

God's Wrath

Part 2

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In Part 1, we saw that God is love, but also examined several examples of God's wrath in both the Old and New Testaments. This is proof that, contrary to what many people claim, God is both loving and wrathful in both testaments. In this last installment, we'll see the importance of understanding God's wrath and its relationship to the Gospel, learn how God can express both love and wrath, and answer some objections.

Why the Doctrine of God's Wrath Is Important

Many churchgoers don't fully understand salvation, because they don't understand what we are saved from. They may know we go to heaven, but ask the average church goer what we are saved from, and you will likely get one or more things from a list of life's troubles: hopelessness, purposelessness, relationship problems, addictions, social injustice, and so on. Some may also have an idea that we're saved from our sins, but they probably see sins more as the cause of earthly troubles than the trigger of God's wrath. Others say they are saved from hell or hellfire, but they see no association between hell and God's wrath.

The Bible gives a straightforward answer to what we are saved from. We are saved from sin and God's wrath:

"[Mary] shall give birth to a son. You shall call his name Jesus, for it is he who shall save his people from their sins."

Matthew 1:21

...who his own self bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness; by whose stripes you were healed.

1 Peter 2:24

Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we will be saved from God's wrath through him.

Romans 5:9

...and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.

1 Thessalonians 1:10

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For God didn't appoint us to wrath, but to the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:9

I could cite many more Scriptures, but these alone are enough to prove that the New Testament unambiguously speaks of God's wrath against sin and our salvation from that wrath through Jesus Christ.

Not understanding that it is sin and God's wrath that we are saved from causes us to be weak in our understanding of the Gospel. This, in turn, leads to our allowing heresy into our midst. And this is just what has been happening.

The Denial of God's Wrath

So, in the face of this evidence, how can people deny God's wrath? They do it by denying the Scriptures that speak of it, and also by denying objective truth.

We are living in a postmodern age in which people are moving away from the worldview that understands that truth is objective. Postmodernists believe that truth is relative to the individual. They want to believe in a loving God who cannot be and is not wrathful against sin, so they readily and without any uneasiness reject as not truth all Scriptures that speak of God's wrath.

After trying to reason from Scripture with some of these people, I've had to conclude that unless or until God opens their minds, it's fruitless. Christians discuss truth, doctrine, and practice with each other by using Scripture. When someone stops the discussion by saying, "I don't accept that passage from the Bible as being true," then there is no common ground for discussion. These people are profoundly spiritually deaf and blind. All we can do is pray that God will open their ears and eyes.

This article, however, is not an argument to the blind, but a warning to the elect.

The Siren Song of Love with No Wrath

Postmodern theologians sing what sounds like an attractive siren song. And the volume of this song rises as it reaches into neighborhood churches and books issued by major Christian publishers.

For at least the past hundred years, the churches have become increasingly weak in teaching about sin and God's wrath. As the voice of the truth becomes feebler, the voice of heresy becomes stronger. This has caused many Christians to know little or nothing about God's wrath. This, in turn, causes

them to have a flawed understanding of the Gospel. This further causes them to have a weak witness to others. I believe it was R.C. Sproul who related that he was once accosted by someone on the street who asked him if he was saved. His response was, "Saved from what?" The accoster, who may have had the best of intentions, couldn't answer. It's a sad situation.

That person wanted to share the Gospel but didn't really know it. I think many, maybe even most, churchgoers today have the same problem. I also think that if someone were to ask them how a loving God can also be wrathful, they wouldn't know how to answer (we'll answer this below). This failure of the churches and the resulting ignorance among church-goers has been a principal factor in allowing postmodern theology to take hold in the seminaries and pulpits.

Postmodernists readily speak of grace. Yet, it is a grace in which God loves people for the sinners that they are with no need for an atoning sacrifice. According to this increasingly popular theology, prostitutes, for example, enter the kingdom of God, not as saints washed by the blood of Christ, but as prostitutes still. They become the children of the kingdom with no need for regeneration or belief in Jesus as Savior or an inner change through the Holy Spirit. They have no thought of turning from their fleshly ways to take on and live by God's values. Jesus' life, death, and Resurrection are not an atoning sacrifice. Jesus did not propitiate God's wrath. Jesus' crucifixion merely demonstrates God's love for all just as they are. According to this seductive teaching, God frees us from sin by showing us there is no such thing as sin. Thus, there is no wrath of God.

A Warning to the Elect

Even the elect can be waylaid and fooled for a time, and this is happening to many right now. There is one way to stop this. We must be discerning, and the way to become discerning is to know the Word of God.

The lie of no wrath of God is what many people want to believe even though Scripture after Scripture contradict it. There is no getting around it. Either you believe the Bible and believe that our loving God is wrathful against sin and unbelief, or you must reject major portions of Scripture and invent your own religion. Sadly, many have chosen to do the latter.

These people call themselves Christians but deny the God who calls people out of sin and forgives and loves them because of the atonement of His Son alone. They've created a golden-calf of a god. This god is happy with just about any lifestyle you can name. They've cast off the God of the Bible who works a miracle of rebirth and sanctification in believers' minds that changes

them so that they discard their old, sinful ways. They reject the God who, if they don't repent, will reject them and cast them away into what is called outer darkness as one would throw away weeds or trash fish. They will perish in an eternal punishment usually spoken of as fire. They will suffer God's wrath forever.

How Can God Be Both Loving and Wrathful?

How, then, can God be both loving and wrathful? Some try to answer that we can sometimes be angry with our children whom we love, and that God does the same. It is true that God chastens (*paideuō*—"trains," "disciplines," "educates") those He loves (Hebrews 12:6). But God's chastening is not God's wrath. God was not chastening the people of Noah's time or the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah. The answer to the question is found in the fact that all humanity falls into one of two groups: the elect and the reprobate.

Based on their natural, sinful nature, all humanity deserves God's wrath. God saves the "world" by saving a portion of it—the elect. And He saves the elect graciously, through His Son. This was His purpose from eternity.

Paul tells us of God "who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before times eternal, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the Good News" (2 Timothy 1:9-10).

Through regeneration, God causes the elect to believe, and "He who believes in him is not judged. He who doesn't believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God. This is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil" (John 3:18-19). God has graciously bestowed the favor of salvation on the elect who do not by their works deserve it any more than anyone else. The rest get the wrath they deserve for their sins and unbelief.

Is this unfair? Absolutely not! God does not have to save anyone. He is gracious to save some. Suppose two men are standing before the king of a middle-ages monarchy. They have both been convicted of murder and are deserving of the death penalty. The king tells one that he will order him hung at sunrise. He gives the other a full pardon. Is this unfair? No. The one who will be executed will get what he deserves, whether the other man is executed or not. What happens to the other man is not his business. The man whom

the king pardoned receives undeserved grace, and seeing the sentence of death on the other man should make him all-the-more grateful.

This is how God can be both loving and wrathful. He is loving toward the believers because Jesus Christ's atonement has purchased their pardon for eternity. And, He is wrathful toward the unbelievers because they are still in their sins and unbelief.

Types and Parables Picturing the Elect and the Reprobate

In the Old Testament, the elect and the reprobate were pictured by the Jews and the Gentiles. Under the New Covenant, the distinction between Jew and Gentile, being only a type, disappears. On the other hand, the fact that the world is really divided into the elect and the reprobate is more plainly revealed in the New Testament.

Jesus gave a parable in which He describes people whom He likens to a roadside, to stony ground, and to thorny places. When someone spreads seeds, they never ultimately flourish in these places. These represent the reprobate. Jesus contrasts these people to people He pictures as good earth. Here, the seeds flourish and produce fruit (Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23). These are the elect.

Further reading: "The Parable of the Sower"
(<https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/sower/>)

He tells another parable of someone who sowed good seed. While he slept, an enemy sows noxious weeds, which Jesus explains represent "children of the wicked one." The sower tells his servants to leave the weeds until harvest time when the good seed will be gathered into the barn, but the weeds will be gathered and burned in the fire (verses 24-30, 36-43).

Further reading: "The Parable of the Tares of the Field"
(<https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/tares/>)

In still another parable, Jesus tells of fishermen who gather fish in their net. They put the good fish into containers, but the bad fish they throw away. "So will it be in the end of the world. The angels will come and separate the wicked from amongst the righteous, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth" (verses 47-50).

Further reading: "The Parable of the Dragnet"
(<https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/dragnet-parable/>)

Over and over, the Bible tells us of God's love upon the believing elect for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ, and His wrath upon the reprobate for their sins and unbelief.

Postmodernists and others who speak of a God who does not have wrath toward the wicked are imagining a god who is not the one, true God we read of in Scripture.

I originally intended to include some objections and my responses to the concept of God's wrath. I see now, however, that it would make this article too long. So, I now intend to make these objections into a separate follow-up that, Lord willing, I'll post in a few days.

If you still don't understand how God can be wrathful, look for the follow-up. Your questions might be answered in it. But I strongly advise that you also study your Bible and pray about it. God's wrath is real, and you don't want to be on the receiving end. Don't throw away the Bible to fit in with the trends of being soft on sin and tolerant of everything but biblical Christianity. God doesn't care about trendiness.

God is wrathful against sin, and since all humans are naturally sinners, there is one, and only one, reason why every human being is not under His wrath. God's Son, Jesus Christ, is that reason. Those who trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior, believing that He bore God's wrath for their sins on the Cross and died for them, God pardons for Christ's sake. All who do not believe that are still in their sins and will suffer God's wrath unless they repent. That's the Gospel truth.