

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

The Wrath of God Lesson #9

There is no doctrine more neglected than the attribute of God's wrath. In an age of increasing sin and immorality it is no wonder that men do not like the subject of wrath. Even professing Christians don't like to talk about it. The word "wrath" rarely, if ever, escapes their lips. Most professing Christians have made their own god, in their own likeness, according to their own imaginations. He is a god who is loving, kind, gracious, compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness and truth. We stop there, however, and ignore that God is also holy, just, and will by no means allow the guilty to go unpunished. We would rather not think that "the whirlwind and storm" is His way, or that Jesus said, "*I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled!*" (Lk. 12:49). Though the Bible emphasizes sin and judgment ten to one over the love of God, and though Jesus spoke of it incessantly, we will not have the God of the Bible. We will not have the Savior as the Scriptures present Him. In this lesson we will look at some of what the Bible says about the wrath of God and seek to find practical application for our lives.

I. WHY STUDY THE WRATH OF GOD

J. I. Packer has written,

"Yet, if we would know God, it is vital that we face the truth concerning His wrath, however unfashionable it may be, and however strong our initial prejudices against it. Otherwise, we shall not understand the gospel of salvation from wrath, nor the propitiatory achievement of the cross, nor the wonder of the redeeming love of God. Nor shall we understand the hand of God in history, and God's present dealings with our own people; nor shall we be able to make head or tail of the book of Revelation; nor will our evangelism have the urgency enjoined by Jude -- 'save some, by snatching them out of the fire' (Jude 23). Neither our knowledge of God, nor our service to Him, will be in accord with His Word."¹

II. DEFINITION OF THE WRATH OF GOD

A. J. I. Packer defining the wrath of God says,

"'Wrath' is an old English word defined in my dictionary as 'deep, intense anger and indignation.' 'Anger' is defined as 'stirring of resentful displeasure and strong antagonism, by a sense of injury or insult'; 'indignation' as 'righteous anger aroused by injustice and baseness'. Such is wrath. And wrath, the Bible tells us, is an attribute of God . . . God's wrath in the Bible is never the capricious, self-indulgent, irritable, morally ignoble thing that human anger so often is. It is, instead, a right and necessary reaction to objective moral evil. God is only angry

¹ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, pg. 142.

where anger is called for. Even among men, there is such a thing as righteous indignation, though it is perhaps, rarely found.”²

B. William Gurnall says,

“The wrath of God is 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. It is the moving cause of that just sentence which He passes upon evildoers.”³

C. The *New American Commentary* notes that,

“God’s wrath is a theme which occurs in both the Old and New Testaments. Some scholars, in the spirit of Marcion of the second century, claim that wrath is an unworthy description of God. They say it is an Old Testament concept associated with God the Father rather than the merciful Christ. L. Morris, however, points out that the concept of God’s wrath is a frequent New Testament theme. The clearest description of it occurs in Rom 1–3; 5:6–11. It is not primarily an emotion, though emotional elements surface since all of God’s being is set in motion in the expression of each attribute. Primarily, his wrath is the active reaction of his nature against all that is contrary to his nature. It is a recoiling of God’s entire being. It has logical and volitional elements and primarily expresses God’s judgment on people. Significantly, it generally occurs at the end of the sin lists in Paul’s writings.”⁴

III. ILLUSTRATIONS OF GOD'S WRATH

A. J. I. Packer says,

“After discussing the longsuffering of God, William Gurnall writes: But think not, sinners, that you shall escape thus; God's mill goes slow, but grinds small; the more admirable His patience and bounty now is, the more dreadful and unsupportable will that fury be which ariseth out of His abused goodness. Nothing smoother than the sea, yet when stirred into a tempest, nothing rageth more. Nothing so sweet as the patience and goodness of God, and nothing so terrible as His wrath when it takes fire.”⁵

B. Thomas Watson illustrating the duration of God’s wrath on sinners in hell says,

“If all the body of the earth and sea were turned into sand, and all the air up to the starry heaven were nothing but sand, and a little bird should come every thousand years, and fetch away in her bill but the tenth part of a grain of all that heap of sand, what numberless years would be spent before that vast heap of

² J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, pg. 134, 136.

³ William Gurnall (1660), quoted by A. W. Pink in his *Attributes of God*, pg. 86.

⁴ Melick, Richard R. *Phillipians, Colossians, Philemon*. Vol. 32. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991.

⁵ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, pg 134.

sand would be fetched away! Yet, if at the end of all that time, the sinner might come out of hell, there would be some hope; but that word 'Ever' breaks the heart. *'The smoke of their torment ascends up for ever and ever.'* What a terror is this to the wicked, enough to put them into a cold sweat, to think as long as God is eternal, He lives forever to be avenged upon them!"⁶

IV. THOUGHTS TO PONDER ABOUT GOD'S WRATH

A. A. W. Pink,

"One cannot imagine that talk of divine judgment was ever very popular, yet the biblical writers engage in it constantly."⁷

B. A. W. Pink,

"A study of the concordance will show that there are *more* references in Scriptures to the anger, fury, and wrath of God, than there are to His love and tenderness. Because God is holy, He hates all sin, His anger burns against the sinner."⁸

C. J. I. Packer,

"If we rejoice not to know that in a soon-coming Day God will make a most glorious display of His wrath by taking vengeance upon all who now oppose Him, it is proof positive that our hearts are *not* in subjection to Him, that we are yet in our sins, and that we are on the way to the everlasting burnings."⁹

D. J. I. Packer,

"It is a plain fact that the loving Savior himself had more to say about the wrath and judgment of God than any other New Testament figure."¹⁰

E. A. W. Pink,

"If it is asked: can disobedience to our Creator really deserve great and grievous punishment? Anyone who has ever been convicted of sin knows beyond any shadow of doubt that the answer is yes, and knows too that those whose consciences have not yet been awakened to consider as Anselm put it, 'how weighty is sin' are not yet qualified to give an opinion."¹¹

"Indifference to sin is a moral blemish, and he who hates it is not a moral leper. How could He who is the Sum of all excellency look with equal satisfaction upon

⁶ Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, pg. 63.

⁷ A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, pg. 82.

⁸ A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, pg. 85.

⁹ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, pg. 137. (See Psa. 35:17; 74:9-10; 94:1-7; Luke 18:1-8; Rev. 6:9-11)

¹⁰ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, pg. 138.

virtue and vice, wisdom, and folly? How could he who is infinitely holy disregard sin and refuse to manifest His "severity" (Rom. 9:22) toward it. How could He, who delights only in that which is pure and lovely, not loath and hate that which is impure and vile? The very nature of God makes Hell as real a necessity, as imperatively and eternally requisite, as Heaven is."¹²

V. SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT FOR GOD'S WRATH

- A. II Kings 22:13 -- "Go, inquire of the Lord for me and the people and all Judah concerning the words of this book that has been found, for great is the wrath of the Lord that burns against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us."
- B. Nahum 1:2-8 -- "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. 4 He rebukes the sea and makes it dry; He dries up all the rivers. Bashan and Carmel wither; The blossoms of Lebanon wither. 5 Mountains quake because of Him And the hills dissolve; Indeed the earth is upheaved by His presence, The world and all the inhabitants in it. 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. 7 The Lord is good, A stronghold in the day of trouble, And He knows those who take refuge in Him. 8 But with an overflowing flood He will make a complete end of its site, And will pursue His enemies into darkness."
- "Nobody stands under the wrath of God save those who have chosen to do so. The essence of God's action in wrath is to *give men what they choose*, in all its implications: nothing more, and equally nothing less. God's readiness to respect human choice to this extent may appear disconcerting and even terrifying, but it is plain that His attitude here is supremely just and poles apart from the wanton and irresponsible infliction of pain which is what we mean by cruelty." *Knowing God*, pg. 139.
- C. Luke 21:20-22 -- "Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are in the midst of the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city; 22 because these are days of vengeance, so that all things which are written will be fulfilled."
- D. Rom. 1:18-19¹³ -- "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them."

11 A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, pg. 83.

12 A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, 83.

13 It is interesting to note that after Paul introduces the theme of his epistle to the Romans (1:16-17) the first thing he mentions is wrath. It is also interesting to note that Paul mentions the wrath of God more in Romans, his most focused gospel epistle, than all of his other epistles combined (*Knowing God*, pg. 139).

- E. Rom. 2:5-6 – “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, 6 who will render to each person according to his deeds.”
- “The root cause of our unhappiness seems to be a disquieting suspicion that ideas of wrath are in one way or another *unworthy of God*.” J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, pg. 136.
- F. Rom. 5:9 – “Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.”
- G. I Thess. 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.”
- H. I Thess. 5:9 – “For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- I. II Thess. 1:6-10 – “For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7 and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when 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, 10 when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed.”
- J. Rev. 6:15-17 – “Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; 16 and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; 17 for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”
- K. Rev. 14:9-12 – “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, 10 he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11 “And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.” 12 Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

VI. ERRORS CONCERNING GOD'S WRATH

- A. Error -- God cannot be both good and wrathful, both loving and wrathful, both kind, compassionate and wrathful.
- B. Error -- We shouldn't talk about wrath because it mars the character of God or because it is socially unacceptable, or because it is negative and makes people feel bad.
- C. Error -- God's wrath is cruel and since God isn't cruel He can't be a God of wrath.
- D. Error -- The God of the Old Testament is a God of wrath, but the God of the New Testament is a God of grace.
- E. Error -- We should never speak of the wrath of God in evangelism as it is too negative and will turn people from Christ.

VII. APPLICATION OF THE WRATH OF GOD

- A. Because the biblical writers taught on God's wrath, so should we.
- B. Because the biblical writers were motivated by the wrath of God to evangelize, we should be too.
- C. Because the biblical writers spoke of the wrath of God to introduce a holy fear of judgment as a precursor to the gospel message, so should we.
- D. We shouldn't feel apologetic, embarrassed, or resentful about speaking about the wrath of God.
- E. We should meditate on the wrath of God because.
 - 1. It helps us remember how detestable sin is to God and in so doing teaches us to hate sin as God hates it.
 - 2. It motivates us to serve God acceptably with reverence and fear.
 - 3. Because we have been saved from the wrath of God, we should be thankful and show our thankfulness by our praise, worship, and obedience to God.¹⁴

"Insurrectionists against God's government shall be made to know that God *is* the Lord. They shall be made to feel how great that Majesty is which they despise, and how dreadful is that threatened wrath which they so little regarded." A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, pg. 83.

¹⁴ *Attributes of God*, pg. 84-85

*ONCE it was mine, the cup of wrath,
But Jesus drank it dry;
When on the cursed tree transfixed,
He breathed the expiring sigh.*

*² No tongue can tell the wrath He bore,
The wrath so due to me;
Sin's just desert; He bore it all,
To set the sinner free!*

*³ Now not a single drop remains;
"Tis finished," was His cry;
By one effectual draught, He drank
The cup of wrath quite dry.¹⁵*

“It is pleasant to pass over a country after a storm has spent itself; to smell the freshness of the herbs after the rain has passed away, and to note the drops while they glisten like purest diamonds in the sunlight. That is the position of a Christian. He is going through a land where the storm has spent itself upon his Savior's head, and if there be a few drops of sorrow falling, they distill from clouds of mercy, and Jesus cheers him by the assurance that they are not for his destruction. But how terrible is it to witness the approach of a tempest: to note the forewarnings of the storm; to mark the birds of heaven as they droop their wings; to see the cattle as they lay their heads low in terror; to discern the face of the sky as it grows black, and look to the sun which shines not, and the heavens which are angry and frowning! How terrible to await the dread advance of a hurricane -- such as occurs, sometimes, in the tropics -- to wait in terrible apprehension till the wind shall rush forth in fury, tearing up trees from their roots, forcing rocks from their pedestals, and hurling down all the dwelling-places of man! And yet, sinner, this is your present position. No hot drops have as yet fallen, but a shower of fire is coming. No terrible winds howl around you, but God's tempest is gathering its dread artillery. As yet the water-floods are dammed up by mercy, but the flood-gates shall soon be opened: the thunderbolts of God are yet in his storehouse, but lo! The tempest hastens, and how awful shall that moment be when God, robed in vengeance, shall march forth in fury! Where, where, where, O sinner, will you hide your head, or where will you flee? O that the hand of mercy may now lead you to Christ! He is freely set before you in the gospel: His riven side is the rock of shelter. You know your need of Him; believe in Him, cast yourself upon Him, and then the fury shall be overpast forever.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Albert Midlane, 1864 in C. H. Spurgeon's, [Our Own Hymn Book: A Collection of Psalms and Hymns for Public, Social and Private Worship](#) (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1883).

¹⁶ Charles Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening*, Feb. 25th.