

This year's theme for Oasis is "Life in the Spirit." To live in the Spirit is to live in the truth, because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. Living in truth means letting the truth shape your behavior. But first we must examine what this truth is. Specifically, we will focus today on the truth about God the Father.

Humans have a tendency to oversimplify reality to make things easier to understand. This is particularly true when it comes to understanding other people. We tend to simplify people and turn them into caricatures, exaggerating a few features that we use to define their whole being. TV is good at doing this. In the comedy show *The Office* there are two characters, Jim and Pam, who were always the normal and well-behaved ones. After so many seasons we thought we understood them, but then in one episode they joined in with their colleagues to taunt a fellow co-worker. We were shocked, but in real life people are more complicated than caricatures. They are not as easy to predict and understand as we would wish. Another example is how I tended to view one of the leaders at AWANA as being a generally mean person because he was strict with us. But it was unfair to define him as only a harsh disciplinarian, because he was also a generous servant and faithful leader. When we claim part of the truth is the whole truth, it becomes a lie.

Today's passage shows us the wrath of God. The repeated sentence in Isaiah 9:12, 17, 21, and 10:4 speaks of anger that is unrelenting. It may even seem excessive to us that God would still pour out His wrath on Israel, even to the point where their desperation forced them into cannibalism. This wrath seems incompatible with passages like Romans 8:38-39, which are uplifting reminders of God's love. This apparent incompatibility led heretics in the early church like Marcion of Sinope to claim that the loving God of the New Testament was not the same as the seemingly vengeful God of the Old Testament. But let us look closer at the reason why God is angry here. It is clear from the passage that Israel's wickedness is what invites God's judgment (9:16, 10:1-2), and that the relentlessness of this punishment is due to the fact that Israel will not repent (9:13). Because of God's righteousness and justice, He shows wrath towards wickedness. But His anger also stems from His love. God wanted to bless Israel and through Israel to bless the other nations. But Israel turned from God and thereby prevented the nations from

acknowledging Him as well. God's anger is a call to repentance. His motivation is love for Israel and for the world. He wants everyone to turn to Him and be saved. So we cannot separate God's judgment from His love.

If we focus only on God's wrath we risk becoming judgmental and legalistic. God does have wrath because of sin, but the whole truth is not as simple as that. If we focus on His wrath, we may risk forgetting His love. But, conversely if we focus too much on His love (described in passages like 1 John 4:7-8), we also may forget His justice and righteousness. We may start thinking that we can do anything we want because God will still love us. We can easily forget that Jesus died on the cross to take away our sin, not just to take away punishment for sin. Forgetting the gravity of sin, we may take His love for granted and start thinking that we deserve it, or even that humanity deserves salvation even if they reject Jesus. We may think that such a loving God couldn't possibly condemn us, no matter how much we turn away. We must be careful not to separate God's love from His righteousness and justice. We must acknowledge both God's wrath and His love. They may seem incompatible to us, but through His wisdom we see these aspects reconciled perfectly in the sacrifice of Jesus, who took God's wrath upon Himself in order to demonstrate God's love for us. We can now approach the brilliant fire of God's righteous glory without being consumed because the love of Christ enables us to stand righteous and confident before God. Through the cross God's wrath put our sin to death, yet through the resurrection we live a new life filled with God's love.

Let us live in the Spirit, by living in the truth. The world may tell you lies about God, which may sound logical. But we must turn to God's word for truth. We must try to understand this complex God of the Bible. Let us not confine God to fit an image that suits our purposes, because then we wouldn't be serving God, rather we would be serving only ourselves.