

GOD'S FIERCE ANGER

By Dave Miller

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Does God get angry? Does he get mad? Does he actually demonstrate wrath against people? Does he demonstrate vengeance? Does he take vengeance against people in certain situations? How many people in the world today would say "No, that's not the God of grace and mercy that I know about?" We are going to go to the Scripture and let the word of God speak. We are going to see whether or not the God of heaven demonstrates the characteristic of anger and wrath.

I submit to you that a disservice has been done to the present generation of people because an inaccurate picture of the character and nature of God has been embedded in our society and in the church. Only God's word can provide us with a balanced, healthy comprehension of God's personal attributes. Only the Bible can bestow upon us the appropriate interplay between the love and mercy of God and the wrath and anger of God.

Current conceptions within our society, which dominate the thinking of many, betray a failure to assess properly the reality of God's wrath. A general attitude of permissiveness, laxness, and indiscriminate tolerance has blanketed American society. This mentality manifests itself both in and out of the church. Out of the church, we see all across our land people unconcerned about seeking God. They structure their lives; they make their moral choices based upon their own desires with no consideration for God. In the church, members comfortably relax in the presence of impenitent sin and open defiance of the laws of God. Members demonstrate a willingness to toy with unscriptural innovation. Church members entertain fellowship with false religion. Churches lose their sense of alarm and urgency in providing wayward church members and unevangelized non-church members with a divine antidote to sin and their lost condition.

Out of this context, voices have arisen which focus almost exclusively upon the love of God. Emphasis is repeatedly placed upon God's compassion, God's mercy, grace, kindness and his long suffering character. We, in fact, are seeing a preoccupation with the goodness and the beneficence of God. Don't misunderstand me. One can never emphasize God's love enough but one can be guilty of misrepresenting the true nature of that love. One can so present the love of God, so that the equally Biblical doctrine of God's wrath makes no sense and fades into irrelevance. I challenge you to read the following passages, which detail the amazing love of God: Matthew 6:30; 7:11; John 3:16; Romans 5:6-8; 8:32; I John 3:16; 4:9, 10; Titus 3:4; Exodus 34:6, 7; Psalm 103:12; Isaiah 1:18; 38:17; Micah 7:19. Of course, the Bible contains many, many more allusions to God's love and God's grace and mercy. These few serve to summarize the basic essence of the incredible love of God.

But let me also urge you to integrate, to blend, to harmonize this Bible doctrine with what the Scriptures teach about God's wrath. Consider carefully passages in both Old and New Testaments, which depict God as a God who, executes his wrath against people. This aspect of the God of heaven has been completely overlooked and ignored in our society. Exodus 20:5 introduces us to the nature of God, who God is. It says, "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them nor serve them [speaking of idols] for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of

them that hate me." "For the Lord thy God is a jealous God among you lest the anger of the Lord thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth" (Deuteronomy 6:15). "For the Lord your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward" (Deuteronomy 10:17). You can not bribe God; he will deal swiftly with people and execute judgment. Deuteronomy 29:27&28 says, "And the anger of the Lord was kindled against this land, to bring upon it all the curses that are written in the book: and the Lord rooted them out of their land in anger, and in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as it is this day." "Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, 'Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us'" (Deuteronomy 32:27)?

The Old Testament is filled with passages that describe for us the fact that a part of God's nature; a part of God's character and personality is anger and the willingness to demonstrate wrath at the proper times. God executes true wrath—wrath that is just and deserved.

In Luke 12:4, 5, Jesus said, "And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him." Those are the words of Jesus Christ, describing his Father, the God of heaven. This is New Testament teaching! Some say, "Well, God is a God of grace and mercy and love and he doesn't get angry about sin. He doesn't get upset with people about their disobedience." These New Testament passages show otherwise.

What about Acts 5, where God literally strikes a Christian couple dead because of their sin? What about Hebrews 10:27? The Hebrew writer says, "A certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." In verse 30—"For we know him that hath said, 'Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord,' And again, 'The Lord shall judge his people.'" Those are Old Testament quotes that the writer alludes to and then he concludes, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Hebrews 12:29 says, "For our God is a consuming fire." That is a quotation of Deuteronomy 4:24. The same teaching of the Old Testament concerning the wrath of God carries right over into the New Testament and the New Testament writers allude to God's wrath. They warn Christians and the entire world to take into consideration the wrath of God, which will be executed against those who disobey him.

Let us go back again for just a moment to the Old Testament. Do you remember the great Judean King Hezekiah, who endeavored to bring the nation back into harmony with God's written revelation? Why? II Chronicles 29:10 says: ". . . that His fierce wrath may turn away from us." You remember whenever Hezekiah humbled himself and all of the people of his generation that had been disobedient humbled themselves, God's wrath was abated. Read II Chronicles 32:26.

King Josiah found himself in a similar circumstance whenever he realized the extent to which the nation had departed from God's ways. The Bible tells us that he tore his robes in anger and grief and sorrow and he said this, ". . . great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do all that is written in this book" (II Chronicles 34:21).

Don't you find it unfortunate that people in our day, in our country, go merrily on their way, out of harmony with God's written words, and yet consoling themselves with a false view of God's love? Many people actually conceive of the God of the Bible as a kindly old grandfather gentleman, with a long white beard, who just can't bear to punish anyone and who will tolerate just any kind of behavior, overlook it, forgive completely. Folks, that attitude has blanketed our society. People are living life however they choose to live it and consoling themselves with the idea that somehow, some way, God is so gracious and God is so merciful that he is just going to forgive me and overlook all of my determination to live how I want to live.

Jeremiah's contemporaries tried to heal the hurt of the people "slightly" as though the neglect of God's will was not that serious! They said, "Peace, Peace" when there was no peace as long as they were out of harmony with the scriptures (Jeremiah 6:14). That is simply not the God of the Bible. If your understanding of the God of heaven is such that you feel that you can believe what you want and practice what you want and that people can go on their merry way living life in view of their own perspective and their own lusts, then you simply do not understand the God of the Bible. Please go to this passage in Jeremiah and read the passages following (Jeremiah 6:14-21) that describe for us the way the God of heaven looked at their lives and His solution to their sins.

We live in a time when people believe and do just about anything and everything imaginable. The ethics of the Bible and New Testament Christianity simply no longer prevail in American society. Our moral and spiritual foundation is deteriorating. We may just as well face that. Simple, godly virtues like honesty, purity, kindness and patience have evaporated in many places. Sexual morality and marital faithfulness have been seriously undermined and eroded. Atheism, humanism and new-ageism, Eastern mysticism and a host of other "-isms" have made tremendous inroads into the thinking of many Americans. TV talk shows and many television programs openly flaunt every sort of lewd, ungodly behavior and belief that a few years ago would have been unthinkable and unacceptable to the American population as a whole.

Even if you are a perpetual optimist, you are forced to face the fact that spiritual, religious and moral chaos have gripped our civilization by the throat and the time has come for us to approach the situation the way the prophets of God did.

We need to warn people about the reality of God's wrath and its inevitable occurrence in that day. Indeed, all people one day will know what God's wrath is. Listen to these words from the inspired apostle: ". . . the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" (II Thessalonians 1:7-9). Do you believe that passage? Do you believe those words? Many people are convinced that God and Christ are just going to save most people. They think very few will be lost, very few will be recipients of God's wrath and those few will be those that are just so wicked and degenerate that no one wants to have anything to do with them.

Such thinking is not true. Do you realize that even though the Bible teaches in John 3:16 that "God so loved the world" — that is, He loves every single human being that has ever

populated this planet-that that same Jesus Christ said in Matthew 7:13, 14 that the majority of all human beings will choose to go down the broad way that leads to eternal destruction that is, hell? Few, he says, will make it into the realm of eternal life, which is heaven. Now if those are the facts of the matter, we would do well to adjust our understanding of who God is and what He requires of us. If my understanding of the God of heaven is such that I believe that somehow in His infinite mercy and grace most people are going to be saved, then I would have the wrong understanding of who God is. My conception of God would be unscriptural and unbiblical because the Bible says most people will be lost by their own choice, by the decisions that they make and the direction in life that they choose. I urge you to realign and adjust your understanding of the God of heaven to fit the Biblical picture. Yes, God loves us. He loves every human being. Indeed, "God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9). God wants everyone to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (I Timothy 2:4). But as a matter of fact, most people will deliberately choose not to follow God. The Bible teaches with equal force that God's wrath, God's anger, God's vengeance will be executed against those people for eternity.

Consider II Peter 3 and the nature of God and his wrath. In II Peter 3:7, Peter said "the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." In verse 9: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens will pass away with a great noise and the elements will melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy living and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? . . . Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.... Ye therefore, beloved, seeing you know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness" (II Peter 3:10-17).

"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (II Corinthians 5:11).

My friend, the Bible teaches vividly, dramatically and certainly the wrath of God. The wrath of God will be executed against those who remain impenitent and refuse to turn to the God of heaven. You see, theoretically, all of us deserve to be condemned to an eternal hell because all have sinned, all have violated God's will. All at one time or another have turned their back upon God and rejected his will. But we can turn to God. How do we do that? Despite what many TV speakers and religious spokesmen say, the Bible teaches that you must believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and believe the word of God. "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrew 11:6). "Faith comes by hearing the word of God" (Romans 10:17). Now many in the religious world stop at that point and they say, "All right, if you believe in Jesus, if you accept Jesus as Lord and Savior of your life, you are instantaneously saved and forgiven at that moment." But we have other passages that teach that once we come to faith in Jesus Christ, we still must repent, that is, change our minds about the way we have been living, the kind of life we've lived, our sins and turn ourselves around in our minds and point ourselves toward God and his will. Then we allow someone else to lower our physical bodies under

water. The Bible calls that "baptism," from *baptizo-immersion*, dipping into water. I Peter 3:21, Galatians 3:27 and Romans 6:4 all say that when we come up out of the waters of baptism, we are new creatures, forgiven of sin; we are Christians, we have been clothed with Christ and we stand before Christ justified and forgiven

Those people who go through that process will escape the wrath of God if they continue to live faithfully the Christian life to the end of their days. In Revelation 2:10 we read, "Be thou faithful unto death and you will receive the crown of life." That's how to escape the wrath of God. Vengeance is a very certain aspect of the nature of God that will be executed against most people who have ever lived. But you and I can escape that wrath, if we will love Him enough to obey Him. Live for Him, strive to perfect our beings in harmony with His will, and thus to look forward to heaven and eternal security with God.

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