

Proposition: God is love; but God is not wrath.

I've given our message for today the title, "God Is Not Wrath".

That no doubt seems a bit odd for a title in a series on the Love of God, but as we work through our message, I hope that you will come to a greater understanding of the love of God.

I also want to remind you that I am depending heavily on D. A. Carson's little book *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* for the ideas in this message.

First, an illustration with which Carson opens his chapter:

Carson tells of a young man he met during his studies in Europe. The young man was an African, raised in mission schools. He was studying in Germany to be an engineer; his wife was studying in England to become a doctor.

Carson observed that his friend would regularly frequent the red-light district of town. He had grown close enough to the other man to ask him about it. He asked what the young man would think if his wife were to do something similar. "I'd kill her," he said.

"Isn't that a double standard?"

"Well," came the answer, "in Africa it is OK for men to do such things but not for women."

Carson reminded him of the standards of the Bible. "The Bible does not have a double standard."

"Ah," he said, "God is good; he's bound to forgive us; that's his job."¹

What is wrong with this idea?

It is a skewed view of the love of God. It is a very common view – a view that God is the Big Daddy upstairs who overlooks our foibles because he loves us so much.

What it does, among other things, is ignore God's wrath against sin.

However, what I want to make clear in this message is this:

Proposition: God is love; but God is not wrath.

¹ D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2000), 65–66.

I. The way the Bible speaks about God's wrath

Isaiah 13.4 A sound of tumult on the mountains, Like that of many people! A sound of the uproar of kingdoms, Of nations gathered together! The LORD of hosts is mustering the army for battle.

Isaiah 13.6 Wail, for the day of the LORD is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty.

Isaiah 13.9 Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, Cruel, with fury and burning anger, To make the land a desolation; And He will exterminate its sinners from it.

Ezekiel 5.11-17 'So as I live,' declares the Lord GOD, 'surely, because you have defiled My sanctuary with all your detestable idols and with all your abominations, therefore I will also withdraw, and My eye will have no pity and I will not spare. ¹² 'One third of you will die by plague or be consumed by famine among you, one third will fall by the sword around you, and one third I will scatter to every wind, and I will unsheathe a sword behind them. ¹³ 'Thus My anger will be spent and I will satisfy My wrath on them, and I will be appeased; then they will know that I, the LORD, have spoken in My zeal when I have spent My wrath upon them. ¹⁴ 'Moreover, I will make you a desolation and a reproach among the nations which surround you, in the sight of all who pass by. ¹⁵ 'So it will be a reproach, a reviling, a warning and an object of horror to the nations who surround you when I execute judgments against you in anger, wrath and raging rebukes. I, the LORD, have spoken. ¹⁶ 'When I send against them the deadly arrows of famine which were for the destruction of those whom I will send to destroy you, then I will also intensify the famine upon you and break the staff of bread. ¹⁷ 'Moreover, I will send on you famine and wild beasts, and they will bereave you of children; plague and bloodshed also will pass through you, and I will bring the sword on you. I, the LORD, have spoken.'"

Many, many passages like this!

II. What we know about God from the passages on wrath

A. God's wrath is aroused against sin: he *feels* wrath intensely

1. When Adam and Eve sinned, in his wrath God cursed man, the serpent, and all of creation
 - a. God banished Adam and Eve from the garden on the pain of death
 - b. God condemned all the descendants of Adam and Eve to death: "dying you shall die"
2. When Israel sinned, God warned, through the prophets, of coming judgement
 - a. The prophets proclaimed God's wrath again and again
 - b. Ultimately, God used fierce empires to destroy both the Northern and Southern kingdoms
 - 1) Assyria, 722 BC
 - 2) Babylon, 586 BC

B. God's wrath, however is a function of God's holiness, it is not an intrinsic perfection of God

1. "Where there is no sin, there is no wrath."²
2. The Bible says, "God is holy" (Ps 22.3, 77.13)
3. Where God "confronts his image-bearers in their rebellion, their *must* be wrath"³
 - If there is no wrath, there is no holiness

BTW, that is why parents must correct rebellion in children. If they do not, they lose moral authority and respect.

What would you think of a god who would not punish rebellion?

² Ibid., 67.

³ Ibid.

III. God's wrath and God's love

A. An unfortunate "evangelical cliché": "God hates the sin but loves the sinner."

1. There is a bare element of truth in this statement, God does love the world before it loved him
2. But the Bible never says this. Instead, we see:

Psalm 5.5 The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes; You hate all who do iniquity.

Psalm 11.5 The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked, And the one who loves violence His soul hates.

John 3.36 "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

B. Humans see wrath and love as mutually exclusive

1. We can't imagine having love for someone for whom we have deep and abiding wrath
2. We see someone else expressing wrath, and we think, "He's not loving"
3. Only exception: we can join the two when our own children are wayward, "but normally we don't think a wrathful persons is loving."⁴

C. God is not like man

1. God's wrath is not "implacable, blind rage"
 - a. It is full of emotion
 - b. But it is a willed response of his offended holiness
2. God's love is not like man's either
 - a. God's love is not generated by the loveliness of the object
 - b. God's love is generated by his person: God is love

⁴ Ibid., 69.

3. There is a sense in which God's wrath is motivated by God's love

2 Peter 3.9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

D. There is a place where God's wrath and God's love meet

Psalm 85.10 Lovingkindness and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

1. Where is that place? The Cross
2. All God's wrath against human sin was poured out on His Son on the cross
3. All God's love for mankind was displayed as He himself took His own wrath for our sakes on the cross

Conclusion:

God is not wrath.

God is love.