

Over the past couple of months we have been considering the attributes of God. I think our human tendency is to leave the justice of God until the very last possible lesson. It seems we want to ignore it or downplay it. But the wrath of God is just as holy and good as all His other attributes. Man acts as if God's righteous justice was some blemish on His perfection, or an old doctrine we have outgrown. However, the Word of God does not flinch or apologize when it speaks of God's righteous justice. In fact, there are more references to God's wrath than there are to His love. That makes us uncomfortable. What child is comfortable when he or she is about to be disciplined? The holiness of God and the resulting wrath of God against sin *should* make our flesh fear and tremble.

When we think of God and His attributes, we too often think of them as man expresses them, which completely distorts them. The character of God is all holy and therefore beautiful, including His wrath (Psalm 96:9). Man's wrath is mixed with selfishness, impure motives, and limited knowledge, but God's justice will never express these human weaknesses. God's justice is always with pure motives, with full knowledge of the heart of those upon whom His wrath is displayed. This attribute needs to be seen exactly as the Word of God declares it. We must quit thinking like unregenerate man and

see the reality of God with a renewed mind. Too often Christians make excuses for the righteous justice of God. We must return to the faithful revelation of Scripture.

We tend to think of the justice of God in its unbridled expression on the great day of His wrath that is to come. But God's righteous indignation toward sin is felt daily. *"God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day."* Psalm 7:11 What kind of a judge would not want to see justice upon evil? Every expression of the wrath of God in Scripture is upon sin. His wrath is always just, and it is always consistent with His grace and mercy (Psalms 116:5). Parents can relate to this in how they feel toward their children (Hebrews 12:7-8). If at the ages of four or five they run out into the street without looking, after you have told them again and again not to, and a car swerves and just misses them, do you say, "now, now dear, musn't run in front of big cars or you get a boo boo." No way! You are so concerned out of love for that child that your emotions flare up and the child sees the seriousness of your command and thinks twice before doing it again.

God's righteous justice is never impure but always a holy. In fact, His purity and justice demand wrath be expressed against evil. We see children whose parents do not carry out the sentence they warn will come to pass, and how it encourages the children to be more rebellious. Worse yet, we see parents who don't care what their children do. One thing the Lord showed me very clearly when we were raising our children was that my wife and I

Commented [PW1]: Psalm 96:9 (ESV)

⁹ Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth!

Commented [PW2]: Psalm 116:5 (ESV)

⁵ Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; our God is merciful.

Commented [PW3]: Hebrews 12:7-8 (ESV)

⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

had to be united on what was permissible and what we would discipline. If we did not carry out what we warned would be the consequences of disobedience, our children would not only be confused, but they would also take advantage of us being unclear.

God is not unclear in His demands or the consequential punishment. His very nature demands purity from His creation who He created in goodness (Genesis 1:31). He is the Creator and has a right to demand from us whatever He wills. We can be sure that His commands are always good (Psalm 19:9; 145:17). When we rebel against our Creator, we rebel against what is right and good. The just sentence is death (Genesis 2:17). God, in His mercy, restrains His wrath but displays enough of it to let us know He is serious and uncompromising. ³⁸ *Yet he, being compassionate, atoned for their iniquity and did not destroy them; he restrained his anger often and did not stir up all his wrath.* Psalm 78:38

As the descendants of fallen Adam, we have to recognize that we are born rebels against our Creator (Romans 5:12). We owe everything to God, receive everything from Him, and yet we refuse to even listen to what He would tell us in His love. Without God in our lives we would seek only to please ourselves and would not care about Him or those made in His image. In His faithfulness and love He patiently warns us, trying to get us to listen for our own good (Daniel 9:14). But often, like arrogant fools, we turn our backs on Him and declare ourselves to be our own god, ruler of our own decisions, and seeking pleasure in things that are destructive.

The justice of God warns us: ³ *But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.* ⁴ *Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.* ⁵ *For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.* ⁶ *Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.* Ephesians 5:3-6

You can see the righteous justice of God in the consequences sin brings. Don't let our political correctness nullify the testimony of the wrath of God on sexually transmitted diseases among other things. Those most likely to contract these diseases are drug addicts that share needles and the promiscuous. The Word of God declares both to be sin, and the diseases are an expression of the justice of God to bring those who do such things to repentance so that they might live.

You might ask, what about the innocent that contracted disease through an accident. They are victims of the sins of others. The consequences of sin hurt those uninvolved and the punishment for that is reserved for the one that donated the blood for money for their next fix. The agenda of an increasing number of people is to stand against the declarations of a loving God who tells us what is right based on His own perfect character.

Commented [PW4]: Genesis 1:31 (ESV)

³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Commented [PW5]: Psalm 19:9 (ESV)

⁹ the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether.

Commented [PW6]: Psalm 145:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ The LORD is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works.

Commented [PW7]: Genesis 2:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Commented [PW8]: Romans 5:12 (ESV)

¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—

Commented [PW9]: Daniel 9:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ Therefore the LORD has kept ready the calamity and has brought it upon us, for the LORD our God is righteous in all the works that he has done, and we have not obeyed his voice.

He tells us what is right and wrong because He cares about us. As we deviate from truth, we hurt ourselves and those with whom we come in contact. As our political and educational systems go deeper into the compromise of humanism, and see unrestrained sexual promiscuity as a right, we will see more and more burden on our system due to society condoning sinful, destructive behavior. If you have health insurance you are sharing the cost already. When we pay taxes we share the cost of sin incurred. The cost of our culture condoning sin and paying the consequences is the justice of God.

Please understand that God would rather the sinner turn and find life in surrender to their Creator (Isaiah 45:22). If that person will not turn, they must face justice. While God's grace and mercy patiently instructs them and waits for them to turn, His justice and righteousness will not wait forever. ¹⁸ *According to their deeds, so will he repay, wrath to his adversaries, repayment to his enemies; to the coastlands he will render repayment.* Isaiah 59:18 The word for "justice" is sometimes translated "repayment". God's justice eventually repays evil with punishment and faithfulness with blessing. It cannot be otherwise, because God will always be just.

The mental turmoil that guilt brings is both the mercy and justice of God. Our sin afflicts our mental state, but that affliction is a merciful blessing to bring us to a relationship with God through Jesus. Psychiatry is too often about getting people to deal with life without having to surrender to God. In many cases it teaches people to deaden themselves to guilt or place blame on others. In some cases drugs are prescribed to help lessen the mental effects that disobedience to God brings. There are genuine needs for people who are dealing with the effects of mankind's fallen condition. There may be a physical need for medication of some kind, but there is always a need for right thinking and the peace that comes through a relationship with God.

The justice of God is seen in natural calamity. Insurance companies still refer to these as "acts of God." Throughout the Scriptures weather is used as a blessing or as a display of God's displeasure. Why do you think the world is seeing an increase in weather related disasters? Cap and Trade is not going to even come near touching the problem. That is not a political statement, it is just reality. It is man thinking he can solve the problems we face without changing man's heart. That, too, is rebellion.

Man refuses to think God allowed disasters to turn us from our unresponsiveness to Him. We don't want to think that we are affected with our nation that has turned its back on Him. If you look at the record of Israel, you will see that is exactly how God works. The droughts affected the righteous as well as the wicked, just as rains of blessing fall on the just and unjust (Ezekiel 21:3; Matthew 5:45). We place such a priority on physical comfort and security that we can't imagine God would take it all away if it would bring us closer to Him. God is more concerned with our eternal state than our temporal happiness.

Commented [PW10]: Isaiah 45:22 (ESV)

²² "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.

Commented [PW11]: Ezekiel 21:3 (ESV)

³ and say to the land of Israel, Thus says the LORD: Behold, I am against you and will draw my sword from its sheath and will cut off from you both righteous and wicked.

Commented [PW12]: Matthew 5:45 (ESV)

⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

The wrath of God should remind man of his place, created for God's glory. ¹¹ *"Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."* Revelation 4:11 When we see God's justice in the earth, we should grieve for the hurting, but we should also praise God for two main reasons. **God's justice is always displayed in righteousness, never without reason (Zephaniah 3:5).** Secondly, **He is expressing restrained wrath that we might turn from our sinful ways.** Unfortunately, the response to the wrath of God is often a hardening of the heart against God rather than a recognition of one's own sin. We don't want to give God credit for the good we enjoy and the abundance of blessings we have experienced, but when we taste His righteous discipline, we are all too ready to say it is unjust of Him. Instead, it should restrain evil, in that mankind should see it and fear to rebel against God. ¹¹ *Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you?* Psalm 90:11

Modern culture has altogether lost the fear of God. Even the church waters down the fear of a holy God. It is retranslated as respect. Of course the word includes that meaning, but it also means to fear His righteous justice (Psalm 36:1).

It is a lack of the fear of God and His righteous justice that allows man to go on declaring himself to be his own god. Does the New Age have any fear of God? None, for their god is really self-enthronement, and they would never punish themselves for what their passions demand. If they imagine a god, he is the benign impersonal universe. Disaster is some karmic outworking unrelated to their present life and actions. Can you see how this frees them in their mind from any responsibility to change? ¹⁹ *God will give ear and humble them, he who is enthroned from of old, Selah because they do not change and do not fear God.* Psalm 55:19

Freedom to do as we please always ends in some form of enslavement. True freedom is aligning ourselves with the purpose for which we were made. It is truth that sets us free (John 8:32). The truth is this: God's ways are best for us because we were made in His image. Godly boundaries are in place to keep us from the bondage of ungodly, enslaving passions.

It is often the proper fear of God and His wrath that causes us to change, to repent and seek a right relationship with Him (2 Corinthians 5:14). Then His love becomes our motivation and His life in us the power that transforms us. It often begins by fleeing from the wrath to come. ^{6b} *...by the fear of the LORD one turns away from evil.* Proverbs 16:6b

Five times the books of wisdom tell us that the fear of the Lord is real wisdom. No wonder there is such a lack of true wisdom today. ¹⁷ *Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the LORD all the day.* Proverbs 23:17 The NIV translates the last part of the verse, "Be zealous for a fear of the LORD." I thank God He deals with me swiftly when I step out of line. I praise Him for that fact that when I let something slide my conscience bothers me until I do something about it. I want to be zealous for the fear of God!

Commented [PW13]: Zephaniah 3:5 (ESV)

⁵ The LORD within her is righteous; he does no injustice; every morning he shows forth his justice; each dawn he does not fail; but the unjust knows no shame.

Commented [PW14]: Psalm 36:1 (ESV)

¹ Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes.

Commented [PW15]: John 8:32 (ESV)

³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Commented [PW16]: 2 Corinthians 5:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died;

Jonathan Edward's famous sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, caused people to shake and tremble in the pews. Sometimes the wailing in the congregation would get so loud they couldn't hear him preach. We flinch when we hear that, but remember that is through the fear of the LORD men change their ways. That was a part of the Great Awakening. How can there be repentance unless we see our sin and God's abhorrence of it (Jeremiah 6:15)? Those people were shaking because the Holy Spirit exposed sin in their heart and revealed how much a righteous God hates sin. We sure need this truth today! The rejection of the fear of God is one reason the church is so like the world.

Perhaps there was an excess of hell fire and damnation in the early decades of the 20th century, but we have now swung to the opposite extreme. The lack of fear of God has caused rampant rebellion against God and the celebration of hedonism. The current today is, "Don't you dare suggest anything is wrong with my life! I choose what is right and wrong for me." God responds in His Word, *"...because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed."* Romans 2:8 (NIV)

There is right and wrong, but it is not determined by you or me. It is determined by the righteous character of Almighty God. James tells us, "The Judge is standing at the door." James 5:9b If that doesn't cause you to examine your heart, to be zealous for the fear of God, your revelation of God's wrath is incomplete. Your view of His hatred for evil is inadequate. Your understanding of His Holiness all too limited.

The wrath we have talked about to this point is restrained wrath because He is patient, not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9). But there is a day coming in which the wrath of the Lamb will be poured out. Justice will be served to those who refuse the love and goodness of God.

Thanks be to God we are saved from the wrath to come through Jesus, on Whom fell the wrath of God against sin. If you want a sense of the justice of God upon sin, look at the price Christ paid for you in the passion of the crucifixion. The suffering and death there was proportional to the justice sin deserves. God hid the worst of it with those three hours of darkness (Matthew 27:45), or we would be trembling right now! God's wrath on sin on the cross gives us an opportunity to escape God's just wrath and choose life. *³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.* John 3:36

⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. Romans 5:9 *^{9b} ...you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,*
¹⁰ 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 1:9b-10 We are moving in a river of time toward that inevitable day from which none escape. In that day, all will be judged by our righteous God as to what we did with Jesus. Have you fled from the wrath to come

Commented [PW17]: Jeremiah 6:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; they did not know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown," says the LORD.

Commented [PW18]: 2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)

⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

Commented [PW19]: Matthew 27:45 (ESV)

⁴⁵ Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.

through faith in Jesus' sacrifice for you? Is the fear of the LORD still motivating you to depart from evil?

Listen to the warning God gave Israel under the Old Covenant. ¹⁹ *one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.' This will lead to the sweeping away of moist and dry alike.* Deuteronomy 29:19 If the warning was that severe to those under the Old Covenant, how much more should we be warned against rejecting the grace of God offered to us through the cross (Hebrews 10:28-29)? The justice of God condemns us all to wrath. The grace, mercy and love of God offers forgiveness to all who will receive Jesus as Lord. He is God's righteous and just resolution to our sin debt.

Questions

- 1 What is one reason man rejects the idea of God's wrath?
- 2 Why does God express wrath?
- 3 What happens when discipline is inconsistent?
- 4 Review Ephesians 5:3-6.
- 5 What is behind political secularism?
- 6 Does God allow disasters?
- 7 Why can we praise God for His justice?
- 8 Does fear simply mean respect?
- 9 Why is the fear of God a healthy thing?
- 10 How do we escape the wrath of God?

Commented [PW20]: Hebrews 10:28-29 (ESV)

²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.

²⁹ How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?