

IV. A BALANCED GOD

1.15.26

*“Do you honestly think that God is going to hand out **the same punishment for mass murder than He does for sexting?**” J. K. Simmons*

*“The thing that he’s doing in that show is **he’s actually taking the place of God.** [He’s saying,] ‘This is why people go to hell.’ Based on what? **Based on his own judgment,** right? Based on what he thinks is bad.” James from Detroit*

1. In the film the point was made that our culture has a hard time grasping the important difference between *human reasoning* and *God’s reasoning*, especially when it comes to determining the severity of punishment for sin. While Progressive Christians do not think that *an eternal conscious torment* is justified as punishment, the Bible says that the punishment is measured by who the crime is committed against (Psalm 51:4; Proverbs 16:11). God is infinitely valuable (Isaiah 40:18, 46:5; Psalm 40:5, 89:6; Romans 8:18; Colossians 2:13; 2 Corinthians 4:2; Revelation 21:6, 22:13). Therefore, any sin against Him deserves an infinite punishment (Revelation 21:8). What was the example given to illustrate this by James in the film? Can you think of another illustration? Does this help you see your sin in contrast to God’s perfect holiness?

2. Paul Washer points how God’s wrath is different from human wrath because God’s wrath does not come from self-centeredness. How did Washer describe God’s wrath and what did he say God’s wrath was based upon?

GOD IS _____ : He intensely _____ all sin.

3. Consider the verses cited in this chapter on God’s wrath: Nahum 1:2 and Romans 12:9. Have you ever thought dualistically the way Richard Rohr does? Have you been able to see that God is both wrathful and loving in the scriptures? Visit Nahum 1:3, Exodus 34:6-7, Psalm 103:8-10, Jonah 4:2, and Nehemiah 9:17.

*“A **dualistic way** of looking at the nature of God would be to say **God is either righteous and wrathful** or He’s **gracious and loving.**” Alisa Childers*

*“The moment that **we choose a side** is the moment that **we end up in some theological error.** We don’t want to live in those **paradoxes:** that **an incomprehensible being can be both/and.**” Anthony Wood*

4. In the film, Josh Buice talked about the connection between God’s mercy and His wrath. How does one necessitate the other? Can you have wrath without mercy? (See Habakkuk 3:2) While it may be difficult to accept that God is “both righteous and wrathful,” and “gracious and loving,” all at the same time, is it right for you (as a creation of God, as a creature) to expect to fully understand or entirely grasp *who God is* and *why He is the way He is*? (For help see 1 Corinthians 13:9, 13:12, & Ephesians 3:14-19)

*"I don't love the idea of God's wrath. **I don't think it's central to the way the bible portrays God,** particularly not in the New Testament. Clearly Israel had an experience with God's wrath, so it's also not something I would find ways to interpret my way out of or around. **It's part of Israel's experience** so we need to take it seriously. But it also leads me **to believe that God changes.**" Tony Jones*

*"You're **denying God's immutability.** Part of what makes God God is that **He doesn't change.**"
James from Detroit*

GOD IS _____ : He does not _____ .

5. Michael Durham says that "God is not schizophrenic" and that there is as much grace in the Old Testament as there is in the New Testament. What were some of the examples and verses that were given? Can you think of more examples that show a more balanced view of God's wrath in the New Testament and God's love in the Old? Lastly, describe the two imbalances that Josh Buice listed when someone does not recognize the balance of God's character.

*"We have to affirm that both the old testament, the new testament, are both and **altogether God's breathed-out word. Fully authoritative.** Think of second Timothy three. Paul is referring to scripture: **'All scripture is God-breathed.'** He is **primarily** referring to **the Old Testament!**" Stephen Wellum*

*"Once you start **picking any one part of the bible** and saying, like, 'I think it's **wrong!**' You go, like, 'Wait a second, **this is just a human book!**'" Bart Campolo*

6. Progressive Christians are not the first to reject the inerrancy and authority of the Bible. Such views are found throughout history and can even be seen in man's earliest encounters with God's revelation (whether written or verbal, see Genesis 2-3; Numbers 14:2, 30-32, 14:2-3; 2 Kings 17:14). It was during the 17th century that "the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods fostered a significant degree of skepticism toward beliefs and practices that had been the consensus for centuries". A "man-centered rationalism" brought on a growing influence of errant views of scripture within the scholarly world that have led into the modern day.¹ If you accept that the bible has errors, you may eventually reject its authority. Alisa Childers talks about how she struggled when confronted with someone teaching this kind of low view of scripture. What was her response? Whose view did she appeal to? What scriptures help you understand how the Bible should be viewed?

*"Progressive Christianity as a movement looks at the earliest Christians **as a movement**. They look at Paul and Peter, the first disciples, the first century church, the second century church, and **they view that as 'That's Christianity in it's infancy.'** People are **growing** and **maturing** into what Brian McLaren would call **'a higher and wiser view of God.'**" Alisa Childers*

*"Essentially you read the Bible **as an evolving narrative**. All we have are **human accounts** of how people understood it in their **evolving understandings** of how the world works." Rob Bell*

1. Grisanti, Michael A., "Approaches to the Study of the Old Testament" in *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament*, by Eugene H. Merrill, Mark F. Rooker, & Michael A. Grisanti (Nashville: B&H, 2011), 123-124.

*"I was sitting in a church service listening to a really fine minister **talk about God being angry and jealous, and in the same breath saying omnipotent, all-caring, all-loving.** And I was caught up in the rapture of that moment **until he said 'jealous'...** and God is also jealous? God is jealous of me? Something about that didn't... **didn't feel right in my spirit.** That's when **the search for something more** than doctrine started to stir within me." Oprah Winfrey*

*"I don't think I have so much of a problem with Oprah maybe **recoiling in that moment.** But what I have a problem with is that instead of testing the spirits, **instead of going through the scriptures** to try to understand for herself, she just totally tossed out any concept of what the pastor was saying and **decided to just go with her feelings.**" Constance Troutman*

7. Paul Washer answers Oprah Winfrey's objections to God's jealousy by providing an illustration. Can you reproduce the illustration in your own words?

8. What were the verses displayed in the film for God's attribute of jealousy?

9. Washer continues saying, "[God] has every right [to be jealous]. This is His world. But His jealousy goes beyond ours in that ours is often times selfish and self-centered. His jealousy also benefits His creatures because He knows that for us to live for anything other than Him will just lead to us being _____. So, His jealousy is motivated not only by His glory, but by _____."

10. Complete these definitions which were given during the film:

He is wrathful: “God intensely _____ all sin.” (1:20:40)

He is immutable: “God does not _____.” (1:27:41)

Sola Scriptura: “_____.” (1:29:31)

He is a Jealous God: “God always seeks to protect His own _____ and _____. He will not share His praise with idols.” (1:33:59)



THE INCOMPREHENSIBILITY OF GOD

In the film, Anthony Wood says, “The moment that we choose a side is the moment that we end up in some theological error. We don’t want to live in those paradoxes: that an incomprehensible being can be both/and.” Since the film did not have time to help its viewers understand this statement more fully, we wanted to provide further explanation and resources here for you to study. This is because the word “incomprehensible” can be easily misunderstood. God’s incomprehensibility is an important statement about who God is and what He has revealed to us, therefore it is important for you to strive to grasp this doctrine as best as you can.

When a pastor or theologian talks about the incomprehensibility of God, he does not mean we cannot know God. Scripture is clear that you can know God (John 17:3; 1 John 5:13). God being incomprehensible means that since God is God and you are you, you cannot comprehend God. The reason you cannot comprehend God is because to do so would mean you are God, because only God comprehends Himself. To put it another way, consider the meaning of the word comprehend. In the Merriam-Webster dictionary the definition of comprehend is “1: to grasp the nature, significance, or meaning of... 2: to contain or hold within a total scope, significance, or amount”.² Both meanings are helpful. We often use the word comprehend in its first sense, which means to simply grasp or apprehend the meaning of something. If used in this way, it means we understand the signif-

2. Merriam-Webster, Inc. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003.

icance of something without knowing everything there is to know about it. But the second use of the term comprehend is what is meant when used of God. If you say you can understand God in a complete or total sense, if you say that you not only know God, but understand everything about Him, then you are saying you have knowledge equal to God's knowledge of Himself. Such comprehensive knowledge is off-limits to anything in the created world. God has not given that ability to anyone. Furthermore, such knowledge is so intimate to the Persons of the Godhead that as a Christian you must be careful to recognize that not only do you have limited knowledge, but that your limited knowledge is restricted to what the Bible reveals. The doctrine of incomprehensibility has guardrails built upon it by other doctrines such as the sufficiency and inspiration of scripture. But overall, it is important, especially to the limits of human knowledge about God. The dangers of misunderstanding the doctrine of incomprehensibility can lead to two significant errors. The first is to overemphasize the mystery of God, leading to excessive ambiguity in defining the doctrines of the faith (consider the Eastern Orthodox Churches as an example of this). The second is to deny the knowability of God altogether (the Postmodern-Emergent movement is a typical result of this direction).

Here are two examples to help you understand this doctrine. The first is to picture picking up a marble with your thumb and index finger. As you hold the marble it is visible while you are grasping it. This is like gasping of God in your limited knowledge of Him. Now picture the marble in the palm of your hand as you close your fist around it. The marble is no longer visible—you have now comprehended the marble. This is like comprehending or having full knowledge of God, which you do not have. When you grasped the marble, you held it without comprehending it, which in no way means you did not have a secure and confident hold on it. But that is quite different from fully comprehending it, which required encompassing the entire marble until it was no longer visible.³ Second, consider an example from scripture. In 1 Kings 8, Solomon just completed the building of the temple of God which his father David intended to build (2 Samuel 7). This building was magnificent in its size, features and precious materials; far more so than any other buildings or temples of its day (1 Kings 7; Ezra 3:10). This temple was meant to be the pristine dwelling place for the Lord God of Israel. Yet, no matter how magnificent it was, in Solomon's prayer of dedication, after acknowledging he had built "the house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel," he says, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27). Solomon confesses that no matter how massive or grandiose a temple he builds, God *cannot* be contained within it. Such is the full knowledge of God in your

3. I have to credit this illustration to Seth Jacobs.

created mind. Just as the infinite God cannot fit into a man-made temple, the comprehensive knowledge of God cannot fit into your finite mind.⁴

Addressing now what Anthony Wood said in the film on the incomprehensibility of God, it is important to understand the reason he employed this doctrine. Anthony wanted to emphasize that since God is beyond our full understanding, you must learn to trust that the two truths being discussed—*the perfect justice* and *perfect love* of God—can exist simultaneously in God and in His works. This is true even though your mind might still find conflict in the two concepts—specifically in accepting that the conflict comes *not* from an inherent problem outside of you, but *from your own inability to fully understand God*. This struggle is often not only in the coexistence of love and justice, but also in these concepts being harmonious. Scripture is clear that both are true and both are in perfect harmony with the character of God, which He put on display in the redemptive work of His Son and the active work of His Spirit regenerating the hearts of His people.

RESOURCES ON THE INCOMPREHENSIBILITY OF GOD & THE BIBLE

- ▶ *None Greater* by Matthew Barrett
- ▶ *Reformed Dogmatics, Vol. 2: God and Creation* by Herman Bavinck

Is the bible inspired, authoritative, sufficient and without error?

- ▶ *Scripture Alone* by James White
- ▶ *The Inerrant Word* by John MacArthur, R. C. Sproul, Alistair Begg, & more
- ▶ *In Defense of the Bible* by Steven B. Cowan & Terry L. Wilder

How can I get help studying the bible?

- ▶ *The MacArthur Study Bible* by Thomas Nelson & John MacArthur (available in NASB & NKJV)
- ▶ *The Reformation Study Bible* by R. C. Sproul (available in ESV)
- ▶ *CSB Spurgeon Study Bible* by CSB Bibles, Holman, & Alistair Begg

How do I know what bible translation to use?

- ▶ *Choosing a Bible: Understanding Bible Translation Differences* by Leland Ryken
- ▶ *Bible Translation Comparison* by Rose Publishing

4. This illustration was borrowed from Dr. James Dolezal who used it during his interview with the IRBS Theological Seminary podcast, <https://irbseminary.org/an-interview-with-dr-james-dolezal-the-contemplation-and-knowledge-of-the-incomprehensible-god/>.

Dualistic Thinking

Either dualistic,
or non-dual.

Non-dual Thinking

Both righteous & wrathful,
and gracious & loving.
