



**Study guide for  
A RESPONSE TO  
BRIAN ZAHND**

In Sam Storm's book *The Dancing God*, he asks the question, "is God primarily, sad, mad, or glad?" Concluding many see God as primarily mad or sad, yet God is primarily Glad, while he can be mad or sad as seen in scripture. His point is our bad presumption of God can change our approach our relationship with God.

Brian Zahnd book, "sinners in the hands of a loving God" could have some readers thinking he's doing the same thing. Yet to use Zahnd's own phrasing "this is not that". Zahnd is not depicting the common misconception of God's basic disposition. He is redefining the God of the Bible. Zahnd is making a theological distinction not a qualifying nuance. It's a different picture of God: a Kind Grandpa God utterly devoid of wrath, a Hipster Jesus obsessed with avocado toast and freeing the oppressed, and a Holy Spirit, who's exists too give people mystical experiences and little more. I admit my description is an overstatement but I get ahead of myself..

## **Four major concerns surface in Zahnd's book.**

### **1. His depiction of God's wrath.**

#### **Zahnd view: Wrath is a Metaphor not an attribute.**

His argument: All the depictions of divine anger in Scripture are only metaphors, none of which are designed to be taken literally. God's wrath is a anthropomorphism not an attribute. Anthropomorphic language describes God in human or created terms like having body parts or compares him to a rock or a mother hen. Yeah it is not anthropomorphic, it has anthropomorphic elements but it is not an anthropomorphism. Zahnd explained away the Old Testament passages as "metaphors". After dispensing with any literal notion of God's wrath, Zahnd is able to make the following sweeping statement about God's character:

"The revelation that God's single disposition toward sinners remains one of unconditional love does not mean we are exempt from the consequences of going against the grain of love. When we live against the grain of love we suffer the cards of self-inflicted suffering. This is the 'wrath of God.'"

So instead of being under the coming wrath of God, unrepentant sinners are merely enduring a season of "self-inflicted suffering." His view seems to be a repackaging of C.H. Dodd view, which understands the wrath of God as an **impersonal process** of cause and effect, the consequence of sin in a morally ordered universe.

Dodd was a great biblical scholar of the last century. He uses passages showing God's wrath is effective. Dodd proposed wrath was the result of an outside situation and not directly referring to God. To Dodd's credit, this group is a majority of the uses in the Old Testament. Yet he ignores those text that show God's wrath to have an affective nature, where the verb for wrath refers back to the subject, God. God is shown to have wrath. While this is a minority of the text, it is a significant minority. As theologian Stephen Wellum reminds us, "The true biblical test of any theology is whether it accounts for all of the biblical data."<sup>1</sup> A passage that clearly points to God's wrath as affective is Ps 5:5-7.

The arrogant cannot stand  
in your presence.  
You hate all who do wrong;  
you destroy those who tell lies.  
The bloodthirsty and deceitful  
you, Lord, detest.  
But I, by your great love,  
can come into your house;  
in reverence I bow down  
toward your holy temple.

There we see God's holy response to sin. God's response to sin in Psalm 5:5-7 may sound severe to the typical western ear. But the Scriptural reality of God's wrath is clear. He hates sin. Note as well the overlapping with Love. God may hate sin but his Love allows the humble to draw near to him.

As for the New Testament passages of God's wrath, Zahnd simply set aside. Here are just a few Matthew 3:7; John 3:36; Romans 1:18-19; 2:5; 5:9 and Colossians 3:6. In the New testaments, We have text where judgment of sin in this age is portrayed as the direct act of God (Acts 5:1-11; 12:23; 1 Cor. 11:30; Rev. 2:22-23).

---

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Wellum, *Christ Alone: the uniqueness of Jesus as Savior* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017). 228

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 describes Christ coming in judgment. It is hard to talk of God's wrath in purely impersonal terms given this verse. While much of Paul's talk about God's wrath is relatively impersonal, the evidence as a whole shows he did not wish to eliminate the concept of wrath as affectus. Stählin's conclusion in the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament is fair:

"In most NT passages ὀργή is in fact the divine work, destiny or judgment of wrath" but "the idea of an actual attitude of God cannot be disputed in respect of many NT verses, any more than this is possible in respect of [love and mercy]." "As in the OT ... so in the NT ὀργή is both God's displeasure at evil, His passionate resistance to every will which is set against Him, and also His judicial attack thereon."<sup>2</sup>

The clearest evidence is found in Hebrews. Where "the author (3:10-11; cf. 4:3) quotes from Psalm 95:10-11 the statement that God was displeased or angry (προσώχθισα) with Israel and swore against them in his anger (ὀργῆ). This is the one place in the New Testament where God is unequivocally the subject of a verb meaning "to be angry."<sup>3</sup> Later in Hebrews, passages, such as Heb 10:31 ("It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God") and Heb 12:29 ("Our God is a consuming fire"), reinforce the impression that for the author of Hebrews, God's wrath was no impersonal process of cause and effect but a real attribute of deity.

Tony lane explains why Dodd and Zahnd are wrong:

The case that God's wrath is purely an impersonal process of cause and effect, the inevitable consequence of sin in a moral universe, can be maintained only with considerable difficulty. It necessitates rejection of the clear teaching of the Old Testament, dubious interpretation of some passages of the teaching of Jesus and Paul, and the rejection of other New Testament passages. This neo-Marcionite procedure (rejection of the Old Testament teaching and selective use of Jesus and Paul) yields no more than a silence about the affective side of God's wrath. No passage in either Testament is alleged that denies the personal and affective nature of God's wrath. The case rests simply on an argument from the (alleged and highly contestable) silence of Jesus and Paul.

---

<sup>2</sup> Stählin, "ὀργή" in TDNT, 5:424-25. Paul is explicitly included in this judgment.

<sup>3</sup> A. T. Hanson, *The Wrath of the Lamb*, pp. 132-33.

In short, as Emil Brunner taught the wrath of God is a reality not to be denied or explained away. It is the real God in his relation to real sin. <sup>4</sup> Elsewhere Brunner writes:

To speak of all this as "anthropomorphic ideas", of all the references to the wrath of God in the Scriptures as "merely the crass anthropopathic relics of an uncultured age, which describes the divine righteousness in terms of the human emotions" (Wegscheider), only betrays the fact that (1.) the writer does not know the God of revelation, the God who makes His Name known to us, and thus that (2.) the very idea of the Holy God and of the Lord God is unpleasing to him, and that, (3.) at the most, he only recognizes a God who does not claim him by His will. <sup>5</sup>

## **What would God be like if he did not hate sin?**

- 1.) He would be a God like the Greek myths. One who delights in hurting others. who he wanted to hurt. Nothing more than a infinitely powerful human.
- 2.) He would be a God like the God of the philosophy. A God like Aristotle or Plato's idea of God. A God of apathy, not troubled one bit by sin, emotionless impersonal god of philosophy.

## **A Theological argument for Wrath**

Zahnd theology does not allow for a holy God or a real view of sin. His denial of wrath cause a cascade of problematic implications: <sup>6</sup>

1. If you do away with the wrath of God, you also do away with the seriousness of my sin. Sinners, become just 'ok' people, who have done some bad things, and they feel bad about.
2. If you do away with the wrath of God, and the seriousness of my sin, you do away with the stunning beauty of the love of God. It is stunning because God loves me even though I am a sinner and an enemy of God.
3. If you diminish the love of God for a sinner, you do away with the beauty of forgiveness and so, His love as a result becomes not that astounding.

---

<sup>4</sup> Brunner, *The Mediator*, pp. 519-21.

<sup>5</sup> Emil Brunner *Dogmatics, Vol I. Doctrine of God.* 162 the numbers in parentheses were added for clarity on his points.

<sup>6</sup> These points can be found in the writings of Emil Brunner as well as Jerry Bridges. It is simple descriptive theological logic. I adapted the wording of these implication from a [review](#) by Jerry Frederick.

4. God's love becomes sentimental and all too human, because it really is not that unusual to love someone who is really not that bad.

5. In no way can the above view of God's Love and Gracious actions produce in the human heart, a gratitude free of entitlement! At best, it affirmed the basic goodness assumed of all humanity and shows God to be a dutiful God who faithfully keeps his obligations to save repentant sinners, ('ok' people, who have done some bad things, and they feel bad about) and forgive their sin.

## **Why wrath is repulsive today.<sup>7</sup>**

But why does the idea of God's wrath arouse so much displeasure today? There are at least three ways in which it offends against the Enlightenment mind-set.

**First, if there is any room for God in a "world come of age" it is for a God whose purpose is to serve humanity.** A genuinely theocentric concept of God is intolerable, because "modern man, through the influence of the thought of the Enlightenment, is so accustomed to think that God's function is to stand surety for human purposes."<sup>8</sup>

**Second, it follows from this that any "God" who wishes to be accepted today must be a tolerant God who respects human rights.<sup>9</sup>** It must of course be acknowledged that belief in the wrath of God in the past has been abused as the author reminds again and again. It has at time been the justification of cruel and inhumane behavior, whether in war or in penal systems. But those wishing to blame the practices on the doctrine would do well to consider the inhumane cruelties of atheistic regimes in the twentieth century. Chairman Mao, the Khmer Rouge, and Stalin come to mind.

**third, the sentimentality of the Enlightenment has given birth to a sentimental view of God and his love.<sup>10</sup>** We want a mellow God. The God of American civil religion, the vague deity proclaimed in TV Holliday special, a deity, who sadly does not cohere either with Scripture or with empirical reality. Such a God promotes a

---

<sup>7</sup> Adapted From Tony Lane's essay

<sup>8</sup> Brunner, *The Mediator*, pp. 467-68

<sup>9</sup> R. P. C. Hanson, *God*, pp. 37-38; Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, pp. 108-9.

<sup>10</sup> Brunner, *The Mediator*, p. 464.

benevolent, skeptical apathy, the tender underbelly of a sentimental civil religion. By contrast, the response to the wrath of God often produced either hostility towards the deity or conviction of sin (John 16:8-11). Christians are not exempt from these pressures, and sentimental, anthropocentric views of God.

Why has the biblical doctrine of the wrath of God not been more effective in correcting these trends?

A.) One reason may be we don't think God gets mad about our sin, we don't, and so he should not either. As R. W. Dale, "It is partly because sin does not provoke our own wrath, that we do not believe that sin provokes the wrath of God"<sup>11</sup>

B.) A more pressing reason may be the false idea that it is incompatible with God's love.

## **Relation between the wrath of God and the love of God**

Are Wrath and love are opposites? A popular opinion today but untrue.

"the opposite of love is not wrath but indifference."<sup>12</sup>

Further We must remind ourselves, God's love is not like human love (Rom 5:6-9). In Romans Paul contrasts, Human love that evaluates, God loves that initiates. God's love is not at odds with his wrath. They are just not understood as an either/or.

Also in Rom 5:6-9, Paul assumes this overlap. "While we were sinners" is understood to mean we were under God's wrath in light what Paul states in v.9. So in v.8 Paul describes a sinner under the wrath of God to coming (ie. final judgment category). Yet while under the wrath of God, God still loves and shows that love in sending Christ.

If we put this together we see the God Moses spoke of, a God not without anger but one who is slow to anger and abundant in steadfast love. God gets upset and wrathful at humanity because of he loves for his creation. This may be hard for mini moderns to even grasp. We so often forget. We shot first, that is to say we are in rebellion. Humanity after the fall is deserving of judgment.

---

<sup>11</sup> R.W. Dale, cited in Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 109

<sup>12</sup> Whiteley, *The Theology of St. Paul*, p. 63. Whiteley quotes A. G. Hebert, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (London: Faber & Faber, 1947), p. 251, where we read that "the opposite of love is not hate; it is indifference."

## God's seriousness

Emil Brunner in his work *Doctrine of God* helps us see God's wrath for what it is. He writes, " *This wrath is not an emotion which resembles anything we know in human experience; it is the inevitable necessary reaction of the will of God to all that opposes him. God takes the fact that he is God "seriously" and this is the only thing that is wholly serious, and from which all that is really serious is derived. "God is not mocked" (Gal 6:7).*<sup>13</sup> He goes on to state the question, " *what kind of God would he be if he did not care whether people took him seriously or not?*" He answers his own question in stating that God takes himself seriously and not just conditionally seriously but absolutely seriously. It is this fact that keeps life from being a joke thus giving meaning to life. It is this seriousness of God that helps us understand God's wrath. Brunner states " *the wrath of God is something terrible, indeed, it is an infinite reality, "as great as God himself,"... because God takes himself, his love, infinitely seriously, and in so doing also takes man infinitely seriously, he cannot do otherwise than be angry, although "really he is only love." His wrath is simply the result of the infinitely serious love of God.*"<sup>14</sup> Love is only infinitely serious if it is also Holy. As P. T. Forsyth has noted, " *If we spoke less about God's love and more about His holiness, more about His judgment, we should say much more when we did speak of His love.*"<sup>15</sup>

### **There is no true love without wrath.**

The Old Testament teaching on the wrath of God has been summarized as: "the wrath of YHWH is a personal quality, without which YHWH would cease to be fully righteous and His love would degenerate into sentimentality."<sup>16</sup>

On this sentimentality aspect Anders Nygren describes such a Marcionite view of love as pure sentimentality void of judgment.<sup>17</sup> And adds, "Only that love which pronounces judgment on all that is not love is in the truest sense restoring and saving love."<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Emil Brunner *Dogmatics*, Vol I. *Doctrine of God*. 160

<sup>14</sup> Emil Brunner *Dogmatics*, Vol I. *Doctrine of God*. 161

<sup>15</sup> Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1909), p. 73

<sup>16</sup> S. Erlandsson, "The Wrath of YHWH," *Tyndale Bulletin* 23 (1972): 116.

<sup>17</sup> Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (London: SPCK; New York: Macmillan, 1932-39), II/1: 110f.

<sup>18</sup> Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, I:75.



Paul's imperative for love to be sincere is followed by the command to hate what is evil (Rom. 12:9). His point is clear, Failure to hate evil implies a deficiency in love. Love without judgment, means love "is reduced to a general altruism" <sup>19</sup>

### **illustration**

Consider: Could God be the good and loving, if he did not react to human evil with wrath?

Answer from C.H. Cranfield,: "For indignation against wickedness is surely an essential element of human goodness in a world in which moral evil is always present. A man who knows, for example, about the injustice and cruelty of apartheid and is not angry at such wickedness cannot be a thoroughly good man; for his lack of wrath means a failure to care for his fellow man, a failure to love."

Cranfield's Qualifies statement

We can't build too much on the human analogy, "even the very highest and purest human wrath can at the best afford but a distorted and twisted reflection of the wrath of God,"<sup>20</sup>

Point of illustration: it is indisputable that a lack of wrath against wickedness is a lack of caring, ie love. "Unless God detests sin and evil with great loathing, He cannot be a God of Love."<sup>21</sup>

## **Three helpful distinctions**

- 1.) God in relation to himself and God in relation to salvation history.
- 2.) God's wrath in the here and now, that can lead to repentance, and God's wrath in the final judgment, where there is no further opportunity for repentance.
- 3.) the distinction between the creator and the creature

### **1.) Wrath and Love in context of God's essence and relation to creation**

Here we come to a key categorical distinction. God in relation to himself and God in relation to salvation history. These two categories allow us to set up boundary markers with which to work within. First, In himself, God is a triune being, a simple

---

<sup>19</sup> Agape and Eros, 1:111

<sup>20</sup> Cranfield, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, 1:109.

<sup>21</sup> D. C. K. Watson, My God Is Real (London: Falcon, 1970), p. 39.

personal being.<sup>22</sup> In God's innermost being, his attributes are perfectly united. There is no love of God that is not holy and no holiness of God that is not loving. Likewise, God's love and his justice are united in his essential nature. In God's unity and essence, we should not think of God's love and his holiness, his mercy and his wrath, as attributes that need to be reconciled to one another.

Second, The holy, loving God acts differently toward us in different circumstances. In his holy, loving wrath he judges us for our sins. In his holy, loving mercy he forgives our sins. It is mistaken to divide the attributes by suggesting that wrath is the manifestation of holiness or justice, but not of love. In salvation history, in Christ, and in Scripture (which is written from an inspired human position within salvation history) we see God acting both in wrath and judgment and in mercy and forgiveness. Clearly these two differ and are in some sense contrary to one another. Yet both originate from the oneness of God's essence that is a holy, loving God. So that in salvation history there is an apparent duality of God's attributes as they are expressed in salvation history.

The cross plays a central role for it is in the cross that God's good name is rectified and his attributes are reconciled. Cranfield understands Romans 3:25-26 as at least in part referring to the way in which God's justice is maintained in the justification of the unjust.<sup>23</sup> The cross involves the harmonization of these seemingly contradictory attributes in history, attributes that are in reality united in the eternal nature of God.

Brunner relates this to God's wrath, "the wrath of God is not the ultimate reality; it is the divine reality which corresponds to sin. But it is not the essential reality of God. In Himself God is love."<sup>24</sup> In the cross we see "the reality of wrath, which is yet in some way a subordinate reality, and the far more overwhelming reality of the love of God."<sup>25</sup> Above all, it is in the cross that God makes both his holiness and his love known simultaneously.<sup>26</sup> "The objective aspect of the Atonement...consists in the combination of inflexible righteousness, with its penalties, and transcendent love." "The love of God breaks through the wrath of God."<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> simple personal being is understood here in contrast with the conception of deity in impersonal in pantheistic religion.

<sup>23</sup> Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, I:211-14.

<sup>24</sup> Brunner, *The Mediator*, pp. 519-21.

<sup>25</sup> Brunner, *The Mediator*, pp. 519-21.

<sup>26</sup> Brunner, *The Mediator*, pp. 450, 470.

<sup>27</sup> Brunner, *The Mediator*, p. 520.

Brunner point out that it is from the biblical narrative that God is clearly known as One who "outside Christ" is really angry at rebellion and destruction, but "in Christ" is "pure love:". From such a narrative is faith real decision and the Atonement a real turning point. Therefore in salvation history, "the God of holiness and love, of revelation and concealment, of mercy and wrath cannot be dissolved, changed into one synthetic conception, without at the same time destroying the seriousness of the Biblical knowledge of God, the reality and the mystery of revelation and atonement....Here arises the "dialectic" of all genuine Christian theology...<sup>28</sup>

## **2. How does God's wrath and his Love connect?**

### **Love and wrath for the particular sinner**

Is God's wrath against a particular sinner is demanded by his love for that particular sinner? In answering that question, we have to distinguish between God's wrath here and now, that can lead to repentance, and God's wrath in the final judgment, where there is no further opportunity for repentance. God's wrath here and now we will call "timeline A". God's wrath in the final judgment we will call the "darkest timeline".

On timeline A, a human being experiences God's wrath in a secondary way, for wrath plays a secondary role in God's dealings with them. The wrath of God issuing in temporal judgement serves to show us the seriousness of our sin and need for repentance, as such it is a part of God's loving dealings with us.

On the "Darkest Timeline", where the opportunity for repentance has ceased. It is hard to see how God expresses his love in judgement towards the damned.

How does the judgement of hell expression of his love toward them in particular? Some say there is no love in final judgment, it is God's wrath unrestrained. While others understand God's being to be undecided and therefore wrath is expressed in act of final judgment but bearing some slight expression of love.

Thomas Aquinas seemed to believe it was possible to see love in the God's act of final judgment expressed as leniency in punishment. Thomas Aquinas begins by noting that justice and mercy are found in all of God's works, "in everyone of God's works justice and mercy are found." He notes, "some works are associated with justice and some with mercy when the one more forcibly appears than the other. Yet mercy appears even in the damnation of the reprobate, for though not completely relaxed the penalty is sometimes softened, and is lighter than deserved. And justice appears

---

<sup>28</sup> Brunner, *The Mediator*, p. 519; cf. pp. 467-68.

even in the justification of the sinner, when fault is forgiven because of the love which God himself in mercy bestows."<sup>29</sup>

### **3. The forgotten distinction: creator creature distinction**

The creator creature distinction is simply this that all God has created is not God. God alone is God. This is the foundation of Christian ontology in which there are two distinct and different spheres God and creation and to put it rather crudely are not made of the same stuff. The creator creature distinction designates, three things of God: God is different from creation. God is distinct from creation but God is not distant from his creation. From this framework and the biblical witness we can infer a key principles about God's relation to creation. God's relationship to humanity is special. We are made in his image. God's relationship to humanity is personal. The Triune God is a personal being, therefore he relates to us in a personal way. Also, as the old testament clearly shows God is a covenant keeping God. He relates to his creation covenantally.

Yet being different and distinct from his creation he does not at every point have a relationship with humanity in the same way. It is not a one for one analogical correlation. A relationship with God is personal but not in the categories of personal relationship we find between humans. For starters, Christians have a personal relationship with God that is mediated by Christ through the new covenant. It is a covenantal relationship with all the promises, stipulations and obligations there in. With this distinction in mind, let us consider how this helps us understand the wrath of God.

#### **A common overlooked problem**

God's wrath is the obverse, converse, or reverse side of his love. Building God's wrath on his holiness justice and jealous love many theologians have concluded that, Wrath is but love spurned.<sup>30</sup> Brunner thinks,

"the wrath of God under which the idolatrous, sinfully perverted man stands is simply the divine love, which has become a force opposed to him who has turned against

---

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia.21.4 (vol. 5, pp. 81-85). The point at issue the principle that justice and mercy are found in every work of God. Thomas also sees God's wrath as a act of God, a outworking of his love and holiness through his justice and righteousness.

<sup>30</sup> Baird, *The Justice of God*, p. 72; R. P. C. Hanson, *God*, pp. 42, 47-48; Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, 1:74-75; Stewart, *A Man in Christ*, pp. 220-21; Stahlin, "ὀργή," in *TDNT*, 5:425, 428; J. W. Wenham, *The Goodness of God* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974), p. 69. It is not being suggested that all of these writers mean the same thing by this language.

God. The wrath of God is the love of God, in the form in which the man who has turned away from God and turned against God, experiences it, as indeed, thanks to the holiness of God, he must and ought to experience it."<sup>31</sup>

If Judgment is according to one's response to the love of God in Jesus Christ (John 3:16-21, 36). Then It might appear that God's judgment is no more than the macabre revenge of a jilted bitter lover. If wrath is nothing more than rejected love, God is open to the following charge: "Why get so angry, then, when we just want to be left alone?"

Qualifier: because the story is not just one of a jilted love. We are God's creatures and owe him our love and obedience. We are sinful people who have been "bought at a price" (I Cor. 6:20). Here is why many modern people misunderstand the connection of love and wrath in God. We are not autonomous individualistic beings receiving unwanted flowers and candy from a neo-Marcionite God who wants to have a relationship with us. A God who has more claims upon us than the romantic affections of a stranger. The love that is being spurned is the love of Creator for creature, of the One who has redeemed us at great cost. To reject such love is to turn one's back upon one's only hope and to consign oneself to wrath and judgment.

## **Two way to conceptualize God's wrath and love**

First, the creator creature distinction necessitates some level of obligation upon the creature towards the creator.

what is never meant by God's wrath when using a human analogy.

"an unpleasant suggestion that God .. is not quite in control of himself." <sup>32</sup>

R. P. C. Hanson

God's wrath does not means that he "for the time lays aside His love and acts like a man who has lost his temper."<sup>33</sup>

J. S. Stewart

God's wrath is free from personal vindictiveness and "he is sustained simultaneously with undiminished love for the offender."<sup>34</sup>

John Stott

---

<sup>31</sup> Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, p. 187.

<sup>32</sup> R. P. C. Hanson, *God*, pp. 45-46.

<sup>33</sup> Stewart, *A Man in Christ*, p. 218.

<sup>34</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 106.

We see this in Romans 5:8, Paul tells us that while we were still sinners (and therefore under the wrath of God) God showed his love for us in Christ's death. God's wrath against sinners is matched by his love for them. The two ideas come together surprisingly and supremely in the cross.

### **A. Love and anger can coexist in a God who is Father**

P. T. Forsyth explains in terms of Parental oversight.

"True love is quite capable of being angry, and must be angry and even sharp with its beloved children." "For He can be really angry only with those He loves."<sup>35</sup>

There may be some value in considering the disciplining of a child as an analogy. Suppose a child willfully and maliciously hurts another child. In what way is the disciplining of that child an expression of love?

- It expresses the parent's love for righteousness and detestation of cruelty.
- It expresses love for the victim in the form of concern for what has been done.
- It expresses love for the perpetrator in that it is intended as discipline.
- it expresses love for society in the disciplining of the child. Those who let undisciplined children loose on society show not love but lack of concern for their children and even greater lack of concern for their future victims in the rest of society.

### **B. Love and anger can coexist in a Good King**

In the social space God's wrath has an analogy which must not be understood in purely individual terms. God as divine king and ruler would not be showing love for his people if he were to allow an enemy to run roughshod over them.

### **Summery**

God's wrath means God is serious about himself and hate sin to the core of who he is. He hates sin for it is that which separates us from him. God's wrath is the result of God's infinitely serious, intimately jealous, holy love for humanity and the fact that he takes who he is as holy just and righteous infinitely serious. Between those two poles the wrath of God is necessitated and understood as an aspect of God's nature.

Note: in appendix five applications of God's wrath to your life are given.

---

<sup>35</sup> Forsyth, *The Work of Christ*, pp. 105, 243; Cf. Amos 3:2: "You only have I chosen ... therefore I will punish you."

# Wrath thought Church History

## The Early Church Fathers on God's Wrath

The patristic Fathers had no illusion of a lopsidedly loving God who would not punish sin. They spoke consistently of a balanced view that included mercy to the repentant as well as wrath to the wicked.

### Origen

Indeed, we speak of the wrath of God. However, we do not maintain that it indicates any passion on His part. Rather, it is something that is assumed in order to discipline by stern means those sinners who have committed many and grievous sins. For that which is called God's wrath and His anger is actually a means of discipline, (in Bercot, DECB, 21)

### Novatian

When we read of His anger and consider certain descriptions of His indignation ... we are not to understand them to be attributed to Him in the same sense in which they are to humans. For although all these things can corrupt man, they cannot at all corrupt the Divine power. All those angers or hatreds of God, or whatever there is of this kind, are displayed for our healing.... They arose out of wisdom, not from vice, (ibid.)

### Lactantius

It is the fear of God alone that guards the mutual society of men. By this, life itself is sustained, protected, and governed. However, such fear is taken away if man is persuaded that God is without anger. For not only the common advantage, but also reason and truth itself, persuade us that He is moved and is indignant when unjust actions are done. There is a just and also an unjust anger.... The unjust anger ... is to be restrained in man—lest he should rush into some very great evil through rage. This type of anger cannot exist in God, for He cannot be injured.... There is also just anger. This anger is necessary in man for the correction of wickedness. Plainly, then, it is also necessary in God, who sets an example for man. Just as we should restrain those who are subject to our power, so also God should restrain the offenses of everyone. We should understand that since God is eternal, His anger also remains to eternity. On the other hand, since He is endowed with the greatest excellence, He controls His anger. He is not ruled by it; rather, He regulates it according to His will.... For if His anger were completely inextinguishable, there would be no place after a sin for satisfaction or reconciliation, (ibid., 21-22)

## **Augustine**

I would exhort to give heed, if they be wise, and to observe how, without any such arts, the position of a shepherd was exchanged for the dignity of the kingly office by David, of whom Scripture has faithfully recorded both the sinful and the meritorious actions, in order that we might know both how to avoid offending God, and how, when He has been offended, His wrath may be appeased. (LSA, 139 in Schaff, NPNF, 1:1)

Take, for example, that saying of the apostle: "But, after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honor, and immortality, eternal life; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil" (OCD, 3:11:17 in *ibid.*, 1:2).

Therefore "God commendeth His love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified in His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him...." From the wrath certainly of God, which is nothing else but just retribution. For the wrath of God is not, as is that of man, a perturbation of the mind; but it is the wrath of Him to whom Holy Scripture says in another place, "But Thou, O Lord, mastering Thy power, judgest with calmness" (AA, 13:6 in *ibid.*, 3).



## **The Reformation Leaders on God's Wrath**

The Reformation backdrop is God's grace in justification by faith is the wrath of God. Because God is just, He must punish sin; His grace through Christ's payment of the penalty for our sin shines more brightly in view of this necessity.

### **Martin Luther**

God is called a "Fire" because He utterly destroys the godless and leaves them nothing; nor is there anything that can resist His wrath. He is called "jealous" because His disposition is such that He will not spare. Who, then, should not fear Him of whom it is known that He will not spare and that He has the ability implacably and unceasingly to take vengeance?

Moses calls God "jealous," one who will not drop the matter, who must stand by His Word. Both are here joined, the will and the power, strength and might, so that He both can and will punish. If people held this to be the truth, they would not despise His Commandments so shamefully. But no one believes Him to be like this until he experiences it.

The wrath of God is real, not fictitious, not a jest. If it were false, then mercy would be fictitious; for as the wrath, so the mercy which forgives.... Christ most assuredly took upon Himself the wrath of God and bore it for us. So He did not take it upon Himself merely as an example, but He is in very truth the purchase price expended for us. God punishes in a twofold manner. In the first place, He does so in grace, as a benevolent Father; and the chastisement is temporal. In the second place, He punishes in wrath, as a strict Judge; and this punishment is eternal. (WLS, 1549, 53)

### **John Calvin**

For were it not said in clear terms, that Divine wrath, and vengeance, and eternal death, lay upon us, we should be less sensible of our wretchedness without the mercy of God, and less disposed to value the blessing of deliverance. For example, let a person be told, Had God at the time you were a sinner hated you, and cast you off as you deserved, horrible destruction must have been your doom; but spontaneously and of free indulgence he retained you in his favour, not suffering you to be estranged from him, and in this way rescued you from danger—the person will indeed be affected, and made sensible in some degree how much he owes to the mercy of God. (ICR, 2.16.2)

## **Post-Reformation Theologians**

Theologians following the Reformers have discussed God's wrath in the same terms as above. The attribute faded only with the rise of modern unitarianism and liberalism.

### **Jacob Arminius**

Hatred is an affection of separation in God; whose primary object is injustice or unrighteousness; and the secondary, the misery of the creature.... But since God properly loves himself and the good of justice, and by the same impulse holds iniquity in detestation; and since he secondarily loves the creature and his blessedness, and in that impulse hates the misery of the creature, that is, He wills it to be taken away from the creature; hence it comes to pass that He hates the creature who perseveres in unrighteousness, and He loves his misery.

Hatred, however, is not collateral to Love, but necessarily flowing from it; since Love neither does nor can tend towards all those things which become objects to the understanding of God. It belongs to Him therefore in the first act, and must be placed in Him prior to any existence of a thing worthy of hatred; which existence being laid down, the act of hatred arises from it by a natural necessity, not by liberty of the will. (WJA, 1.456)

### **Jonathan Edwards**

Those who come to Christ need not be afraid of God's wrath for their sins; for God's honor will not suffer by their escaping punishment and being made happy. The wounded soul is sensible that he has affronted the majesty of God, and looks upon God as a vindicator of his honor; as a jealous God that will not be mocked, an infinitely great God that will not bear to be affronted, that will not suffer his authority and majesty to be trampled on, that will not bear that his kindness should be abused. (WJE, 376)

God has set bounds to every man's wickedness; he suffers men to live, and go on in sin, till they have filled up their measure, and then cuts them off. Consider, you know not what wrath God may be about to execute upon wicked men in this world. Wrath may, in some sense, be coming upon them, in the present life, to the uttermost, for ought we know. (WJE, 2.122, 2.124)

### **Charles Hodge**

God's wrath flows from His holiness. The truth of this doctrine may also be inferred from the holiness of God. If He is infinitely pure, his nature must be opposed to all sin; and as his acts are determined by his nature, his disapprobation of sin must manifest itself in his acts. But the disfavour of God, the manifestation of his disapprobation, is

death, as his favour is life. It cannot be that this essential opposition between holiness and sin should be dependent for its manifestation on the mere ab [extra] consideration that evil would result from sin being allowed to go unpunished. It might as well be said that we should feel no aversion to pain, unless aware that it weakened our constitution. We do not approve of holiness simply because it tends to produce happiness; neither do we disapprove of sin simply because it tends to produce misery. It is inevitable, therefore, that the perfection of the infinitely holy God should manifest its opposition to sin, without waiting to judge the consequences of the expression of this divine repugnance. (ST, 422)

### **William G. T. Shedd**

There is a kind of wrath in the human soul that resembles the wrath of God, and constitutes its true analogue. It is the wrath of the human conscience, which is wholly different from that of the human heart. This kind of anger is commanded in the injunction "Be ye angry and sin not" (Eph. 4:26). Were this species of moral displacency more often considered, and the Divine anger illustrated by it, there would be less of the common and unthinking opposition to the doctrine of the Divine wrath. (DT, 176)

### **J. I. Packer**

The wrath of God in Romans denotes God's resolute action in punishing sin. It is as much the expression of a personal, emotional attitude of the triune Jehovah as is his love to sinners; it is the active manifesting of his hatred of irreligion and moral evil.... God's wrath is his reaction to our sin, and "law brings wrath" [Rom. 4:15] because the law stirs up sin latent within us and causes transgression—the behavior that evokes wrath—to abound [5:20; 7:7-13]. As a reaction to sin, God's wrath is an expression of his justice. (KG, 154)

## 2. His Prescription for Forgiveness

### Evidence Zahnd penal substitutionary atonement

The author makes these statements:

- “The cross is many things, but it is not a quid pro quo to mollify an angry God.”
- “Yes, it was a murder that God knew would happen - because of our addiction to sin and violence - but God’s foreknowledge of this killing doesn’t mean that it was God’s will for Jesus to be murdered.”
- “The cross is not a picture of payment; the cross is a picture of forgiveness. Good Friday is not about divine wrath; Good Friday is about divine love.”
- “The cross is not the place where God vents his wrath on Jesus. The cross is the place where human fear and anger are absorbed into God’s eternal love and recycled into the saving mercy of Christ.”

All these statements are clear indications that the author rejects penal substitutionary atonement.

“The cross is not where God finds a whipping boy to vent his rage upon; the cross is where God saves the world through self-sacrificing love. The only thing God will call justice is setting the world right, not punishing an innocent substitute for the petty sake of appeasement.”

### Zahnd believes that God did not kill Jesus

Zahnd teaches that God knew about the cross but never “willed” the horrific events of the cross. It was allowed.

#### Counter points

- 1.) if allowed but not willed then how is the cross a self giving act of the Trinity -  
Father gives the son John 3:16  
The Son Gives himself - John 10:18.  
Spirit is self giving in being the gift to make adoption of fallen humanity possible. Rom 8:15
- 2.) In Acts 2:22-23, 4:27-28 point to the sovereignty of God in salvation and demonstrate God’s involvement in the cross from start to finish.

Affirming the love and mercy of God at the cross but discounting his wrath is wrongheaded, a god who is all love, all grace, all mercy, no sovereignty, no justice, no holiness, and no wrath is a fairy that grants wishes not a God of all glory. .

Zahnd denouement that PSA casts God the Father as a sadist and the son as a masochist is wrong.

"A theory of the cross that says it was God who desired the torture and murder of Jesus on Good Friday turns the Father of Jesus into a cruel and sadistic monster. It's salvation by divine sadism."

## **Scriptural Responding to God as a moral monster**

### **Theological response:**

**First**, Two principles set the stage for our texts.

1.) The Trinity is other-centered. This is affirmed in the perichoresis of the Trinity. This is affirmed in the perichoresis of the Trinity. Each member of the Trinity is self giving to the other members. Thus member acts in unselfish ways.

2.) the Trinity has one will in perfect harmony. Thus what one member wills the other members will. (In the garden of gethsemane Christ's struggle was within his humanity. He submitted his human will to the divine will.)

**Second**, Isaiah 53:10 (NASB, NIV ESV)

Is God a sadist? A sadist gets pleasure from hurting others.

**Three**, Heb 12:1-2, is Jesus a masochist? A masochist Is someone who gets pleasure from being hurt. Is Jesus described as a masochist in the text?

**Four**, since the Trinity has one will, Heb 12 sheds light on Isaiah 53.

- So Is God described as a sadist in the text?

Answer: Not pleasure in the crushing another, but pleasure in someone else not having to be crushed.

- So Is Jesus described as a masochist in the text?

Answer: Not his joy in being hurt is Not joy in the burden of the cross, but joy in someone else not having to take on the burden.

Example: You dislike doing the dishes. Yet You do the dishes for a loved one. Your joy is not in doing the dishes having to carry that burden.

## Zahnd's view of atonement

Jonah Sanford, Greek scholar went through Zahnd's book. his takeaway is helpful.

"I agree with Brian Zahnd that the Penal Substitution theory of Atonement deserves criticism. It is too concerned with categories of wrath and appeasement and not enough with the radical love and forgiveness of Christ; it is recent as far as Atonement theories go (originating with Calvin about 500 years ago, though it has its roots in Anselm's 12th c. Satisfaction theory); and it is all but rejected by the entire Eastern Church, which should raise some flags. I do not, however, agree with much of Zahnd's alternative. Though he supposes to explain a more ancient way of viewing the Atonement, his theory looks much more like Moral Influence (Peter Abelard's 12th c. response to Anselm's theory) than Christus Victor. His use of the parable of the Prodigal Son as a canon-within-canon is an over-correction, and his total psychologizing of hell and wrath may hold kernels of truth (St. Isaac the Syrian's thoughts on hell being the torment of God's love to those who have rejected it is profoundly helpful), but to divorce them completely with categories of punishment and divine consequence is to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Ultimately, Zahnd's solution to Penal Substitution is largely a mix of emotional appeal and questionable exegesis. We can and should be critical of Calvin's Atonement model, as there are far richer soteriologies to be found in figures like Irenaeus of Lyons and Maximus the Confessor. However, the path to a God of true peace, love, and forgiveness is not to be found through the interpretive gymnastics that Zahnd often employs."

Zahnd view - He calls it the CHRISTUS Victor view yet it is more like Scapegoat theory.

The Scapegoat Theory is a modern Atonement theory rooted in the philosophical concept of the Scapegoat. Here the key figures Rene Girard and James Allison. Within this theory of the Atonement Jesus Christ dies as the Scapegoat of humanity. This theory moves away from the idea that Jesus died in order to act upon God (as in PSA, Satisfaction, or Governmental), or as payment to the devil (as in Ransom).

Scapegoating therefore is considered to be a form of non-violent atonement, in that Jesus is not a sacrifice but a victim. There are many Philosophical concepts that come up within this model, but in a general sense, we can say that Jesus Christ as the Scapegoat means the following.

- 1) Jesus is killed by a violent crowd.
- 2) The violent crowd kills Him believing that He is guilty.
- 3) Jesus is proven innocent, as the true Son of God.
- 4) The crowd is therefore deemed guilty.

## A Defense of Penal substitutionary

Penal substitutionary atonement is not an invention of Calvin - it is the plain teaching of Scripture. Christ bore the penalty for our sins. Christ was the substitute for every sinner that would ever believe.

- We deserved wrath - yet Jesus stands in as our substitute (Heb. 9:26).
- We were the enemies of God and separated from him because of our sin - yet Jesus reconciled us to God (Isa. 59:2; Col. 1:20-22; 2 Cor. 5:18-19).
- We were slaves to sin, yet Jesus was our redeemer (John 8:34, 36; Mark 10:45; Col. 1:13; Eph. 1:7).
- We deserved the wrath of God - yet Jesus was our propitiation (Rom. 3:25; 1 John 2:2, 4:10) and satisfied the righteous demands of the law by absorbing the wrath of the Father against sinners.

We have hope because we are saved from the wrath of God and saved through the Son of God.

The heart felt response to such a perspective is gratitude. Cross born, Grace driven, gratitude give rise to a new way of living. These realities spark new motivation. We live into the future by such truth. Hope born of the satisfaction of wrath is a sure hope. A hope that know the unwavering Love of God for in the cross our evidence He loves the imperfect, and unlovely.

Richard Niebuhr In , *The Kingdom of God in America* (1937), Niebuhr criticized liberal social gospel theologians and his words could well apply to the end of Zahnd theological trajectory. Niebuhr described their message as, "A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross."<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Richard Niebuhr *The Kingdom of God in America*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 193

### 3. A Dangerous hermeneutic

Herminutial key: Jesus as the full revelation of God<sup>37</sup>

*"The Bible is not the perfect revelation of God; Jesus is."*

*"Jesus is greater than the Bible,"*

*"Jesus is the Savior of all that is to be saved ... including the Bible. Jesus saves the Bible from itself! Jesus shows us how to read the Bible and not be harmed by it."*

*"When I point out that the Bible is the penultimate word of God that points us to the ultimate Word of God who is Jesus, I do so as a person with a high view of Scripture and a lifelong commitment to the Bible. When we speak of the Word of God, Christians should think of Jesus first and the Bible second. It's Jesus who is the true Word of God, not the Bible."*

Zahnd thinks he is reading the Old Testament in the light of God's self-revelation in Jesus. He argue that this method enables us, and in fact requires us, to correct all sorts of things that the texts actually say, particularly those which involve wrath. Reading in the light of God's self-revelation in Jesus, involves reading a difficult text - like the destroy the Canaanites text, or Yahweh pouring out his anger for. The Psalms (God's form of thrash metal) - then figuring/assuming/guessing(?) that Jesus could never have condoned it, and then concluding that the text represents a primitive, emerging, limited picture of God, as opposed to the inclusive, wrath-free God we find in Jesus.

Zahnd's doing what Andrew Wilson called the Jesus tea-strainer hermeneutic. Wilson contrasts "the Jesus lens" vs. Jesus tea-strainer.

- "Jesus lens" is a piece of glass that influences your reading of the text while still leaving the text intact.
- "Jesus tea-strainer" is a fine mesh that only allows through the most palatable elements, while meticulously screening out the bitter bits to be dumped unceremoniously on the saucer.

---

<sup>37</sup> First of the way Zahnd formulates the concept of Jesus as the full revelation of God, is very similar to the Unitarian formulation of the same idea.



One enhances your reading, the other subtracts from your reading. One sees Christ prefigured all over the Old Testament in types and prophecies, finding what is revealed in the new was first concealed in the old. The other reads Jesus's story and find a Jesus that resembles us, a Jesus is cast in our (modern cultural) image, and then reads the rest of the Bible through that perspective. It is confirmation bias on steroids.

In short, Zahnd thinks he is using a Jesus lens, when in fact it is more a Jesus tea-strainer. As he reads he only allows those palatable elements he likes, while meticulously screening out the bitter bits that are distasteful to a modern (progressive?) pallet. The text we screen out are dumped on the saucer labeled uninspired. Because no one wants to read those tea leaves.

## **Old school approach**

Zahnd's "Jesus" approach is really just old school liberalism. His approach is in reality an old-school, German critical evolutionary view of the Old Testament as developing primitive religion. "The Old Testament is the inspired telling of the story of Israel coming to know their God. It's a process. God doesn't evolve, but Israel's understanding of God obviously does" (p. 30). Zahnd seeks an easy resolution by assuming primitive elements must mean stupid. The early Biblical authors, with their primitive "Bronze Age" ideas, tribal loyalties and Neanderthal bloodlust, were just grossly and radically confused about God the whole time, inadvertently lying about him. And God was letting them. He repackages it as the complex option which honors the Bible's mystery, and the centrality of Jesus. Yet Zahnd's project ends up treading some old liberal ground in a way that would make Ritschl and Harnack proud. Not to mention, Zahnd understanding of the old testament patriarchs is a textbook example of chronological snobbery.

## **To key ideas to his hermeneutic that he mangles**

Accommodation and Progress revelation are to theological concepts that deal with scripture in the transmission and superintendent of revelation by God and the misuse and redefined by the author.

A. Progressive revelation mishandled

1.) Sound view of Progress revelation

Progressive revelation is the unfolding of the meta narrative of scripture from type and shadow, prophecy and promise to fulfillment and fullness. Progressive revelation always builds on what came before like stairs leading to a pinnacle. The process of

revelation is then a continuing, unfolding storyline told by a self-consistent, self-revealing Author.

## 2.) Zahnd's view of progressive revelation

The Old Testament is "a journey of discovery", of "progressive revelation" (p.15), Through the Old Testament Israel slowly came to learn to know her God until the point where Jesus arrives (p.31). God didn't change, but Israel's understanding did. For a time, God allowed Israel's "Bronze Age" assumptions about the violent gods who fought and punished to get baked into their conception of God as they told the story, but slowly they came to know better. And finally, Jesus shows up and "closes the book on vengeance."

## B. Accommodation Redefined

### 1.) Sound view of Accommodation (for an exhaustive definition see appendix)

Accommodation is God Grace in revelation. Barth called it God speaking with a lisp. Accommodation is the way God condescend to meet humanity where we are in our weakness and sustaining his revelation in spite of us. For example: The heart of Old Testament religion is the sacrificial system. Augustine says, sacrificial system is a form of religion adapted to its time and place, but it is an appropriate adaptation. It's the same religion before Christ, whose signs and figures point ahead to Christ, but a God-ordained similarity so that there is basic unity of God's ways and works across dispensations, or stages in covenant history. God made an accommodation that was appropriate and fitting to time but with a fuller meaning to be revealed in the future. So God does not lie, nor does he abandon his people to lies about his character.

### 2.) Zahnd's view of accommodation

With regards to the assumptions of the biblical authors made: "These assumptions were inevitable, but they were wrong" (p. 30).

God's Accommodation was a upholding of untruth. So that at the center of Israel's Scriptures God tolerated an idolatrous depiction of him as a "monster" of the worst sort. God accommodated the weakness of men in allowing falsehood to be transmitted historically about him for generations. This view does not make sense in light of the huge premium God places on not making up false idols and representations of him (Exod. 20:4).

In a nutshell, a sound view of Accommodation is telling your kid babies come from the love of a mother and a father while skipping some of the more sorted details, or telling your kid babies come from the stork. One is accommodation as adapted but true communication, while the other is a lie.

The end result of this hermeneutic, however, is dangerous. By saying that anything in the Bible that we find objectionable can be discounted in light of the parts of the Bible we find palatable, we raise the specter of Marcion, who found the God of the Old Testament too distasteful, much preferring the teachings of Jesus, and simply rejected the parts of the Bible he did not like. His unwarranted pitting of the Bible against Christ is a subtle move that opens a Pandora's box which only invites doctrinal error and confusion. It is an unnecessary hermeneutical hurdle that trips the unsuspecting and ultimately undermines the authority, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture.

## **Various Rebuttals to some obvious misinterpretations.**

Zahnd fails to listen to Jesus himself. (He does not follow his own hermeneutic)

1.) Jesus affirmed the lasting authority of every bit of Scripture: (Matthew 5:17-18).

2.) Jesus' statement of violence "I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled! . . . Do you think I have come to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division." Luke 12:49,51

3.) Jesus acts of violence: The cleanse the temple or cursing of a fig tree.

4.) Jesus criticized the Pharisees for doing exactly what Zahnd is doing: using one portion of Scripture to annul another. They had used the commandment to love God first as a loophole that would allow a person to neglect his parents, claiming all he had to give he was giving to God. Jesus insisted that this form of hierarchical nullification is false.

You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men (Mark 7:8).

Jesus rejects their hermeneutic with an epic burn (non-judgemental zero-wrath burn)  
You are "making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down"  
(Mark 7:13).

### **On Jesus understanding of the day of the Lord**

When Jesus quotes from Isaiah 61 in Luke 4, he proclaims the year of the Lord's favor but leaves out "the day of vengeance of our God", improving Isaiah's message by purging it from a nationalist lust for retaliation (p.41). Truth is Jesus understood The

Day of the Lord as having two aspects; a great and a terrible day. We see this distinction in Malachi as the great and terrible day. In his first coming he is meek and mild servant come to save in his second he's kicking butt and taking names.

Zahnd Claims people got the idea that the Second coming of Jesus involving a bit more judgment than his first coming from their need for vengeance and/or simply a bad reading of Revelation (p.172) In John 5, Jesus speaks of his future works as the Judge, when he will send his angels to "gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace" (Matt 12:41-42). Jesus seems to be speaking of a second coming. So it wasn't blood lust or bad comprehension but Jesus seemed to say so himself.

### **On retributive justice and God's nature**

For Zahnd Jesus is the true and final Word of God, telling us about a God who is like the Father, who forgives without anger or atonement, and whose judgment is never retributive. Zahnd holds up Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Father as the ultimate portrait of God's loving, non-retributive nature (Luke 15). Yet doing Theology from just one parable is not doing good theology. One needs to surveying a variety of the parables, to get a circumspect perspective of Jesus' Theology.

In the same Gospel, Jesus also tells the parable of the Vineyard Owner and the Wicked Tenants (Luke 20:9-18). At the end of it, after the tenants kill his son, Jesus asks, "What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyards to others." The point is he Vineyard Owner is God in this story, the Father who avenges himself on the foes of his Son.

The parable of the Wedding Feast, Jesus says those who come unprepared will be thrown out of the party into the darkness (Matt 22:1-14).

The parable of the faithless servant who abuses the other servants in his master's absence. Jesus stating that upon the master's return "The master will cut him in pieces and make him share the fate of the disobedient" (Luke 12:46).

The parable where the King ends up throwing the unmerciful servant in jail to be tormented for his lack of mercy; Jesus ends that one saying, "So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart" (Matthew 18:21-35). This is the punchline to his parable on why we ought to forgive our brothers just as God does. Jesus apparently saw no contradiction between threatening retribution against a lack of mercy.

In surveying a variety of the parables, we have got a pretty good blend of Old Testament-sounding retribution in Jesus' portrait of his Father. (I'll be damned)

### **Jesus affirms Old Testament accounts of retributive justice.**

In Luke 10, his woes against Chorazin and Bethsaida and Capernaum presumes that the judgment against them was from God and that they stand under similar threat.

Luke 17, Jesus talks about the judgment coming at the end and compares it to the judgment of God which came against the world "in the days of Noah" as well as "in the days of Lot", which Genesis clearly attributes to God. And yet Jesus doesn't repudiate it or explain it away but says such a judgment will happen when the Son of Man returns again.

### **On Genocide in the Old Testament**

I wonder if zohon has never read Ez 33:11

"As I live I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live."

In an interview, John Goldingay, responds to the notion that the OT promotes a God of wrath in contrast to the NT. Goldingay observes that "In the OT, God is "compassionate and gracious, long-tempered, big in commitment and truthfulness, preserving commitment toward the thousands... In the NT God sends trillions of people to Hell."<sup>38</sup> His point was that proponents of such a dichotomy, only reveals they have done a shallow reading of Scripture.

John Walton was asked, About the issue of violence in the Hebrew Bible. The interviewer stated that some "solve" this by ignoring such texts and focusing solely on the God of the NT, he responded

In whatever way we explain God's administration of the world and his sovereign action in it, justice at times calls for stamping out injustice. Having said that, I believe that we misunderstand some of the actions of God reported in the Old Testament, so the question must also be addressed with exegetical rigor ... Under no circumstances are we justified in being dismissive of OT texts or in concluding that somehow Jesus and the NT repackaged an unacceptable view of deity.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> from overthinking Christain blog interview with John Goldingay [link here](#)

<sup>39</sup> from overthinking Christain blog interview with John Walton [link here](#)

## 4. Eloquent and thoughtful misrepresentation of others (Or His rhetorical style).

### On his style of argument

As one book reviewer described his style this way (Derek Rishmawy )

it is a rhetorically-explosive collection of false dichotomies and theological half-truths aggressively pressed against misrepresentations, gross caricatures, or extreme examples. He seems to relish aggressive, unfair rhetorical flourishes. I will be blunt and say Zahnd seems incapable of representing any of his opponents fairly.

I'm not trying to be harsh or a jerk, but in this case, Zahnd shot first. He pulls no punches talking about the sadistic, cruel, bloodthirsty, "monster God" he opposes—and presumably those teaching penal substitution, etc. believe in. Nor does he mind delving into some unfair, armchair psychologizing about people who need to believe in such things, explaining their views in a light they'd be reticent to own.<sup>40</sup>

### On His uses caricatures

American Christians as dimwitted, angry, violent, and selfish. These are realities that no doubt exist in some individuals that also in no way define the whole. The aim is to bandwagon the trendy notion of bashing the America and western ideology as inherently oppressive and corrupt.

Zahnd ridicule penal substitutionary atonement and it's adherence.

"Among the many problems with Calvin's theory of the cross is that it turns God into a petty tyrant and a moral monster. Punishing the innocent in order to forgive the guilty is monstrous logic, atrocious theology, and a gross distortion of the idea of justice."

Zahnd ridicule penal substitutionary atonement because he does not have an argument

Calvin and Edwards as mustache twirling villains hell-bent on exercising the deep-seated anger issues and misogynistic tendencies through there theology. Zohnd

---

<sup>40</sup> Derek Rishmawy book review from blog 'Reformedish' [Link here](#)

showed little care with presenting historical figures in an accurate way. Which means he's never had a biography of either one of them. For example:

Attack on the Edwardsean vision of God (God's Wrath)

- Edwards depicts God as a "sadistic juvenile dangling spiders over a fire."
- Edwards's vision of hell to "the Almighty's eternal Auschwitz."
- Edwards's vision of God is compared to a "sadistic monster."

Edward's theological locus of control was not wrath but God's beauty and glory. He was considered by many biographies to be a theologian that spoke more about the beauty and glory of God than any other theologian of his time.

### **On argumentation method**

- Zahnd's argument has little to no connective tissue between his assumptions and his conclusions.
- His use of false dichotomies (it is unclear if he really believes the two ideas are at odds)

Example : "The cross is not a picture of payment; the cross is a picture of forgiveness" (p. 86).

Traditional theology would say both are true.

### **His overall rhetorical strategy in the book**

He repeatedly uses a-priori assumptions, unsubstantiated leaps, ad hominem attacks. As well as many areas of exegetical sloth. In order for his overall premise to maintain balance Zahnd resorts to using three management tactics.

First, he prioritizes the words of Jesus over anything else in scripture. This result is a convenient tactic for dismissing any texts that don't fit his structure. If Paul says something that would balance out the words of Jesus then Paul is wrong.

Second, he completely ignores, simply doesn't address or consider, a great deal of relevant passages.

Third, he employs the "that doesn't mean what it says" exigencies.

In short, the above observations point to all Christians tend to practice interpretive laziness and assume we can know the text at a glance only to follow our own confirmation biases. Good exegesis is not possible when an over-reactionary lens guides your exegesis and hermeneutics.

# Appendix

## Accommodation

**Accommodation** is the theological principle that God, while being in His nature unknowable and unreachable, has nevertheless communicated with humanity in a way that humans can understand and respond. The principle is used in many ways.

When related to the transition of revelation, God accommodates himself to the human capacities of those to whom revelation is given.

The concept of Biblical accommodation is the view that in the giving and oversight of scripture, God has made allowance for, the original audience's language and general level of understanding. In this way, divine revelation is adjusted to the disparate intellectual and spiritual level of humanity at different times in history, without misinformation or disinformation.

Consider this illustration:

Human language introduces a further complication into the notion of Biblical accommodation. The Bible was first written in the Hebrew and greek Languages. Given the imprecise nature of human language, translations of the original text into other languages will be like imperfect. A reader of such a translation (this includes the contemporary translations) will by default not have the clarity of comprehension a reader of the original language would have available to them. Yet and understanding of theological accommodation allows for the belief that despite this natural linguistic barrier, God still has the power to use such translations in order to reveal his nature and plan of salvation to people.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> The Implication should be evident, Christians do not have to learn Ancient Hebrew and Greek in order to hear what God has to say. It helps but is not necessary.



## Application of God's wrath for your life

1. In the end: if we truly love God, Barth suggests, what we must do when faced with the reality of God's wrath:

"We must love Him also in His anger, condemnation and punishments, or rather we must see, feel and appreciate His love to us even in His anger, condemnation and punishment."<sup>42</sup>

2. Advice from St. Bernard: In Bernard's sixth sermon on the Song of Songs he describes God's mercy and judgment are like the two feet of God. They are feet that are united in the single person of their owner but that we encounter to some extent separately.

The lesson that Bernard draws: A warning not to neglect either foot.

A. We must temper sorrow for sin with the thought of mercy, so as to avoid despair;

B. We must temper contemplation of God's mercy with remembrance of his judgment, so as to avoid lukewarm negligence.

3. The wrath of God as a doctrine of the church rescues us moral relativism by showing us that right and wrong are objectively real and pointing us to the moral significance of our deeds. In our society, the word "judgmental" is used to rule out in advance the offering of moral judgement. I know a church leader who was lambasted for daring to criticize adultery. Adultery is acceptable; judgment is not. A worthy attitude of believing the best and biblical hesitation to passing judgment on individuals has been confused with an unwillingness to make moral judgments. Yet evil spreads like a virus when people do not take the time to distinguish between what is morally good and what is evil. Slowly over decades in a society morality will become a matter of taste and choice. The wrath of God gives a theological foundation and moral significance to our deeds.

4. The second theme is the fear of God. Together with the demise of the wrath of God there is the rejection of fear as a valid motive. This is another of those dangerous half-truths. Tertullian attacks the Marcionites for their boast that they did not fear their God.<sup>43</sup> The total rejection of the fear of God is just another seduction of neo-Marcionism. Augustine rightly observed that the person who fears hell fears burning, not sin.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, p. 394.

<sup>43</sup> Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 1.27

<sup>44</sup> Augustine, *Letters* 145.4, in *NPNE*, I:496

Mainstream Christianity has always recognized that true obedience is motivated not by fear but by love. It is not a reluctant, fearful, slavish obedience that God seeks but a joyful, free response of love. Historic Christianity has not been so naive as to imagine that this lofty ideal dispenses with the need for fear. Augustine, recognized that the free response of love is often preceded by the constraints of coercion. Children need initially to be disciplined at least in part by fear. But if the process of discipline is successful the values being conveyed are internalized. That which initially is done in order to avoid parental disapproval or punishment is done freely and willingly. The motivation of fear is not invalid (as is so often implied today) but insufficient. Jesus had no qualms about telling his disciples to "fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell" (Luke 12:5).<sup>45</sup>

Here is where I disagree with a hero of mine. Wayne Grudem once wrote, "we should feel no fear of God's wrath as Christians."<sup>46</sup> In my humble opinion he is just not stating the whole truth. If God did not spare Israel, his people, we should let their experience be a lesson, "Our father don't play, when he warns! it is not in vain!" Many pastors make a language distinction between God's discipline and God's wrath (this is not without some value). Yet the Bible is clear, no matter how you label it, discipline/wrath terminates in an act of judgment (just consider, Ananias and Sapphira). We should let his wrath remind us, our God can be very serious.

Lactantius notes that there is no true religion or piety without some fear of God and that without the wrath of God there is no fear of God.<sup>47</sup> Just consider Proverbs 9:10, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom", and while the term "fear" here embraces much more than the fear of God's anger, it does not exclude it. The fear of God's anger is a starting point for taking God seriously, the ground floor reason for creaturely obedience. Such fear is an intrinsically human response, something of an initial 'knee-jerk' reaction of the soul, when experientially confronted with the holiness of God. (Isaiah 6:1-10) . We all begin here but only legalisms and perfectionists stay there.

---

<sup>45</sup> J. A. Baird, *The Justice of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (London: S.C.M., 1963), pp. 61-62, in his work, he deals with the difficulty some have in accepting this today.

<sup>46</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p. 206

<sup>47</sup> Lactantius, *A Treatise on the Anger of God* 6, 8, 11

# Zondervan's Dictionary of Bible Themes <sup>48</sup>

## Divine Anger (in general)

**Definition:** The anger of God is directed against all human sin, disobedience, rebellion and wickedness, which threaten to thwart his purposes for his creation and people.

Causes of divine anger

Disobedience Isa 5:24-25 See also Nu 22:22; Jos 7:1; 2Ki 22:13; Ps 78:21-22; Mic 5:15; Zec 7:12; Mk 3:5; Ro 2:5; Eph 5:5-6; Heb 3:7-12

Sinfulness Isa 57:17 See also 1Ki 8:46; 11:9; 2Ch 19:2; 32:25; Eph 2:1-3; Col 3:5-6

Apostasy and idolatry Nu 25:3 See also Dt 4:25; 9:8; Jos 22:18; 23:16; Jdg 2:19-20; 10:6-7; 1Ki 14:15; 2Ki 22:17; Ezr 9:14; Jer 7:17-18

The characteristics of God that provoke his anger

He is a holy God Ps 7:11 See also Jos 24:19-20; Jer 10:10

He is a jealous God Dt 6:15 See also 1Ki 14:22; Ps 79:5; Eze 16:38; Na 1:2

He is the universal judge Ps 79:6 See also Ezr 8:22; Isa 34:2; Zep 3:8

He is also compassionate and slow to anger Ps 103:8 See also Ex 34:6; Ne 9:17; Ps 78:38; 86:15; Jnh 4:2; Na 1:3

Consequences of divine anger

Death and destruction Dt 9:8 See also Ex 15:7; 32:10-11; Nu 11:1-2; Job 4:9; Isa 13:5; Jer 32:29

Present judgment La 2:2 See also Nu 32:13; 2Ki 13:3; Isa 51:20; Eze 7:8; Hab 3:12; Mt 21:12-13

Future judgment Isa 13:9 See also Da 8:19; Mt 3:7; Ro 2:5

God's rejection of his people Jer 7:29 See also Dt 31:17; 2Ki 17:18; 23:25-27; Ps 78:59; 89:38; La 2:6-7

Being saved from the anger of God

God's anger may be temporary Ps 30:5 See also Ps 103:9; Isa 54:8; 57:16; 60:10

God's anger cannot be averted by human means Zep 1:18 See also Pr 11:4

Humility and repentance are required Zep 2:3 See also Ge 18:30-32; Dt 9:18-19; 2Ch 12:7,12; 30:8; Isa 64:9; Joel 2:13

God's anger is averted on account of his love for believers La 3:22 See also Hos 11:9

God's anger is averted on account of the work of Jesus Christ Ro 5:9 See also Jn 3:36; 1Th 1:10; 5:9

---

<sup>48</sup> Zondervan's Dictionary of Bible Themes, Eds. Martin H. Manser, Alister E. McGrath, J. I. Packer, Donald J. Wiseman (Zondervan Grand Rapids, 1999, digitized Logos 2009.) taken from Logos edition; Reference numbers are as follows 5790 divine anger, 1025 Anger of God, 2009 Anger of Christ

## Anger of God (in particular)

**Definition:** The punitive and vindictory reaction, legitimate and controlled, yet awesomely emphatic, of God, the righteous judge to unrighteousness in his human creatures. Up to the present, the expression of God's anger and wrath has had the purpose of drawing sinners to repentance and conversion, but this will not be the case at the final judgment.

The nature of God's anger

- It is fearsome Na 1:6 See also Jos 7:26; Eze 38:18
- It is reluctant and short-lived Ex 34:6 See also Isa 54:7-8; Ne 9:16-18
- It is consistent with his righteous and merciful character Ps 7:11 See also Hab 3:2
- It fulfils God's purposes Jer 23:20 See also Jer 30:24

The causes of God's anger

- Idolatry and unbelief Nu 25:3 See also Ex 32:8-10; Dt 8:19; Jdg 2:10-14; 1Ki 14:9; 16:32-33; 22:53; 2Ki 23:19 Josiah removes idolatrous shrines; 2Ch 28:25; 34:25; Jer 8:19; 32:29; 44:3; Jn 3:36 the unbelief of rejecting the Son of God; Ro 1:18-23; 2:8
- Disobedience and disloyalty Jos 7:1 See also Dt 9:7; 2Ki 22:13; 1Ch 13:10; Ps 106:29; Jer 32:32; Zec 7:13; Eph 5:6
- Ungodly living: God's judgment against the ungodly is a sign of his anger against actions that contradict his righteous character and purposes: 2Ti 3:1-9; Jude 14-16
- Pride, arrogance and hypocrisy Mt 23:27-28 See also 2Ch 32:25; Pr 3:34; 8:13; Isa 13:11; Hos 12:14; Mal 4:1
- Complaints against, and opposition to, God's purposes Nu 11:1 See also Nu 14:27; 21:5
- Injustice Zec 7:9-12 See also 2Ch 19:7; Jer 22:13; Eze 9:9; Mal 3:5; Mt 23:23
- The rejection of God's servants Heb 10:29-31 See also Dt 32:35-36; Ps 135:14; Ne 9:26; Zec 7:12; Mt 21:33-41; Ac 7:35-37

God reveals his anger

- In present times Ro 1:18 See also Jer 10:10
- On a future "day of wrath" which is anticipated Ro 2:5 See also Isa 13:9,13; Eze 7:19; Zep 1:15,18; 2:2

The consequences of God's anger

- God allows those who reject righteousness to remain in their sin Ro 1:18-32 See also 1Ki 14:16; 2Ch 12:5; Ne 9:28; Isa 54:7-8; Jer 7:27-29; 12:7-8
- Punishment will be experienced by rebellious people Dt 8:19 See also Isa 59:18; Jer 21:14; Mt 18:34-35; 25:28-30
  - Punishment of death: Ex 12:12; Nu 32:13; Jos 7:25-26; Isa 13:9-13; Da 5:30; Ac 5:5,10
  - Punishment of exile: 1Ki 14:15; Jer 15:13-14; 25:7-11
  - Destruction of the whole nation of Israel: La 2:1-9; Eze 38:19-21
- God will be feared as his holiness and greatness are revealed Isa 59:18-19 See also Eze 38:22-23
- Ultimately God will purify and restore his people for service Mal 3:2-4 See also Jer 15:19-21

# Anger of Jesus Christ

**Definition:** Jesus Christ's controlled emotion arising from his unswerving opposition to evil and his determination to eradicate it.

Causes of Jesus Christ's anger

- Petty legalism in religious observance Mt 15:3; 23:1-4; Mk 3:4-5
- Attempts to prevent access to him Mk 10:14
- People leading others into sin Mt 18:6-7 pp Mk 9:42 pp Lk 17:1-2

Demonstrations of Jesus Christ's anger

- Purging the temple Mt 21:12-13 pp Mk 11:15-17 pp Lk 19:45-46; Jn 2:14-16
- Cursing the fig-tree Mk 11:14 pp Mt 21:19

Jesus Christ's words in anger

- Against demons Mt 17:18 pp Mk 9:25 pp Lk 9:42 See also Mk 1:25-26 pp Lk 4:35
- Against disciples Lk 9:55-56 See also Mt 16:23 pp Mk 8:33
- Against Pharisees Mt 23:13 See also Mt 12:34; 15:7-9 pp Mk 7:6-8; Mt 23:15-16,23-33; Lk 11:42-44; 13:15; Jn 8:44
- Against unbelief Mt 17:17 pp Mk 9:19 pp Lk 9:41 See also Mt 12:39-45 pp Lk 11:29-32; Mk 8:38; Lk 11:50-51
- Against false prophets Mt 7:15
- Against the rich Lk 6:24-26
- Against unrepentant cities Mt 11:20 See also Mt 11:21-24 pp Lk 10:13-15

Jesus Christ reflects the anger of God. Jn 3:36 See also Mt 5:21-22,29; 22:7,13; 25:30,46; Lk 21:23

The anger of the glorified Christ

- Against the unbelieving world Rev 6:16
- Against the wayward church Rev 2:16 See also Rev 2:5,22-23; 3:3,16