

# The Wrath Of God's Love

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## God Does As God Is.

Before we can come to a correct understanding of God's attitudes and actions, we must first know His character. God's attitudes and actions are based on His character; they are determined by His character; they are consistent with His character; they demonstrate His character.

"God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16). In that terse statement, "love" is not a predicate nominative; that is, it does not define the essence of God's *being*. It is a predicate adjective; that is, it is the all-inclusive statement of God's moral *character*. It means that His and our highest well-being is God's ultimate objective in all that He does and allows to be done, all things being considered together.

As the ultimate moral and governmental *authority*, God has the ultimate moral and governmental *obligation* to uphold universal moral law and order. Moral law and order are the necessary means and conditions of the highest well-being of all, including God Himself. God has this necessary obligation because He is the only one naturally and morally qualified. God's supreme love compels Him to govern.

This moral obligation to govern includes the right and therefore the responsibility to enforce the penalty of violating moral law. Moral law without a penalty would be only advice.

It is incorrect to say that God is a God of justice as well as a God of love. That sets God's justice outside of His love and in contrast to His love. It implies that God is not acting out of love—that is, for the highest good—in executing the penalty of the moral law.

It *is* correct to say that God is a God of justice as well as a God of *mercy*, because both justice *and* mercy are qualities and actions of God's love. They are different means to the same end. God acts with justice; when He can justly do so, He acts with mercy. God willingly grants mercy rather than impose justice whenever the conditions of mercy are met. Whenever mercy can be granted without violating justice, "mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13). Any judge or governor who forgave everyone unconditionally would be a fool; and *God is no fool*. Most people are rejecting God's mercy by rejecting its necessary conditions: repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

God sees and hears everything. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good" (Proverbs 15:3). "All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13).

Evil, pride, injustice, oppression, violence, war, greed, immorality—the constant drama of human selfishness and rebellion; the roar of cursing, blasphemy, false accusations, insults—God allows Himself to endure it all *right to His face!*

"The dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty" (Psalm 74:20). How would any of us react if we watched someone sexually abusing a child? raping a woman? stabbing someone to death? cheating an older couple out of their life savings? or any of a thousand other cruelties? How would we feel? *Outraged. Angry.*

God loves people. People hurt people. People hurt God. God sees people hurting and ruining themselves and one another. God suffers all of that along with the victims. How must *He* feel?

God created human beings in His image, according to His likeness (Genesis 1:26, 27). God is a person, and He created us as persons. Our ability to feel joy and happiness, grief and sorrow, inner hurt and anger implies that our Creator also has that ability. How much greater must be God's capacity to experience these feelings? If we feel indignation, outrage and anger at sin, how much more must God feel it? Think how passionately He must abhor sin.

At times people allow these feelings to get control of them, leading them to irrational outbursts and actions. God does not do that. Even though His emotional capacities are immeasurably greater than ours, God is never controlled by His feelings. He is always in sovereign control of all His qualities, abilities and actions.

God's anger at evil and evildoers is not an irrational reaction, a mindless emotional outburst. God is emotionally moved, but not emotionally motivated. God acts with great feeling, but not merely out of feeling. His judicial wrath is the deliberate, reasonable and proper expression of the righteous indignation of a loving God, who is committed to the highest good in upholding moral law by executing its just and necessary penalty.

So, why doesn't God do something about evil? Why doesn't He stop it *now*? Because God is the Judge, not the "Chief Of Police." According to the Bible [Romans 13:1 - 7], God has committed law enforcement in this present age to civil government, imperfect and often unjust as it is. Sometimes God's judgments are in the earth so that the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness (Isaiah 26:9). God has brought judgment on nations by allowing them to reap what they sowed and also by allowing others to conquer and oppress them. Such judgments are persuasive and corrective. Yet in all of that, God is avoiding uprooting the wheat along with the tares (darnel, weeds); He is allowing them to grow together until the harvest (Matthew 13:29).

In this present age of grace, God is seeking to save people through the gospel, that is, to bring them to repentance and faith in Christ. In doing so God is only postponing final judgment. God's righteous wrath is on hold, yet steadily growing. They who despise God's "goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering" do not realize that the purpose of His goodness is to lead them to repentance. But because of their hardness and impenitent heart, they are only storing up for themselves a massive, dormant but actively expanding volcano of wrath "in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Romans 2:4, 5, 8).

## There Was No Intercessor.

Before the advent of Jesus Christ, God's righteous wrath on incorrigible nations was punitive. After centuries of unrestrained depravity, God's long forbearance ceased to be a virtue. Justice demanded destruction. The Flood is a prime example of this.

God said to Abraham that his descendants would live as strangers in Egypt, then in the fourth generation they would return to Canaan because "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" (Genesis 15:16). Hundreds of years of divine forbearance finally came to an end. God said enough is enough. Israel became the agent of God's long-delayed wrath.

Concerning the ancient Amalekites, God said to Moses, "I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven" (Exodus 17:14). King Saul "did not obey the voice of the Lord nor execute His fierce wrath on Amalek" (1 Samuel 28:18). Israel suffered greatly as a result.

Amalek; Edom (Joel 3:19); Moab and Ammon and the Philistines and Tyre (Ezekiel 25); Nineveh (Zephaniah 2:13); Babylon (Jeremiah 51:60 - 64). Those and other nations that put themselves under the sentence of God's judgment—*gone!*

In the days of Jonah, the king of Nineveh called on the people to repent and "cry mightily to God ... who can tell if God will turn and relent and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?" (Jonah 3:8, 9). However, it was only a passing repentance. Eventually, Nineveh fell and was destroyed.

The Psalms contain over forty references to God's anger and wrath. In what are called the "imprecatory psalms," David calls down God's wrath on his enemies: "Arise, O Lord, in Your anger; lift Yourself up because of the rage of my enemies, and awake for me to the judgment You have commanded!" (Psalm 7:6); "Shall they escape by iniquity? In anger cast down the peoples, O God! (Psalm 56:7). In Psalm 21:8, 9, he says, "Your hand will find all Your enemies; Your right hand will find those who hate You. You shall make them as a fiery oven in the time of Your anger; the Lord shall swallow them up in His wrath, and the fire shall devour them."

These and others like them do not come out of a selfish desire for personal revenge. They are a call for justice. David's enemies were God's enemies, the enemies of everything right and good. Also, some of these psalms refer prophetically to the enemies of Christ—Psalm 2 for example: "Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed [Christ], saying, 'Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us.' He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure; 'Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion.'" This and what follows in Psalm 2 should be a sobering warning to all who make, judge, and administer laws. Do not disdain the word of the Holy Trinity.

God had a special covenant relationship with ancient Israel. That covenant included chastisement. For that reason the times of God's anger and wrath toward Israel were intended to be corrective, not destructive. The Old Covenant was a covenant of law, of works. Here is the law. Obey it, and here are the blessings. Disobey it, and here are the penalties. "The law brings about wrath" (Romans 4:15).

Some years ago a man said to me, "I go by the Ten Commandments." I thought to myself, "good luck!" Sometime later he bumped his head and let out a string of profanities. Poor soul.

If you live by the law, be sure you never break it. You will be the first person to succeed before or since Jesus of Nazareth. We have all forfeited that option because "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Where the conditions of mercy do not exist, the penalties of justice are the only option. Such was the case during the Old Covenant. At times the spiritual and moral condition of the people degenerated to the "trigger point" of divine judgment. God's person, honor and moral authority were treated with contempt. Mercy had long been spurned. Therefore continued mercy became no longer a virtue. The situation demanded justice. Only justice would meet the requirements of moral law and order for the sake of the highest wellbeing of orderly society. For that reason the Old Testament contains about three hundred references to the anger and wrath of the Lord being provoked and ignited ("kindled") in various ways *and to varying degrees* at the disobedience of individuals and nations.

These occasions must be kept in perspective by remembering that they took place over a period of at least several hundred years. Also, most of them were directed toward ancient Israel, particularly at times when the people abandoned themselves to gross idolatry and its sexual immorality. These times include: the forty years in the wilderness; the times of the judges; the apostasy of northern Israel, and the condition of Judah just before the Babylonian Captivity. For the last two reasons, Isaiah, Jeremiah (including Lamentations), and Ezekiel contain over one hundred of the Old Testament references to God's anger and wrath. In the time of Elijah the prophet there were only seven thousand who had not bowed their knees to Baal (1 Kings 19:18).

All this anger and wrath came on Israel because they had sinned so grossly against so much light and so many spiritual privileges. Unlike other nations, they had the miracles, the sanctuary, the sacrifices, the priesthood, the prophets, "the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers," and eventually the Messiah (Romans 9:4, 5).

Before the New Covenant in Christ, very few intercessors arose with the spiritual stature to intercede effectively for the people at those times when spiritual and moral conditions reached the critical point.

The prophet Isaiah declared, "He [God] saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him" (Isaiah 59:16; also 65:3).

*There was no one to intercede.* There was no one to provide the conditions that would make mercy reasonable and therefore possible and just. The Hebrew word for "wondered" literally means "stunned." In view of the impending destruction, misery and death that necessary justice would bring, God was appalled, horrified that there was no intercessor.

On occasions certain people who were in covenant relationship with God did succeed in averting impending judgment.

By his intercession Abraham successfully reduced down to ten the minimum required number of righteous people in Sodom so God could and would spare the city—a minimum never met (Genesis 18:22 - 33).

By his intercession Moses succeeded in averting the destruction of the entire nation of Israel (Exodus 32:7 - 35). He appealed to God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He appealed to God's honor and reputation. Then he finally said to God, "Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written" (verse 32). Moses was willing to offer *himself* in place of the people! This upheld the honor of God, because it was honorable for God to answer a prayer so selfless, so noble coming from the spiritual and moral leader of the nation.

Moses's intercession did not change God. It changed the *situation*, creating a condition for the merciful but outraged God to continue mercy and forbearance wisely and safely without undue harm to Himself and His authority, to moral law and order, to the highest good of the universe.

Concerning this occasion, the psalmist stated, "He said that He would destroy them, had not Moses His chosen one stood before Him in the breach, to turn away His wrath, lest He destroy them" (Psalm 106:23).

The apostle Paul approached this level when he said that he was at the point of wishing himself accursed from Christ for his fellow Jews (Romans 9:3).

Besides Abraham and Moses, a few other outstanding individuals also rose to the occasion.

Phinehas was the son of Eleazar and grandson of Aaron the high priest. When thousands of Israelite men engaged in a sexual orgy with the women of Moab, Phinehas took action. A prominent man of Israel brought a prominent woman of Midian to his family publicly, right in the sight of Moses and the people who were crying out to God. Phinehas took a javelin, followed the man into the tent, and with one thrust shoved the javelin through both of them. This stopped the plague that was underway, but not before 24,000 died, 23,000 of them in one day. God said to Moses, "Phinehas ... has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal" (Numbers 25:11).

When Rehoboam, Solomon's son, became king of Israel, "he forsook the law of the Lord, and all Israel along with him" (2 Chronicles 12:1). Shishak, the king of Egypt, invaded Israel and plundered the temple and the king's house. When Rehoboam and the elders of Israel came together in Jerusalem, the Lord spoke through the prophet Shemaiah, "You have forsaken Me, and therefore I also have left you in the hand of Shishak." When Rehoboam humbled himself, "the wrath of the Lord turned from him, so as not to destroy him completely, and things also went well in Judah" (verse 12).

Much later king Hezekiah, twenty-five years old and in the first year of his reign, announced to the priests and Levites in the temple, "Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel, that His fierce wrath may turn away from us" (2 Chronicles 29:10). Hezekiah made sweeping reforms that lasted during his reign.

Manasseh was Hezekiah's grandson. During Manasseh's long reign, the spiritual and moral condition of Judah became irreversibly corrupt. Josiah, Manasseh's grandson, attempted to

revive and reform Judah during his thirty-one year reign. "Nevertheless, the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath, with which His anger was aroused against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him. And the Lord said, 'I will also remove Judah from My sight, as I have removed Israel'" (2 Kings 23:26, 27). Josiah's reforms were only external and temporary—too little, too late.

During the last days of the kingdom of Judah, Jeremiah was almost alone in warning the nation of coming judgment. The people scorned him and even tried to kill him. After suffering so much seemingly in vain, the weeping prophet changed his prayer and asked God in His justice to send the judgment that had become inevitable (Jeremiah 18:20). As the northern kingdom of Israel had done earlier, Judah went past the point of no return.

God said to the prophet Ezekiel, "Son of man, when a land sins against Me by persistent unfaithfulness, I will stretch out My hand against it; I will cut off its supply of bread, send famine on it, and cut off man and beast from it. Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver only themselves by their righteousness" (Ezekiel 14:13, 14).

God's righteous and just wrath came on the people because they themselves had provoked it. Stubbornly, persistently, relentlessly, and in defiance of all divine appeals and remonstrances, they pursued a steady course of self-willed defiance and disobedience. They trampled on God's law, mocked and persecuted His prophets, and spurned His mercy. Would a loving, wise, and just God allow that to continue indefinitely and without retribution? He would be unloving and unjust if He did—unloving and unjust to Himself and to His creation.

So now we understand better why the anger and wrath of God were so prominent during the time of the Law and the prophets. In general there was no intercessor, no one to intercede, to uphold God's honor and thus avoid judgment; so God had to uphold it Himself by the only means left: judgment—the release of His holy indignation, anger, and wrath.

That inevitable alternative to His mercy did not change God. God did not cease being loving and merciful. It changed the course of action that God had to take because His mercy had been stubbornly rejected. God changed His course of action with the utmost reluctance.

### God Is Not Angry By Nature.

God said through the prophet Isaiah, "Fury is not in Me" (Isaiah 27:4). It is not natural and normal for God to be angry. He is not "an angry God." His anger has to be provoked. By their persistent sinning, people force the issue. They make the penalty necessary. They outrage God and bring His judicial wrath upon themselves.

God's wrath is temporary. "His anger is but for a moment" (Psalm 30:5); yet, *oh, what can happen in that "moment"!* God said to His covenant people, "For My name's sake I will defer My anger, and for My praise I will restrain it from you, so that I do not cut you off" (Isaiah 48:9). "With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you" (Isaiah 54:8). "In My wrath I struck you, but in My favor I have had mercy on you" (Isaiah 60:10). "'Return, backsliding Israel,' says the Lord, 'and I will not cause My anger to fall on you; for I am merciful,' says the Lord, 'and I will not be angry forever'" (Jeremiah 3:12).

Earlier God said through the prophet Joel, "Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm" (Joel 2:13).

Many times Israel had provoked God to just and righteous anger. "But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them. Yes, many a time He turned His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath" (Psalm 78:38). God holds His wrath in abeyance. It has to be activated, "stirred up." God is only as angry as He has to be in a given situation and only for as long as He has to be.

Hosea was a prophet of God to the northern kingdom of Israel during the time leading up to its fall to the Assyrians in 722 BC. Because of the flagrant immorality of his wife, Hosea's heartbreaking domestic life paralleled God's heartbreak over the spiritual adultery of His people. He was a heartbroken husband speaking for a heartbroken God. At that time the Assyrians were "the rod of My [God's] anger" (Isaiah 10:5). The northern kingdom was often referred to as Ephraim because it was the main tribe. "Ephraim provoked Him [the Lord] most bitterly" (Hosea 12:14). Still, we feel the grief of God in Hosea 11:1 - 9. "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? ... "My heart churns within Me; my sympathy is stirred. I will not execute the fierceness of My anger; ... " (verses 8, 9). So God promised future mercy and restoration. "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for My anger is turned away from him" (Hosea 14:4).

"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever" (Psalm 103:8, 9; also Psalm 145:8, 9).

At times God completely removed His wrath. The psalmist said to the Lord, "You have taken away all Your wrath; You have turned from the fierceness of Your anger" (Psalm 85:3).

In Proverbs 24:17, 18 we have an interesting insight into God's attitudes. "Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles; lest the Lord see it, and it displease Him, and He turn away His wrath from him."

The prophet Jonah looked forward to God's judgment on Nineveh. When Nineveh repented, God relented. This disappointed Jonah. In his angry prayer, Jonah said to God, "I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm" (Jonah 4:2).

The prophet Micah said that God "does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy" (Micah 7:18).

In the days of Ezra, after the Jewish captives had returned to Jerusalem, a day was appointed for the Levites to stand together for united prayer and confession. Here is part of their confession: "You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in kindness" (Nehemiah 9:17).

In Nahum 1:2 - 6 we read that God is slow to anger; nevertheless, when it becomes necessary for God to be angry, the results are devastating! "Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by Him" (Verse 6).

If God is slow to anger and His anger does not last forever, then why is God "angry [enraged] with the wicked every day" (Psalm 7:11)? From what has been said thus far, we have the

essence of the answer. Day and night, billions of sinners are constantly provoking His anger by their sin and their sinning.

According to Romans 9:22, God is willing "to show His wrath and to make His power known." God is willing and therefore chooses to do so because justice demands it as a necessity. The proper and full demonstration of God's wrath and power will serve as an everlasting witness to God's commitment to uphold moral law, and also a perpetual warning of the consequences of sin. God's forbearance demonstrates that He is slow to anger. He endured with great patience those who used His patience only as an opportunity to continue to fit themselves more fully for their foreknown and therefore foreordained destruction.

"The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in ungodliness" (Romans 1:18). We are warned: "Let no man deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 5:6. Also Colossians 3:6). That was written to believers!

"One sinner destroys much good" (Ecclesiastes 9:18). This includes "nice" people who live by the norms of society, work hard, raise families, pay their debts, help people, maintain a good reputation, but who do not love God with all their heart and therefore do not truly love others as themselves. This includes people like the professional woman who was raised in church, who boasted that when she was a teenager she told Jesus Christ: "get out of my life!" It includes the "nice" young adult who stood in church and silently shook her head when asked if she would accept Jesus Christ as her Savior and Lord. She said "no" to God just as firmly and definitely as a hardened criminal—just more politely.

All of us have sinned. This fact alone completely cuts the ground out from under all self-righteousness. God has a world of guilty sinners to deal with; and as the supreme moral authority, He is obligated to uphold moral law. That means executing the just penalty on those who have broken the moral law. That includes all of us.

### How? Who?

But God is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9). So how can God grant mercy safely and justly? Forgiving sin is the most dangerous thing God can do. It means setting aside the penalty. If even one person can get by with doing wrong, the integrity of moral law is violated. God cannot remove the penalty without acting in reckless disregard for the well-being of the entire universe of moral beings.

If God is going to forgive sin, something must be put in the place of the penalty that will do what the penalty is intended to do. It must say to all once and for all that mercy is not to be misunderstood as laxity. In this and other ways it must satisfy the demands of the broken law.

What can that be? Repentance? Repentance is a necessary *condition* of forgiveness, but our repentance alone will not save us. We have sinned against the Holy One, and only He can save us. Either the guilty must suffer the penalty, or someone who is innocent must suffer and die in place of the guilty.

Who can make such a sacrifice on behalf of sinners? Another mere mortal cannot do it, because we have all sinned. An angel from heaven could not satisfy the demands of the broken moral law on our behalf. Who, then, could be our substitute and make the required sacrifice on



our behalf? It must be someone who is innocent, someone of the highest position and authority, someone who would do it solely out of supreme love because he certainly would not owe it to us. Who can do this? Who *would* do this?

There is only One—*God Himself!* And that is exactly what God did. In the Second Person of the eternal God-head, He took upon Himself full humanity. God became one of us to save us. His name is JESUS!

We come now to the cross. The sight shocks us. The life-blood of the Son of God is being poured out for our sins. How great is the guilt of our willful disobedience? How great is God's outraged justice? How great is God's love, demonstrated in His commitment to give *Himself* for us as the only just way to forgive our sin? Look *at our suffering, dying Substitute!*

It is the spectacle of the ages. We see the great offended Lawgiver once and for all upholding the honor and integrity of the moral law by suffering under its penalty in our place. We see God's determination to forgive us only on conditions that will satisfy the requirements of justice and break the power of sin in our hearts and lives. Immediately we realize, "He is suffering because of *my* sin. He is dying under the burden of *my* sin. It cost God everything so I could be forgiven."

Now we see our sin in all of its ugly reality. If the sight of our Creator and lawful Sovereign taking on Himself our humanity to suffer and die in agony and blood on an old rugged cross under the burden of our sins—if that does not break our stubborn hearts, make us love God and hate sin, *then nothing will!*

The Savior looks up. His eyes meet yours. He calls you by name. He says, "I am doing this for you—*because I love you.*" Can you turn around, walk away, and go on living the life and doing the things that nailed Him there? Everything in you should move you to cry out, "My Savior and my God! Forgive me! I believe You! I love You and I will live for You forever!

### We Have An Intercessor!

Thank God, the cross was not the end. In three days Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the Son of the living God, rose from the dead. His resurrection validated His sacrificial, vicarious death.

After careful and thorough research and investigation, Luke, the inspired and proven accurate historian, records: "He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them [the apostles] during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3).

At the end of forty days, Jesus ascended into heaven and was seated at the right hand of God. Jesus Christ is now our exalted High Priest, our Mediator, our Intercessor!

All this fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 53. This prophecy concerning the Messiah, the Christ, states that "He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12).

Jesus is the one Mediator between God and man (1Timothy 2:5). He is our "merciful and faithful High Priest" (Hebrews 2:17). He is "seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Hebrews 8:1). "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost [completely and

forever] those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

Now God can be at the same time both "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26). He offers to all who will repent and believe complete forgiveness, full justification, and personal reconciliation with Himself.

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). "Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him (verse 9).

Jesus Christ is "our Rescuer out of the coming wrath" (1 Thessalonians 1:10). "For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:9). That is the good news for all who truly believe.

### The Wrath Of The Lamb.

Jesus Christ showed us a quality of God's character that had not been fully revealed. But what Jesus Christ showed us and what He did for us did not change God. God cannot change. He declared, "I am the Lord; I do not change" (Malachi 3:6). He is forever the same. The God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. He is "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). The Father is just as loving, kind, merciful, as Jesus—*and Jesus is just as holy, righteous, just, as the Father.* The Father and the Son do not have different attitudes toward sin. Jesus showed us God's grace and mercy. *He also showed us God's justice and holy wrath.*

We must not create our own "Jesus." Many people create an imaginary Jesus out of their own presuppositions and speculations. They might use some biblical data, ignoring or even rejecting the rest. The result is a caricature of the real Jesus.

Even many Christians have a real but only partial image of Jesus. The result is an incomplete, somewhat distorted Jesus. The pictures they have are of Jesus blessing the children, carrying a lamb in His arms, knocking at the door, kneeling in prayer, dying on the cross, standing outside the empty tomb. These are all correct. They portray much that is real about Jesus, particularly as He revealed the grace, gentleness, kindness, compassion, and self-sacrifice of God's love. However, they omit something else that is real about Jesus, particularly as Jesus revealed the holiness, justice, and wrath of God's love. They omit how Jesus affirmed and expressed God's righteous indignation against sin.

Just before He healed a man, Jesus saw some Pharisees who were ready to accuse Him of "breaking" the Sabbath. Mark 3:5 records that Jesus "looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts." Yes, *with anger!*

When Jesus saw people selling animals in the temple, He made a whip of cords, drove them all out of the temple with the sheep and the oxen, poured out the exchangers' money and overturned their tables, and ordered them not to make His Father's house a house of merchandise (John 2:15, 16).

In His Olivet discourse, given just before His crucifixion, Jesus declared that "there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people" (Luke 21:23). That is why, on His way to be

crucified, Jesus said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children" (Luke 23:28). It happened less than forty years later. The wrath came on them fully (1 Thessalonians 2:16).

The apostle John knew Jesus well when He was on earth. But one day John saw Him portrayed in His resurrected glory, with a sharp two-edged sword coming out of His mouth. John fell at His feet as dead (Revelation 1:12 - 17). It was the same Jesus, but now in His full majesty and power.

Jesus said, "The Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son" (John 5:22). God gave Jesus "authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man" (verse 27). God will judge the world by Jesus Christ (Acts 17:31). Jesus "will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom" (2 Timothy 4:1).

Psalm 2 warns the nations, their people and rulers who reject God and Christ and the moral law: "Now therefore, be wise, O kings; be instructed you judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son [give Him full obedience and homage], lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him" (Psalm 2:10 - 12).

The time will come when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, "in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

We watch the coming drama unfold in Revelation 6:12 - 17. Here is part of the horrific scene: "And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!'"

*From the wrath of the Lamb!* The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world is the Lamb who will bring divine wrath on those who rejected Him and His sacrificial love for them.

The gentle Savior who blessed the children, healed the sick, and gave His life blood for us on the cross will one day tread "the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" (Revelation 19:15). We come to Him now as our merciful Savior, or we face Him later as our righteous and outraged Judge.

John the Baptist said to the crowds coming to him to be baptized, "Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Luke 3:7). He also said that whoever puts his faith in the Son has eternal life, but whoever refuses to obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him (John 3:36). God has called us to eternal life; lay hold of it with a firm grip and never let it go (1 Timothy 6:12).