

Indignation

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“Behold, the name of the Lord comes from a remote place, burning is His anger and dense His smoke; His lips are filled with indignation.”

Isaiah 30:27

Indignation—The Hebrew word here is *za’am*. It is a word for intense anger, especially anger over the rejection of God’s lovingkindness and mercy. This word is often found in connection with the idea of wrath. In order to understand indignation, we need to understand the idea of divine wrath.

In the modern Western world we are insulated from wrath. Our exposure to anything close to the idea of wrath is usually no more than a digital image on a television screen. We know that many parts of this world are experiencing the wrath of men, but they are far from us. We prefer not to think about it. After all, we think we are peace loving and civilized. Unfortunately, this denial of the presence of wrath shields us from something that God wants us to know. God is also a God of wrath.

Whenever anyone says that God is a God of wrath, he is likely to be dismissed as a fanatic. We are told that wrath belongs to the ancient view of God. The modern God has undergone “anger management” and is now only a wonderful, loving sugar daddy. Please, let’s not be fooled. God’s wrath is an essential part of who God is. It is not an ancient mistake and it is not cured by theological psychotherapy. God’s wrath is the other side of His intense love for us. Once we understand why wrath is undeniable, we will no longer consider it outdated.

Imagine that you offer your own children the most precious gift you could ever give. It is a life full of purpose, grace and benefit to them. It is designed to maximize everything that they can be. It is the perfect harmony of action and attitude. But time after time, they refuse your gift. They spit on it. They desecrate your invitations. They deliberately try to stop your offer and they encourage the children of your neighbors to follow them in belittling, destroying and harming your peaceful intentions for them. The time will come when you, with broken heart, cut them off. Your anger toward their intentional rejection only reflects how important the offer was. This is indignation. It is the result of spurned love.

When we are justified by God’s grace, when we accept the gift of forgiveness, wrath passes us by. We embrace the gift because we know, at last, that it is all for our benefit. But there are others who will never admit they need God. They cast His love in the dirt. They choose to inherit the other side of the love-coin, the anger of rejection.