**Insights on the Wrath of God**

 **Romans 1:18-3:19**

**Intro: Romans 1:18** tells us “*the Wrath of God has been revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”*

The following section from 1:19 through 3:19 puts all of humanity under God’s judgment (wrath).

**Defining the wrath of God**

The biblical idea of God’s wrath is a prevailing theme throughout the whole of scripture. Both Old and New Covenants are alive with the reality of God’s wrath upon man’s sin and rebellion.

By definition, God’s wrath means Jehovah God’s strong emotion and desire to satisfy his righteousness with vengeance. It is seen in his anger, indignation, judgment and punishment of sin. The word “wrath” as translated in the NT is “orge” (pronounced as or-gay). The wrath of God results from deliberate, repeated, and presumptuous sin against his will.

There are two common errors made in interpreting God’s wrath:

The 1st error is to relegate these “*God gave them over*” indictments to only heathen, pagan humanity. Three times Romans says “*God gave them over*”; but this increasing, progressive judgment is inclusive of every human who has “*suppressed the truth*.”1:18 Paul summarizes God’s anger in 3:10-19 by quoting Psalms 14 “*there is none righteous, no not one.”* He sees all mankind under God’s wrath apart from the saving grace of Christ and his atoning work on the Cross. This includes you and me! Only by believing in Jesus did we escape the wrath of God (see John 3:36).

The 2nd common error of our culture is to remove our guilt by minimizing sin. When a culture no longer acknowledges sin as rebellion against a Holy God, then it also loses sight of who God is. Tell me what you think about sin and I will tell you what you think about God. Our sin is the antithesis of God’s righteous character.

For example, **Romans 1:24-28,** is God’s spoken wrath in opposing homosexual lust, stating that it is an “*abandoning the natural function”* (of sexual desires) for degrading passions. Paul calls such behaviors the result of a “*depraved mind.”* However, in our post-modern way of thinking, there are no right or wrong sexual behaviors, only preferences. This way of thinking God calls depraved. Yet, because of such minimizing of sin, our culture has absolutely no consciousness of God’s wrath. God being angry with us or sitting in judgment of us is unthinkable to our post-modern culture. It is even absent from much of today’s pulpits. The church has no concept of the wrath of God.

**Example:** in **Romans 1: 24, 26, 28** we see God’s patience with our rebellion in his three times “passing over,” or giving us over to our depravity. This tells us that our Holy God continually balances his wrath against sin with his forbearing mercy towards sinners.

**The Golden Calf- Exodus 32:7-14**

We see this in the Golden Calf experience, recorded in **Exodus 32:7-14.** God has just miraculously delivered the nation Israel from the idolatrous Egyptians. They are barely dry from the spraying waters of the parted Red Sea when they fashion an idol to worship. God would have been just had he swiped out the whole bunch; yet as Moses intercedes in behalf of the nation, we hear that “God repented himself” of his wrath. The prophet Habakkuk says, “*In wrath he remembered mercy.”****Hab.* 3:2**

The whole narrative of scripture is God’s wrath in conflict with his forbearing love and mercy. **Romans 6:23** says, “*The wages of sin is death* (God’s wrath) *but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* See the conflict? There is judgment and grace, with grace winning out.

**The Day of Wrath**

So strong is God’s emotion against sin, that judgment is his last word and deed toward humanity. Scripture affirms throughout that all history is moving towards God’s “day of Wrath.”

Even though the redeemed will escape the Great White Throne judgment, all others small and great are destined for THAT throne of Wrath. Wrath has been here, is coming, and will come! Revelation 20 is God’s last word in judgment.

**The believer and the Wrath of God**

The question arises concerning the elect (born again believers) and God’s wrath. The simple answer is to declare that the believer in Christ is spared, saved and delivered from God’s wrath. While this is certainly true that we have been justified (declared innocent in God’s court), it is also true that wrath is upon the unjust and the church can suffer the effects of God’s wrath on sinners.

**Example #1** Sodom & Gomorrah

Genesis 18-19 tells the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. So godless was the immorality of these twin cities of sin that God utterly destroyed that civilization with fire and brimstone called down from heaven. Abraham interceded for Sodom six times asking God to spare the population for the sake of even ten righteous men. God agreed to abate his wrath for the sake of even ten, but sadly, he could not find ten righteous in the midst of such darkness.

There is an application here for today’s true believers living in our sodomite cultures. God’s first emotion towards sinners is to forgive, not condemn. He is patient with fallen depraved mankind for the sake of the righteous in any culture. Our presence, prayers, and witness is holding back the wrath of God. Jesus said, “*for the sake of the Elect*,” God holds back his wrath (see **Matthew 24:22)**

**Example #2** Israel

There were righteous Israelites who were banned from entering the Promised Land for forty years, wandering in the wilderness with all the rest. They suffered God’s judgment along with the unrighteous. God’s wrath came down again when Israel was carried off into Babylon. There were righteous Jews exiled right beside idolatrous Jews.

**Example #3** Nazi Germany

Think of Nazi Germany when God’s wrath came down on Hitler’s Third Reich. There were Christians in Germany who suffered and died as a consequence of being in a country under God’s wrath. This does not mean God aims his wrath at his faithful children, but it does reveal that living in a culture under wrath can result in the righteous being caught in friendly fire. It rains on the just and the unjust.

**Wrath and Discipline**

God’s wrath against wickedness is not the same as God’s discipline over his children. Wrath has vengeance in it. God’s wrath is against righteousness betrayed, suppressed, or rejected. His wrath is a “getting even.” It is making wrong things right. He did this for those who are saved by faith in his Grace manifested in Christ. Jesus took all of God’s wrath upon himself-in our behalf. Christ’s bride, his church, will never experience God’s wrath.

However, the church, and you and I as individuals can and will experience The Father’s discipline. **Hebrews 12:5-10**, quoting **Proverbs 3:11-12**, and **Deut. 8:5,** tells us that the very evidence that we are legitimate sons of God is that he loves us enough to discipline us.

 This discipline never feels like wrath, in that it has no punishment it. The only punishment is the wages of sin, which always brings its own reward. **Heb. 12:11** says God’s motive in his discipline of us is to train us in righteousness. It can be painful or sorrowful at the moment, but his love is in it for our greater good.

**Wrath and the Child of God**

Mark it down-God’s wrath is much more than just his anger against sin. It is wrath and wrath has judgment, punishment, and vengeance in it. This reminds us of two truths:

**First,** we as Christ-followers will never experience his wrath. All our punishment and judgment was on Christ for our sakes.

**Second**, scripture does tell us that wrath is God’s solo act against sin. He does not seek or want our partnership in his wrath. **Romans 12:17-19** says, “*Never pay back evil for evil to anyone…never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”* We are not to wish wrath on anyone, but rather to “*be at peace with all men”* **Rom. 12:18**

**Wrath is not always seen as wrath**

**Romans 1:18** says God’s wrath is “*revealed from heaven*.” Just like the gospel story is the revealed “*righteousness of God*,” even so God’s wrath is not always seen for what it is by those unwilling to see it. For example, those who are spiritually blind cannot see God’s handiwork in nature even though God is actively revealing himself through nature. Often times it takes the word of a Hebrew prophet to rightly interpret Israel’s daily news. The prophet would warn Israel of coming wrath, but the nation and its leaders did not believe in divine wrath. When judgment came in the form of Assyrian and Babylonian armies, it took years in exile for them to believe their condition was God’s judgment upon them.

This is true today. Most American church goers see America’s “hard times” as caused by bad economies, bad government and such, seldom ever associating such hard times as God’s wrath upon our nation for its dissent into darkness. Rather than repenting, we seek better government, better policies, or a better economy.

**Revealed Wrath**

Like Israel of old, modern man needs a revelation of God’s impending judgment upon us. I agree with Billy Graham who said 50 years ago, “If God doesn’t judge America, he must apologize to Sodom & Gomorrah!” We today do not see the cause and effect of our troubles as spiritually related. We only see circumstantial causes and effects. We see the natural not the supernatural.

How we need a modern day prophet to call us back to God in order to stay his wrath.