

Are There Two Gods in the Bible?

I like the God in the New Testament. He's so loving. I'd rather not read the Old Testament; the God there is so angry and full of wrath."

And that, my friends, is how many people—both inside the church and outside—summarize the difference between the two parts of the Bible.

That is a tragic conclusion. Even Christians who know the whole of the Bible refers to only one perceive a different characterization of God in the Old and New Testaments.

Where does this idea come from? A major section of the Old Testament is the law—the Torah—and too many people just see it as a collection of rules; a list of do's and don'ts that make God look like a major killjoy.

Aww, but Jesus talks about love. Love your neighbor ... do good to those who hate you ... forgive as God has forgiven. And let's not forget the most quoted verse in the Bible: "For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Now that's love!

When people make distinctions like this about the Bible, it's not an indictment against the Bible. It's an indictment of their unfamiliarity with Scripture. A Barna survey says 20% of Americans have read the Bible completely through, and 61% of Christians have. Frankly, I doubt that. I'm sure many people have read *portions* of the Bible, but in honest conversations people have admitted to me they've never read the Bible through. (Surveys like this are skewed by the "desirability bias" in which people give the answer that is desirable. And I'm sure by skimming through sections of the Bible, people feel like they have the gist of the Bible; therefore, they've "read" it.)

And lest I be accused of not practicing what I preach, I have read the Bible through. In fact, in addition to my regular study of God's Word, I am currently in my 57th read through the Bible.

So why would I question people's honesty about Bible reading? I question whether they have read it closely because every time I read Scripture, I see a God of love in the Old Testament and a God of wrath in the New Testament. In other words, God's wrath is evident in both the Old and New Testaments—and so is His love.

Space limits me from listing more than a few Scriptures, but those who see only wrath and judgment in the Old Testament need to take a close examination at the New Testament.

- "God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth" (Rom. 1:18).
- "Because of your hardened and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment is revealed" (2:5).
- "Let no one deceive you with empty arguments, for God's wrath is coming on the disobedient because of these things" (Eph. 5:6).

And those who see only the love of God in the New Testament need to read the Old Testament.

- "Know that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps his gracious covenant loyalty for a thousand generations with those who love him and keep his commands" (Deut. 7:9).
- "But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth" (Ps. 86:15).
- "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, I have continued to extend faithful love to you" (Jer. 31:3).

When the Old Testament stands alone, without any connection to the New Testament, it is a collection of books that points to our lostness. The Old Testament points to our utter inability to do what is right and please God. Yet even in our rebellion and lostness, God continually calls to us out of His love. That's the heart of the Old Testament.

The New Testament shows us what God has done about our lost state. His wrath is still present, but at the cross of Christ, that wrath was poured out on Jesus Christ.

"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, because it is written, Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree" (Gal. 3:13).

God's wrath is against all sin and rebellion. For those who trust in Jesus, He has removed that wrath from us. He took it upon Himself and freed us from our sin and, therefore, freed us from God's wrath. But if anyone chooses not to trust in Jesus, they're still in their sin and, therefore, still under God's wrath.

"The one who believes in the Son has eternal life, but the one who rejects the Son will not see life; instead, the wrath of God remains on him" (John 3:36).

By grace, He covers us with His love even though we deserve His wrath. That's the whole message of the Bible from start to finish. Don't talk to me about two Gods in the Bible. It's not there. His character and attributes are consistent throughout.