

THE WRATH OF GOD

THE NEED TO KNOW GOD'S WRATH

- Today there are many people, even within the church, who would prefer not to think about the wrath of God
- Most people have an aversion to seeing God as a God of wrath, viewing it as a contradiction to his love
- In an age when the love of God is emphasized over most other perfections, few want to think of God's hatred against sin...they find divine vengeance distasteful
- "It is sad indeed to find so many professing Christians who appear to regard the wrath of God as something for which they need to make an apology, or who at least wish there were no such thing. While some would not go so far as to openly admit that they consider it a blemish on the Divine character, yet they are far from regarding it with delight; they like not to think about it, and they rarely hear it mentioned without a secret resentment rising up in their hearts against it. Even with those who are more sober in their judgment, not a few seem to imagine that there is a severity about that Divine wrath that makes it too terrifying to form a theme for profitable contemplation. Others harbor the delusion that God's wrath is not consistent with His goodness, and so seek to banish it from their thoughts."¹
- But until the wrath of God is understood and fully embraced, the greatness and sweetness of God's love and mercy cannot be fully appreciated
- The wrath of God is the black velvet backdrop against which the depth of God's love is most brilliantly seen
- Only when we understand that he judges our sin can we appreciate his glorious grace for what it is
- The darkness of God's wrath showcases the unmerited mercy which God has lavished on us
- If we fail to comprehend the dark background of his wrath, then the brilliance of his amazing love fades
- Thus, the good news of God's love is not properly understood until we know the bad news of his wrath

- It is for this reason that Jonathan Edwards so focused on God's wrath in his famous sermon *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*
 - "Your wickedness makes you as it were heavy as lead, and to tend downwards with great weight and pressure towards hell; and, if God should let you go, you would immediately sink, and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf; and your healthy constitution, and your own care and prudence, and best contrivance, and all your righteousness, would have no more influence to uphold you and keep you out of hell, than a spider's web would have to stop a falling rock. Were it not that so is the sovereign pleasure of God, the earth would not bear you one moment; for you are a burden to it...The sovereign pleasure of God for the present stays his rough wind; otherwise it would come with fury, and your destruction would come like a whirlwind, and you would be like the chaff of the summer threshing-floor."
 - "The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider or loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked; his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else but to cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times so abominable in his eyes as the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. You have offended him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince; and yet 'tis nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment."

THE EXPLANATION OF GOD'S WRATH

- The Bible in no way attempts to hide the severity of God's fierce anger against sin
- From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible presents a clear and consistent picture of a holy God who is angry with sin everyday
- This is a necessary corollary to his love...God's love necessitates his wrath since the God who loves righteousness must equally hate every form of evil wherever it is found

¹ A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, 82.

- A failure to hate what is contrary to his nature would make God's love mere sentimentality
- The God who loves all that is good and pure and holy also hates all that is evil and defiled and perverse
- In order for God to be perfect love, He must also be characterized by hate...because perfect love demands hate...to not hate what is the opposite of love is to not truly love
- The God who loves what blesses his people must hate what harms them
- He cannot be indifferent toward the sin which violates his holiness
- He cannot stand by and condone that which contradicts his moral purity
- He must hate sin...he must judge sinners...otherwise, he would cease to be holy
- God's kindness and severity must be seen together if either one is going to be properly understood and appreciated
- God is perfect in love and perfect in wrath...and a weakening of one will always dilute the other

Psalm 45:7 ~ You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of joy above Your fellows.

Romans 11:22 ~ Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.

Ephesians 2:1-5 ~ And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. 3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)

- What is God's wrath? → "Simply put, God's wrath is His absolute detestation of all sin and His rightful judgment of it wherever it is found. It is the necessary response of His fierce anger against all that is contrary to His holy nature. It is His expressed displeasure and righteous indignation against all evil. It is the holiness of God stirred into action against sin."²
- God is angry against sin because it is a violation of his moral will and divine sovereignty
- God cannot be neutral toward sin...his wrath is an expression of his holiness
- Divine wrath is righteous antagonism toward all that is unholy
- He must hate sin and he must punish sinners otherwise he would cease to be holy
- His holiness requires that He respond to sin with wrath and anger and justice
- If God did not have wrath against sin, then he would not be a holy God
- It is perfectly appropriate and necessary for a holy and righteous God to be moved to anger against evil
- "Would a God who took as much pleasure in evil as He did in good be a good God? Would a God who did not react adversely to evil in His world be morally perfect? Surely not. But it is precisely this adverse reaction to evil, which is a necessary part of moral perfection, that the Bible has in view when it speaks of God's wrath."³
- It is important to understand that, whereas our hate is motivated by sinful anger and selfish responses, God's hatred is motivated by His perfect holiness
- Human anger is a reflection of the evil heart of man...even when we are angry about the right things, we usually engage in sinful anger in some way
- That's why we must not read our concept of anger onto God...he never flies off the handle
- God's anger is not a vindictive or malicious retaliation whereby he inflicts injury in return for injury received...it is not a blind rage a celestial bad temper
- Rather, it is driven by his desire to protect those whom he loves from that which harms them
- And it is pure and untainted by sin...because it is related to his holiness which demand that he cannot tolerate sin

² Steven Lawson, *Made in Our Image*, 111.

³ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 136-137.

- “God never makes a mistake in exercising His wrath. He doesn’t fly off the handle in a momentary fury. When He is angry, it is the right expression of His holiness and justice.”⁴
- The word that is almost always used to refer to God’s wrath in the NT is *orge*
- The Greek NT only has 2 main words for “wrath”
 1. *thumos* – refers to a boiling fury...a sudden outburst of sinful anger which blazes up quickly...usually short lived...it refers to an impulsive, passionate rage
 2. *orge* – refers to a deep seated, settled anger...an anger that smolders beneath the surface...less explosive...less violent...but much longer lasting...something that has been building over a long period of time...something that is settled and controlled
- *orge* carries the idea of not a sudden flaring up of anger that is soon over, but rather a strong and settled indignation that lingers over time
- God’s wrath is a strong and settled opposition to all that is evil
- Scripture is full of statements about God’s wrath...in fact, there are more references in Scripture to the anger, fury, and wrath of God than there are to his love and tenderness

Deuteronomy 32:39-41 ~ See now that I, I am He, And there is no god besides Me; It is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded and it is I who heal, And there is no one who can deliver from My hand. 40 Indeed, I lift up My hand to heaven, And say, as I live forever, 41 If I sharpen My flashing sword, And My hand takes hold on justice, I will render vengeance on My adversaries, And I will repay those who hate Me.

Psalms 2:4-5 ~ He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them. 5 Then He will speak to them in His anger And terrify them in His fury.

Psalms 7:11 ~ God is a righteous judge, And a God who has indignation every day.

Isaiah 13:9 ~ Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, Cruel, with fury and burning anger, To make the land a desolation; And He will exterminate its sinners from it.

Jeremiah 7:20 ~ Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, My anger and My wrath will be poured out on this place, on man and on beast and on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground; and it will burn and not be quenched.”

Nahum 1:2-3, 6 ~ A jealous and avenging God is the LORD; The LORD is avenging and wrathful. The LORD takes vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies. 3 The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, And the LORD will by no means leave the guilty unpunished...6 Who can stand before His indignation? Who can endure the burning of His anger? His wrath is poured out like fire And the rocks are broken up by Him.

Zephaniah 1:14-15 ~ Near is the great day of the LORD, Near and coming very quickly; Listen, the day of the LORD! In it the warrior cries out bitterly. 15 A day of wrath is that day, A day of trouble and distress, A day of destruction and desolation, A day of darkness and gloom, A day of clouds and thick darkness

Matthew 3:12 ~ His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Romans 2:5 ~ But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 ~ the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, 8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power

Revelation 19:15 ~ From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.

⁴ John MacArthur, *God: Coming Face to Face with His Majesty*, 90.

- The Bible never apologizes for God’s wrath...it never hides the severity of his fierce anger against sin
- Wrath is a consistent theme in the Bible and a defining characteristic of the God we meet in its pages
- That’s why we need to explain the phrase “God hates the sin, but loves the sinner”
- On the one hand, it is true that God loves the sinner...he creates people in his image...in his likeness
- On the other hand, Scripture repeatedly states that God abhors the wicked and hates the sinner

Leviticus 26:15, 30 ~ if, instead, you reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances so as not to carry out all My commandments, and so break My covenant...30 I then will destroy your high places, and cut down your incense altars, and heap your remains on the remains of your idols, **for My soul shall abhor you.**

Psalm 5:5-6 ~ The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes; **You hate all who do iniquity.** 6 You destroy those who speak falsehood; **The LORD abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit.**

Psalm 11:5 ~ The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked, And **the one who loves violence His soul hates.**

- God abhors the wicked...his wrath rests on both the sin and the sinner

THE NATURE OF GOD’S WRATH

Abiding Wrath

- God’s wrath is a present reality in that it is abiding on the heads of sinners...only his mercy holds it back

John 3:36 ~ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on Him

Romans 1:18 ~ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

- The verb “is revealed” is in the present tense indicating that it is a continual, ongoing, present reality for those without Christ...unregenerate sinners presently experience God’s wrath and abide under it
- It is not just that God will one day condemn sinners for unbelief...it is that they are already in a state of condemnation
- Those who persist in unbelief are already under God’s judgment in that they stand condemned
- “Whoever lacks grace is like someone who lacks pardon; every hour he is in fear of execution. How can a wicked man rejoice? Over his head hangs the sword of God’s justice and under him hell fire burns.”⁵

Cataclysmic Wrath

- There are individual times in human history when God brings severe judgment on the human race in the form of a natural disaster
 - The Flood (Gen 6-7)
 - The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18-19)
 - The plagues on the Egyptians and the destruction of Pharaoh’s army (Ex 7-11, 14)
 - The consuming of Nadab and Abihu by fire (Lev 10)
 - The swallowing Korah and his family in the ground because of rebellion against Moses (Num 16)
- These are all expressions of God’s catastrophic wrath
- The righteous anger of God always burns with indignation against sin
- God must punish sin if He is to be the righteous Judge of heaven and earth!

⁵ Thomas Watson

Consequential Wrath

- God's wrath is revealed in the principle of sowing and reaping

Job 4:8 ~ According to what I have seen, those who plow iniquity And those who sow trouble harvest it.

Proverbs 1:31-32 ~ So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way And be satiated with their own devices. 32 For the waywardness of the naive will kill them, And the complacency of fools will destroy them.

Hosea 8:7 ~ For they sow the wind And they reap the whirlwind. The standing grain has no heads; It yields no grain. Should it yield, strangers would swallow it up.

Galatians 6:7 ~ Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.

- Sinful actions will be met with God's wrath in the form of consequences

Abandonment Wrath

- This demonstration of God's wrath occurs when God forsakes the person who repeatedly forsakes Him
- It expresses itself when the sinner, after repeatedly rejecting the knowledge of God and the gospel of Christ, is abandoned by God and turned over to the pursuit of their own sins
- This is when God removes all restraints against sin in the life of an unbeliever and turns him over to his own sinful desires...God allows him to go his own rebellious way
- When that happens, a person ends up spiraling into a black hole of sin and they experience the full consequences of their sinful choices

Psalm 81:11-12 ~ But My people did not listen to My voice, And Israel did not obey Me. 12 So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart, To walk in their own devices.

Proverbs 1:24-31 ~ Because I called and you refused, I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention; 25 And you neglected all my counsel And did not want my reproof; 26 I will also laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your dread comes, 27 When your dread comes like a storm And your calamity comes like a whirlwind, When distress and anguish come upon you. 28 Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently but they will not find me, 29 Because they hated knowledge And did not choose the fear of the Lord. 30 They would not accept my counsel, They spurned all my reproof. 31 So they shall eat of the fruit of their own way And be satiated with their own devices

Romans 1:24-32

- In the wrath of abandonment, God engages in a process of judicial hardening and withdrawal of restraints whereby people are given up to their own corrupt preferences
- God lets sinners go and leaves them to their own devices to experience the penalty of their sin
- A person who rejects God and his grace through Christ inevitably will experience a life of misery
- In short, God abandons those who abandon him

Eschatological Wrath

- This is God's wrath that will be poured out in the last days...the wrath surrounding the final hour of human history immediately preceding the return of God's Son
- Literally, all hell will break loose on the earth
- During the Tribulation, God's judgment will be unleashed on the earth
 - The seal judgments (Rev 6) – Antichrist comes, wars, famines, death, martyrdom, disturbances in the sky
 - The trumpet judgments (Rev 8-9) – God will strike the earth, seas, rivers, springs, sun, moon

- The bowl judgments (Rev 16) – sores will afflict people, rivers turn to blood, sun will scorch the earth, darkness will cover the earth, giant hailstones will pelt the earth, cities will collapse, islands will sink into the sea
- All this will climax at the battle of Armageddon when Christ returns and destroys all His enemies...the destruction of human life will be so great that a river of blood will flow as high as a horse's bridle (Rev 19)

Eternal Wrath

- God's eternal wrath is reserved for all those who reject Christ and who will be cast into everlasting hell

Hell is a Place of Wrath

Revelation 14:9-10 ~ Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger"

- There is an interesting relationship between the two words "wrath" and "anger"
- Wrath (*thumos*) means "a vehement fury, hot anger, fierce outbursts of wrath, more sudden in its rise, but which does not last as long"
- Anger (*orge*) means "a settled indignation, settled anger, less sudden in its rise, but more lasting in its nature"
- When used together, these words intensify the reality of God's anger
- The angel says that this wrath and anger will be in the form of "wine" and drank from a "cup"
- To "drink from the cup of God's wrath" is an OT way of picturing the awfulness of future judgment (Ps 75:8; Is 51:17; Jer 25:15-17)
- The "wine of wrath" is a symbol of divine judgment
- Rev 14:10 indicates that this wine of God's wrath will be "mixed in full strength" (i.e. "undiluted")
- The angel is referring to God's wrath being poured out in its greatest concentration
- The common practice in that culture was to mix wine with water to weaken its concentration
- But John is saying that the wrath of God poured out in hell will be full strength, in its fullest concentration

Hell is a Place of Pain

Revelation 14:10 ~ and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone

- One of the difficult things about studying hell is the graphic language that is used to portray its terrors
- It is a place of unmatched pain such that human language cannot even communicate the severity of it
- It is a place of "torment" (*basanizo*) = torture, severe distress, severe pain, harassed, distressed
- Those in hell are in genuine distress, real pain and suffering
- Hell's torments will be worse than anyone could imagine and the language used to describe hell cannot accurately communicate its pain
- The terms "fire, brimstone, darkness, weeping, gnashing of teeth" are intended to confound all our senses with dread
- Such terms do not speak of extinction and they refute the annihilationist's claim that the main purpose of fire in judgment is to destroy

Hell is in the Presence of Christ

Revelation 14:10 ~ in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb

- Many presume hell to be a place away from God's presence which is ruled by the devil
- Many tend to think of hell as Satan's kingdom over which he rules
- But that's what this verse says...it says that hell is in the presence of God and that hell is ruled by Christ and not Satan
- Notice Revelation 14:10 indicates that hell is "in the presence of the holy angels" and "in the presence of the Lamb"
- Both the holy angels and the Lamb (who is Christ) are in the presence of God
- Thus, this verse says that hell is in the presence of God and those who are in hell experience God's wrath and punishment in His very presence....God is present in hell!
- In one sense, those in hell are separated from presence of the Lord

Matthew 7:23 ~ Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.'

2 Thessalonians 1:9 ~ And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power

- Those in hell are separated from God, banished from his presence relationally, barred from his love and grace and mercy
- On the other hand, they are the very presence of God's wrath, justice, and hatred against sin
- Rev 14:10 indicates that those who suffer in hell do so in the very presence of God
- Thus, God will be the hell of the one and the heaven of the other

Hell is Eternal

Revelation 14:11 ~ And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night

- Smoke means fire and this fire is an eternal fire, speaking of everlasting torment
- "forever and ever" means literally "unto the ages of ages" (Gr. αἰῶνας αἰώνων), the strongest expression of eternity in Greek
- This is not a momentary torment (i.e. purgatory or annihilationism) but one that continues forever
- The angel reinforces this true by saying "and they have no rest day and night"
- The wicked enjoy no relief from the unrelenting wrath of God because hell never ends
- "Consider what it is to suffer extreme torment forever and ever: to suffer it day and night from one year to another, from one age to another, and from one thousand ages to another (and so adding age to age, and thousands to thousands), in pain, in wailing and lamenting, groaning and shrieking, and gnashing your teeth - with your souls full of dreadful grief and amazement, [and] with your bodies and every member full of racking torture; without any possibility of getting ease; without any possibility of moving God to pity by your cries; without any possibility of hiding yourselves from him; without any possibility of diverting your thoughts from your pain; without any possibility of obtaining any manner of mitigation, or help, or change for the better. Consider how dreadful despair will be in such torment. How dismal will it be, when you are under these racking torments, to know assuredly that you never, never shall be delivered from them. To have no hope: when you shall wish that you might be turned into nothing, but shall have no hope of it; when you shall wish that you might be turned into a toad or a serpent, but shall have no hope of it; when you would rejoice if you might but have any relief; after you shall have endured these torments millions of ages, but shall have no hope of it. After you shall have worn out the age of the sun, moon, and stars, in your dolorous groans and lamentations, without rest day and night, or one minute's ease, yet you shall have no hope of ever being delivered. After you shall have worn a thousand more such ages, you shall have no hope, but shall know that you are not one whit nearer to the end of your torments. But that still there are the same groans, the same shrieks, the same doleful cries, incessantly to be made by you, and that the smoke of your torment shall still ascend up forever and ever. The more the damned in hell think of the eternity of their torments, the more amazing will it appear to them. And alas, they will not be able to keep it out of their minds! Their tortures will not divert them from it, but will fix their attention to it. O how dreadful will eternity appear to them after they shall have been thinking on it for ages together, and shall have so long an experience of their torments! The damned in hell will have two

infinities perpetually to amaze them, and swallow them up: one is an infinite God, whose wrath they will bear, and in whom they will behold their perfect and irreconcilable enemy. The other is the infinite duration of their torment.”⁶

Redemptive Wrath

- This wrath was displayed on the cross as Jesus bore believers’ sins and endured the wrath of God so that they would never be subject to condemnation
- When Jesus died for us, God vented his fury fully on Christ as he was not only our sin-bearer, but also our wrath-bearer
- As Christ hung on the cross, a holy God unleashed on him the fullness of his divine anger against our sin
- Christ absorbed this wrath in full (the doctrine of propitiation) and experienced hell itself
- Far worse than physical suffering was the spiritual suffering Christ endured on our behalf
- It’s incredible...the wisdom of God devised a way for the love of God to deliver sinners from the wrath of God while not compromising the righteousness of God!

THE IMPLICATIONS OF GOD’S WRATH

Never Underestimate the Heinousness of Sin

- Although we are prone to regard sin lightly and gloss over its hideousness, we must never forget God’s utter detestation of sin
- We must frequently be reminded of God’s frightful vengeance upon sin

Tremble Before the God of Wrath

- Those who do not know him must fear final judgment...and flee to Christ

Luke 12:4 ~ I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. 5 “But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!

Hebrews 10:31 ~ It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

- Those who do know him can only serve him properly when they have a reverence for his awful majesty

Hebrews 10:28 ~ Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

Thank the Lord that We are Exempt from His Wrath

- We have every reason to be thankful as believers since God’s redemptive wrath has spared us from his eternal wrath

1 Thessalonians 1:10 ~ and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

1 Thessalonians 5:9 ~ For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ

Start Gospel Opportunities with the Bad News

- Only when someone understands what they need to be saved from will they run to Christ

⁶ Jonathan Edwards, sermon “The Eternity of Hell’s Torments”