

The God of Purity

In Hebrew and Greek (the main original languages of the Bible) the word “holy” means “set apart”. That word sums up God. He is set apart from the rest of His earthly creation. In fact, God had to set Himself apart when man disobeyed Him and introduced sin into the world. The prophet Habakkuk says of God:

You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness (Habakkuk 1:13).

Matters have become steadily worse during the time that man has managed planet earth. Today’s instant media means that we can easily see just how bad things are. Wars and civil unrest are erupting in many parts of the world, and hunger in others. Everywhere we see the breakdown of personal relationships and ecosystems collapsing because of the way we exploit the planet and each other. There is selfishness and greed on a grand scale.

Moses described the purity and holiness of God when he was permitted to see His glory during Israel’s wilderness journey:

The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty (Exodus 34:6-7).

We see not only that God is pure, but that this purity has consequences.

An Angry God?

It may come as a surprise to think of God as angry. Many people rightly believe that He is a God of love, but that is where they leave it. They fail to recognise that He is also a God of justice and righteousness. Some people have suggested however, that God is vengeful, particularly in the Old Testament. However, although God talks about taking vengeance (see Hebrews 10:30) it is in the context of those who insult the sacrifice that His Son made.

So why does God get angry, and what does He get angry about? God’s anger is different from our hot-tempered rudeness and wrath. He is as much sad as angry, but when God shows these emotions, action follows.

God’s anger at the violence and evil in the world at the time of Noah is described like this:

The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart (Genesis 6:6).

What makes God angry is violence, ill-treatment of other human beings, and our failure to respond to His purity and His love.

The Bible has a catalogue of occasions when people failed to do as God asked, deliberately went against His express wishes, or were ungrateful when He showed great kindness. Consider the story of the Israelites in Numbers 11:4-10 or the consequences for the people of Isaiah’s day when they ill-treated each other and ignored God (Isaiah 5: 21-25).

God comments on His own slowness to anger (Nahum 1:3). Peter picks up on this when he says that God is:

...longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

We tend to get angry when we feel misjudged or insulted. To a degree that is how God feels. Humans tend to seek Him when we think He might be useful to us, and to ignore Him at other times. We misjudge or misrepresent His purity, love, kindness and provision of salvation through His Son.

He wants to help and look after us, but many only want that on their own terms, being able to do whatever they want, and that includes selfishness, greed, violence. It's not surprising that He gets angry.

The good news is that when Jesus Christ returns to the earth to set up God's kingdom, human selfishness and pride will be eliminated and God will no longer be grieved or made sad.

A Jealous God

Jealousy is an emotion we can all relate to. We want to be the centre of attention, to be loved and valued. Jealousy is an emotion that may only affect us mildly and intermittently, or it may be a passionate overwhelming obsession that dominates our thinking and can lead to terrible words or actions.

God describes Himself as jealous:

The LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God (Exodus 34:14).

This is repeated in Deuteronomy 4:24, adding that He is a "consuming fire". God is using this description of

jealousy to demonstrate how much He loves us and how badly He wants to have a relationship with us. He does not appreciate having rivals for our affections and attention. What is the centre of our lives? To what do we give our time, effort and emotion? Whether it is sport, music or any of the other everyday things that can take over, they can leave little or no room for God.

By contrast, in the life of the Lord Jesus, every waking moment was dedicated to carrying out God's wishes. Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love God with all of our being and that the second is to love our neighbour as ourselves. Not much room is left for self after that, nothing which could make God jealous.

Purity in Action

We do not want to make God angry or jealous, we want to reflect His purity in our lives. Jesus explained the purity of God when he said:

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Matthew 5 :8).

This is difficult. How often do bad thoughts pop up in our heads, unexplained, unwanted and reluctant to leave? trying to become 'pure in heart' is the work of a lifetime.

It is good news that because of Jesus' sacrifice, God will credit us with this purity as we try to improve our own minds through His word.

God will always remain holy and pure. He will remain set apart until the earth is restored to perfection in His kingdom. Starting now, we can learn to be pure through Jesus.

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