath so He can present us to the Father, but only after we smarten up and repent of our sinful ways.
- ◆ In all these scenarios, God comes off looking like an arbitrary tyrant who is hell-bent on punishing the wicked.

We have already addressed some of the issues surrounding these events like the flood as to why God acted in a particular way, but we need to return to the question of God's character to understand this subject of God's wrath or anger.

- ◆ Right from the start, we should acknowledge one thing about God's character, and that is, He is a holy God who hates sin, wickedness and evil, and these things make Him angry.
- ◆ ***Psalms 5:5 The arrogant cannot stand in your presence. You hate all who do wrong.***
- ◆ But is it a bad characteristic to hate sin? Would we prefer a God who is not holy, not just, not righteous, one who doesn't hate sin, wickedness and evil?
- ◆ This is not a human judge we are dealing with whose judgment can be clouded by human tendencies such as favouritism, prejudice, bigotry, or partiality.
- ◆ This is the judge of righteousness and truth whose judgement is always determined by another of God's characteristics and that is "love."
- ◆ As we saw earlier, the one characteristic that best describes God is "love."
- ◆ The apostle John expressed it in the simple sentence, "God is love" (1 John 4:8).
- ◆ So the overriding principle that governs everything God does flows from this one overriding characteristic.
- ◆ If God is creating, it's for the purpose of love.
- ◆ If He is redeeming, it's for the purpose of love.
- ◆ If He is correcting, it's for the purpose of love.
- ◆ In the same sense, we can only conclude that any display of God's wrath is also an expression of God's love as He responds with justice to an injustice.
- ◆ It would be a mistake to separate the wrath of God from the love of God.
- ◆ So in those cases where we witness an expression of God's anger towards humanity, it has to be in reaction to some extreme wickedness, some injustice or hurt that opposes what God ultimately stands for, loving relationships!
- ◆ Instead of wanting to pay back, get even or destroy, God's expression of anger is to restore order, to liberate the oppressed, and to heal relationships.

For example let's look at God's angry reaction to Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden.

- ◆ What we see in God's anger with Adam and Eve is a natural anger which flows from a loving parent when they see their children doing something that will harm themselves or others
- ◆ Their foolish decision had set humanity on a course that could only result in pain, suffering and death, events diametrically opposed to "loving relationships."
- ◆ Which of us as parents have not reacted with anger after we have done our best to protect and educate our children only to watch them do something stupid that caused them some physical, emotional or spiritual harm.
- ◆ You would have to wonder about the genuineness of the love of parents who didn't react with anger – it's a natural and healthy response of loving parents.
- ◆ God is no different. If He did not oppose sin and evil He too would be an irresponsible parent.
- ◆ His anger in the Garden was also directed at the devil.
- ◆ His anger again stems from "love" as the devil was attempting to destroy God's purpose for His children.
- ◆ In effect, God's reaction is a divine "no," "No, my purpose will stand, I'm not going to let you destroy what I have planned for my children! And whatever it takes, even if it costs the life of my beloved son we will bear that cost."
- ◆ It is in reaction to a threat to what He has planned for his children that the anger of God is aroused.

We saw God's drastic intervention earlier in the examples of Noah's flood and with Sodom and Gomorrah.

- ◆ We saw His decision to intervene was in response to the violence, perversion and wickedness that permeated their societies.
- ◆ Again, behaviour that was totally contrary to God's characteristic of love.
- ◆ There were victims to these evils and God will only tolerate evil so long before intervening (Matthew 24:22).
- ◆ God in love acts with both divine justice and divine mercy.
- ◆ We are not just talking about dishing justice out to the wicked, but justice also for the weak and vulnerable who have been exploited by the wicked.
- ◆ ***Isaiah 11:4 but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.***
- ◆ Justice has two sides; it punishes the wicked and brings relief to the oppressed.
- ◆ If God's justice is biased, it is towards the poor, the defenceless and the oppressed (Psalms 146:7-9).
- ◆ This is why justice in the hands of a loving God is not something to be approached with dread, but rather a blessing to be received with thanksgiving.
- ◆ In extreme cases, as in the story of the flood and Sodom and Gomorrah, God in love, determined the world was better off without the influence of these depraved and wicked children.
- ◆ Events had to be arrested in much the same way our modern civilised governments respond to the likes of ISIS and other terrorist organisations.
- ◆ The inhabitants of Syria and Iraq are much better off without the wicked influence and cruelty of ISIS.
- ◆ So rather than viewing God as a heartless, vengeful and mean God ready to zap us the minute we step out of line, we need to regard Him as a loving parent who loves His children, and even when dispensing justice, He does so out of love.
- ◆ The fact God does get angry with us demonstrates He does love us and will not let us get away with our self-destructive and inhumane ways.
- ◆ This anger, however, doesn't mean God stops loving us any more than we stop loving our children.
- ◆ And even though it was the physical end for the wicked in the time of Noah, and Sodom and Gomorrah, it doesn't mean this is the end of the story for them, because Jesus drops in this cryptic statement in Matthew 10:15
- ◆ ***Matthew 10:15 Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.***
- ◆ Why would Christ drop in this statement unless he has something planned for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah on judgment day?

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- ◆ We will come back to this statement later when we look at the subject of the Judgment.
- ◆ It was this same Jesus who rebukes his disciples for wanting to call down fire from heaven on a Samaritan village that didn't welcome Jesus (Luke 9:51-56).
- ◆ This doesn't exactly sound like a God who gets some sick pleasure in seeing the wicked being dropped into burning hellfire.
- ◆ It was this same Jesus who admonishes us to "Love our enemies."
- ◆ ***Luke 6:35-36 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.***
- ◆ It would be the height of hypocrisy for Jesus to tell us to love our enemies, and then for Him to turn around and destroy his enemies, the wicked, without an opportunity for repentance.
- ◆ If we are honest, it is only because of his willingness to do this that we stand here today as forgiven sinners, because at one stage we too were enemies of God (Colossians 1:21).
- ◆ So it is highly likely the same grace that has been extended to us will one day be extended to all the enemies of God including the victims of the flood and the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah if we understand Matthew 10 correctly.

Just in case we need additional proof that God loves His children and always acts out of love for them. Why would this God who supposedly acts like an arbitrary tyrant decide to offer Himself on the hideous cross to pay the death penalty required for the sins perpetuated by the cruel and perverted inhabitants of the world of Noah's flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, and the rest of the billions who have ever lived?

- ◆ This is the same God we have hurt and offended with our emphatic "no" to His loving invitation to dwell in love with Him.
- ◆ Yet what does He do? He demonstrates He still loves us by taking our sin along with its guilt and consequences on Himself.
- ◆ ***Romans 5:9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!***
- ◆ Jesus absorbs the wrath of God's anger towards sinners by submitting Himself voluntarily to God's punishment on the wicked.
- ◆ It is this fact that separates Christianity from all other religions.
- ◆ The gods of other religions require their followers to pay for their own offenses.
- ◆ In contrast, the Christian God looks over the judgment bench, pronounces us guilty deserving of the death sentence, then gets up, walks around to the other side of the bench and pays the death penalty in our stead.
- ◆ A holy God requires the death penalty to be paid to atone for our sins, and then makes a sacrifice on our behalf.
- ◆ The love of God and the wrath of God fuse upon the cross.

He does this because "God is love."

- ◆ And this simple statement applies to all three persons of the Trinity.
- ◆ The fact part of Jesus' mission was to reveal the true nature of the Father to us implies humanity has a distorted view of God and this included how God executes justice (John 14:9).
- ◆ We saw earlier how the patriarch Job's ordeal was designed to correct Job and his three friends' inaccurate view of God.
- ◆ This is a common problem usually stemming from the mistake of "making God in our image" rather than the other way around.
- ◆ One of these distortions is to think Jesus smiles on us while the Father stands in the background frowning at us, the old "good cop, bad cop" routine.
- ◆ To believe this effectively does great violence to the unity concept of the Trinity as well as two other important characteristics of God, justice and grace.
- ◆ In this scenario, the Father is the God of justice while Jesus is the God of grace.
- ◆ Yet this same Jesus who came to reveal the Father also said, ***"I and the Father are one"*** (John 10:30).
- ◆ We cannot separate the actions of Jesus from the actions of the Father and the Holy Spirit.

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- ◆ So if we want to get an accurate understanding of the nature of the Father we need to study the life of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ However, this unfortunate teaching of the “good cop, bad cop” routine has led to a warped concept of God.
- ◆ On the one side we have the fire and brimstone crowd who view God through the prism of justice to the detriment of the grace.
- ◆ On the other hand, libertarians minimize the justice of God and over-emphasize the grace of God.
- ◆ Both extremes lead to a warped concept of God.
- ◆ If we regard him only as a God of justice then our relationship with Him is based on that concept alone.
- ◆ If we regard him only as a God of grace then our relationship with Him is based on that concept alone.
- ◆ While both of these virtues are important characteristics of God’s nature, both are governed by the overriding characteristic of who God is, love.
- ◆ Notice how these three characteristics of God are linked in John 3:16-17 and are an expression of love
- ◆ ***John 3:16-17 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world (justice), but to save the world through him (grace).***
- ◆ Both justice and grace are a manifestation of and are governed by the love of God.
- ◆ Whether God is acting in His capacity as Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Creator, Sovereign, Judge, Savior, He is always acting from the perspective of love.
- ◆ When we understand this we can better comprehend the true nature of God.
- ◆ So to think there is some division in the Trinity is patently false, there is no “good cop, bad cop” routine going on.
- ◆ God the Father is opposed to evil; Jesus is opposed to evil, the Holy Spirit is opposed to evil and they love us enough not to let us get away with our sin.
- ◆ God has a fierce, burning passion of love that is directed at those things that threaten to destroy His purpose.
- ◆ And the most loving example of that burning passion was when Jesus offered Himself as the sacrifice to absorb the wrath of God towards the sins of humanity in what became known as the “Passion of Christ.”
- ◆ ***So we need to be very careful we aren’t too quick to judge God’s motives in his dealing with his children – He always acts from a motive of divine love even if it appears from a human perspective His wrath is unjustified.***
- ◆ Instead we need to take a leaf from the book of Job and recognise we don’t see all the facts from where we sit and we need to learn to trust the one who has the responsibility of turning rebellious sinners into His holy loving children.
- ◆ There is always a loving reason why God acts the way He does.
- ◆ ***The last few times we have dealt with mostly negative news, the devil, the tragedy in the garden, and the rebellion of mankind against God.***
- ◆ But we need not despair. Because running parallel to the bad news associated with mankind’s rejection of God is the good news of what God is doing to restore the severed relationship.
- ◆ So next time we come to that important passage of scripture, Genesis 12 which spells out God’s plan for mankind’s redemption.