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### Angry Love

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# Angry Love

by Miroslav M. Kis

An angry God of love? How can this be? Anger means loss of temper, a sign of weakness. Love is expressed in forbearance, patience, and graciousness, and God is more like that. He is love. How can love be angry? This would seem to be a contradiction impossible for God's harmonious character.

Yet we cannot ignore it. In both Testaments of the Bible God reveals His love and His anger. "His wrath is poured out like fire" (Nahum 1:6, NIV). Even Jesus, who showed the full extent of love to those around Him (John 13:2-5, NIV) also looked around with anger (Mark 3:5) and drove out the money-changers (John 2:13-17).

For centuries, thinkers attempted to make sense out of this mystery. Some believed that the "wrath of God" was only a human metaphor. To others the language of "wrath" had a pedagogical function. Cultural anthropologists saw in it a vestige of the primitive fear of taboos. Our modern and enlightened civilization refuses to be impressed by anger. It responds readily to the call of love alone.<sup>1</sup>

God can be angry, Scripture states. In Him these two attributes do not stand in contradiction. His wrath is different from human anger. Lactantius, a third-century apologist and tutor of emperor Constantine's son Crispus, says that man is a creature of time, and his emotions are related to the passing moment. His anger, therefore, ought to be curbed. But God is eternal and perfect. His anger is no passing emotion, but is always of set purpose and design.<sup>2</sup> God is slow to anger, but angry with a purpose. His wrath is the clear expression of His saving love.

Nor is God's love like human love. It is first of all the message of God's wrath and our disgrace. Love tells us that God means business with sin and evil. He is the avenger for all injustices, swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and adultery (see Hosea 4:2). It would not be loving for God to be easygoing with our sins. Because God cares enough, the distinction between good and bad, right and wrong, still subsists. Because He loves us and hates sin, one day all wrongs will be made right. The uneasy conscience, the feeling of guilt, these are good news of God's anger. It helps us to fear to sin (see *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 217,218) because God's wrath is revealed (Rom. 1:18). And this fear is the beginning of wisdom.

God's loving wrath makes new beginnings possible. The new beginning after the Flood, the new birth in the Christian experience, the new creation of the earth to come, are all the results of God's angry love. He is angry at sin, angry and uncompromising with evil, but tenderly loving with sinners. His wrath consumes the sin in me, and this is how He prepares the way for forgiveness. This is how He makes me safe to be loved.

It is good to be in the hands of an angry God, for His anger is *for* me, *not against* me. And "when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold" (Job 23:10, NIV).

## OPINION

**Key texts:**  
Hosea 4:9;  
Romans 1:18

1. Lloyd-Jones, D.M. *The Plight of Man and the Power of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1945), pp. 61, 62.  
2. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, ed., *The Anti-Nicene Fathers*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), vol. 7, p. 277.

Miroslav M. Kis is the chairman of the theology and Christian philosophy department of the theological seminary at Andrews University.