

# THE HOLY SPIRIT IN RELATION TO GOD'S LOVE AND WRATH

Rustin Umstatt

*Assistant Professor of Theology  
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary  
Kansas City, MO 64118*

## Abstract

The theory of the Spirit as the mutual-love of the Father and the Son is fairly standard in Western Christianity. Since the Spirit can be distinctively called the love of the Trinity, it becomes necessary to relate the conclusion that God's love and wrath are intimately connected. Therefore, God's wrath is often described as God's spurned love. This article investigates the claim that God's wrath is poured out on people by the Spirit. First the paper establishes Augustine's mutual-love theory and once the theory is in place, it moves to Martin Luther's understanding of the *opus proprium* and the *opus alienum* of God. After establishing Luther's thesis and then connecting it with Augustine's proposal it is possible to conclude the Spirit executes the judgment of the Son given to him by the Father upon those who refuse his salvation.

## Introduction

Stanley Grenz writes:

The Spirit's fundamental role within the divine life determines the role of the Spirit within the divine activity in the world. By being the bond between the Father and the Son, the Spirit completes the eternal immanent Trinity. In the same manner, the Spirit acts as the completer of the divine program in the world and hence the completer of the economic Trinity.<sup>1</sup>

He has adopted the postulate that the Spirit is the bond of mutual-love between the Father and the Son, and that this love, primarily encountered in the Spirit, is that which guides creation back to its Creator. In his systematic work he makes the further connection between love and wrath

---

<sup>1</sup>Stanley Grenz, "The Holy Spirit: Divine Love Guiding Us Home," *Ex Auditu* 12 (1996): 1.

when he states “those who undermine the love God pours forth for the world experience his love in the form of wrath.”<sup>2</sup> His position on both the Spirit as the mutual-love of the Father and the Son and on God’s wrath being how those who reject God experience his love clearly allows for the Spirit to have an active role in condemnation, but he never makes the connection within his writings. In order to undergird Grenz’s conclusions regarding the mutual-love theory and the love-wrath theory, an investigation will be made into each, with the intention at the end to synthesize the two ideas, as Grenz has done in his systematic work, but with the inclusion of the Spirit’s role in the synthesized scheme.

The Augustinian theory of the Spirit as the mutual-love of the Father and the Son is fairly well accepted in Western Christianity.<sup>3</sup> Since the Spirit can be distinctively called the love of the Trinity, it becomes necessary to relate the conclusion that God’s love and wrath are intimately connected, so much so that God’s wrath is often described as God’s spurned or rejected love. Wrath does not exist within the immanent Trinity, but comes into existence in relation to fallen humanity’s rejection of his love. If this love is the Spirit, then God’s wrath is intimately related to the Spirit.

In order to investigate the claim that God’s wrath is poured out on people by the Spirit, it will first be necessary to establish Augustine’s mutual-love theory. Once the theory is in place, then it will be necessary to move to Martin Luther’s understanding of the *opus proprium* and the *opus alienum* of God, or God’s proper and alien work.

After establishing Luther’s thesis and then connecting it with Augustine’s proposal, as Grenz has done, albeit not explicitly, in his systematic work, it will be possible to conclude that the Spirit is the person of the Trinity who actualizes God’s alien work to humanity, or to put it another way, the Spirit executes the judgment of the Son given to him by the Father upon those who refuse his offer of salvation.

---

<sup>2</sup>Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 95.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph Ratzinger, “The Holy Spirit as Communio: Concerning the Relationship of Pneumatology and Spirituality in Augustine,” *Communio* 25 (1998): 324-37; Grenz, “The Holy Spirit,” 1-13; Jenson, *The Triune God*, 146-61; Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:259-337; Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 37-40; David Coffey, “The Holy Spirit as the Mutual Love of the Father and the Son,” *Theological Studies* 51 (1990): 193-229.

### Mutual-Love Theory

Augustine begins his investigation of the Trinity by establishing the relationships between the persons of the Godhead. Within the Godhead, the only difference between each person is located in opposed relationships. The Father and the Son share the same essence with the only distinction being that the Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Father. The very names of Father and Son contain within them the opposed relationship. One can say that the Son is the Son of the Father, or oppositely that the Father is the Father of the Son. However, when one speaks of the Holy Spirit he cannot make the same maneuver as regards opposed relations. The Spirit of the Father cannot be reversed to say the Father of the Spirit. The Father is only the Father of the Son, not the Spirit. Additionally, one can say the Spirit of the Son, but cannot reverse the order to say the Son of the Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

Since the name "Holy Spirit" in itself does not contain an opposed relation, but in fact, is a combination of two attributes that are common to the Godhead, holiness and spirituality, Augustine argued that another term was needed to establish the opposition of the relationship that exists between the Father and the Spirit and the Son. While the name Holy Spirit is proper to the person of the Holy Spirit since he is the Spirit of both the Father and the Son, the name itself can also be applied to all the members of the Godhead since God is Spirit according to John 4:24. Just as all the members of the Godhead are omnipotent, wise, and good, all the members are both spirit and holy, but the third person of the Trinity has been distinctively given the name Holy Spirit. Augustine writes that the "Holy Spirit is a kind of inexpressible communion or fellowship of Father and Son, and perhaps he is given this name just because the same name can be applied to the Father and the Son."<sup>5</sup>

The first title for the Holy Spirit for which he argued was gift, seeing as both Acts 8:20 and John 4:10 describe the Spirit as a gift.<sup>6</sup> The Spirit

---

<sup>4</sup>Augustine *De Trinitate* 5.13.13-16.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 5.3.12

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 5.3.12-16. Coffey correctly notes that nowhere in the Bible is the Spirit directly called 'gift', nor does it ever state directly that Christ gives the Spirit. While John 4:7-15 and Eph 4:7-8 are used by Augustine to support his claim for the Spirit as gift, neither passage unequivocally makes this assertion, and even if one accepts Augustine's interpretation, neither passage has the 'gift' being given by both the Father and the Son, but the Father only. The idea of the Spirit as the gift of the Father and the Son is built upon the *filioque* doctrine. While this is acceptable, it needs to be made clear that the Spirit as the 'gift of the Father and the Son is founded upon the *filioque* primarily, and then upon

is the gift of the Father and the Son, in as much as the Spirit proceeds from both of them.<sup>7</sup> If the Holy Spirit is understood as the gift of the Father and the Son, the first step to an opposed relationship is completed. While the Spirit as the gift of the Father and the Son was Augustine's first move to establish the relationship of the Spirit to the Father and the Son, he also argued that the Spirit is the mutual-love of the Father and the Son.<sup>8</sup>

Basing his conclusion on 1 John 4: 8-16, in which John stated that God is love, he argued that while the whole Trinity is indeed love, the Holy Spirit is rightly called the love of the Trinity. The love of God is

---

certain Scriptures interpreted in its light. Coffey, "The Holy Spirit as the Mutual Love of the Father and the Son," 196-98.

<sup>7</sup> The mutual-love theory of Augustine encouraged the Western addition of the *filioque*, in that the Spirit must proceed from both the Father and the Son in order to be the mutual-love of both, at least within Augustine's pattern. Wolfhart Pannenberg adopts the mutual-love theory of Augustine but in the process revolutionizes some of the classical formulations of Trinitarian theology. He does not follow the traditional path that sees the Trinity established under the monarchy of the Father, with relations of origin being the only distinguishing factors within the Godhead. Instead, each person in the Trinity is constituted by a web of relationships with the other members. Pannenberg contends that procession and generation reduce the Spirit and the Son to passive roles, while Scripture presents a more complicated picture as the Father generates the Son, but then hands over authority to him. The Son sends the Spirit, but it is the Spirit that completes the work of the Son. The monarchy of the Father is "not the presupposition, but the result of the common operation of the three persons. It is thus the seal of their unity." From this perspective, Pannenberg introduces the idea that the Spirit functions in the Trinity in a manner similar to a force field in physics. A force field manifests its power in the relations of particular objects within the field, while remaining autonomous from the objects. The force field is the divine essence in which the Three participate, but a field is impersonal. Therefore, the Spirit is both a person in the Godhead and the force field that holds the Three together since both the essence of divinity and the person of the Holy Spirit are understood by Pannenberg as uniting love. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:317-84. While Pannenberg's innovative Trinitarian theology causes many problems, it is presented here, not as an endorsement of his position, but instead to show that even in the absence of an acceptance of the *filioque*, the idea of the Spirit as mutual love can still be supported. For a critique of Pannenberg's Trinitarian scheme see Anselm Kyongsuk Min, "The Dialectic of Divine Love: Pannenberg's Hegelian Trinitarianism," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 6 (2004): 252-69.

<sup>8</sup>"What is meant is that while in that supremely simple nature substance is not one thing and charity another, but substance is charity and charity is substance, whether in the Father or in the Son or in the Spirit, yet all the same the Holy Spirit is distinctively named charity." *Ibid.*, 15.5.29.

both the very nature of God and that which God gives to humanity. Love is both God and from God, but according to Augustine "the Father alone is God in such a way that he is not from God, and thus the love which is God in such a way that it is from God must be either the Son or the Holy Spirit."<sup>9</sup> 1 John 4:12 reveals that if believers love each other then God abides in them and his love is perfected or completed in them. His abiding is evidenced by the love that they show for each other. The reciprocity of love between believers is nothing other than the reciprocity of God himself between them.<sup>10</sup> In this way, believers are able to experience the fullness of God's communion with them. In v. 13, John revealed that believers can know God is abiding in them and they are abiding in God, in that he has given the believers his Holy Spirit. It is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the community, both individually and corporately, that was the sign and seal that they were abiding in God and that God's love was abiding in them. Since love is God's very nature, and the believers received confirmation of God's love abiding in them through the Spirit's abiding in them, Augustine concluded that the Spirit was the love of God indwelling and abiding within the believers and bringing their communion to completion.<sup>11</sup>

Additionally, Augustine employed Romans 5:5 as further evidence for the mutual-love theory. Paul was encouraging his readers to endure in the face of suffering and persecution because God was using the situation to produce hope in their lives. If they held on to this hope, they would not be put to shame because God's love had been poured into their hearts through the Holy Spirit.<sup>12</sup> He is the guarantee of the Father's promises to his people, and therefore, his presence in the believers' lives guaranteed the hope upon which they rested. It is in the Spirit that God's love is poured into the believers' hearts, but God's love is nothing other than the Spirit who is poured out on all flesh. God's love and Spirit function in the same capacity, to induce hope in the lives of believers and to solidify the hope produced. When God pours out his love, he pours out nothing other than his own self, and this is done through the Spirit in as much as he is the mutual-love of the Father and the Son.<sup>13</sup><sup>14</sup> The Spirit as the

---

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 15.5.31.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 15.5.31. "So it is God the Holy Spirit proceeding from God who fires man to the love of God and neighbor when he has been given to him, and he himself is love."

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 15.5.31.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 15.5.31.

<sup>13</sup> Although Douglas Moo does not comment upon the mutual-love theory in his commentary he does make the connection that Paul uses the same verb for 'poured out' to refer to God's love in Rom 5:5 and the Spirit in Titus 3:6. He then entertains the idea that the subject of Rom 5:5 might be the Holy Spirit

mutual-love of the Father and the Son is a well-established axiom within Trinitarian theology. The axiom does not seek to prove that the Father and the Son do not also love, but only to relate how the Spirit relates to the other two members of the Godhead in the immanent Trinity. As the Son proceeds from the Father by generation, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son by procession, he is the love that the Father and Son share together. In the economic Trinity it is in, by, and through the Holy Spirit that humanity is able to encounter and experience God's love. This statement holds true even if one rejects the mutual-love theory, as is attested by Romans 5:5. Having established that humanity experiences God's love in, by, and through the Spirit, it is possible to advance to the discussion of the relationship between God's love and wrath.

### **The Love-Wrath Theory**

A God without wrath, without displeasure at the corruption and bondage of his creation, is one without love for that same creation. It is because of his deep love for creation, and humanity in particular, that his wrath is aroused against the sin and rebellion that plagues it. God's wrath is not to be equated with human wrath, as if the two were identical. There is a similarity between the two so that one is able to use the same word for both, but one must also be aware of the infinite qualitative distinction between God's and humanity's wrath.

God's holiness and love working in conjunction call forth his wrath. If he were not holy, then humanity's rebellion would not offend him. He would have no problem with those who choose to disobey him, since he would not have a standard to which to hold humanity accountable. Secondly, if he did not love his creation, then sin would not arouse his

---

himself, but concludes that the love of God is the subject. However, God's love "is conveyed to our sensations by the Holy Spirit, who resides in every believer." Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 304-05. Even if, as Moo argues, the subject in the verse is God's love and not the Spirit, it is only in the Spirit that the love can be experienced by humanity, and therefore, the basic contention of the mutual-love theory in the economy is maintained.

<sup>14</sup>"The particularity of the Holy Spirit is evidently that he is what the Father and Son have in common. His particularity is being unity. The general name 'Holy Spirit' is the most appropriate way to express him in the paradox characteristic of him – mutuality itself." Ratzinger, "The Holy Spirit as *Communio*," 326.

wrath because he would be indifferent to what his creation did. However, God is holy and God is love.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, when his creation turns its back on him and attempts to find its good in some place other than him, his wrath is aroused against the offense. Sin is not the breaking of an impersonal law passed by a distant legislator, but is instead the rejection of God himself, and this rejection is none other than the rejection of all that is good and right. When a person seeks to find completion and wholeness outside of God, he is seeking for that which is only found in him. By his very nature, God reaches out in love to the world, to bring the world back into a proper relationship with him so that it can find its completion. This reaching out in love, however, does not overlook the reality that humanity has gone its own way, has turned its back on its Creator, and has therefore violated his holiness.

From the foregoing discussion of God's love and holiness, it would seem that God is trapped in a dilemma regarding humanity. His holiness will not allow people off the hook for their sin, but his love will not abandon them to the hook upon which they have impaled themselves. The answer to the dilemma is not found in deep philosophical speculation over his nature, but instead is found in the historical revelation of God on the cross.<sup>16</sup> It is on the cross that his wrath and love meet, with love breaking through wrath to reveal that wrath is not an immanent attribute of God, but is called forth in reaction to humanity's rebellion.<sup>17</sup> God is love, but he displays wrath. The tension between God's love and wrath has been dealt with in numerous ways, from the facile assumption that he has no wrath, through the universalistic assumption that although he has wrath, it has a purificatory effect upon

---

<sup>15</sup>Lev 11:45 and 1 John 4:8.

<sup>16</sup>Human reason cannot determine whether or not God is love or wrath. It is only in the revelation that God gives of himself that a correct interpretation of creation can be made. It is only by faith in Christ that a person can know that God's love overcomes his wrath. On the cross, God's wrath and love meet, but in the meeting, God's love prevails over his wrath and provides a means whereby fallen humanity can return home. The truth of the previous statement is not attainable by human reason, for to human reason, the cross is nothing other than wrath and defeat. If the cross speaks to fallen humanity at all, it can only declare the absence of God. It is only through the eyes of faith that one can see the objective reality of God's nature. It is only through the eyes of faith that a person understands the cross as both wrath and love. It is only through the eyes of faith that one sees how God's love breaks through his wrath to redeem his creation. Egil Grisliis, "Luther's Understanding of the Wrath of God," *Journal of Religion* 41 (1961): 284-86.

<sup>17</sup>Emil Brunner, *The Mediator: A Study of the Central Doctrine of the Christian Faith*, trans. Olive Wyon (London: Lutterworth Press, 1934), 515-35.

creation so that eventually wrath will cease as creation *in toto* returns to him, all the way to the more sophisticated, albeit equally as disastrous claim that his wrath is nothing more than the natural outworking of cause and effect in a moral universe.

The question remains how adequately to correlate God's love and wrath, how to explain that while God is love, he does, in reality, have wrath towards those elements within creation that stand in opposition to him. The path to reconciling his love and wrath will pass first through Martin Luther's assessment of the *opus proprium Dei* and the *opus alienum Dei*, and after explicating Luther's understanding between redemption and condemnation, the journey will quickly pass through a study of several modern theologians who have adopted Luther's axiom, often in modified form, to elucidate the relationship between love and wrath. Finally, the journey will end where it began, at Stanley Grenz, who will serve as the paradigm of those who equate God's love and wrath. From his equation of God's love-wrath and his acceptance of Augustine's mutual-love theory, it will be possible to say what Grenz has hinted at, but failed to say, about the relationship between the Holy Spirit and wrath.

Luther recognized the truth of the claim that sin strikes at the very person of God, because God is love and righteousness, and sin injures and insults righteousness.<sup>18</sup> Luther writes, "He (God) is not only justice but also love of justice; and whoever loves justice, receives it from Him. It would not be sin if it did not offend God."<sup>19</sup> Sin as an attack on God's very person necessitates a response in him that will not allow sin to stake a claim to legitimacy, since there is only one true God, and all others are mere idols. His jealousy to protect his status as God is not motivated from fear, but from love. To establish anything other than the one true God as God is to embrace the lesser over the greater. God is the greatest possible good for creation and when something lesser is chosen, God, in his love, must react in wrath against that choice. His wrath is "coextensive with his majesty; like God himself, it is eternal, omnipotent, and infinite."<sup>20</sup> Luther, however, did not understand God's

---

<sup>18</sup>For an overview of the various positions regarding Luther's understanding of God's wrath see Grislis, "Luther's Understanding of the Wrath of God," 277-88.

<sup>19</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. Jaroslav Pelikan (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), 14:316.

<sup>20</sup>Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 169. Althaus makes this claim from a statement of Luther's on Psalm 90. Luther is arguing that in evangelism, one must approach the hardened, smug sinner with the reality of God's wrath, but for the person who has already been terrified, who no longer imagines that there

wrath as an essential part of his nature, but instead argued that wrath is the subjective experience of the person who stands in opposition to him.<sup>21</sup> He contended that God's "compassion is more abundant because it is part of God's nature, since wrath is truly God's alien work, in which He engages contrary to His nature, because He is forced into it by the wickedness of man."<sup>22</sup> This is not to say that his wrath is not real, but it is to say that his wrath is not the final reality. There is a dialectic between wrath and grace, law and gospel, and the dividing line between the two is found in Christ. For those outside of Christ, God's wrath is a reality, but for those in Christ, his wrath is nothing other than his mercy, and his punishment is discipline, not condemnation.<sup>23</sup> In Christ, God has reconciled his wrath towards humanity; therefore, he is able both to justify sinners, and to remain just in the process.<sup>24</sup>

The transition from God's wrath to his love is not made through an intellectual enterprise, as if one need merely come to realize that God does not have any wrath at all, as if one needed only to think correctly about him, but is instead made through a radical commitment of trust.<sup>25</sup>

---

is a safe place to hid from God, one needs to show God's grace and love, to show that "God is not an enraged demon, but the true God Himself, who is Lord of all things." From the understanding of God as infinite, two things are learned, one is that his grace and love is infinite towards those who fear and love him, while at the same time his wrath is infinite towards those who remain in their smug rejection of God. "For the effect is always commensurate with the magnitude of the efficient cause." Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. Paul M. Bretscher (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 13:93.

<sup>21</sup>"For faith leads you up and opens up the heart and will of God for you. There you see sheer, superabundant grace and love. . . Anyone who regards Him as angry is not seeing Him correctly, but has pulled down a curtain and cover, more, a dark cloud over his face. But in Scriptural language 'to see His face' means to recognize Him correctly as a gracious and faithful Father." Luther, *Luther's Works*, 13:37.

<sup>22</sup>Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. George V. Schick, (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1960), 2:134.

<sup>23</sup>Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 171.

<sup>24</sup>Rom 3:26.

<sup>25</sup>The fatal flaw of the Moral Influence Theory of the Atonement, and all such theories, is that it understands God's wrath as only a misunderstanding of God on humanity's part, with no objective basis for the reality in God. According to proponents of the Moral Influence Theory, what humanity needs is not to be reconciled, but re-educated. There is no retributive need in God, either in his own nature or his law, which requires some form of sacrifice or propitiation to be made in order for him to forgive humanity. God is already reconciled with humanity through his love. What is needed is a means whereby humanity can be enlightened, educated, or persuaded of the love of God. Samuel

the wrath of God is only removed in Christ, and entry into the sphere of Christ's existence, into the body of Christ, is only gained by faith in Christ. This is a faith that encounters God's wrath, breaks through that wrath by Christ's absorption and defeat of it in the cross and resurrection, and subsequently stands in God's presence recognizing that he is indeed love, not wrath, in his essential being.

Numerous theologians from a wide spectrum of belief have understood God's love and wrath as the other side of the same coin. In order to make the coin analogy work concerning the nature of God, however, one needs to be clear that in the immanent Trinity there is only one side of the coin and that is love, while in the economic Trinity the one-sided coin of love is manifested as two-sided due to sin. It might be helpful to highlight a selection of theologians who have adopted the postulate that God's wrath is the obverse of his love. Of course, not all the theologians mentioned use the idea with the same meaning, and thus, it will be necessary to clarify their presuppositions to understand fully what is meant by the relationship between love and wrath. The question hinges upon how the person understands the nature of wrath, is it an objective aspect of God, or is it only a subjective experience of the person? As already demonstrated, Brunner adopts Luther's postulate about the love and wrath of God when he states, "God is present in this anger, it is actually *His* anger. For God is not mocked. That something has been interposed between God and man objectively, not merely subjectively in the consciousness of man, is thus not a pagan idea, but it is the view of the Christian Bible itself."<sup>26</sup> Brunner is clear that God's wrath objectively encounters humanity. R. P. C. Hanson writes that "wrath is the converse, the under side, of God's love. It accompanies love, as darkness accompanies light, if you reject light you must have darkness."<sup>27</sup> In contradiction to Brunner, however, Hanson argues that "wrath is carefully treated as something ordained and controlled by God indeed, but distinct from him."<sup>28</sup> God's wrath is not an objective reality imposed between himself and humanity, but instead is the absence of the experience of God's love. J. W. Wenham describes

---

Wyatt Driggers, "Development of the Moral Influence of the Atonement" (Ph. D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1934), 20-32. This is not what Luther was declaring, but instead that wrath is an objective reality for the person under it. Wrath, however, is not the final reality. The final reality is that God is love. For the person who refuses to accept this truth about God, on God's terms, not the person's, then God's love is experienced as wrath and condemnation, God's *opus alienum*.

<sup>26</sup>Brunner, *The Mediator*, 518.

<sup>27</sup>Hanson, *God*, 47.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 46.

God's wrath as "the obverse of the love of God, it is love rejected."<sup>29</sup> James Stewart declares, "God's wrath is God's grace. It is his grace smitten with dreadful sorrow. It is His love in agony."<sup>30</sup> According to J. Arthur Baird, "wrath is the antithesis of love. It is God's reaction to man's rebellion against his sovereignty. It is a broken fellowship. It is God's confirmation of a man's self-rejection. In effect, God's wrath is his rejected grace. As such, it is an indivisible part of his love."<sup>31</sup>

As already demonstrated, another theologian who adopts Luther's distinction is Stanley Grenz. He maintains that love is the very essence of God. He is love apart from creation, and therefore, "God is love is the foundational ontological statement we can declare concerning the divine essence. God is foundationally the mutuality of the love relationship between the Father and the Son, and this personal love is the Holy Spirit."<sup>32</sup>

True love will jealously defend the love relationship in which it exists. Thus, a husband is rightly jealous that his wife belongs to no other man. Love will not allow outside intruders into the relationship. From this assertion, one can understand that God is a "jealous, wrathful God. Those who would undermine the love God pours forth for the world experience his love in the form of wrath." From another angle, Grenz suggests that when people choose to reject the good and refuse to

---

<sup>29</sup>John William Wenham, *The Goodness of God* (London: InterVarsity Press, 1974), 69. While Wenham is not clear on the issue, it appears that he holds to the objective nature of God's wrath.

<sup>30</sup>Stewart, *A Man in Christ*, 221. Stewart's conception of wrath does not match Brunner's. For Stewart, God's wrath is nothing more than humanity's self-punishment for not accepting the good. This is similar in conception to C. H. Dodd's thesis that wrath is simply the natural outworking of sin in a moral universe. God is not directly involved in the result.

<sup>31</sup>Baird, *The Justice of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, 72. Baird makes reference to Stewart's conception of wrath as God's love in agony, but Baird does not hold to the distinction between God and wrath that Stewart maintains.

<sup>32</sup>Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 93. While Grenz does not depreciate the holiness of God, he rejects the move of a theologian such as James Leo Garrett who elevates the holiness of God to the position of being a fundamental attribute on par with God's love. He argues that the intention of elevating God's holiness is to justify God's prerogative in condemning people to hell. God must be holy in order to accommodate the biblical evidence for condemnation. Grenz believes, however, that holiness, by its nature, is contained within the concept of love. Ultimately, the debate is academic, as both arguments arrive at the same location in relation to God's love and wrath. Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 2:239-46; Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 94.

become that for which God intended them, “they remain the recipients of God’s love, but experience that love in the form of wrath.”<sup>33</sup> From this, Grenz concludes that hell is nothing other than the eternal experience of the rejection of God’s love.

### **A Synthesis of the Two Theories**

It is now possible to combine the mutual-love and the love-wrath theories in order to explicate the Spirit’s relationship to God’s wrath. From the outset, it needs to be maintained that God’s wrath is not the same thing as the final judgment. Paul clearly shows in Ephesians 2:3 that believers were at one time children of wrath. God’s wrath stands in opposition to all that is opposed to him, and while this wrath has an eschatological perspective, in that all temporality gains its bearing from the eschaton, it is not solely an eschatological phenomenon. God’s wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness. The reason for making this distinction becomes clear when one examines the issue of soteriology.

It is in the salvation event that a person passes from under God’s wrath and comes into the final reality that is his love. If the Spirit is indeed the mutual-love of the Father and the Son, and God’s wrath is the reverse side of his love, then in truth, when a person is transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light, when a person is saved, he moves from under God’s wrath as experienced through the Holy Spirit into his love as experienced through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit does not change in the transfer, but the person’s relationship to God as

---

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 95. William Crockett argues that God does not love those who are in hell. His article is not directly related to the issue of God’s love, but is arguing that Paul was a Particularist, not a Universalist. Part of his argument rests upon the postulate that at some point God must stop loving a person in order for that person to remain in hell. It would seem that his conclusion is that God’s love is reformatory, and if God did not remove his love then the person would of necessity have to be released from hell. Of course, this raises the problem as to whether God ever loved the person. If God loved the person for a time, was his love not reformatory in that instance? Additionally, Crockett defines God’s love as his “merciful acts in history.” Love is action, not feelings. Once again, Crockett fails to answer the question about God’s love for the individual before death. If God loves a person before death, but does nothing to save the person, where is the action on God’s part? While Crockett is correct that Paul was a Particularist, the reason is not that God ceases to love those in hell, but because those in hell have never responded to God’s love. William V. Crockett, "Wrath That Endures Forever," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34 (1991): 195-202.

experienced by him in the Spirit is changed. Furthermore, it is in the Spirit's power that a person is able to accept Christ's work on the cross as the payment for his own sin. When a person accepts Christ's bearing of God's wrath on the cross he is transformed into a new creation, life springs into existence from death. This coming to life, this recognizing of God's love behind, beneath, and within his wrath, is accomplished by the very Spirit under whom the person experiences both the wrath, which is truly God's wrath, but not his final reality; and the love, which is truly God's love, and is indeed the final reality of God. God is love, but has wrath towards sinful humanity. The Spirit is love, but has wrath towards sinful humanity, in as much as sinful humanity remains in its sin.

"God is an eternal lover," and as such, God loves his creation eternally.<sup>34</sup> Those who reject that love relationship experience the "dark side" of God's love.<sup>35</sup> While Grenz gets this part of the equation correct, he fails to follow through on his own implications and ascribe the "dark side" of God's love to the bright side of his love. Both are experiences of the Spirit, who is the unifying love of God. Nevertheless, even if someone were to reject the mutual-love theory of Augustine, he would not by that move remove the Spirit from participating in judgment, for Romans 5:5 states that the love of God is poured into people's hearts through the Holy Spirit. According to this verse, the Spirit is the person in whom people experience the love of the entire Godhead. Conversely, if God's wrath is the flipside of his love, then the flipside it would stand to reason is experienced in the Holy Spirit as well.

Stanley Grenz serves as a perfect representative of the church's unwillingness to ascribe the judgmental aspects of God's nature to the Spirit. Grenz makes all the connections in his systematic work that are necessary to show that the Spirit is the channel for both God's love and wrath, but only follows through on explicitly stating that the Spirit is his love. Either he refuses to declare the Spirit as God's wrath, or it never occurred to him to connect the dots he established. Either way, the Spirit's role in judgment is more clearly elucidated when one is able to see the unified nature of both the immanent Trinity's love as manifested and bonded in the Spirit and of God's love and wrath as it is encountered by both the redeemed and unredeemed. In the combination of the mutual-love theory and the love-wrath theory one is able to more clearly see the role of the Holy Spirit in judgment.

---

<sup>34</sup>Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 836.

<sup>35</sup>"God's love has a dark side. Those who spurn or seek to destroy the holy love relationship God desires to enjoy with creation experience the divine love as protective jealousy or wrath. Because God is eternal, our experience of God's love – whether as fellowship or as wrath – is also eternal." Ibid.