

The Wrath of God Must not be Downplayed

The wrath of God is a strange concept in this morally relative world. Some people even become quite angry at the notion that God is angry! But the Bible is profuse with it and the Gospel is precious only to those who have a vivid awareness of it.

Approximately six thousand years ago “the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, so He destroyed all living things on the earth” (Genesis 6:5; 7:23). A time is yet to come when every class and type of people on earth will cry out to the mountains, “fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!” (Revelation 6:15-17).

Ancient Israel was God’s chosen nation and enjoyed His unprecedented blessings. Yet, God warned her that, because of her sins, “I will stretch out My hand against you and destroy you” (Jeremiah 15:6). On July 18, 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian army breached Jerusalem’s city walls. That breach culminated a torturous thirty-month siege in which the city’s citizens slowly starved to death or resorted to cannibalism to survive (Lamentation 4:8-10). Upon entering the city the soldiers massacred thousands, brutally tortured others, chained the survivors together, herded them off to Babylon as wild animals, and reduced the city to rubble (II Chronicles 36:17; Jeremiah 38:22-23; 39:9; Lamentations 5:11-13).

The Scripture informs us that “God is angry with the wicked every day,” that He “hates all workers of iniquity,” and that “the wrath of God comes upon the children of disobedience” (Psalm 7:11; 5:5; Ephesians 5:6). One of the last messages of the Bible is a partial listing of sinners who “shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone” (Revelation 21:8). John the Baptist declared that whoever does not believe in Jesus, “the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36).

Jesus reminded His listeners of a tragedy when a tower fell and crushed eighteen people. Then He warned them that, “unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:4-5). On another occasion, in an obvious reference to God, Jesus told of a king who “was furious, sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city” because they had rejected his son’s marriage invitation and persecuted his servants (Matthew 22:1-7).

Jesus Christ’s message and ministry is frankly incomprehensible apart from understanding that He came to “deliver us from the wrath to come” (1 Thessalonians 1:10). The crucifixion itself was a thunderous shout of the wrath of God upon sin. Christ is the second member of the Holy Trinity. Yet, because He bore His people’s sins, the first member of the Holy Trinity struck out in justifiable and full retribution even upon Him (Isaiah 53:5-10). Thus, Christ suffered the full measure of God’s wrath as a substitute for guilty sinners so that those who receive the redemption offered in Him by faith are “not condemned” (John 3:18). They are rather “blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). They, “having been justified by faith, have peace with God” (Romans 5:1).

Furthermore, no one will bow in loving adoration of the God of grace that has not first trembled before the God of wrath. Grace is the unmerited kindness of God toward those who deserve His wrath. But just as there is no appreciation of medicine when there is no sickness, there is no appreciation of grace when there is no wrath. Isaiah sang, "I will mention the lovingkindness of the Lord" (Isaiah 63:7). But he first felt that the Lord would destroy him for his sin, "woe is me, for I am undone!" (6:5).

So, do not be deceived. God is not a moral relativist. If you have sinned and have not turned to Jesus Christ you are in imminent danger. "Indignation and wrath is upon those who do not obey the truth" (Romans 2:8). But do not despair if you trust Jesus Christ. All God's wrath against you was poured out on Him. "Christ suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust that He might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18).