

Title: The Wrath of God: What is the meaning of the Wrath of God and how can an understanding of the concept inform Christian pastoral care?

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## ABSTRACT

There are many issues in today's world which cause people to question the love of God, perhaps the chief one being the question of how there can be an all-powerful and all-loving God when the innocent suffer. But there are also things in the Bible which many find difficult to reconcile with a God of love. God's apparent wrath, anger, and judgement, are a challenge to many, particularly *wrath* which is usually seen as a completely negative and destructive.

Can God really be this jealous, judgemental, wrathful being, seemingly full of hate and harsh judgement? Wrath is considered an exclusively negative attribute which seems unsuitable for attribution to the character of God. Indeed, it is the only one of the Roman Catholic *seven deadly sins*: wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy, and gluttony, which is also deemed to be an action of God. How can we understand this dichotomy?

The concept of God's *wrath* occurs throughout both the Old and New Testament. This paper attempts to provide a working definition of *wrath* and produce a brief overview of its occurrence in the Old and New Testaments. The size of this paper does not permit the exegesis of at least one usage of each Hebrew or Greek word rendered *wrath* in the English text. Instead, it is limited to two passages from the Old Testament and two from the New, selecting one group of verses from each of the Pentateuch,

the Prophets, the Gospels, and the Epistles, and looking at four of the most common words which are translated as wrath.

The paper then considers the understandings of a number of classical and contemporary theologians of the wrath of God.

The main findings of this work are that, contrary to received wisdom, the idea of the *wrath of God* is found fairly consistently throughout the Old and New Testament, it is not solely an Old Testament concept. However, the understanding of what this means varies widely between theologians.

My overall conclusion is that God is *not* a wrathful God, but in some ways this may be seen in opposition to the scriptural witness. Much depends on ones view of the Bible: is it God's infallible word to mankind, or a human attempt to describe the experience of God, of inspired men and women?

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