

# The Wrath of God

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## INTRODUCTION

Holding a schizophrenic view of deity, many consider the God of the Old Testament as One of wrath, while He who is revealed in the New Testament is a God of love. Reality is more complex than the cartoon-cutout conceptions of men. Jehovah, the Creator of heaven and earth, the Lord God revealed in the Hebrew and Christian Scripture, is holy, exalted, unchanging, a perfect blending of love and longsuffering, wrath and retribution, goodness and grace, virtue and vengeance, etc.

Interestingly, while the Old Testament refers to God's wrath, and contains many examples of its outpouring, "the wrath of God" is a phrase found only in the New Testament, at least in the NASB (John 3:36; Rom. 1:18; 5:9; 12:19; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6; Rev. 14:10; 14:19; 15:1, 7; 16:1).

What is the meaning of "wrath"? The Greek word *orgē* refers to "(1) a state of relatively strong displeasure, with focus on the emotional aspect, *anger*; (2) strong indignation directed at wrongdoing, with focus on retribution, *wrath*" [BDAG]. Translated "anger" or "wrath" in the NASB, it is used of man's impulsive anger, often imperfectly expressed and thus perilous (James 1:19-20), or God's righteous judgments upon sins, perfectly expressed in the past, present and future (Rom. 2:5-11).

The Lord God wants what is best for mankind; our adversary, the devil, desires the exact opposite. Adam and Eve transgressed God's commandment, resulting in pain in work/labor (Gen. 3:17-19), pain in childbirth (Gen. 3:16), pain in sickness and death (Gen. 2:17; 3:3, 19, 24). Being a violation of God's purpose and pattern for mankind, sin carries adverse consequences (1 John 3:4). Those who sow the wind reap the whirlwind (Hos. 8:7; cf. Prov. 22:8).

What forms of human conduct provoke the wrath of God? In this lesson, we note Jehovah's reaction to rebellion in general, and sexual immorality in particular. Recognizing that His wrath is poured out upon individuals and nations, let us be obedient to the gospel of grace, so that we might be rescued from the wrath to come.

## POURED OUT UPON FAITHLESS DISOBEDIENCE

Faithless disobedience provokes the wrath of God: “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but **the wrath of God** abides on him” (John 3:36). Many misunderstand Jesus’ earlier statement in John 3:16 as an affirmation of the efficacy of faith only. However, the aforementioned statement, along with the surrounding context, demonstrates the fallacy of such thinking (John 3:14-21).

## POURED OUT UPON SEXUAL IMMORALITY

### *Fornication in General*

Having adopted a hedonistic mentality, many today live for pleasure, with sexual fulfillment being paramount. As a result, our culture is becoming more decadent, debased and debauched. However, sexual immorality (in all its various manifestations) provokes God’s wrath (Eph. 5:3-12, esp. vs. 6; Col. 3:5-11, esp. vs. 6).

### *Homosexuality in Particular*

Affirming the universality of sin, Paul focuses on the Gentiles, then the Jews, and finally concludes, “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” In discussing the fallen state of the Gentiles, Paul says, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness...” (Rom. 1:18). He then catalogues man’s sinful provocations, beginning with the practice of homosexuality and lesbianism (Rom. 1:18-32, esp. vs. 18, 24-27).

Why does homosexuality provoke the wrath of God? It violates God’s provision for human companionship and procreation (Gen. 2:18-24). It removes sexuality from its proper sphere (i.e., the God-ordained relationship of a man and woman, who are joined in a mutually beneficial, life-long union). When robbed of its sacredness, sex becomes nothing more than animalistic desire. Furthermore, homosexuality and lesbianism are “against nature,” ignoring the essential differences/distinctions between men and women, demonstrating confusion regarding roles and relationships. Exchanging the natural function of the opposite gender, such individuals burn with desire for members of their own sex, committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error (Rom. 1:24-27).

Paul included homosexuality in a list of sins that carry spiritually devastating consequences (1 Cor. 6:9-11). The Corinthians were converted to Christ from a corrupt culture. While their past lives may have been marred by such shameful conduct, through obedience to the gospel, they were washed (i.e. baptized for the remission of sins), sanctified (set apart from their former sinful lifestyle through repentance and spiritual renewal), and thus justified (counted as righteous because they are now living in harmony with the will of God).

Addressing Timothy, Paul affirms that homosexuality (along with other base behavior) is contrary to sound teaching that accords with the glorious gospel of our blessed God (1 Tim. 1:8-11). Discussing the characteristic conduct of sinful men (those who are lawless and rebellious, ungodly and sinners, unholy and profane), the apostle groups together as one those who commit murder (including patricide), those who are sexually immoral (including homosexuality), those who are kidnappers, and those who are liars and perjurers.

What possible connection do these disparate actions have in common? They are all harmful. They are all selfish. They are all destructive. To commit murder, one would have to override the conscience on many levels. This is especially true for those who kill their fathers or mothers. To become a kidnapper, one must evidence extreme callousness to the sufferings he brings upon the victim and their families. So also with the practice of sexual perversion: one must ignore God's pattern of creation, His provision for companionship, the physical laws governing nature and the spiritual laws governing the heart, mind and soul.

Lest there be any doubt as to Paul's meaning, note the definition of the Greek word that occurs in both of the aforementioned passages: *arsenokoitēs*, translated "homosexuals," is a compound of *arsēn* [male] and *koitē* [a bed], and refers to "a sodomite" [Thomas 733a]. BDAG define it as "a male who engages in sexual activity with a person of his own sex, pederast." Louw and Nida say it refers to "a male partner in homosexual intercourse, i.e., 'homosexual' [88.280]. This word occurs 2x in the NT (1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10).

## **POURED OUT UPON CORRUPT CULTURES**

The Lord God not only comes in judgment upon individuals, but His wrath is also poured out upon nations. There have been times in history when man's collective guilt was so great, that God acted decisively, destroying corrupt cultures and sin-sick societies.

### *The Anti-Diluvian World*

In the days of Noah, God's wrath was poured out on the antediluvian world (Gen. 6). God's mercy was seen in the 120 year delay, during which Noah, a preacher of righteousness, warned the world of coming judgment, and prepared an ark for the salvation of his household (Gen. 6:3; Heb. 11:7; 1 Pet. 3:19-20; 2 Pet. 2:5). Unfortunately, the men of Noah's day did not heed the warning or take advantage of the opportunity, and thus faced calamitous destruction (Matt. 24:36-39; Luke 17:26-27).

### *The Cities of the Plain*

In the days of Abraham and Lot, God's wrath was poured out on the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18-19, esp. vs. 18:20). God condemned and destroyed the cities of the plain, reducing them to ashes, setting them forth as an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter, and follow after strange flesh (2 Pet. 2:4-10, esp. vs. 6; Jude 6-8, esp. vs. 7).

Divine judgment was so complete that subsequent Biblical references to “Sodom and Gomorrah” signify absolute destruction, upon the cities of the plain (Gen. 19:23-29), upon Israel (Deut. 29:22-23; Amos 4:11-12; Matt. 10:14-15), upon Babylon (Isa. 13:19-22; Jer. 50:39-40), upon Edom (Jer. 49:17-18; cf. Isa. 63:1-6), etc. Since our nation is now provoking God’s anger in a similar fashion, we should heed the lessons of the past.

God’s mercy is seen in His willingness to spare the city of Sodom if ten righteous individuals could be found there (Gen. 18:22-33). However, only one righteous man (Lot) dwelt in Sodom (2 Pet. 2:7-9), and the men of the city deeply resented his rebuke of their wicked conduct (Gen. 19:9). They were hardened beyond repentance or redemption (Isa. 3:9).

### *The Land of Canaan*

In the days of Joshua, God’s wrath was poured out on the inhabitants of Canaan (Lev. 18:24-30). However, His mercy is seen in the centuries long delay that occurred during the Patriarchal era and Israel’s sojourn in Egypt (Gen. 15:12-16).

### *The Roman Empire*

Civil government is ordained of God for the purpose of punishing evil doers and blessing those who do good (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). However, when these roles are reversed, nations face divine condemnation (Psa. 107:33-34; Prov. 14:34). The wrath of God is also poured out upon sin-sick societies, and corrupt governments that promote wickedness and persecute those who are faithful (Rev. 14:9-12, esp. vs. 10; 14:17-20, esp. vs. 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1).

What is the destiny of a nation that provokes God’s anger? While sobered by recent events, and distressed that our nation is drifting further away from its Judeo-Christian heritage, faithful disciples will remember that God alone is supreme, and He is in control (Psa. 2). We love our nation, and well we should. God has blessed our nation. Yet, we should not assume that the United States of America is somehow exempt from the divine law of sowing and reaping, or that we will never face the wrath of God.

## **CONCLUSION**

Remembering that we are sojourners, dwelling in a hostile environment, travelling through a world of sin and sadness, let us set our affections on things above (Col. 3:1-4), and look for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God (Heb. 11:8-10).

Remember that righteous people can cause God to delay or defer in His divine judgments (Gen. 18:32-33). Living in a world of darkness, may our lights shine brightly (Matt. 4:12-17; 5:14-16; Phil. 2:14-16).

Let us be faithful in the face of opposition, persecution, and even death (Rev. 2:10). Remember that the promise of salvation is offered to all who respond in obedience to the gospel (Rom. 5:6-11, esp. vs. 9). Therefore, let us not test God, as did Israel of old, but avail ourselves of His grace and goodness, while there is time and opportunity (Heb. 3:7-11; 4:1-3).