

The Tennessee Tribune

Volume 22, No. 43, 3 Sections THURSDAY, October 27-November 2, 2011, 2011

From Retribution to Reconciliation: The Importance of the New Testament *A Commentary by Jason Curry*



The Reverend Dr. Jason Richard Curry is Dean of the Fisk Memorial Chapel at Fisk University. He can be reached at jcurry@fisk.edu or www.fiskmemorialchapel.com.

Unfortunately, there are many people who only see God as an angry God or as a God of punishment. The average scary movie speaks of "the wrath of God," insurance companies often speak of "acts of God (e.g., a tree falling on a house)," and atheists or agnostics talk about a God who doesn't exist or couldn't possibly love or forgive others. After talking with many people who hold these positions about God for more than two decades, I realize that they have often arrived at their conception of God through their reading of the Old Testament. Indeed, by reading many of the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament, it is possible to construct a mental picture of a God who is only angry with humanity, and solely interested in or committed to retribution (punishment) toward a certain people or nation. I will admit that no one really wants to hear about a God that punishes people; therefore, when some of my family members,

colleagues and students say that they have little time or patience for "this kind of God," I do not dismiss their remarks. I completely understand their shock, anger and resentment; however, I also understand that they are searching for a deeper and more meaningful understanding of God, and that is why I am grateful that they have chosen to have a sincere conversation about the nature of the God in which I believe.

In the Old Testament, we may find a God of retribution; however, in the New Testament, we're sure to find a God of reconciliation; a God who loves humanity and wants to be reconciled (united) with humanity through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, we may find a God of war, but in the New Testament, we definitely find a God of peace and love. It is because of God's love for humanity (John 3:16), that God changed the

nature of His relationship with us. God's new covenant, New Testament or new relationship with humanity will always be expressed through love, not anger or war. When people want to talk about a God of war or retribution, dismissing them or handing them a copy of the New Testament will probably not be particularly helpful for beginning this important and necessary conversation. I've found that having and honest and meaningful conversation with people who do and do not love the Lord, feeding people who need food and providing clothing for people who need clothing are the most effective ways of telling or convincing people of God's love, which is called grace. As we go about our lives, let us reflect this grace in all that we do. Amen.