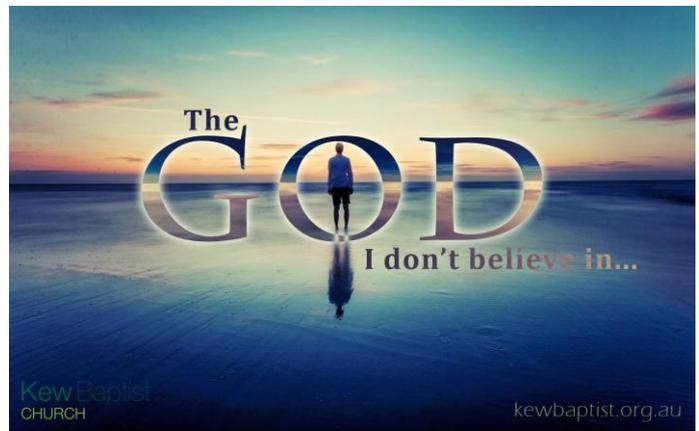


## The Angry God: Introduction

Just imagine that you were given the job of being the gatekeeper in Heaven for a day. How would you decide who to let in? Let's say on your day Mother Teresa, Hitler and your goofy uncle Dave showed up. Would you let them all in? Why? Why not? Or, what about Omar Mateen (the Pulse Nightclub terrorist), or a paedophile priest?



Everyone loves a Facebook meme of Jesus who only ever loves you and allows you to do whatever you like. This is playdough Jesus - you just mold him into whatever sort of God you need. He would never judge, never talk about hell, and never punish anyone for wrongdoing. Let's face it, what's not to love about playdough Jesus? And it's not hard to see why we do this, for as Timothy Keller says: "In our culture divine judgement is one of Christianity's most offensive doctrines."

But let's have a look at the historical Christian view of Jesus based on the Bible, which is the only Jesus we have.

*Read through them and then discuss how this changes/affirms/challenges your view of Jesus.*

## Jesus and Apostles on Hell and Judgement

- "But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has **authority to throw you into hell**. Yes, I tell you, fear him." Lk 12:5.
- "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being **condemned to hell**? Mt 23:33.
- "But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister, will be **subject to judgment**. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be **in danger of the fire of hell**." Mt 5:22.
- "But I tell you that everyone will have to **give account on the day of judgment** for every empty word they have spoken." Mt 12:36.
- Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all **judgment to the Son**, that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. Whoever does not honour the Son does not honour the Father, who sent him.
- "Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and **will not be judged** but has crossed over from death to life. Jn 5:22–25.
- Apostle Peter: "He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify **that he is the one whom God appointed as judge** of the living and the dead." Ac 10:42.
- Apostle Paul in Athens: "For he has set a day when **he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed**. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead." Ac 17:31.
- "You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before **God's judgment seat**. It is written:  
" 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord,  
'every knee will bow before me;  
every tongue will acknowledge God.' "  
So then, each of us will **give an account** of ourselves to God." Ro 14:10–12.

- “For we must all appear **before the judgment seat of Christ**, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” 2 Co 5:10.
- “And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. **The dead were judged** according to what they had done as recorded in the books.” Re 20:12.

### God’s Righteous Anger

“Wrath, unlike love, is *not* one of the intrinsic perfections of God. Rather, it is a function of God’s holiness against sin. Where there is no sin, there is no wrath—but there will always be love in God. Where God in his holiness confronts his image-bearers in their rebellion, there *must* be wrath, or God is not the jealous God he claims to be, and his holiness is impugned. The price of diluting God’s wrath is diminishing God’s holiness.”

D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 67.

Ok, get this: God’s anger is not part of his nature or personality like love is. God is love. But, anger or wrath is a response from God towards evil and sin. That is, if there was no evil and no sin, God would never express anger.

There is a difference between ancient and modern thinking on this, and Western culture and traditional cultures. In the West we love Jesus’ teaching on forgiveness, loving one another, turning the other cheek, and including the outcast and the sinner. But we are affronted and offended by his teaching on judgement and hell. In some Eastern cultures and traditional societies, they have no problem with the teachings on divine judgement and hell, and may find it harder to accept forgiving enemies and including the lowest and the last. Are you saying our cultural perspective is superior to theirs? If the claims of Jesus are true, then every culture and every person will be both drawn to and challenged by his teaching.

As Becky Pippert (*Hope Has its Reasons*) has noted, “Anger isn’t the opposite of love. Hate is, and the final form of hate is indifference...God’s wrath is not a cranky explosion, but his settled opposition to the cancer...which is eating out the insides of the human race he loves with his own being.”

“God is angry at evil and injustice because it is destroying [creation’s] peace and integrity.” Keller

Yale theologian, Miroslav Volf states: “If God were not angry at injustice and deception and did not make a final end to violence – that God would not be worthy of worship. ...The only means of prohibiting all recourse to violence by ourselves is to insist that violence is legitimate only when it comes from God.”

Czesław Miłosz (Nobel-prize winning Czech poet once noted, when he reflected on Marx’s notion that religion was the opiate of the peoples: “And now we are witnessing a transformation. A true opium for the people is a belief in nothingness after death—the huge solace of thinking that for our betrayals, greed, cowardice, murders we are not going to be judged.

All great religions—Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam—have a vision of man as judged after death...All religions recognize that our deeds are imperishable...”

*Put aside your emotional response for a moment, do you think if there was a perfect, holy and just God that it would be appropriate for this God to be angry at evil and wrongdoing? Do you think our culture is gripped by an “opiate” that we are not accountable to god for our actions, and how does this view affect our society?*

### Humanity’s Plight Before a Just God and the Gracious Response of God

The bible pictures all of humanity in a fallen state, away from God and under his sentence of Judgment- his anger essentially. But here's the good news. God has acted to rescue you from the penalty of your own sin. Now, in the West today, people mostly don't care about what happens in the afterlife and don't lie awake thinking about it. So you can just reject this religious rubbish and get on with your life. But wait, not so fast! Don't you care about justice, about the world being made right, about harmony and peace between all peoples, about eradicating racism, sexism, classism, and insert whatever things bothers you here ism? Don't you care about the natural world and want to preserve the environment and the earth's fragile ecosystems? Don't you care about justice for the poor, the homeless and oppressed, about finding a way to end exploitative greed and multi-national power and abuse over the little people, about stopping human trafficking, ending the exploitation of woman and children in the sex trade. Don't you care about any of this?

Yes, of course you do...AND GOD DOES ALSO INFINITELY MORE THAN YOU COULD EVER IMAGINE. So just come back to Jesus for a moment, dying on the cross. He is not only dealing with your personal sins there, through Jesus' life, his death and his being raised from death, God is bringing about God's purposes and desires for the earth and for humanity. THIS IS GOOD NEWS! But, God must justly deal with all that is wrong, with all that is evil, with all that is violent and harmful to people and to the world. And, my friend, you and I are part of the problem. If God were to "snap his fingers" and remove every trace of evil, selfishness, greed, envy, lust, and injustice from all of creation, would you and I still be here?

*Consider, reflect and discuss these passages about God's all-inclusive invitation to all people.*

- For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that **whoever** believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. Jn 3:16
- As Scripture says, "**Anyone** who believes in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of **all** and richly blesses **all** who call on him, for, "**Everyone** who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Ro 10:11–13
- "What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your **Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.** Mt 18:12–14
- "This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants **all people** to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and people, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for **all people.**" 1 Timothy 2:4
- All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, **not counting people's sins against them.** And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. **God made him who had no sin to be sin for us,** so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Co 5:18–21.

*Discuss these passages and how gracious and generous is God to a rebel world. Do you see why the first Christians called the message of God's saving grace in Jesus "Good News"?*

### **Hell and alternate views of the afterlife**

"What if when we die we don't end, but spiritually our life extends into eternity? Hell, then, is the trajectory of a soul, living a self-absorbed, self-centred life, going on and on forever." Tim Keller

Atheists, agnostics and Christians will all believe that human beings are capable of violence, selfishness and cruelty and other terrible moral and spiritual errors. All would also believe that such things must be redressed and paid for. The real difference comes in the views about life after death. Christians believe that because we are spiritual beings who live on after we die, the moral and spiritual errors we involve ourselves in here on earth follow us into the next world. So, is an atheist, or an agnostic narrow for believing that human selfishness and cruelty has to be dealt with in this life? No. And Christians are not narrow to believe these things must be dealt with in the next life also. But just how this happens is not entirely clear, though we know we have strong biblical images of eternal punishment for fallen angels and rebellious unrepentant human beings.

The doctrine of Annihilationism or conditional immortality holds that God will not consign people to hell, but essentially “de-create” them. Those who reject God and continue to refuse his offer of mercy will one day cease to exist.

The doctrine of Universalism holds “that hell is in essence purgative and therefore temporary and that all intelligent beings will therefore in the end be saved. F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1679.

John Stott was a highly respected and renowned evangelical pastor and teacher who, like many, struggled with the idea of eternal punishment of the lost, saying, “Emotionally, I find the concept [of eternal conscious torment] intolerable and do not understand how people can live with it without either cauterizing their feelings or cracking under the strain.” Stott urged that that “the ultimate annihilation of the wicked should at least be accepted as a legitimate, biblically founded alternative to their eternal conscious torment.”

*Both of these views are not out of the realm of a biblical position on judgment and hell. Discuss them and weigh them against other biblical images.*

## **The God of Love**

You believe in a God of love? Great! Welcome to the Bible, the only place we find the existence of a God “who created the world out of love and delight.” Tim Keller

“The source of the idea that God is Love is the Bible itself. And the Bible tells us that the God of love is also a God of Judgement who will put all things in the world to rights in the end.” Tim Keller

*Read the following passages and spend some time reflecting, dwelling on, praying to, and worshipping this God of Love.*

- Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; Ex 34:5–7.
- God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. 1 Jn 4:16–18.