

Chapter 4:

God or Projection?

The Old Testament often paints pictures of God that are difficult to reconcile with the God revealed in Christ. We read of entire nations wiped out, enemies struck down, and violence credited to the hand of the Almighty. How do we make sense of this?

One possibility is that humanity—still growing, still stumbling—confused its own impulses with the voice of God. When tribes went to war, it was convenient to declare, “God told us to do it.” When leaders felt threatened, they invoked divine judgment to justify their actions. God became the banner under which human anger and tribal vengeance marched.

But does this reflect God’s heart—or our projections?

When Jesus came, He unsettled the religious establishment precisely because He did not look like the God they imagined. He ate with sinners, embraced the unclean, forgave the guilty, and refused to call down fire on His enemies. In fact, when His disciples wanted to summon fire from heaven—as Elijah once had—Jesus rebuked them. He would not allow God’s name to be used as a cloak for human destruction.

If God is love, then anything that reeks of hatred, domination, or annihilation cannot be His voice. Instead, those stories may reveal how limited humanity’s vision was, and how willing they were to drape their violence in sacred garments.

The truth is, God has never changed. What has changed is our perception. The God of Abraham and the God revealed in Christ are one and the same—but Abraham saw through a glass darkly, while in Christ we see face to face. Jesus did not arrive to change God’s character; He came to correct our vision.

Perhaps the harshest portraits of God in scripture are less about who God is, and more about who we were. They are mirrors of humanity’s projections—our fears, our tribalism, our bloodlust—placed on the canvas of divinity. Christ comes, not to condemn us for this distortion, but to peel back the veil and say, “This is what God really looks like.”

Journal Prompts

- 1.) Have you ever struggled with the violent portrayals of God in the Old Testament? How have you reconciled them in the past?
- 2.) Can you think of moments when people—including yourself—gave God credit for something more human than divine?

- 3.) How does Jesus' life and teaching challenge the older images of God as vengeful or violent?
- 4.) What would change if you read scripture through the lens of God's unchanging love, rather than human projection?

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