

KNOWING GOD: LESSON 22

THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL: GOD'S WRATH (PART I)

Nahum 1:2

I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. How often do you think about God's wrath? Heard many sermons about it?
2. ** Does the following fact shock you? "God's wrath" is mentioned 42 times in OT; 35 times in NT!

**"A study of the concordance will show that there are more references in Scripture to the anger, fury, and wrath of God, than there are to His love and tenderness." (A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, p. 75)

****Nahum 1:2-3, 5-8:** "God is jealous, and the LORD avenges; The LORD avenges and is furious. The LORD will take vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies; 3 The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, And will not at all acquit the wicked....5 The mountains quake before Him, The hills melt, And the earth heaves at His presence, Yes, the world and all who dwell in it. 6 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. 7 The LORD is good, A stronghold in the day of trouble; And He knows those who trust in Him. 8 But with an overflowing flood He will make an utter end of its place, And darkness will pursue His enemies."

Matt. 3:7-10: "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, 'Brood of vipers! **Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?** 8 'Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, 9 'and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. 10 'And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.'"

2 Thess. 1:7b-10: "when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, 8 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. 9 These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, 10 when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed." (cf. Rom. 1:18; 2:5; 12:19; 13:4-5; 1 Thes. 1:10; 2:16; Rev. 6:16-17; Lk. 21:22-24, etc., etc.)

**"...the Bible could be called the book of God's wrath, for it is full of portrayals of divine retribution, from the cursing and banishment of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 to the overthrow of Babylon and the great assizes ('judicial inquests,' Webster) of Revelation 1-18 and 20. Clearly, the theme of God's wrath is one about which the biblical writers feel no inhibitions whatever. Why, then, should we? Why, when the Bible is vocal about it, should we feel obliged to be silent? (J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 150)

- A. ** I highly recommend J.I. Packer's book "Knowing God." (Be careful with his Calvinistic bias!)
- B. The 1st time I read it I was shocked as he claimed God's wrath is "**The heart of the gospel.**"
3. **3** Today let us begin a study of some important aspects of God's wrath and then why we should consider God's wrath may actually be: **The heart of the gospel!!**

II. DISCUSSION:

I. **4** God's wrath:

A. This is the 22nd lesson on *Knowing God*. We have learned much about God's attributes: His:

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|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| ☛ Unchanging (#4) | ☛ Word (#15, 16, 17) |
| ☛ Great and Majestic (#8) | ☛ Love (#18) |
| ☛ Wisdom (#9) | ☛ Grace (#19) |
| ☛ Holiness (#10) | ☛ Judge (#20) |
| ☛ Righteousness (#11) | ☛ Jealousy (#21) |
| ☛ Sovereignty (#12, 13, 14) | |

- B. ** I hope you have gotten the point that all the traits and attributes God possesses He possesses them **INFINITELY** and **PERFECTLY**! There is no part of His character that is deficient or at odds with any other part...He is **PERFECT**!

Matt. 5:48: "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."

Jas. 1:17: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning."

- C. ** God is **NOT** bound by the limitations and imperfections characterized by even the best among us. Consequently, just as God's *holiness*, *righteousness* and *love* are *infinite* and *perfect*; so also His wrath is *infinite* and *perfect*.

*** "...God's wrath in the Bible is never the capricious, self-indulgent irritable, morally ignoble thing that human anger so often is. It is, instead a right and necessary reaction to objective moral evil. God is only angry where anger is called for. Even among humans, there is such a thing as righteous indignation, though it is, perhaps, rarely found. But all of God's indignation is righteous. Would a God who took as much pleasure in evil as he did in good be a good God? Would a God who did not react adversely to evil in his world be morally perfect? Surely not. But it is precisely this adverse reaction to evil, which is a necessary part of moral perfection, that the Bible has in view when it speaks of God's wrath." (J. I. Packer, Knowing God, p. 151)

- D. 5 Let's consider **three** key points to clarify our understanding of God's wrath:

① ** The meaning of God's wrath:

- ☛ Denotes God's resolute action in punishing sin.

*** "It is as much the expression of a personal, emotional attitude of the triune Jehovah as is his love to sinners; it is the active manifesting of his hatred of irreligion and moral evil." (J. I. Packer, Knowing God, p. 154)

*** **Rom. 1:18:** "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,"

Eph. 5:6: "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience."

- ☛ ** Wrath is God's reaction to sin.

Rom. 4:15: "because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression." (cf. 1 Jn. 3:4)

Heb. 3:10-11: "Therefore I was angry with that generation, And said, 'They always go astray in their heart, And they have not known My ways.' I I So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'" (cf. Heb. 4:3)

- ☛ ** God's wrath is always judicial; it is an expression of His justice.

Rom. 3:5-6: "But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.) 6 Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world?"

Rom. 2:5b: "...the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,"

1 Pet. 4:17-19: "For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 Now 'If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?' 19 Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator."

Rom. 12:19: "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord." (cf. Rev. 6:10)

- ☛ ******God's wrath is **ALWAYS** something people choose for themselves!

Jn. 3:18-19: "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19 'And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.'"

Rom. 2:5-6: "But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 6 who 'will render to each one according to his deeds':"

******"The essence of God's action in wrath is to give men what they choose, in all its implications: nothing more, and equally nothing less. God's readiness to respect human choice to this extent may appear disconcerting and even terrifying, but it is plain that his attitude here is supremely just—and is poles apart from the wanton and irresponsible inflicting of pain which is what we mean by cruelty." (J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 153)

② **6** The revealing of God's wrath:

Rom. 1:18: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,"

- ☛ "is revealed" is present tense; hence, God is making a "constant disclosure" of His wrath. How does He accomplish this?
- ☛ ******Verse 18 begins with "For," so verse 18 is connected with the thoughts of verse 17:

Rom. 1:17: "For in it [gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'"

- ☛ In Paul's day the "revealing" (making manifest) of God's wrath came through the **CONTRAST** between the gospel ("The just shall live by faith.") and the "ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" in v. 18: consider what Paul goes on to write...
- ☛ The gospel vs. "degeneracy" of the Gentile world (1:18-32).
 - ✓ "without excuse" (v. 20)
 - ✓ "know[ing] the righteous judgment of God" (v. 32)
 - ✓ Every society has some form of "morality" a "societal conscience"!
 - ✓ But, through their own choice they chose "degeneracy"; therefore, "God gave them over to a debased mind" (v. 28).
 - ✓ Certainly, when one compares the gospel vs. the degeneracy of the Gentile world (and today's society!), he can see the need/requirement for God's wrath!

Rom. 1:32: "...those who practice such things are deserving of death,"

- ☛ ******The gospel vs. "lawlessness" of the Jews (chapter 2).

The "Jewish" world was no better! They (see 2:17-20):

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| ☛ "rest on the law" | ☛ "approve the things that are excellent" |
| ☛ "boast in God" | ☛ "instructed out of the law" |
| ☛ "know His will" | ☛ "confident" "guide[s] to the blind" |
| ☛ "a light to those who are in darkness" | ☛ "a teacher of babes" |
| ☛ "an instructor of the foolish" | ☛ "having the form of knowledge and truth in the law" |

- ☛ ****YET!** With all that going for them Paul levels this charge against them:

Rom. 2:24: “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,”

- ☛ **Why?** They did not keep God’s law! (2:25-29). Hence, once again, when one compares the gospel vs. the lawlessness of the Jewish world, he can see the need/requirement for God’s wrath! (Many lawless religious people today!)

****Rom. 2:1-3:** “Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. 2 But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. 3 And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?”

- ☛ ****What was true in Paul’s day remains true today and will always remain true as long as time stands!** God’s wrath is continuing to be revealed (made manifest) by the contrast between those that obey the gospel (“*The just shall live by faith.*” cf. Rom. 10:17; Heb. 11; Jas. 2:24) and the:
 - ✓ “World” without God continues its downward spiral by **CHOICE!** Has “morality” improved among those who reject God? Is God still giving “them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;”? (1:28) Are they still worthy of death? (Rom. 1:32) **YES!!**
 - ✓ “World” with “lawless religion” (religion not based on the authority of God’s word) continues to draw man further and further from God; continues to generate more and more religious confusion and error minute by minute! 2 Tim. 3:13 Are they still “inexcusable” and unable to escape the “judgment of God”? (Rom. 2:3) **YES!!**
 - ✓ Isn’t the contrast between these things and the gospel a continuous revealing of God’s wrath against “all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men”? **Absolutely!**

③ **7 The deliverance from God’s wrath:**

******“In the first three chapters of Romans Paul is concerned to force on us this question: If ‘the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men,’ and a ‘day of wrath’ is coming when God will ‘render to every man according to his deeds,’ how can any of us escape disaster? The question presses because we are ‘all under sin’; ‘there is no one righteous, not even one’; ‘the whole world’ is ‘held accountable to God’ (3:9-10, 19). The law cannot save us, for its only effect is to stimulate sin and show us how far we fall short of righteousness. The outward trappings of religion cannot save us either, any more than mere circumcision can save the Jew. Is there any way of deliverance, then, from the wrath to come?” (J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 155)

- ☛ Fortunately, the answer is **YES**, we can be delivered from God’s wrath. **How?**

The “how” of our deliverance from God’s wrath leads us into the very...

2. **8 Heart of the gospel:** Because the heart of the gospel concerns our deliverance from God’s wrath!

A. ****** Do you remember the story of Helen of Troy?

- (1) Helen, queen of Sparta in ancient Greece, was kidnapped by Prince Paris (Troy).
- (2) Her abduction sparked the famous **Trojan War** (e.g., the story of the Trojan horse; some claim it is a true event; others claim it is a myth.).
- (3) Not important, because the story accurately reflects the ideas and concepts upon which all pagan religions are based:
- (4) ****** According to legends surrounding the Trojan War (dates back to 1300-1200 B.C.),

“Prince Paris had carried off Princess Helen to Troy. The Greek expeditionary force had taken ships to recover her, but was held up half-way by persistent contrary winds. Agamemnon, the Greek general, sent home for his daughter and ceremonially slaughtered her as a sacrifice to mollify the evidently hostile gods. The move paid off; west winds blew again, and the fleet reached Troy without further difficulty.” (J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 179)

B. **** Lessons about all pagan religions:**

- ☛ A “plurality” of gods, with none achieving absolute dominion.
- ☛ But each god had within his/her power the ability to make man’s life “easy” or “hard.”
- ☛ The temper of these “gods” was consistently unpredictable; they took offense at even the smallest of things.
- ☛ They especially became “upset” and made a man’s life “hard” if they felt a person was giving too much attention to one of the other “gods.”
- ☛ So, if your life was “hard” you had likely “upset” one of the “gods.”
- ☛ Therefore, your only recourse was to “humor” or “mollify” the offended “god” by offering that “god” a sacrifice (i.e., a bribe).
- ☛ The “bigger” the sacrifice (bribe), the better one’s chance of getting back into “the good graces” with the offended “god” and your well being restored.
- ☛ **** Hence, the ultimate sacrifice became the death of a human being; after all what else is of more value than human life?**

******“Thus pagan religion appears as a callous commercialism, a matter of managing and manipulating your gods by cunning bribery. And within paganism propitiation, the appeasing of celestial bad tempers, takes its place as a regular part of life, one of the many irksome necessities that one cannot get on without.” (J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 180)

C. **9 Surprisingly**, *propitiation* is in the Bible:

**** Def.:** “to gain or regain the favor or goodwill of (appease, conciliate, pacify)” (Webster).

(1) **** Old Testament:**

- (a) E.g., idea is expressed in the sin offering, *Day of Atonement* (Lev. 4:1-6:7; 16:1-34).
- (b) Another is the example of God’s outpouring of wrath as a result of the rebellion recorded in Num. 16 (Complained and rejected the leadership of Moses and Aaron the day after the destruction of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.).

Num. 16:46-48: “So Moses said to Aaron, ‘Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them; **for wrath has gone out from the LORD**. The plague has begun.’ 47 Then Aaron took it as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people. 48 And he stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped.”

(2) **** New Testament:** *propitiation* used 4 times: Rom. 3:21-26; Heb. 2:7; 1 Jn. 2:1-2; 4:8-10

**** 1 Jn. 2:1-2:** “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 And He Himself is the **propitiation** for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”

**** 1 Jn. 4:8-10:** “He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the **propitiation** for our sins.”

******“What has happened? The wrath of God against us, both present and to come, has been quenched. How was this effected? Through the death of Christ. ‘When we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son’ (Rom. 5:10). The ‘blood’—that is, the sacrificial death—of Jesus Christ abolished God’s anger against us and ensured that his treatment of us forever after would be propitious and favorable. Henceforth, instead of showing himself to be against us, he would show himself in our life and experience to be for us. What, then, does the phrase ‘a propitiation...by his blood’ express? It expresses, in the context of Paul’s argument (Rom. 3:21-26, *cvt*), precisely this thought: that by his sacrificial death for our sins Christ pacified the wrath of God.” (J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 184)

D. **10** Four key facts concerning Biblical propitiation:

(1) **** Propitiation is the work of God:**

- ☛ In paganism, man *propitiates* the “gods.”
 - ☛ In Christianity it’s the opposite! God *propitiates* His own wrath by His own action!
- Rom. 3:25:** “...whom God set forth as a propitiation...”
- 1 Jn. 4:10:** “...sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

(2) **** Propitiation required the death of Jesus Christ:** Regardless of the perfection of His life, His teachings, etc., Jesus had to shed His blood to be the *propitiation* for **OUR** sins!

Heb. 9:22: “And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.”

Rom. 3:25: “...whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood...”

Eph. 1:7: “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace...”

Gal. 3:13: “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’),”

(3) **** Why did God propitiate His own wrath?** Love for YOU and ME! We couldn’t do it ourselves!

Heb. 10:1: “For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.” (cf. Jn. 3:16)

Rom. 5:6: “For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.”

1 Jn. 4:10: “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (cf. Jn. 3:16)

Rom. 5:8-9: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.”

(4) **** Propitiation manifests God’s righteousness:** God’s detractors might be tempted to call into question God’s morality in how He has dealt with sin (innocent dying for guilty; and His great forbearance). But on the contrary, the way God has chosen to satisfy His wrath “declares His righteousness,” notice...

****Rom. 3:25-26:** “whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, 26 to demonstrate (declare, KJV) at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21)

- ☛ Even in man's sin (even prior to Christ's death) God did not react as the "gods" with "adverse providence."
- ☛ Rather, God exhibited "*forbearance*" in that He "*passed over sins that were previously committed*" (postponed punishment, etc.)(cf. Heb. 9:15; Acts 17:30),
- ☛ Therefore, can God really be as concerned about good and evil as He claims? Is He really concerned about what justice requires?
- ☛ **YES**, God is just! **YES**, God is concerned about sin! **YES**, sin cannot go unpunished! Just as Christ died of our sins; He died for those "*previously committed*"!

**"Our sins *have been* punished; the wheel of retribution *has* turned; judgment *has* been inflicted for our ungodliness—but on Jesus, the lamb of God, standing in our place. In this way God is *just—and* the justifier of those who put faith in Jesus, who "was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Rom. 4:25)." (J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 188)

III. CONCLUSION: I I

1. There is so much more I want to say about God's wrath and propitiation. And, no sermon is worth a dime if it doesn't show us how to apply the principles taught to our everyday lives.
2. Lord willing, next time we will finish our thoughts on God's wrath and propitiation and make some specific applications. In the meantime, consider the following thoughts:

12"The wrath of God is a perfection of the Divine character on which we need to meditate frequently. First, that our hearts may be duly impressed by God's detestation of sin. We are ever prone to regard sin lightly, to gloss over its hideousness, to make excuses for sin. But the more we study and ponder God's abhorrence of sin and His frightful vengeance upon it, the more likely we are to realize its heinousness. Second, to beget a true fear in our souls of God, 'Let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire' (Heb. 12:28, 29). We cannot serve Him 'acceptably' unless there is due 'reverence' for His awful Majesty and 'godly fear' of His righteous anger, and these are best promoted by frequently calling to mind that 'our God is a consuming fire'. Third, to draw out our soul in fervent praise [to Jesus Christ] for having delivered us from 'the wrath to come' (1 Thess. 1:10). Our readiness or our reluctance to meditate upon the wrath of God becomes a sure test of how our hearts really stand affected towards Him." (A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, p. 77)

3. **13** Do you truly know God? Then consider and you need to "reckon with [the] solemn reality of his [awesome] wrath." (J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 157)
4. ** "For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (Rev. 6:17)
5. How about you? Are you ready? Why not obey NOW, today? (Heb. 5:9; 2 Cor. 6:2)

Some of the material in this sermon is
from *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer