

More Than Loving

August 23, 2020

One mistake some people make is to see God as only loving. They choose to see God as one dimensional in character. They picture God as having only one quality, one characteristic, one value. They hold up passages like the following written by the apostle John.

1 John 4:16 (NIV) God is love.

Love is a wonderful attribute of God. Love is the greatest motivator in God. Everything God does towards us is because he loves us. John 3.16 says that God loves us so much that he sent us a savior. Love is highly valued by God. Love is so true of God that John wrote that God IS love.

In our world, love is held up as the highest value for any person to live out. In Jesus we see this highly valued quality of God. Jesus loves us to the point of sacrificing himself for us.

But God is much bigger than love. God has a multi-faceted character.

Some only see what they want to see when they read the Bible. If they only want to see God as loving, they ignore all else that the Bible reveals about God.

You and I are multi-faceted individuals. There is more to us than just one characteristic. God is also multi-faceted in character. In addition to being loving, God is compassionate, kind, merciful, good, faithful, and just. In fact, God is as much all these other qualities as he is loving. He is fully loving. He is also fully faithful. He ALWAYS keeps his promises. God is fully just.

One problem with describing God by only one quality is that we create a false God to believe in. We deny or cover up the truth about God. And that displeases God. Whenever we choose to present God as less than he is, we sin against him. It dishonors God.

A second problem with presenting God as one dimensional in character is that it leads us to false conclusions about what God does or does not do. The person who only sees the love of God might say, "I don't think a loving God would condemn anyone to hell." Perhaps you have heard someone say that. I have.

That would be a reasonable statement IF God were only loving. But because God is also good and just that statement is false. We can see this if we apply it to an everyday situation.

If I said to you, a loving judge would not sentence to jail any of the policemen involved in George Floyd's death, you might say, "Well then, I don't want a loving judge to rule that case. I want a just judge. I want justice for him and his family."

Well, God is just. God is good. Therefore, God MUST punish sin. God MUST punish sin. God has proved that he punishes sin by doing so in the life of the Israelites.

> **God punished the sins of the Israelites.**

Numbers 16:42-46 (NIV) ... when the assembly gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron and turned toward the Tent of Meeting, suddenly the cloud covered it and the glory of the LORD appeared.

Then Moses and Aaron went to the front of the Tent of Meeting, and the LORD said to Moses, "Get away from this assembly so I can put an end to them at once."

And they fell facedown. Then Moses said to Aaron, "Take your censer and put incense in it, along with fire from the altar, and hurry to the assembly to make atonement for them. Wrath has come out from the LORD; the plague has started."

It is recorded that 14,700 people died from the plague that day. God punished their rebellion and unbelief.

That is just one of many examples in the Old Testament of God punishing the Israelites for their sin. Sometimes he ended lives. Other times he brought draught or other calamities.

> **This punishment of sin is called the wrath of God.**

The word wrath is an expression of God's righteous anger over sin. There is no way to downplay it. There is no way to soften it. Nor should we. His wrath is an expression of righteous anger and well-deserved punishment.

Acts of God's wrath do not reduce God's love of us. Just as parents still love their children even as they discipline them, so God loves us even when he punishes sin. But unbelief and intentional sin dishonors and insults God. Such behavior rightly angers him. And because he is good and just he MUST punish sin.

He WILL punish sin. God plans to punish all sin at some future point in time. He has already set the day. In the Bible it is called the Day of the Lord. In the meantime...

The whole world is living under condemnation.

Let's take a fuller look at an often quoted passage.

John 3:16-18 (NIV) 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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

Every unbeliever in the good news of Jesus is already living under the condemnation of God. It is as if they are living on death row in the federal penitentiary, except most are unaware that

they are already condemned to hell. And every sin they commit adds to the wrath to come later against them.

Romans 2:5 (NIV) But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

All the world is living under the condemnation of God. And the days are counting down to destruction. God IS loving. But God is also just and good. God cannot and will not just overlook sin.

We looked at one example of God punishing Israel for sin. God also will punish all nations for the corporate sins of that nation. Let's look at another passage where God reveals he will punish Israel and a different nation for sin. We will look at this because we will learn something important about the wrath of God.

In Isaiah 9, God reveals through the prophet Isaiah that God is angry with Israel, the northern kingdom. He had decided to end them as a nation.

Isaiah 9:19 (NIV) By the wrath of the LORD Almighty the land will be scorched and the people will be fuel for the fire...

God is going to ruin Israel by lifting his hand of protection from around them. God will allow the Assyrian army to invade the land and takeover Israel. Even so, God will later punish Assyria for this sin against Israel.

Isaiah 10:5, 12 (NIV) "Woe to the Assyrian, the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the club of my wrath!"

When the Lord has finished all his work against Mount Zion and Jerusalem, he will say, "I will punish the king of Assyria for the willful pride of his heart and the haughty look in his eyes.

God fulfilled that by letting the Babylonians bring an end to the Assyrian empire. Now what I want you to see is that the punishment of Israel and later of Assyria were both announced by God ahead of time. God announced what was going to take place. He announced beforehand the act of his wrath upon these two nations.

Here is the point: **> God never loses his temper.**

God's wrath is unlike our wrath. When we speak of the wrath of man, it often carries the idea of one who has lost his temper, of a person who flies-off-the-handle. This is never true of God.

God announced his wrath ahead of time. This coming wrath, this expression of his anger, was planned, was thought out. As such, God could determine what was a fair punishment, a just consequence for their sin. The consequence was limited in scope. It was appropriate to the sin.

God never loses control of himself. God never exhibits fits of temper or rage. These words do not apply to God as they often apply to us. In our anger, we may fly-off-the-handle. In our anger, we may respond almost purely out of emotion. God never does so. Even though the word wrath is used over and over, it is not the same as when we are wrathful.

As I said earlier, there is a final day of God's wrath that is coming upon the world.

Isaiah 34:1-4 (NIV) Come near, you nations, and listen; pay attention, you peoples! Let the earth hear, and all that is in it, the world, and all that comes out of it! The LORD is angry with all nations; his wrath is upon all their armies. He will totally destroy them, he will give them over to slaughter. Their slain will be thrown out, their dead bodies will send up a stench; the mountains will be soaked with their blood. All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree.
(Jeremiah 7:20)

That day has not yet come. It will be the worst day in the history of the planet. And it is often mentioned in the New Testament. It is overlooked by those who describe God only as a loving God and not as a just God.

Matthew 3:7 (NIV) But when he (John, the baptizer) saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"

This is what so many miss when they read the Bible. There is a great emphasis on this coming wrath. But many read right past it and do not think about it. Some even paint a false picture of two Gods, an angry God in the Old Testament and a loving God in the New Testament. They ignore the passages in the Old Testament that speak of God's love and blessings for his people. And they ignore the New Testament passages that speak of God's coming wrath.

But there is an answer for all who are presently living under the condemnation of God.

We have been looking at truth for us in the book of 1 Thessalonians. Today God has a wonderful truth for us from there. Look with me at chapter 1. We will start reading in verse 7.

1 Thessalonians 1:7-10 (NIV) And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia--your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead--Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.
(John 3:36; Romans 5:9)

Jesus rescues us from the coming wrath. Jesus came so that all those who put their faith in him will be forgiven of their sins, escape the wrath of God, and inherit eternal life.

The coming wrath of God upon the sins of the whole world is bad news, the worst news ever. It will be horrible for everyone alive at that time.

Never forget the good news of Jesus. Never let it become unimportant to you. And never leave out the bad news of God's wrath upon sin. It is the bad news that makes the good news, good.

We are all sinners against God, deserving to be condemned to hell. We are good people. But we are not good enough.

Flee from the coming wrath. Admit your sin and your need for the savior, Jesus. Put your faith in Him, his teaching, his death, and his resurrection, and you will be saved from the wrath of God.