

A Redacted God

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Imagine the appeal of a drive-thru church tailored to fit today's culture:

"Welcome to McChurch's, where you can have Him your way. May I take your petition, please?"

"Hello, yes, I'd like to order a Savory Savior Burger with extra blessings and a side of forgiveness. Um. . . better super-size that this week. Oh, and hold the wrath. Nobody likes that; I don't even know why you offer it."

"Certainly, sir, would you like something to drink with that?"

"Oh, right, let me have a large Living Water please. . . and some toys for the kiddies; that manger set with Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthazar, and a plush Jonah whale. Thanks!"

"Yes, sir! That'll be a 12% tithe at the first window, please."

Let's not be too quick to scoff at this scenario. We live in a culture where many sophisticated people view the Bible as "quaint." They are quick to say that certain Biblical events (e.g., a floating ax head?) could not have happened as recorded but instead reflect a magical view of things typical of primitive cultures. We now know better. We now know that the God of the Old Testament is different than the Father of Jesus in whom we have come to believe.

Again, we may scoff at this modern attitude, but . . . are we really immune from this Cultural COVID? Aren't we now more inclined to preach God's NICENESS, hardly mentioning His wrath? Do we tend to separate God's wrath from His love? About God's wrath, do we inwardly think, "That's the God of the Old Testament?"

But in Romans (located in the New Testament in MY Bible), we see the COMPLETE God, both His love AND His wrath.

*For the **wrath** of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth (Romans 1:18).*

Also, in Romans:

*What if God, desiring to show his **wrath** and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? (Romans 9:22-24).*

And what is contained in those bowls mentioned in Revelation?

Anyway, there are huge cultural and secular forces in play today that influence the church. To speak out against sin (sin that incurs God's wrath) is to risk offending congregants who might leave.

Visitors, like consumers, audition churches to see which best fits their comfort zone. Does the church have an entertaining worship band or choir? Is the pastor personable? Are his sermons comforting? Are there many parishioners? Is there daycare? People our age? Kids?

When did comfort become the deciding factor in choosing a place to glorify and worship God?

Does the church need to change with the times or risk fading into irrelevance? As an example, we may give sermons about the sin of adultery, but how much teaching is given to guide those not married who are struggling with their carnal temptations? Society rather encourages these people to give in to those pressures. But what about the church? Is the church silent on many such contemporary moral issues?

We DO need to find ways to address ALL concerns of our modern society in a godly fashion. We need to rely on the timeless guidance of the Bible, the complete Bible, which is just as relevant today as it was millennia ago. The Bible is the Word of God disclosed in a book, just as Jesus is the Word of God disclosed in a person. If we cannot see how the Word relates to a “modern” situation, perhaps the fault lies within us. We need to rely on the COMPLETENESS of God to fully provide guidance through these morally troubled times.

Some thirty years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson wrote *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*, known to us as the Jefferson Bible. This was his private declaration of independence from historic Christian theology. He merely removed all parts of the Gospels which didn't fit his deistic theology. Out went supernaturalism, including references to the Trinity, as well as the divinity, miracles, and the resurrection of Jesus. His Bible begins with the birth story without mentioning angels or prophecy. It concludes with the cross and the tomb (but not an empty tomb). The last words in his Bible are these: “There laid they Jesus. And rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher, and departed.”

That's it. Jesus died and was buried – period. End of story.

Have we done the same things with our conception of God today? Keep the parts that seem culturally acceptable (to keep people coming to church) and redact the rest?

Perhaps the songs we sing today, which rarely mention God's wrath, are a collage of our culture, a mirror of our conceptions of God and justice and salvation. Certainly, some churches preach the “niceness” of God as if it were His ONLY attribute; that it is somehow “evil” to punish evil, and I'm okay, and you're okay, and God's okay with us being okay. Let's just all get along.

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked... (Galatians 6:7a).

Jesus, the Word of God, is not artificially split into Old and New; His Love separated from His Wrath. Indeed, His wrath IS one facet of His great love for us. When we grapple with the issues facing the church today, let us use His examples and follow His guidance. Let us lean on ALL of Him.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight (Proverbs 9:10).