

The Wrath of Our God

Romans 1:18

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In the Westminster Shorter Catechism, question 84 asks: “What doth every sin deserve?” The Answer is “Every sin deserveth God’s wrath and curse, both in this life, and that which is to come” (24). In this catechism, we hear what is echoed throughout Scripture—that “sin deserves God’s wrath and curse.” But many do not understand this attribute of God. Many accept that God is a loving God but have a hard time seeing His wrath. That problem alone has caused many Christians to completely omit the wrath of God from their presentation of the Gospel. To not speak of wrath is to not speak the whole Gospel. Yes our God is a “God of love” (1 John 4:16) but He is also a God of wrath.

John MacArthur beautifully states: “God’s attributes are balanced in divine perfection. If He had no righteous anger and wrath, He would not be God, just as surely as He would not be God without His gracious love. He perfectly hates just as He perfectly loves, perfectly loving righteousness and perfectly hating evil (Ps.45:7; Heb.1:9). One of the great tragedies of modern Christianity, including much of evangelicalism, is the failure to preach and teach the wrath of God and the condemnation it brings upon all with unforgiven sin. The truncated, sentimental gospel that is frequently presented today falls far short of the gospel that Jesus and the apostle Paul proclaimed” (Romans, 60).

“A study of the concordance shows that there are more references in Scripture to the anger, fury, and wrath of God, than there are to His love and tenderness. Because God is holy, He hates all sin; because He hates all sin, His anger burns against the sinner (Ps.7:11) (A.W. Pink, Gleanings in the Godhead, 76).

Nahum 1:2-3 says, “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. In whirlwind and storm is His way, And clouds are the dust beneath His feet” (NASB).

Verse 6 says, “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” (NASB).

Isaiah said, “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” (13:9, NASB).

God said in Jeremiah 7:20, “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” (NASB).

In the New Testament John the Baptist declared in Matthew 3:12: “And 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” (NASB).

Paul said regarding the lost in Romans 2:5, “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” (NASB).

In the book of Revelation we read of Christ in Revelation 19:15: “And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite 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” (NASB).

Scripture paints an absolutely fearful and horrifying picture of God’s wrath. Charles Spurgeon said, “The wrath of the Lamb is the most awful wrath beneath the sun.” Hebrews 10:31 puts it this way: “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” God is perfect in love—and equally perfect in wrath. Both the Old and the New Testaments reflect that balance, saying of God, “You

have loved righteousness and hated wickedness” (Ps.45:7, NASB).

As we consider this attribute of God tonight, I want to invite you to look at one of the clearest passages in the New Testament regarding *the wrath of our God*. It’s found in Romans 1:18. It says, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”

Paul begins his presentation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the *wrath* of God. And in this presentation, he presents five features that characterize the wrath of God. Let’s begin first with the phrase “the wrath of God” and see how he *defines* it in this passage.

I. The Definition of God's Wrath (v.18a)

“For the wrath of God”

There are two words that are translated “anger” in the New Testament:

The Greek word *thumos* is “a word derived from *thuo* which originally meant ‘a violent movement of air, water, the ground, animals, or men’ (TDNT, III:167). It came to signify the panting rage which wells up in a man's body and spirit. Thus *thumos* came to mean passionate anger, arising and subsiding quickly.”

The Greek word *orge* is “a word much more suited to a description of God's wrath in the NT. It is derived from *orgao*, which speaks of ‘growing ripe’ for something or ‘getting ready to bear’. It thus gave *orge* the meaning of a settled disposition or emotion arising out of God's nature. It is specifically said to be ‘of God’ in John 3:36 (on the lips of Jesus)” (Sam Storms).

The wrath of God is not a “passionate anger, arising and subsiding quickly.” It is a “settled, determined, indignation.”

It is different than the “momentary, emotional, and often uncontrolled anger (*thumos*) to which human beings are prone” (MacArthur).

“Most often when we get angry, we are offended and our pride gets in the way. That is a reflection of the evil heart of man. Even when we are angry about the right things, our own sinfulness usually pollutes our anger. That’s why we must not impose our concept of anger onto God. God’s anger is pure and untainted by sin” (John MacArthur, *Our Awesome God*, 89-90).

A.W. Pink defines it as “His eternal detestation of all unrighteousness. It is the displeasure and indignation of Divine equity against evil. It is the holiness of God stirred into activity against sin” (The Attributes of God [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975], p. 83).

A. God’s Wrath is Pure because it is Related to His Holiness

1. His holiness demands that He not tolerate sin

- a) Christ’s cleansing of the temple was a demonstration of His holy wrath (Jn.2:13-16)
- b) His cleansing of the temple was done a second time as recorded in Mat.21:12-13 and shows how furious He was that His Father’s house was flagrantly dishonored

It says, “And Jesus entered the temple and cast out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who were selling doves. 13 And He * said to them, "It is written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER'; but you are making it a ROBBERS' DEN” (NASB).

2. God’s anger is not irrational rage; it is the only response that a holy God could have toward evil

“God could not be holy and not be angry at evil. Holiness cannot tolerate unholiness” (MacArthur).

- a) Hab.1:13 says, “You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, And cannot look on wickedness.”

- b) Ps.5:4 says, “For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness, Nor shall evil dwell with You.”
- c) Paul declares that love cannot tolerate unholiness because it refuses to “rejoice in unrighteousness” (1 Cor.13:6, NASB).

B. God’s Wrath is Pure Because it is Related to His Justice (Joshua 7:19)

II. The Timing of God’s Wrath (v.18b)

“For the wrath of God *is revealed*”

“Revealed” is the familiar Greek word *apokalupto*, which means, “to uncover or make known or to bring to light.”

This verb is used here in the present tense which would indicate that God’s wrath is *continually* being revealed. It is perpetually being manifested .

A. God’s Wrath Has Always Been Revealed to Fallen Mankind

1. The fall of man (Gen.2:16-17; 3:6-19; 5:5)
2. The flood (Gen.6:1-8)
3. Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen.19)
4. Egypt
 - a) The plague of frogs (Ex.8:2)
 - b) The plague of lice (Ex.8:16)
 - c) The plague of flies (Ex.8:21)
 - d) The plague of pestilence (Ex.9:3)
 - e) The plague of boils (Ex.9:9)
 - f) The plague of hail (Ex.9:18)

- g) The plague of locusts (Ex.10:4)
- h) The plague of darkness (Ex.10:21)
- i) The plague of death of the firstborn (Ex.11:5)
- h) The destruction of Pharaoh's army (Ex.14:26-30)

5. The cross

“By far the surpassing revelation of God's wrath was that placed upon His own Son on the cross, when Jesus took to Himself the sin of the world and bore the full divine force of God's fury as its penalty God hates sin so deeply and requires its penalty so that He allowed His perfect, beloved Son to be put to death as the only means by which fallen mankind might be redeemed from sifits curse” (John MacArthur, Romans, 64).

Isaiah 53:4-6 says, “Surely He has borne our griefs
 And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him
 stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But He
 was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised
 for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace
 was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. 6
 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned,
 every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on
 Him the iniquity of us all.”

B. God's Wrath is Being Stored Up for the Coming Day of Wrath (Rom.2:5-11)

Geoffrey Wilson said, “God is no idle spectator of world events; He is dynamically active in human affairs. The conviction of sin is constantly punctuated by Divine judgment” (Romans: A Digest of Reformed Comment, 24).

The historian J.A. Froude said, “One lesson, and only one, history may be said to repeat with distinctness; that the world is built somehow on moral foundations; that, in the long run, it is well with the good; in the long run, it is ill with the wicked” (Short Studies on Great Subjects, 21)

III. The Source of God’s Wrath (v.18c)

“For the wrath of God is revealed *from heaven*”

A. God’s Wrath is Rendered from Heaven

Despite Satan’s present power as prince of the air and of this world, the earth is ultimately dominated by heaven, the throne of God

1. The Lord says in Isa.66:1 that “Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool.”
2. He is the “Judge of the earth,” therefore Ps.94:1-2 says, “O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongs-- O God, to whom vengeance belongs, shine forth! 2 Rise up, O Judge of the earth; Render punishment to the proud.”
3. Ps.96:10-13 begins by a declaration: “Say among the nations, The Lord reigns; The world also is firmly established, It shall not be moved; He shall judge the peoples righteously." 11 Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; Let the sea roar, and all its fullness; 12 Let the field be joyful, and all that is in it. Then all the trees of the woods will rejoice before the Lord. 13 For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, And the peoples with His truth.”

4. Ps.97:1 echoes that declaration by stating emphatically that “The LORD reigns.”
5. This phrase is repeated again in Ps.99:1, “The LORD reigns; Let the peoples tremble! He dwells between the cherubim; let the earth be moved.”

The earth is dominated by heaven’s rule and God’s wrath has its source in heaven.

This is the wrath *of God* which comes down from *heaven*.

B. God’s Wrath is Revealed in Two Ways

1. Through His moral order

“When God made the world, He built in certain moral as well as physical laws that have since governed its operation. Just as a person falls to the ground when he jumps from a high building, so does he fall into God’s judgment when he deviates from God’s moral law. That is built-in wrath. When a person sins, there is a built-in consequence that inexorably works. In this sense God is not specifically intervening, but is letting the law of moral cause and effect work” (John MacArthur, Romans, 65).

Paul stated it this way in Galatians 6:7-8: “ Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.”

2. Through His direct and personal intervention

God is not some “impersonal cosmic force that set the universe in motion to run its own course. God’s wrath is executed exactly according to His divine will” (MacArthur).

“Several Hebrew words which convey a highly personal character are used in the Old Testament to describe God's anger.

Hara is used ninety-one times. It refers to becoming heated, to burning with fury, and is frequently used of God (see, e.g., Gen. 18:30).

Haron is used forty-one times. It refers exclusively to divine anger and means "a burning, fierce wrath" (see, e.g., Ex. 15:7).

Qatsaph, which means bitter, is used thirty-four times, most of which refer to God (see, e.g., Deut. 1:34).

The fourth term for wrath is Hemah, which also refers to a venom or poison, is frequently associated with jealousy and is used most often of God (see, e.g., 2 Kings 22:13).

David declared that "God is a righteous judge, and a God who has indignation every day" (Ps. 7:11). "Indignation" translates zaam, which means to foam at the mouth, and is used over twenty times in the Old Testament, often of God's wrath.

Whether the cause and effect wrath or the personal fury of God is meted out, the wrath originates in heaven” (John MacArthur, Romans, 65).

IV. The Extent of God's Wrath (v.18d)

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven *against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*”

A. God's Wrath is Universal

1. It's “against all” who deserve it

Since “there is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom.3:10) and the “Scripture has confined all under sin” (Gal.3:22), every person without Jesus Christ will experience God's wrath

There is no amount of goodwill or giving to the poor or helpfulness to others or even service to God that can exclude a person from the wrath of God. Only through Jesus Christ can one be delivered.

a) Acts 17:30-31 says, “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, 31 because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead” (NASB).

b) John the Baptist said to the Pharisees and Sadducees that came to his baptism: “Brood of vipers! Who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance” (Mat.3:7-8).

2. God is impartial and He will take vengeance “against all ungodliness and unrighteousness” (Rom.1:18)

2 Thess.1:8-9 says that Jesus will come “in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.”

B. God’s Wrath is Reserved For and Justly Directed at Sin (v.18d)

Ungodliness and unrighteousness “are synonyms” (MacArthur).

1. “Ungodliness” Gr.asebia (noun) means “irreverence, godlessness, impiety” (ANLEX). It is “wickedness in general, neglect or violation of duty toward God” (WSNTDICT).

Simply stating it “refers to lack of reverence for, devotion to, and worship of the true God” (MacArthur).

Jude uses this term 4 times to describe the focus of God’s wrath upon sinful mankind when he says, “And about these also Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, ‘Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him’” (Jude 14-15).

2. “Unrighteousness” Gr.adikia (noun) refers to “injustice and wrong doing” (GING) and “encompasses the idea of ungodliness but focuses on

its result” (MacArthur).

“Sin first attacks God's majesty and then His law. Men do not act righteously because they are not rightly related to God, who is the only measure and source of righteousness. Ungodliness unavoidably leads to unrighteousness. Because men's relation to God is wrong, their relation to their fellow men is wrong. Men treat other men the way they do because they treat God the way they do. Man's enmity with his fellow man originates with his being at enmity with God.

Sin is the only thing God hates. He does not hate poor people or rich people, dumb people or smart people, untalented people or highly skilled people. He only hates the sin that those people, and all others, naturally practice, and sin inevitably brings His wrath” (John MacArthur, Romans, 67).

V. The Cause of God’s Wrath (v.18e)

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who *suppress the truth in unrighteousness.*”

A. Man’s Sinful Disposition is to Suppress the Truth

1. Every man is naturally inclined to follow sin and resist God
 - a) Man in his natural state is “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph.2:1)
 - b) He “does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he

know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor.2:14).

“Receive” Gr.dechomai, “to receive by deliberate and ready reception of what is offered.”

- c) Proverbs 13:21 says that “evil pursues sinners.”
- d) Proverbs 21:10 tells us why—because “the soul of the wicked *desires* evil.”

Man naturally follows sin. He doesn’t need any help doing this; he does it automatically.

“Unrighteousness is so much a part of a man’s nature that every person has a built-in, natural, compelling desire to suppress and oppose God’s truth” (MacArthur).

2. Men are not naturally lovers of God

- a) They hate God and would rather He was dead

That’s why Ps.14:1-3 says, “The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, They have done abominable works, There is none who does good. 2 The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God. 3 They have all turned aside, They have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, No, not one.”

George Whitfield says, “Every man by his own natural will hates God.”

The message of the Gospel then is not “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.” It is God loves you and hates your sin and unless you repent you will experience the full fury of His wrath.

In fact John 3:18 says they are presently under the condemnation of God.

- b) They hate God and they hate the message of the cross because it’s “foolishness” to them (1 Cor.1:18)
- c) Because of this, they “suppress the truth”

“Suppress” Gr.katecho (verb, pres.act.gen.)

Because of the use of the present tense, this phrase could be rendered, “who are constantly attempting to suppress the truth by steadfastly holding to their sin” (MacArthur).

“Suppress means to “hold back” (GING), to “hold down” (Fri), to “restrain” (UBS) or “hinder” (DBL Greek).

It is “to prevent, to hinder, to restrain, to keep from” (Louw-Nida) *the truth*.

B. Man Suppresses the Truth in Unrighteousness

- 1. It’s their sinful disposition they love and because they refuse to turn from it they *suppress the truth*
- 2. Paul shows us what he means by *unrighteousness* in vv.19-32

CONCLUSION

What is your response to God's wrath? Do you see it as something that should be omitted from the Gospel because it *offends* people? Do you think it is not politically correct to talk about God's wrath? Before you can talk about escaping from it you have to mention that it is coming and why! How can one escape God's wrath? This is question 85 in the Westminster Shorter Catechism and it answers: "To escape the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin, God requireth of us faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life, with the diligent use of all the outward means whereby communicateth to us the benefits of redemption." What is faith in Jesus Christ? Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as He is offered to us in the gospel." What is repentance unto life? "Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience." If you haven't rested upon Christ for salvation and repented of your sin you will not escape the wrath of God, presently or in the future.

As we close, listen to an excerpt from Jonathan Edwards 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. . . .

There are the black clouds of God's wrath now hanging directly over your heads, full of the dreadful storm, and big

with thunder; and were it not for the restraining hand of God, it would immediately burst forth upon you. 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” ([Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 1992], pp. 20-21).

To “flee the wrath to come” you must “bring forth fruits worthy of repentance” (Mat.3:7-8). Examine yourself now as we pray.