

## Does God Ever Get Angry at Christians?

The Bible clearly teaches that God is angry with the wicked. It says His wrath abides all those who do not believe in Jesus. (See John 3:36.) But what about those who are in Christ? When a Christian sins, does God get angry at him? John McCarthur, a well-known theologian, seems to think so. Here are some statements he made concerning this taken from an [article](#) on the Grace To You web site:

*Some object to the idea that God could ever be displeased with His own children. They ask: Can our once-and-for-all forgiven sins ever provoke divine displeasure? The answer is a resounding “Yes.” ....*

*In a very practical sense, God’s indignation over your daily sins demonstrates His love for you.*

*That’s the thought of [Hebrews 12:5-11](#) where some form of the word discipline is used seven times. Divine displeasure over your sin brings discipline, reproof, and scourging. ....*

*God’s discipline — sometimes involving punishment for disobedience — is painful.*

While I have respect for John McCarthur and have quoted him in some of my writings, I believe his perspective of God on this issue seems distorted and destructive to the gospel. Christians sin every day in some way or another. If God is continually getting angry with the Christian for his daily sins, that Christian would never be able to heed the biblical encouragement to come boldly unto the throne of grace by faith in Christ alone. (See Hebrews 4:16.) Rather, he will always be wondering if his performance has appeased God’s anger sufficiently to warrant approaching Him. He will always have reason to wonder if God is indignant toward him at any given moment.

In the article sighted above, John McCarthur suggests that there are two types of forgiveness with God, judicial and parental. He rightly believes that because of Jesus’ work on the cross, there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ (See Romans 8:1). But he insists that while those in Christ have received forgiveness judicially, that somehow, God, as a parent, still gets angry with Christians when they sin. The Bible does not teach this. I believe it is conjecture on John McCarthur’s part. He has come up with this theory to support his belief that God gets angry with Christians when they sin.

McCarthur seems to compartmentalize forgiving (by God) into two categories, concerning our legal standing with him and then our personal standing with Him. Forgiving cannot be dissected this way. Forgiving always involves the heart and without the heart, it does not qualify as true forgiveness. Jesus said, “*My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart*” (Mathew 18:35). When a person offends another person, there is a break in the relationship. Until a person forgives the offender from the heart, he has anger and resentment toward him for the offense. When a person forgives “from the heart,” he no longer retains anger or resentment in his heart for the one who offended him. Anything short of this does not qualify as forgiving from the heart. God would never expect us to do something that He Himself does not do. If God instructs us to forgive “from the heart,” then surely He must forgive from the heart.

McCarthur’s theory makes the Heavenly Father out to be someone who gets offended continually by His children. As a result of their sinning, He becomes indignant in His heart toward them. His feelings toward them are tied to their performance. Unless they continually do the things that please Him, the familial relationship with them is broken unless and until they ask Him for forgiveness. Until then, He remains indignant toward them.

McCarthur’s image of God is inconsistent with the way Jesus loved His disciples. John said that Jesus “explained God.” (See John 1:18.) We can look at Jesus and determine what the Father is like. Jesus’ disciples said and did many things that were very hurtful to Jesus. For example, on the night he was betrayed, Jesus was pouring out his heart while telling them that one of them would soon betray Him. He was obviously hurting inside. But, being the selfish sinners they were, they immediately began arguing which one of them was the greatest. Jesus could see that they really did not care about Him. They also would soon deny Him. Did Jesus

become indignant toward them? Did he resent them? No. He continually exhibits a loving, forgiving attitude toward them and tries to teach them the importance of serving rather than being served. (See Luke 22:14-32.)

McCarthur's image of God is contrary to how He expects husbands to love their wives. The Bible teaches husbands to love their wives as Christ loves the Church. (See Ephesians 5:25.) How does the Church treat Jesus? The Church (us) continually acts like adulteresses toward Him. He knew this before He died for her. He lavished His love on her by dying for her. Was Jesus just paying the penalty for the sin or did He bring about restoration of the personal relationship at the same time? He brought about RECONCILIATION. This term signifies restoration of a personal relationship. If it was merely a legal transaction, the Bible would only speak of justification. But it does speak of reconciliation. Can you picture Jesus, the one who died for us, continually getting offended by our sins even though He died for them? Compare that image of Jesus with the one Isaiah provides:

*You will also be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, And a royal diadem in the hand of your God. It will no longer be said to you, "Forsaken," Nor to your land will it any longer be said, "Desolate"; But you will be called, "My delight is in her," And your land, "Married"; For the LORD delights in you" (Isaiah 62:3-4).*

I wonder how John McCarthur teaches husbands to love their wives. Does he tell them that it is okay for them to harbor resentment toward them when the wife betrays the husband? Does he tell them that it is okay to withhold forgiveness until the wife comes to him and pleads for forgiveness? Does he tell them that Jesus has indignation toward his bride so it is okay if they have indignation toward their brides?

The Bible teaches that Jesus bore the wrath of God on the cross. He purchased forgiveness for His Bride. She is His beloved. As a result, she is pictured as being clothed in white raiment and thoroughly washed of her sins. The sins are depicted as having been taken out of the way and nailed to the cross. (Colossians 2:13 – 14). There is now no condemnation for her. Indignation and wrath is reserved for His enemies, not His beloved.

The Bible never pictures Jesus as indignant toward His beloved bride. While on earth, Jesus never showed indignation toward His disciples. Jesus said, "*He who has seen Me has seen the Father*" (John 14:9). If Jesus does not become angry and indignant toward His beloved, and shares the same characteristics as His Father, then how can the Father become indignant toward His children? It is completely inconsistent. It seems preposterous.

Perhaps John McCarthur does not understand the nature of true forgiveness which always involves the heart. Perhaps he thinks forgiveness is just something a person chooses to do with their will apart from the way they feel in their heart towards the one who offended them. Many Christians do not seem to realize that forgiveness involves the heart. If a person says he forgives while yet harboring resentment toward the one who offended him, he has not forgiven from the heart.

McCarthur pictures God as one who is displeased with his children. Since they sin numerous times each day, He must always be displeased with them. He must always be indignant toward them. If God feels this way toward me, how can I dare come boldly to the throne of grace?

McCarthur also points to Hebrews 12:5-11 to support his view. He claims that since God "punishes" Christians for disobedience, this implies that He gets angry with them. I believe McCarthur is inserting an idea into this passage that cannot be substantiated. It does not say that God is angry. Most English versions use the word "discipline," not "punishment." Many people seem to think discipline has a negative component that involves displeasure of the one doing the disciplining. On occasion, many human fathers have disciplined their children while having anger and indignation toward them. The Hebrews 12 passage does not say that God disciplines His children this way. In fact, the word "discipline" has a strong educational component to it. The author here is speaking about the child training that God the Father begins once a person is born again into God's family. The Father does not wait until the child commits some flagrant sin to begin the child training process. Rather, He immediately begins conforming the new child into the image of Jesus.

Many Christians think that Hebrews 12:4-8 is a warning passage. "You better keep in line or God will take you to the wood shed!" The author of Hebrews did not write it as a warning. Rather, he meant it to be a comfort to them, not a warning. In verse four, he says, "*Have you forgotten the word of "exhortation,"*" referring to a quote he then makes from the scriptures. It is unfortunate in my opinion that the translators opted for the word

exhortation in most translations. The Greek word is *paraklesis* which actually means encouragement or comfort. The Holy Spirit is said to be the Comforter, from the word *parakletos*, from the same Greek root. Neither the Greek words used nor the context warrant thinking of this passage as a warning passage.

To see more clearly, all you have to do is examine the many passages in the book of Hebrews that the author intends to warn (rather than comfort.) The warning passages are intended to make the reader examine his faith to verify that it is real lest he be cast into the fire at the judgment. Hebrews 6:4-8 is one of these warning passages. It has a much different sense to it than the Hebrews 12 passage. In the Hebrews 6 passage, he clearly teaches that if a person proves to be an unbeliever, he will end up being cast into the furnace and burned. But he goes on to say, “But we are convinced of better things concerning you” (Hebrews 6:9). In Chapter 12, he gives them a word to encourage them and give them assurance of God’s love toward them:

*You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; and you have forgotten the exhortation [WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT] which is addressed to you as sons,*

*“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,*

*Nor faint when you are reproved by Him;*

*For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines,*

*And He scourges every son whom He receives.”*

*It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons” (Hebrews 12:4-8).*

Consider the people to whom he writes this. These were not people that had fallen into sexual immorality. They had not begun to attend sacrifices to other gods at the local temple. On the contrary, these people had been suffering for the name of Jesus and demonstrating great faith in the face of persecution:

*“You showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one” (Hebrews 10:34).*

These were hardly children that needed to be “taken to the woodshed” and “punished” for bad behavior. Yet, these were the people to whom he gives the exhortation to “not despise the discipline of the Lord.” Clearly, the author was not using this as a warning. It is a word of encouragement. They are undergoing extreme trial and suffering. So, he says, “Take courage, this all proves that you are truly God’s beloved children” (my paraphrase). The author is clearly NOT warning them, “Keep in line lest God get angry with you and punish you with indignation.”

I believe that Jesus paid it all! He not only made possible my justification, but He also brought about full reconciliation of the relationship. Having washed me of my sins, I am pictured as His bride and His love toward me remains steadfast in spite of my pathetic performance. Any view short of this takes away from the gospel and elevates works back into the formula for right standing in the personal relationship between God and His children.

Someone might say, “If our performance does not affect God’s emotional disposition toward those who are in Christ, then won’t they become lax? Are there no consequences for their sin?” *The Bible says, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life” (Galatians 6:4-5).* Like gravity in the physical world, God has set in place spiritual cause and effect principles. These are just as real as those in the physical world.

The book of Revelation also teaches that in order to avoid painful chastening, we should repent whenever we become aware of sin in our lives.

*“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: <sup>15</sup> “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. <sup>16</sup> So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. <sup>17</sup> Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and*

*do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—<sup>18</sup> I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.<sup>19</sup> As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.<sup>20</sup> Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.<sup>21</sup> To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.*

We should indeed be motivated to avoid being rebuked and chastened by God for a lukewarm heart! Sin always has consequences. But we must not assume that God gets angry or has indignation toward His children just because these principles are in operation?

The Bible does teach that sin causes separation between God and the unbeliever. (See Isaiah 59:2.) But Jesus has made it possible for our sins to be washed away so that we are seen by God to be white as snow. (See Isaiah 1:18.) God does not move away from us when we sin. But sin blinds our eyes so that we are hindered in our perception and experience of Him. The Christian may receive some motivation from the warning that sin causes corruption in our lives. But greater still is the motivation to watch over our hearts with all diligence, knowing that sin robs us of our enjoyment of God. So, we are motivated in many ways to walk in the Spirit so that we will not fulfill the lusts of our flesh. (See Galatians 5:16.) Because God has regenerated us, we strive to live holy lives. We do not live passive lives presuming on God's unconditional love for us in Christ. Rather, we have the attitude of Paul that is careful not to presume anything. We are extremely serious about our desire to be with Christ in the end. We do not want to end up finding out that we are disqualified.

*“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified” (I Corinthians 9:24-27).*

While I strive this way, I do so knowing that God's love for me remains steadfast no matter what. I am my Beloved's and He is mine. His banner over me is love. (See Song of Songs 2:4.) Jesus is the lightning rod that absorbed all of God's wrath toward me. As a result, I have been reconciled to God, brought into right relationship with Him. *In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us (Ephesians 1:7-8).* I have received forgiveness for all my sins, past, present and future. Jesus paid it all! Because of this alone, I can come boldly to the throne of grace without any fear that God is indignant toward me. This makes me want to love Him all the more.

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