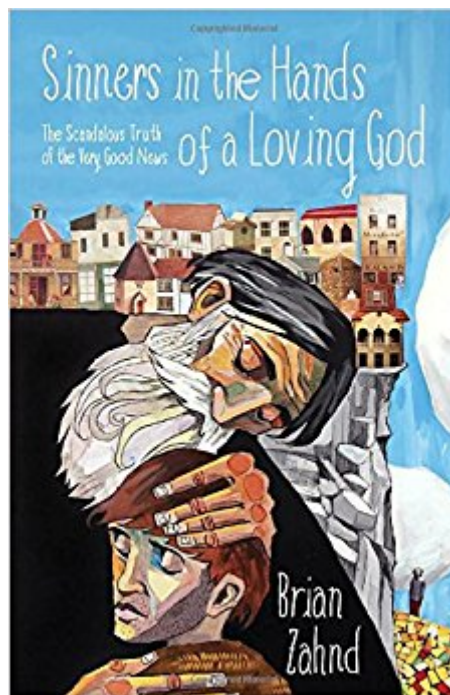




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Sinners In The Hands Of A Loving God: The Scandalous Truth Of The Very Good News



Synopsis

God is wrath? Or God is Love? In his famous sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” Puritan revivalist Jonathan Edwards shaped predominating American theology with a vision of God as angry, violent, and retributive. Three centuries later, Brian Zahnd was both mesmerized and terrified by Edwards’s wrathful God. Haunted by fear that crippled his relationship with God, Zahnd spent years praying for a divine experience of hell. What Zahnd experienced instead was the Father’s love revealed perfectly through Jesus Christ for all prodigal sons and daughters. In *Sinners in the Hands of a Loving God*, Zahnd asks important questions like: Is seeing God primarily as wrathful towards sinners true or biblical? Is fearing God a normal expected behavior? And where might the natural implications of this theological framework lead us? Thoughtfully wrestling with subjects like Old Testament genocide, the crucifixion of Jesus, eternal punishment in hell, and the final judgment in Revelation, Zahnd maintains that the summit of divine revelation for sinners is not God is wrath, but God is love.

Book Information

Paperback: 224 pages

Publisher: WaterBrook (August 15, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1601429517

ISBN-13: 978-1601429513

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.7 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 6.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars 28 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #2,687 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #3 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Theology > Christology #21 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Religious Studies > Theology #51 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Living > Spiritual Growth

Customer Reviews

“With the heart of a pastor and the skill of a poet, Brian Zahnd cuts through all the fear and fundamentalism to reveal a gospel that is indeed good news. *Sinners in the Hands of a Loving God* is a beautifully written, pointed, and prophetic tribute to the love of God as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. As Zahnd shows us, this love is not weak; it’s not a safe, feel-good cop-out. Rather, it’s the very revelation of God, the force that changes the world.”
—Rachel Held Evans, author of *Searching for Sunday* “The same attributes that make

Brian Zahnd a great pastor make him a gifted author: he's honest, humble, willing to change his mind, and unfailingly centered on Christ. For him to reconsider his view of God took study and prayer, and we benefit. Sinners in the Hands of a Loving God will be an extraordinary gift to many, for it clearly and compellingly teaches God's love. This is the book that the evangelical church needs.

• Tony Jones, author of *Did God Kill Jesus?*

"Brian Zahnd walks boldly into the violent propensity of so much Christian theology and preaching that has wounded so many people, a propensity in which he himself has participated. He not only shows what bad, irresponsible theology this is, pervasive as it continues to be; he exposes the hackneyed trope of dispensationalism that feeds so much worldly violence and that authorizes so much wounding. But more than that, in his poetic mode, Zahnd invites to an alternative that is grounded not in Biblicism but in the reality of Jesus who embodies the inexplicable love of God that passes all human understanding. Zahnd writes as one emancipated to evangelical joy. He invites his readers to walk with him into such a God-given vocation that honors the God of love and that loves the neighbor."

• Walter Brueggemann, Columbia Theological Seminary

"I know we're a bit too quick to say things like 'This will change your life!' these days, but seriously: this book will change your life. For too long, too many of us have wondered if God is angry or disappointed or frustrated or disgusted with us: you don't need to wonder anymore. Brian's new book is one of the most beautiful, truthful, and compelling visions of God as revealed by Jesus I have ever read. I can't shut up about this glorious, necessary, healing book: it is a must-read for every Christian."

• Sarah Bessey, author of *Jesus Feminist* and *Out of Sorts: Making Peace with an Evolving Faith*

"I can't count the times I felt like standing and cheering while reading this book. Brian Zahnd knows his material extremely well. He speaks from a blend of study and experience, with the authority of a theologian, the care of a shepherd, and the inspiring beauty of a poet. From Genesis to Revelation, Brian helps us identify, expose, and oppose the weaponization of Scripture and instead embrace Jesus as the Bible's central theme and God's ultimate self-disclosure. If you read one book about Jesus this year, buy mine. But if you read two, this one will do just nicely."

• Bruxy Cavey, teaching pastor at the Meeting House, and author of *The End of Religion and (re)union: the Good News of Jesus for Seekers, Saints, and Sinners*

"With too many American Christian leaders echoing the angry, arrogant, vindictive, and violent rhetoric of our political culture, it's hard to imagine a book more relevant and needed than Brian Zahnd's *Sinners in the Hands of a Loving God*. Zahnd rightly helps us see that for better or

worse, we reflect the image of the God we believe in. Zahnd's insights into Scripture are rich and deep, making clear that if we want a less violent future, we need a vision of a nonviolent God. • Brian D. McLaren, author of *The Great Spiritual Migration* "I have come to love Brian Zahnd and his writings. They are deep, reflective, authentic, and inspiring. *Sinners in the Hands of a Loving God* is a brilliant and important book that every Christian should read. If you've ever struggled with the violence attributed to God in Scripture, or the angry and vengeful images of God sometimes taught in Christian circles, this book will speak to you. • Adam Hamilton, pastor and author of *Making Sense of the Bible* "Without overstatement, I believe we are living in the midst of a seismic, apocalyptic shift in how we understand the character of God. There is a widescreen revelation of God's heart unfolding, shaking the very foundations of the Church. This revelation of the tenderness of God is so vast and pervasive that all kinds of former assumptions must be called into question •demanding that violent contexts of terror, in Phyllis Trible's phrase, be revisited. Brian Zahnd is the most lucid, crisp, prophetic articulator of this revelation/revolution, and *Sinners in the Hands of a Loving God* is him at his incisive best. It is masterfully written, illuminating both the Jesus of Scripture and the violence of the world that rejected him. At the intersection of John the Baptist and Bob Dylan, Brian Zahnd prepares the way for us to behold and see that the God we heard was a lion, was actually a lamb all along. This is startling, revelatory reading. • Jonathan Martin, author of *How to Survive a Shipwreck and Prototype*

Brian Zahnd founded Word of Life Church in St. Joseph, Missouri over 35 years ago, and he still serves as lead pastor to a congregation committed to authentic expression of Jesus Christ in the twenty-first century. He's also the author of *Water to Wine*, *A Farewell to Mars*, *Beauty Will Save the World*, *Unconditional?*, and *What to Do on the Worst Day of Your Life*. @BrianZahnd

Excellent!

It is difficult to read a theologically dense book that is at the same time very readable. In *Sinners in the Hands of a Loving God* we find beautiful theology that is incredibly readable. I have to be honest, I'm a huge Brian Zahnd fan. Last year as I was going through a time of rethinking my faith I read *Water to Wine*. The book was just what I needed. While *Sinners in the*

Hands of a Loving God

did not have the same shock factor as “Water to Wine” just because I’ve read most of Brian’s blogs, this book depicts the good news of the Gospel. In SITHOALG, Zahnd expresses that if we truly want to know what God is like, we must find our answer in Jesus. Zahnd beautifully articulates how the old notions of God as violent and sending his son to be killed to satisfy his wrath, is not what we find in the Gospels. God is like Jesus. Period. While many have depicted Zahnd as being a Marcionite, Zahnd expresses that he has very high view of the Old Testament. According to Zahnd, the Old Testament points people to the Word of God – Jesus. My favorite chapter of the book is the chapter on hell. I’m not going to say much on this review because I think you should buy the book. But I’ll just say that for anyone struggling with what they think about hell, this chapter will talk about how Jesus viewed hell. It is my favorite chapter. I’d recommend this book just for that chapter. Criticisms, you may ask? Maybe I would have worded some things differently especially when he was talking about Penal Substitution Atonement (I think N.T Wright’s view of PSA doesn’t disregard the whole theory while still dispels the notion that God was angry at Jesus or humanity). But I want to be clear – this book is a beautiful, biblical, and amazing work of Christian theology. For anyone struggling with their faith or just wanting to know more about Christianity in general, this book is for you.

I can relate to the probing questions Brian asks and attempts to answer in this wonderful book that I couldn’t put down. I am a Pastor of about the same age and with similar experiences. I shed tears as the heartache of the issues he faces also touched my heart. Certainly some given to defending a certain sort of orthodoxy might take offense at Brian’s answers. But his best answer is Jesus. Jesus reveals the truth about God and His love and should be listened to - not on equal footing with the Law and Prophets - but as the One who reveals God in purest light while the others contain shadows. Thank you Brian. I am uplifted, recharged and feel like pressing on to know the God of Love better in my own life and share Him in my ministry. A book I will read over and over again.

Honestly, Sinners in the Hands of a Loving God is one of the most eye-opening and challenging books about faith I have ever read. I grew up in the Bible Belt and I had know how much toxic and dangerous theology I had inherited from my local church environment. And those unhealthy preconceptions about God have manifested themselves in arrogant and judgmental behaviors

throughout my faith journey. Brian Zahnd's premise is as devastatingly simple as it is hopeful - Jesus is the perfect embodiment of God, and thus Jesus' life, death is the "perfect theology" we should strive to echo in our own lives. Along the way, Zahnd dismantles unhealthy views of the Bible ("A Christian can't cite Moses to silence Jesus."), the violence in the Old Testament, the victory of the cross, and the reasons we miss the point of the Book of Revelation (fans of Left Behind will be sorely disappointed by this last section). Zahnd excels at revealing how an overemphasis on various atonement theories within the American church has created a bloodthirsty God that can only be satisfied through the ritualistic sacrifice of his only Son - a view of God that's more pagan than Christian. Zahnd says "Jesus did not shed his blood to pay off God in the form of a ritual sacrifice. That's not what God wanted. Jesus shed his blood in faithful obedience to his Father's will, demonstrating divine forgiveness even as he was crucified!" It's amazing how such a seemingly subtle shift in our understanding of the cross can change everything. Prior to reading this book I had unknowingly carried around the toxic idea that God initially hated me, and it wasn't until He killed his Son that he found the capacity to love me. *Sinners in the Hands of the Loving God* dissolves this view of God, and instead challenges me to see God Himself on the cross forgiving humanity even as we murder Him. Do I agree with all of Zahnd's conclusions? Of course not (and what's the fun of reading a book about God that you know you're already going to 100% agree with?). But *Sinners in the Hands of a Loving God* revealed to me an entire new way of thinking about God and experiencing His presence - a way paved with love and mystery, not violence and shame. This is an extremely accessible book (and, at 200 pages, short), but I wouldn't recommend it to newcomers of the faith. Zahnd presumes the reader has grown up within or at least had experience within the Southern evangelical faith community, and an uninitiated reader may become a little lost with his cultural references to modern evangelical culture. Overall, if you've ever struggled with reconciling the angry God of the OT with the love of Jesus, or why the cross is such Good News if it involves so much spilt blood, then this is the book of for you. I'm sure students from certain seminaries can pick this book apart with a systematic theology cribbed from Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards, but they can keep their angry God. I'm sticking with Jesus.

Pastor Brian Zahnd may be the most well read and scholarly Pastor I have known. Yes, my experience is limited, but I have been around the church now for almost 40 years. That said, his writings are accessible and pastoral. *'Sinners in the Hands of the Loving God'* will make you rethink everything pertaining to your relationship with God. I'm absolutely fascinated by and in love with the God that is portrayed in these pages. I give my full endorsement to this important project and pray

that its impact will reach far and wide.

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