

Sin and Condemnation: The World's need to get right with God (42)

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

(Continuation from 08/21/16)

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).**

1. [\(Romans 1:18\)](#) **God's Wrath— Ungodly— Unrighteous: the subjects of God's wrath.**

[Romans 1:18 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁸“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”

In the brief scope of one verse ([Romans 1:18](#)), Paul presents six features that characterize God's wrath: 1) its quality, 2) its time, 3) its source, 4) its extent 5) its nature, and 6) its cause.

The Quality of God's Wrath

[Romans 1:18a \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁸“For the wrath **of God** is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”

First, the quality of this wrath is seen in the fact that it is divine, it is **of God**. It is therefore unlike anything we know of in the present world. God's wrath is not like human anger, which is always tainted by sin. God's wrath is always and completely righteous. He never loses His temper. **The Puritan writer Thomas Watson** said, “Is God so infinitely

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holy? Then see how unlike to God sin is.... No wonder, therefore, that God hates sin, being so unlike to him, nay, so contrary to him; it strikes at his holiness.”

Unable to reconcile the idea of God’s wrath with his own ideas of goodness and righteousness, one liberal theologian made this claim: “We cannot think with full consistency of God in terms of the highest human ideals of personality and yet attribute to Him the rational passion of anger.” **But it is foolish, not to mention unbiblical, to measure God by human standards and to discount the idea of His wrath simply because human anger is always flawed by sin.**

God’s anger is not capricious, irrational rage but is the only response that a holy God could have toward evil. God could not be holy and not be angry at evil. Holiness cannot tolerate unholiness. **Habakkuk** says of the Lord ([Habakkuk 1:13](#)).

[Habakkuk 1:13 \(NASB\)](#)

¹³“**Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You cannot look on wickedness with favor.** Why do You look with favor On those who deal treacherously? Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up Those more righteous than they?”

And as **Paul** declares, neither can love tolerate unholiness, refusing to “**rejoice in unrighteousness**” ([1 Corinthians 13:6](#)).

[1 Corinthians 13:4-6 \(NASB\)](#)

⁴“Love is patient, love is kind *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant,

⁵ does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*,

⁶ does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth.”

Jesus twice cleansed the Temple because He was incensed at the money changers and sacrifice sellers who made His “**Father’s house a house of merchandise**” and “**a robber’s den**” ([John 2:14-16](#); [Matthew 21:12-13](#)).

[John 2:14-16 \(NASB\)](#)

¹⁴“And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated *at their tables*.

¹⁵ And He made a scourge of cords, and drove *them* all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables;

¹⁶ and to those who were selling the doves He said, “Take these things away; stop making My Father’s house a place of business.”

[Matthew 21:12-13 \(NASB\)](#)

¹²“And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves.

¹³ And He said to them, “It is written, ‘MY HOUSE SHALL BE

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CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER’; but you are making it a ROBBERS’ DEN.”

He was furious that His Father’s house was flagrantly dishonored.

Speaking in place of the sinful inhabitants of Jerusalem, **Jeremiah** acknowledged the rightness of God's punishment of them, saying,

Lamentations 1:18 (NASB)

18 “The LORD is righteous; For I have rebelled against His command; Hear now, all peoples, And behold my pain; My virgins and my young men Have gone into captivity.”

In confessing before **Joshua** that he had kept for himself some booty from Jericho that was to be reserved for the house of the Lord, Achan acknowledged that the punishment he was about to receive was just and righteous (**Joshua 7:20-25**).

Joshua 7:20-25 (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:

21 when I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar and two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold fifty shekels in weight, then I coveted them and took them; and behold, they are concealed in the earth inside my tent with the silver underneath it.”

22 So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and behold, it was concealed in his tent with the silver underneath it.

23 They took them from inside the tent and brought them to Joshua and to all the sons of Israel, and they poured them out before the LORD.

24 Then Joshua and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the mantle, the bar of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent and all that belonged to him; and they brought them up to the valley of Achor.

25 Joshua said, “Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day.” And all Israel stoned them with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones.”

Even in the warped and perverted societies of men, indignation against vice and crime is recognized as an essential element of human goodness. We expect people to be outraged by gross injustice and cruelty. The noted Greek exegete **Richard Trench** said, “There [can be no] surer and sadder token of an utterly prostrate moral condition than... not being able to be angry with sin—and sinners” (*Synonyms of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983], p. 134). God is perfectly so all the time with a holy fury.

The Timing of God’s Wrath

Romans 1:18b (NASB)

18 “For the wrath of God **is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”**

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Second, the timing of God's wrath is seen in the fact that it **is revealed**, a better rendering being "**constantly revealed.**" God's wrath is continually being revealed, perpetually being manifested. *Apokaluptō* (revealed) has the basic meaning of **uncovering**, **bringing to light**, or **making known**.

God's wrath has always been revealed to fallen mankind and is repeatedly illustrated throughout Scripture. It was first revealed in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve trusted the serpent's word above God's. Immediately the sentence of death was passed on them and on all their descendants. Even the earth itself was cursed. As already mentioned, God's wrath was revealed in the Flood, when God drowned the whole human race except for eight souls, in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and in the drowning of Pharaoh's army. It was revealed in the curse of the law upon every transgression and in the institution of the sacrificial system of the Mosaic covenant. Even the imperfect laws that men make to deter and punish wrongdoers reflect and thereby help to reveal the perfect and righteous wrath of God.

By far the surpassing revelation of God's wrath was that placed upon His Own Son on the cross, when Jesus took to Himself the sin of the world and bore the full divine force of God's fury as its penalty. God hates sin so deeply and requires its penalty so that He allowed His perfect, beloved Son to be put to death as the only means by which fallen mankind might be redeemed from sin's curse.

The British commentator **Geoffrey B. Wilson** wrote, "God is no idle spectator of world events; He is dynamically active in human affairs. The conviction of sin is constantly punctuated by Divine judgment" (*Romans: A Digest of Reformed Comment* [London: **Banner of Truth**], p. 24).

The historian **J. A. Froude** wrote, "One lesson, and only one, history may be said to repeat with distinctness; that the world is built somehow on moral foundations; that, in the long run, it is well with the good; in the long run, it is ill with the wicked" (*Short Studies on Great Subjects*, vol. 1, "The Science of History" [London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1915], p. 21).

We wonder, then, why so many wicked people prosper, seemingly doing evil with utter impunity. But if God's wrath is delayed, His bowl of wrath is all the while filling up, increasing judgment for increased sin. They are only storing up wrath for the coming day of wrath ([Romans 2:5](#)).

Donald Grey Barnhouse recounts the story of a group of godly farmers in a Midwest community being irritated one Sunday morning by a neighbor's plowing his field across from their church. Noise from his tractor interrupted the worship service, and, as it turned out, the man had purposely chosen to plow that particular field on Sunday morning in order to make a point. He wrote a letter to the editor of the local paper, asserting that, although he did not respect the Lord or honor the Lord's Day, he had the highest yield per acre of any farm in the county. He asked the editor how Christians could explain that. With considerable insight and wisdom, the editor printed the letter and followed it with the simple comment, "God does not

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settle [all] His accounts in the month of October” (*Man’s Ruin: Romans 1:1-32* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952], p. 220).

The Source of God’s Wrath

Romans 1:18c (NASB)

¹⁸“For the wrath of God is revealed **from heaven** against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”

God’s wrath is rendered **from heaven**. Despite Satan’s present power as prince of the air and of this world, the earth is ultimately dominated by **heaven**, the throne of God, from which His wrath is constantly and dynamically manifested in the world of men.

Paul frequently speaks about *the wrath*, indicating a specific time or type of wrath. Although the **NASB** rendering does not indicate it, there is a definite article before *wrath* in **Romans 3:5**, which should read, “**who inflicts the wrath.**”

Romans 3:5 (NASB)

⁵“But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God who inflicts **[the] wrath** is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.)”

In **chapter 5** he speaks of our being “saved from the wrath of God through” Christ (**v. 9**), in **chapter 12** of our leaving “room for the wrath of God” (**v. 19**), and in **chapter 13** of believers being in subjection to God “not only because of wrath, but also for conscience’ sake” (**v. 5**).

Romans 5:9 (NASB)

⁹“Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be **saved from the wrath of God through** Him.

Romans 12:19 (NASB)

¹⁹“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.”

Romans 13:5 (NASB)

⁵“Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, **not only because of wrath, but also for conscience’ sake.**”

In his letter to Thessalonica he assures believers that Jesus delivers them “**from the wrath to come**” (**1 Thessalonians 1:10**).

1 Thessalonians 1:10 (NASB)

¹⁰“And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us **from the wrath to come.**”

Heaven reveals God’s wrath in two ways, through **His moral order** and through **His personal intervention**. When God made the world, He built in certain moral as well as physical laws that have since governed its operation. Just as a person falls to the ground when he jumps from a high building, so does he fall into God’s judgment when he deviates

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from God's moral law. That is built-in wrath. When a person sins, there is a built-in consequence that inexorably works. In this sense God is not specifically intervening, but is letting the law of moral cause and effect work.

The second way in which God reveals His wrath is through **His direct and personal intervention**. He is not an impersonal cosmic force that set the universe in motion to run its own course. God's wrath is executed exactly according to His divine will.

Several Hebrew words which convey a highly personal character are used in the Old Testament to describe God's anger. *Hārâ* is used ninety-one times. It refers to becoming heated, to burning with fury, and is frequently used of God (see, e.g., [Genesis 18:30](#)).

[Genesis 18:30 \(NASB\)](#)

³⁰“Then he said, “Oh may the Lord not be [*Hārâ*] **angry**, and I shall speak; suppose thirty are found there?” And He said, “I will not do *it* if I find thirty there.”

Hārôn is used forty-one times. It refers exclusively to divine anger and means “a burning, fierce wrath” (see, e.g., [Exodus 15:7](#)).

[Exodus 15:7 \(NASB\)](#)

⁷“And in the greatness of Your excellence You overthrow those who rise up against You; You send forth Your burning anger [*Hārôn*], and it consumes them as chaff.”

Qâtsaph, which means **bitter**, is used thirty-four times, most of which refer to God (see, e.g., [Deuteronomy 1:34](#)).

[Deuteronomy 1:34 \(NASB\)](#)

³⁴“Then the LORD heard the sound of your words, and He was angry [*Qâtsaph*] and took an oath, saying.”

The fourth term for **wrath**, *Hēmâh*, which also refers to a **venom or poison**, is frequently associated with jealousy and is used most often of God (see, e.g., [2 Kings 22:13](#)).

[2 Kings 22:13 \(NASB\)](#)

¹³“Go, inquire of the LORD for me and the people and all Judah concerning the words of this book that has been found, for great is the wrath [*Hēmâh*] of the LORD that burns against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us.”

David declared that “**God is a righteous judge, and a God who has indignation every day**” ([Psalm 7:11](#)). “**Indignation**” translates *zā'am*, which means “**to foam at the mouth,**” and is used over twenty times in the Old Testament, often of God's wrath.

[Psalm 7:11 \(NASB\)](#)

¹¹“God is a righteous judge, And a God who has indignation [*zā'am*] every day.”

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Whether the cause and effect wrath or the personal fury of God is meted out, the wrath originates in heaven.

The Extent and Nature of God's Wrath

Romans 1:18d (NASB)

¹⁸“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven **against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men** who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”

The **fourth** and **fifth** features of God's wrath concern **its extent** and **its nature**.

God's wrath is universal, being discharged **against all** who deserve it. No amount of goodwill, giving to the poor, helpfulness to others, or even service to God can exclude a person from the **all** Paul mentions here. As he later explains more explicitly, “**both Jews and Greeks are all under sin,...** all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (**Romans 3:9, 23**).

Romans 3:9 (NASB)

⁹“What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that **both Jews and Greeks are all under sin.**”

Romans 3:23 (NASB)

²³“For **all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**”

Obviously, some people are morally better than others, but even the most moral and upright person falls far short of God's standard of perfect righteousness. No one escapes.

Men's relative goodness compared to God's perfect standard can be illustrated by a hypothetical attempt to jump from the beach near Los Angeles to Catalina Island, a distance of some twenty-six miles. Some people could not manage to jump at all, many could jump a few feet, and a rare few could jump twenty or twenty-five feet. The longest conceivable jump, however, would cover only the smallest fraction of the distance required. The most moral person has as little chance of achieving God's righteousness in his own power as the best athlete has of making that jump to Catalina. Everybody falls short.

The second emphasis of this phrase is on the nature of God's wrath. It is not like the wrath of a madman who strikes out indiscriminately, not caring who is injured or killed. Nor is it like the sin-tainted anger of a person who seeks to avenge a wrong done to him. God's wrath is reserved for and justly directed at sin. *Asebia* (**ungodliness**) and *adikia* (**unrighteousness**) are synonyms, the first stressing a faulty personal relationship to God. God is angered because sinful men are His enemies (see **Romans 5:10**) and therefore “**children of wrath**” (**Ephesians 2:3**).

Romans 5:10 (NASB)

¹⁰“For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”

Ephesians 2:3 (NASB)

³“Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.”

Ungodliness refers to lack of reverence for, devotion to, and worship of the true God, a failure that inevitably leads to some form of false worship. Although the details and circumstances are not revealed, Jude reports that Enoch, the righteous seventh-generation descendant of Adam, prophesied about God’s coming “....¹⁵ **to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him**” (**Jude 14-15 NASB**). Four times he uses the term **ungodly** to describe the focus of God’s wrath upon sinful mankind.

Unrighteousness encompasses the idea of ungodliness but focuses on its result. Sin first attacks **God’s majesty** and then **His law**. Men do not act righteously because they are not rightly related to God, who is the only measure and source of righteousness. **Ungodliness** unavoidably leads to **unrighteousness**. Because men’s relation to God is wrong, their relation to their fellow men is wrong. Men treat other men the way they do because they treat God the way they do. Man’s enmity with his fellow man originates with his being at enmity with God.

Sin is the only thing God hates. He does not hate poor people or rich people, dumb people or smart people, untalented people or highly skilled people. He only hates the sin that those people, and all others, naturally practice, and sin inevitably brings His wrath.

The Cause of God’s Wrath

Romans 1:18e (NASB)

¹⁸“**For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.**”

“But how is it,” we ask, “that God can hold everyone responsible for moral and spiritual failure, and be so angry when some people have so much less opportunity than others for hearing the gospel and coming to know God?” The answer is that, because of his sinful disposition, every person is naturally inclined to follow sin and resist God. This phrase could be rendered, “**who are constantly attempting to suppress the truth by steadfastly holding to their sin.**” **Unrighteousness** is so much a part of man’s nature that *every* person has a built-in, natural, compelling desire to **suppress** and oppose God’s **truth**.

As Paul declares in the following verse, “**That which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them**” (**Romans 1:19**). His point is that all people, regardless of their relative opportunities to know God’s Word and hear His gospel, have internal, God-given evidence of His existence and nature, but are universally inclined to resist and assault that evidence.

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No matter how little spiritual light he may have, God guarantees that any person who sincerely seeks Him will find Him. **“You will seek me and find Me,”** He promises, **“when you search for Me with all your heart”** ([Jeremiah 29:13 NASB](#)).

But men are not naturally inclined to seek God. That truth was proved conclusively in the earthly ministry of Christ. Even when face-to-face with God incarnate, the Light of the world, **“¹⁹....men loved darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. ²⁰For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed”** ([John 3:19-20](#)).

As David had proclaimed hundreds of years earlier, **“The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; there is no one who does good”** ([Psalm 14:1 NASB](#)). Sinful men oppose the idea of a holy God because they innately realize that such a God would hold them accountable for the sins they love and do not want to relinquish.

Every person, no matter how isolated from God’s written Word or the clear proclamation of His gospel, has enough divine truth evident both within and around him ([Romans 1:19-20](#)) to enable him to know and be reconciled to God if his desire is genuine.

[Romans 1:19-20 \(NASB\)](#)

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

It is because men refuse to respond to that evidence that they are under God’s wrath and condemnation. **“This is the judgment,”** Jesus said, **“that... men loved the darkness rather than the light”** ([John 3:19 NASB](#)). Thus God is angry with the wicked every day ([Psalm 7:11](#)).

[Psalm 7:11 \(NASB\)](#)

¹¹**“God is a righteous judge, And a God who has indignation every day.”**