

Sin and Condemnation: The World's need to get right with God

(37)

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[Romans 1:18-3:20](#)

(Continuation from 07/17/16)

A. God's Case Against All Ungodliness and Unrighteousness of Men: Why God Shows Wrath, [Romans 1:18-23](#)

(Romans 1:18-23) Introduction: the message of this passage is perfectly clear: why God reveals and executes wrath upon men.

1. **The subjects of God's wrath (v.18).**
2. **Men reject that "within" them—conscience and thoughts (v.19).**
3. **Men reject that "without" them—the signs of creation (v.20).**
4. **Men do not honor God nor give thanks (v.21).**
5. **Men become prideful and turn away from God (v.22-23).**

2. **(Romans 1:19) God, Proof of— Mind— Conscience: God—the only living and true God—shows wrath because men reject that *within them*; that is, they reject their consciences and thoughts and reasoning's about God. (Cp. [Romans 2:15](#).)**

Romans 1:19 (NASB)

¹⁹“Because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.”

Reasons for the Wrath of God--part 1 ([Romans 1:19-21](#))

Romans 1:19-21 (NASB)

¹⁹“Because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.

²⁰For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

²¹For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.”

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The head of the department of evangelism for a major denomination in America said, “We don’t need to evangelize the people of the world who have never heard the message of salvation. We only need to announce to them that they’re already saved.”

That leader reflects the rising tide of universalism, the belief that, because God is too loving and gracious to send anyone to hell, everyone ultimately will go to heaven. If that were true, there obviously would be no place for judgment in the proclamation of the gospel. Just as obviously there would be no place for biblical evangelism, as the person just quoted contends.

Some years ago, an article in *The Times* of London reported that fourteen church study groups in **Woodford** looked at the Old Testament psalms and concluded that eighty-four of them were “not fit for Christians to sing” (“**Psalms Chosen from New Testament**” [23 August 1962], sec. 1, p. 10). They reasoned that the wrath and vengeance reflected in those psalms was not compatible with the Christian gospel of love and grace.

But Scripture makes clear that **justice**, **wrath**, and **judgment** are as much divine attributes as are **love**, **mercy**, and **grace**. In [chapters 27-28](#) of [Deuteronomy](#) more than fifty verses detail God’s judgment on those who violate His commandments.

In response to Jeremiah’s plea for vengeance against his enemies, God said,

[Jeremiah 19:3-7 \(NASB\)](#)

³ And say, ‘Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem’: thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, “Behold I am about to bring a calamity upon this place, at which the ears of everyone that hears of it will tingle.”

⁴ “Because they have forsaken Me and have made this an alien place and have burned sacrifices in it to other gods, that neither they nor their forefathers nor the kings of Judah had *ever* known, and *because* they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent

⁵ and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, a thing which I never commanded or spoke of, nor did it *ever* enter My mind;

⁶ therefore, behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when this place will no longer be called Topheth or the valley of Ben-hinnom, but rather the valley of Slaughter.

⁷ “I will make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place, and I will cause them to fall by the sword before their enemies and by the hand of those who seek their life; and I will give over their carcasses as food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth.”

Isaiah declared,

[Isaiah 13:9 \(NASB\)](#)

⁹ “Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, Cruel, with fury and burning anger, To make the land a desolation; And He will exterminate its sinners from it.”

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Nahum testified that,

Nahum 1:2-3 (NASB)

²A jealous and avenging God is the LORD; The LORD is avenging and wrathful. The LORD takes vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies.

³The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, And the LORD will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished. In whirlwind and storm is His way, And clouds are the dust beneath His feet.

As was noted in the previous teachings, lest some think that God's wrath and judgment are primarily Old Testament concepts, it should be noted that the New Testament has equally vivid portrayals of those divine attributes.

When a group of Pharisees and Sadducees came to John the Baptist for baptism, he dismissed them with the scathing words,

Matthew 3:7-8 (NASB)

⁷But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

⁸"Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance."

A short while later he said of Jesus,

Matthew 3:11-12 (NASB)

¹¹"As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

¹²"His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

On a later occasion John told some enquiring Jews,

John 3:36 (NASB)

³⁶"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."

Jesus was God incarnate and therefore love incarnate, but He spoke more about judgment and hell than anyone else in Scripture. He probably spoke more about those truths than everyone else in the New Testament combined.

The Sermon on the Mount is replete with warnings about divine wrath and judgment.

Matthew 5:22 (NASB)

²²"But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell."

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A little later He says,

Matthew 5:29-30 (NASB)

²⁹ “If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.”

³⁰ “If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.”

He declared that,

Matthew 8:12 (NASB)

¹² “But the sons of the kingdom [unbelieving Jews] will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

As He sent out the Twelve to witness in Israel, Jesus told them,

Matthew 10:14-15 (NASB)

¹⁴ “Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet.

¹⁵ Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for *the* land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.”

Later during that same time of instruction He said,

Matthew 10:28 (NASB)

²⁸ “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

He warned the multitudes

Matthew 12:36-37 (NASB)

³⁶ “But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the **day of judgment.**”

³⁷ “For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you **will be condemned.**”

Matthew 12:41-42 (NASB)

⁴¹ “The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.”

⁴² “*The Queen of the South* will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.”

Matthew 13:40 (NASB)

⁴⁰ “So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age.”

Matthew 13:49 (NASB)

⁴⁹ “So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous.”

Matthew 16:26 (NASB)

²⁶ “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”

Matthew 18:34-35 (NASB)

³⁴ “And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him.”

³⁵ “My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.”

Matthew 22:13 (NASB)

¹³ “Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

Matthew 23:33 (NASB)

³³ “You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?”

Matthew 24:50-51 (NASB)

⁵⁰ “The master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect *him* and at an hour which he does not know,

⁵¹ and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Matthew 25:26-30 (NASB)

²⁶ “But his master answered and said to him, ‘You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no *seed*.’

²⁷ ‘Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my *money* back with interest.’

²⁸ ‘Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.’

²⁹ “For to everyone who has, *more* shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away.”

³⁰ “Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Paul declared that it is because of “the fear of the Lord [that] we persuade men” ([2 Corinthians 5:11](#)).

2 Corinthians 5:11 (NASB)

¹¹ “Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord [that], we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.”

In other words, it is because of God’s fearful judgment on unbelieving mankind that we should be motivated to witness to God’s provision of escape through Jesus Christ.

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Luke reports that when Paul began to speak about “righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix [the governor] became frightened” ([Acts 24:25](#)).

[Acts 24:25 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁵ “But as he was discussing **righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened** and said, “Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you.”

Paul warned the Ephesian church:

[Ephesians 5:6 \(NASB\)](#)

⁶ “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.”

The same apostle warned unbelievers:

[Romans 2:5 \(NASB\)](#)

⁵ “But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.”

[Romans 2:8-9 \(NASB\)](#)

⁸ “But to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.

⁹ *There will be* tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek.”

[Romans 2:16 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁶ “On the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.”

The author of Hebrews declared,

[Hebrews 10:26-27 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁶ “For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

²⁷ but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES.”

[Hebrews 12:25 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁵ “See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned *them* on earth”, **the writer says later**, “much less *will* we *escape* who turn away from Him who *warns* from heaven.”

In his vision from Patmos, the apostle John heard an angel warn unbelievers,

[Revelation 14:9-11 \(NASB\)](#)

⁹ “Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand,

¹⁰ he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and

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brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.

¹¹“And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.”

The New Testament ends with the somber warning from the Lord Himself:

[Revelation 22:14-15 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁴“Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city.

¹⁵Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.”

[Revelation 22:18-19 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁸“I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book;

¹⁹and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.”

People today, as in times past, deny that God is wrathful, and those denials come in **two basic forms**. **One teaches** such ideas as soul sleep, the notion that an unbeliever simply goes into eternal sleep at death, without suffering any sort of conscious punishment. **The other form** of denial is universalism, which teaches that ultimately God will save everyone. But both of those heresies directly contradict God’s Word.

Four cautions are in order in regard to spurious teachings about God’s wrath.

First, we should be aware of the great appeal to the natural man of such concepts as unconscious soul sleep and universalism, both of which deny God’s judgment and wrath. **Second**, we should recognize the pervasive influence of Christian liberalism, which views God as being too loving to condemn anyone and necessarily denies the authenticity of the texts that state otherwise.

Third, we should realize that religious groups that deny God’s wrath are frequently cultic.

And **fourth**, we should remember that denial of God’s wrath removes the purpose and motivation for witnessing, namely; the God-glorifying salvation of unbelievers from sin and hell.

Bible teacher R. A. Torrey wisely wrote: “Shallow views of sin and of God’s holiness, and of the glory of Jesus Christ and His claims upon us, lie at the bottom of weak theories of the doom of the impenitent. When we see sin in all its hideousness and enormity, the Holiness of God in all its perfection, and the glory of Jesus Christ in all its infinity, nothing but a doctrine that those who persist in the choice of sin, who love darkness rather than light,

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and who persist in the rejection of the Son of God, shall endure everlasting anguish, will satisfy the demands of our own moral intuitions.... The more closely men walk with God and the more devoted they become to His service, the more likely they are to believe this doctrine” (*What the Bible Teaches* [New York: Revell, 1898], pp. 311-13).

Throughout the history of the church, faithful men of God have understood and proclaimed the biblical truths that God is a God of justice and judgment and that His wrath is against all unbelief and ungodliness. That knowledge was the great motivation for their tireless service in winning the lost.

John Knox pleaded before God, “**Give me Scotland or I die.**”

As the young **Hudson Taylor** contemplated the fate of the unreached multitudes of China, he earnestly prayed, “I feel that I cannot go on living unless I do something for China.”

Upon landing in India, **Henry Martyn** said, “Here I am in the midst of heathen midnight and savage oppression. Now, my dear Lord, let me burn out for Thee.”

Adoniram Judson, the famed missionary to Burma, spent long, tiresome years translating the Bible for that people. He was eventually put into prison because of his work, and while there his wife died. After being released, he contracted a serious disease that sapped what little energy he had left. Nevertheless, he prayed, “Lord, let me finish my work. Spare me long enough to put the saving Word into the hands of the people.”

James Chalmers, a Scottish missionary to the South Sea Islands, was so burdened for the lost that someone wrote of him, “In Christ’s service he endured hardness, hunger, shipwreck and exhausting toil, and did it all joyfully. He risked his life a thousand times and finally was clubbed to death, beheaded, and eaten by men whose friend he was and whom he sought to enlighten.”

Although he was unable to go overseas, **Robert Arthington** enabled countless others to go. By working hard and living frugally he managed to give over \$500,000 to the work of foreign missions. He testified, “Gladly would I make the floor my bed, a box my chair, and another box my table, rather than that men should perish for want of the knowledge of Christ.”

Those faithful saints, and many others like them, **have clearly understood the wrath and the judgment of God and the consequent horror of men dying without Christ.** Without such understanding there is no basis for evangelism. If men are not lost, hopeless, and incapable of glorifying God apart from Christ, there is no reason for them to be saved by Him.

The biblical order in any gospel presentation is always **first the warning of danger** and **then the way of escape**, first the judgment on sin and then the means of pardon, first the message of condemnation and then the offer of forgiveness, **first** the bad news of guilt and **then** the good news of grace. The whole message and purpose of the loving, redeeming grace

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of God offering eternal life through Jesus Christ rests upon the reality of man's universal guilt of abandoning God and thereby being under His sentence of eternal condemnation and death.

Consistent with that approach, the main body of [Romans](#) begins with [1:18](#), a clear affirmation of God's wrath "**against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.**"

As the apostle points out in his [Ephesian](#) letter, all unbelievers are "**by nature children of wrath**" ([2:3](#)), born unto God's wrath as their natural inheritance in fallen mankind. With the Fall, God's smile turned to a frown. Moses rhetorically asked God,

[Psalm 90:11 \(NASB\)](#)

¹¹ "Who understands the power of Your anger And Your fury, according to the fear that is due You?"

The Puritan writer **Thomas Watson** said, "As the love of God makes every bitter thing sweet, so the curse of God makes every sweet thing bitter" (*A Body of Divinity* [Carlisle, Pa.: **Banner of Truth**, 1983 reprint], p.151).

A more contemporary writer, **George Rogers**, said that God's "righteous anger never rises, never abates: it is always at flood tide in the presence of sin because He is unchangeably and inflexibly righteous" (*Studies in Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1 [Los Angeles: **G. Rogers**, 1936], p. 40).

How could One who delights only in what is pure and lovely not loathe what is impure and ugly? How could He who is infinitely holy disregard sin, which by its very nature violates that holiness? How could He who loves righteousness not hate and act severely against all unrighteousness? How could He who is the sum of all excellency look with complacency on virtue and vice equally? He *cannot* do those things, because He is holy, just, and good. Wrath is the only just response a perfectly holy God could make to unholy men. Righteous wrath therefore is every bit as much an element of God's divine perfection as any other of His attributes, as Paul makes quite clear in [Romans 9:22-23](#).

[Romans 9:22-23 \(NASB\)](#)

²² "What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?"

²³ And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory."

Paul is determined for us to know that before we can understand the grace of God we must first understand His wrath, that before we can understand the meaning of the death of Christ we must first understand why man's sin made that death necessary; that before we can begin to comprehend how loving, merciful, and gracious God is we must first see how rebellious, sinful, and guilty unbelieving mankind is.

Tragically, even many evangelicals have come to soft-pedal the theme of God's wrath and judgment. Even so much as a minimum mention of hell has been quietly removed from much

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preaching. Wrath, when mentioned at all, is frequently depersonalized, as if somehow it is worked out automatically by some deistic operation in which God Himself is not directly involved.

Many are inclined to wonder if man really deserves such a harsh fate. After all, no person asks to be born. Why then, they surmise, should a person who had nothing to do with his own birth spend eternity in hell for being born sinful?

The question, “**Why is *everyone* born under God’s wrath and condemnation?**” deserves attention. It is those very questions that Paul answers in [Romans 1:19-23](#), where he explains why God is justified in His wrath against all sinful men.

Some people, even some pagans, have recognized God’s right to be angry at man’s sin. During the priesthood of Eli, while the young Samuel still served under him in the Temple, Israel had reached a low spiritual level. There was religious tokenism but little genuine faith or obedience.

Thinking to use the ark of the covenant much as a magic charm to assure their victory, Israel took it into battle against the Philistines. But Israel not only lost 30,000 men in the battle but also lost the ark of the covenant to the enemy. After suffering numerous disastrous and embarrassing experiences with the ark, the Philistines decided to return it to Israel. When they returned it, they sent along a guilt offering to assuage the anger of God against them. Although their understanding of Israel’s God was faulty and the offering they presented to Him was thoroughly pagan, they nevertheless recognized His power and His right to judge and punish them as being guilty of violating His honor (see [1 Samuel 4-6](#)).

When Achan stole some of the booty from Jericho, all of which was to be given to the Tabernacle treasury, his sin caused Israel to be defeated at Ai. When his disobedience was exposed, he readily confessed, saying, “**Truly, I have sinned against the Lord, the God Israel**” ([Joshua 7:20](#)).

[Joshua 7:20 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁰ “**So Achan answered Joshua and said, “Truly, I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel, and this is what I did.”**

God is absolutely just, never condemning unless condemnation is deserved. Achan knew God’s law given through Moses and he knew of God’s special ban on taking the spoil from Jericho for personal use.

The pagan Philistines, on the other hand, knew only of God’s tremendous power. But Achan and the Philistines both knew they were guilty before God and deserved His wrath. In [Romans 1:19-23](#), Paul gives four reasons why they and every person born except Jesus Christ, fully deserve to be under God’s wrath.

[Romans 1:19-23 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁹ “**Because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.**

²⁰ **For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal**

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power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

²¹ For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

²² Professing to be wise, they became fools,

²³ and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.”

Those reasons may be identified as **1) God’s revelation, 2) man’s rejection, 3) man’s rationalization, and 4) man’s religion.**