

Palisades Community Bible Church

Online Sunday School

What Is God's Wrath?

July 4, 2021

By: Brent Briggs

God's wrath? This is a relatively minor subject in the Church, isn't it? We don't hear many sermons on God's wrath. In our secular age, God's wrath is a foreign and unwanted truth. Mention it in most circles and you'll be labeled a kook. Nevertheless, the wrath of God is a very real theme that runs throughout the Bible. It is something Christians must consider in order to fully know the God who is love, light, and life.

"God's wrath" is in perfect harmony with all His divine attributes. It is defined as "the holy action of retributive justice towards persons whose actions deserve eternal condemnation." Despite the disinterest of our secular age, and many in the church, the wrath of God is a deeply biblical truth. It affirms God's righteous displeasure with sin and His just retribution upon unrepentant sinners. Even more, it helps us to define Grace.

As Christians, we enjoy, and celebrate, God's immeasurable grace. What Jesus accomplished on the Cross was nothing less than God's great remedy for sin. But do we understand just HOW IMMEASURABLE God's grace **IS**? Do we ever pause to contemplate how repugnant sin is in His eyes? Do we ponder how puny we are that God should even take notice of us, much less spend his Son's life on us? Consider this description from Johnathan Edwards' famous sermon; "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God":

This that you have heard is the Case of every one of you that are out of Christ. That World of Misery, that Lake of burning Brimstone is extended abroad under you. There is the dreadful Pit of the glowing Flames of the Wrath of God; there is Hell's wide gaping Mouth open; and you have nothing to stand upon, not any thing to take hold of: there is nothing between you and Hell but the Air; 'tis only the Power and mere Pleasure of God that holds you up.

You probably are not sensible of this; you find you are kept out of Hell, but don't see the Hand of God in it, but look at other Things, as the good State of your bodily Constitution, your Care of your own Life, and the Means you use for your own Preservation. But indeed these Things are nothing; if God should withdraw his Hand, they would avail no more to keep you from falling, than the thin Air to hold up a Person that is suspended in it.

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

This admonition makes me shudder....not for myself, for I am saved by the blood of my Christ (I thank Jesus daily for such a priceless gift!). I shudder for every member of my family that is without Jesus. I shudder when I see the marchers in a parade that celebrates the shameful and perverted treatment of their bodies. I shudder when a rotten, corrupt, villainous character places his/her hand on the Bible and swears to uphold our constitution. I shudder when I look at the products of our educational system; people who think God is a joke...a myth...a puppet of mankind. I shudder for the young woman who was convinced she could treat her body any way she wanted to, and then dispose of an unwanted child....all without consequence!

Lest we think that being saved by Grace is all 'sunshine and lollipops' let us consider the fates of those around us. You know; the people with whom we work, or see at parties, or at holidays? The ones we have decided to avoid because they won't listen, the ones who brashly state their position so openly that you cannot bring yourself to talk with them...

We were not saved for our own salvation's sake. We were saved to touch others. It is for these that Jesus died, also. Just before He ascended into heaven:

Matthew 28: 18 Then Jesus came up and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all

nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you[ad] always, to the end of the age.”

As many a preacher has stated; when you read in the Bible “therefore,” look to see what it is ‘there for.’ Jesus was saying that, His disciples are to make disciples BECAUSE all authority in heaven has been given to Him. All authority has been given to me and, for that reason, go and make disciples. “Go,” do not stay. “Make disciples,” not friends....disciples.

So, WE are tasked with sharing the Gospel with those described by Johnathan Edwards, above, who are hanging by absolutely nothing above the abyss. Failing to make disciples is an act of unfaithfulness that is worthy of God’s wrath....did you know that? Let’s see what was going on in ancient Israel, when they were disobedient. Just before Moses died, he spoke, as recorded in Deuteronomy 31:

Anticipation of Disobedience

24 When Moses finished writing on a scroll the words of this law in their entirety, 25 he commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the Lord’s covenant, 26 “Take this scroll of the law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God. It will remain there as a witness against you, 27 for I know about your rebellion and stubbornness. Indeed, even while I have been living among you to this very day, you have rebelled against the Lord; you will be even more rebellious after my death!

28 Gather to me all your tribal elders and officials so I can speak to them directly about these things and call the heavens and the earth to witness against them.

29 For I know that after I die you will totally corrupt yourselves and turn away from the path I have commanded you to walk. Disaster will confront you in future days because you will act wickedly before the Lord, inciting him to anger because of your actions.”

30 Then Moses recited the words of this song from start to finish in the hearing of the whole assembly of Israel:

Why did Moses focus on the Levites? When Moses came down from Mt. Sinai and saw the debauchery of the Israelites, he called those who were faithful to God to come to him. Exodus 32:

25 Moses saw that the people were running wild, for Aaron had let them get completely out of control, causing derision from their enemies. 26 So Moses stood at the entrance of the camp and said, “Whoever is for the Lord, come to me.” All the Levites gathered around him, 27 and he said to them, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, has said ‘Each man fasten his sword on his side, and go back and forth from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and each one kill his brother, his friend, and his neighbor.’”

The Levites were those who left the party to stand with God. These were the faithful few. They were given a special job. What a picture of God’s wrath! God ordered the deaths of those who were dishonoring both Him, and themselves. God ordered the faithful ones to put the unfaithful to death.

Suppose God had only admonished those perverse and disobedient people? Suppose He had only given them a time of trouble for their sins? Were they ignorant of their behaviors? Had they not seen what the Lord had done for them, and did they not realize that they were dishonoring God? What would they do once that chastening had passed? Would they live their lives in honor of their Lord? Or, would they return to their sin and debauchery? (one need only read the rest of the Old Testament to find the answer...repeatedly!)

So, now, we focus on Moses at the end of his life. He, once again, called upon the ‘faithful Levites’ and gave them a special instruction. But, this time, THEIR disobedience, their rebellion against God, their stubbornness before God’s word, was the focus. After ordering “THE LAW” to be placed beside the Ark of the Covenant, Moses foretold the disasters that will be the natural result of their disobedience and sin. Then, Moses recited these words before the entire assembly of Israel. Deuteronomy 32:

Invocation of Witnesses

1 Listen, O heavens, and I will speak; hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.

2 My teaching will drop like the rain, my sayings will drip like the dew, as rain drops upon the grass, and showers upon new growth.

3 For I will proclaim the name of the Lord; you must acknowledge the greatness of our God.

4 As for the Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are just. He is a reliable God who is never unjust, he is fair and upright.

5 His people have been unfaithful to him; they have not acted like his children— this is their sin. They are a perverse and deceitful generation.

6 Is this how you repay the Lord, you foolish, unwise people? Is he not your father, your Creator? He has made you and established you.

7 Remember the ancient days; bear in mind the years of past generations. Ask your father and he will inform you, your elders, and they will tell you.

8 When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when he divided up humankind, he set the boundaries of the peoples, according to the number of the heavenly assembly.

9 For the Lord's allotment is his people, Jacob is his special possession. (Jacob's inheritance is Israel)

10 The Lord found him in a desolate land, in an empty wasteland where animals howl. He continually guarded him and taught him; he continually protected him like the pupil of his eye.

11 Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that hovers over its young, so the Lord spread out his wings and took him, he lifted him up on his pinions (feathers).

12 The Lord alone was guiding him; no foreign god was with him.

13 He enabled him to travel over the high terrain of the land, and he ate of the produce of the fields. He provided honey for him from the cliffs, and olive oil from the hardest of rocks,

14 butter from the herd and milk from the flock, along with the fat of lambs, rams and goats of Bashan, along with the best of the kernels of wheat; and from the juice of grapes you drank wine.

Israel's Rebellion

15 But Jeshurun (an endearing term for Israel) became fat and kicked (rebelled against his master); you got fat, thick, and stuffed! Then he deserted the God who made him and treated the Rock who saved him with contempt.

16 They made him jealous with other gods, they enraged him with abhorrent idols.

17 They sacrificed to demons, not God, to gods they had not known; to new gods who had recently come along, gods your ancestors had not known about.

18 You forgot the Rock who fathered you; and put out of mind the God who gave you birth.

A Word of Judgment

19 But the Lord took note and despised them because his sons and daughters enraged him.

20 He said, "I will reject them. I will see what will happen to them; for they are a perverse generation, children who show no loyalty.

21 They have made me jealous with false gods, enraging me with their worthless gods; so I will make them jealous with a people they do not recognize, with a nation slow to learn I will enrage them.

22 For a fire has been kindled by my anger, and it burns to lowest Sheol (the lowest depths of the earth); it consumes the earth and its produce and ignites the foundations of the mountains.

23 I will increase their disasters; I will use up my arrows on them.

24 They will be starved by famine, eaten by plague, and bitterly stung; I will send the teeth of wild animals against them, along with the poison of creatures that crawl in the dust.

25 The sword will make people childless outside, and terror will do so inside; they will destroy both the young man and the virgin, the infant and the gray-haired man.

The Weakness of Other Gods

26 "I said, 'I want to cut them in pieces. I want to make people forget they ever existed.

27 But I fear the reaction of their enemies, for their adversaries would misunderstand and say, "Our power is great, and the Lord has not done all this!"

28 They are a nation devoid of wisdom, and there is no understanding among them.

29 I wish that they were wise and could understand this, and that they could comprehend what will happen to them."

30 How can one man chase a thousand of them, and two pursue ten thousand, unless their Rock had delivered them up — and the Lord had handed them over?

31 For our enemies' rock is not like our Rock, as even our enemies concede.

32 For their vine is from the stock of Sodom, and from the fields of Gomorrah.

Their grapes contain venom; their clusters of grapes are bitter.

33 Their wine is snakes' poison, the deadly venom of cobras.

34 "Is this not stored up with me?" says the Lord, "Is it not sealed up in my storehouses?"

35 I will get revenge and pay them back at the time their foot slips; for the day of their disaster is near, and the impending judgment is rushing upon them!"

36 The Lord will judge his people, and will change his plans concerning his servants; when he sees that their power has disappeared, and that no one is left, whether confined or set free.

37 He will say, "Where are their gods, the rock in whom they sought security, 38 who ate the best of their sacrifices, and drank the wine of their drink offerings? Let them rise and help you; let them be your refuge!"

The Vindication of the Lord

39 "See now that I, indeed I, am he!" says the Lord, "and there is no other god besides me. I kill and give life, I smash, and I heal, and none can resist my power."

40 For I raise up my hand to heaven, and say, 'As surely as I live forever, 41 I will sharpen my lightning-like sword, and my hand will grasp hold of the weapon of judgment; I will execute vengeance on my foes, and repay those who hate me!

42 I will make my arrows drunk with blood, and my sword will devour flesh—the blood of the slaughtered and captured, the chief of the enemy's leaders."

43 Cry out, O nations, with his people, for he will avenge his servants' blood; he will take vengeance against his enemies, and make atonement for his land and people.

Then, Moses said to the assembly:

46 he said to them, "Keep in mind all the words I am solemnly proclaiming to you today; you must command your children to observe carefully all the words of this law. 47 For this is no idle word for you—it is your life! By this word you will live a long time in the land you are about to cross the Jordan to possess."

In the same way that Adam's disobedience brought forth curses upon the earth, the disobedience of the Israelites also brought forth generational consequences. Deuteronomy 32:

Instructions about Moses' Death

48 Then the Lord said to Moses that same day, 49 "Go up to this Abarim hill country, to Mount Nebo (which is in the land of Moab opposite Jericho), and look at the land of Canaan that I am giving to the Israelites as a possession. 50 You will die on the mountain that you ascend and join your deceased ancestors, just as Aaron your brother died on Mount Hor and joined his deceased ancestors, 51 for both of you rebelled against me among the Israelites at the waters of Meribah Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin when you did not show me proper respect among the Israelites. 52 You will see the land before you, but you will not enter the land that I am giving to the Israelites."

One of the curses Moses earned for his own disobedience was that he would see, but not enter the "promised land." And, because of Israel's continued disobedience and unfaithfulness, their time in this promised land was filled with wars, defeat, slavery and strife.

Application

How often have we observed in children the unlearned acts of disobedience and sin? Nobody must teach a one-year-old to say "No!" Nobody must teach a two-year-old to run faster when Mom says, "Come here!" Nobody must teach a teenager to sneak off and drink beer or smoke pot. Nobody must teach a married person to cheat. It is the same sin that has been inherited by each mortal since Adam and Eve. It is this very sin that condemns every human to hell before they wear their first diaper!

That condemnation is real. Our secular society scoffs at it. Many churches pretend it's not there. Pointy-headed professors teach young people it's the stuff of myths created by ignorant shepherds thousands of years ago.

Yet, it is very real. Every person you see that is not in Christ is suspended above the pit of hell with nothing but air in between....and the patience of God is all that prevents their fall. Can it be that our own reluctance to share Christ with those facing such peril can be equated with Israel's sin? Have we Christians grown fat and lazy and content? Are we so spiritual that we're of no earthly value? What of the person behind the counter at the store? What of the person who has told you

to take your religion elsewhere? What of the person who wears the spiked hair and dozens of piercings in his/her face? What of those in your own family?

If one of these was injured in a car accident, you would not hesitate to call 911, would you? Yet, can you walk by them every day and ignore the fact that the flames of hell are licking the soles of their shoes?

God has made a way! We must proclaim it! Let us not become like ancient Israel and repeat the sin of disloyalty. It is not for our own satisfaction that we share the Gospel. It is because we were commanded to by the very God who rescued us from the pit!

As Edwards stated, it is nothing but the good hand of God keeping the sinner from plummeting to hell. Let us see the lost as imperiled in this way and reach out for them.

We were once in their place and someone reached out to us.