

“The Wrath of God”
1 Thessalonians 1:10
(Preach at Trinity, April 28, 2019)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. **1 Thessalonians** was written in response to the good news Timothy had delivered regarding the faith of the new believers in Thessalonica. Paul’s heart was filled with great joy and gratitude in hearing they were remaining steadfast even in the face of great personal hardship they were experiencing because of their faith.
2. In **Verse 9** Paul describes how they had abandoned their idols in order to serve the living and true God and then in **Verse 10** Paul describes them as maintaining a Christian priority in this life. They were living in expectation of the return of Christ – “and to wait for His Son from heaven . . .”
3. They were maintaining an eternal perspective that transcends the condition of this life. They had their eye to the sky with a continual expectation of Christ returning in the clouds of glory.
4. Paul considered this as further evidence of their salvation. William Hendriksen writes: “*As they saw it—and rightly so—a man is not truly converted unless he glories in this doctrine and shores its force in his life.*”¹
5. An important aspect of this was their confidence as they considered this event. The return of Christ for many is a fearful thought. It is fearful because they are not confident all is well with their soul. The return of Christ for many will be a terrifying event.

Revelation 6:15-17 NAU - "Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; ¹⁶ and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; ¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"
6. For the Thessalonian Christians and for thousands like them, the thought of Christ’s return filled their heart not with fear but with great joy. All fear has been removed because Jesus Christ has delivered his people from the wrath to come.

1 Thessalonians 1:10 NAU - "to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come."
7. An important aspect of the second coming of Christ is the aspect of judgment. All will stand before Jesus Christ to give account. Most people today don’t believe this. This is why so few see any value in the Gospel. They don’t believe the concept of sin or of judgment.

¹ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of I-II Thessalonians*, New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 3:57.

- A. Most look upon religion philosophically. They see it as a matter of personal preference. Everyone has the right to choose for themselves whether to be religious or not to be religious, and everyone can choose which religion best suits them. All religions are seen as equally valid and we must not be intolerant of the religious choices of others.
 - B. The thought of God inflicting suffering upon a human being seems too intolerant for the modern man.
 - C. Inflicting suffering and displaying wrath seems out of character for God. Most see God as being loving and benevolent and only capable of giving us good things. And most see themselves as deserving of good things from God. God's wrath sounds like an outburst of anger signaling a loss of self-control. It just seems so ungod like.
8. How are we to understand the wrath of God?
- I. In order to understand the wrath of God you need to understand God
 - A. This is a problem at the outset
 - 1. God cannot be comprehended by the finite human mind.
1689 LBC – *Chapter 2 – Of God and of the Holy Trinity*:
“The Lord our God is but one only living and true God; whose subsistence is in and of Himself, infinite in being and perfection; whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but Himself . . .”
 - 2. Most people try to define God using the attributes of humanity as their guide. This is a fatal approach. God is not a man. He isn't like man.
 - 3. Scripture sometimes describes God by way of using human attributes. We call this anthropomorphism. The anthropomorphisms of Scripture are God's condescension to aid our finite thinking but fall infinitely short in defining God.
 - a. For example we read in Deut 11:
Deuteronomy 11:2 NAU - "His mighty hand and His outstretched arm" – God possesses neither hand nor arm.
 - b. Hezekiah prays in 2 Kings:
2 Kings 19:16 NAU - "Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, O LORD, and see"
God has neither ears nor eyes.
 - B. God is to be understood in terms of His Divine attributes. His attributes define Him.
 - 1. Although some of God's attributes are what we call “communicable” – that is, they can be imitated by man, human imitation is not an exact copy of God's attributes. The creature cannot possess them perfectly, eternally, immutably, infinitely, etc.
 - 2. God is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. He is self-existent and self-sufficient. He derives His being from Himself.
 - a. Everything that God is comes from Himself. God is independent in need of nothing. There are many attributes that comprise the being of God.

- b. God is omni-present, omnipotent, and omniscient. God described Himself to Moses as “I AM.” God “is.” In other words, God does not *have* His attributes. He *IS* His attributes.
God is good. God is love. God is holy. God is patient and forbearing. God is just. God is sovereign. etc.
- 3. We could go on and on describing God in all His infinite attributes. In terms of our focus this morning we can add another attribute to the being of God: God is wrath. He doesn’t *have* wrath. Wrath is an element of His Divine being.
- 4. Wrath is consistent with the perfections of God. In fact, God cannot but have wrath if He is to be holy.
A.W. Pink wrote: “Now the wrath of God is as much a Divine perfection as is His faithfulness, power, or mercy. It must be so, for there is no blemish whatsoever, not the slightest defect in the character of God; yet there would be if wrath were absent from Him! Indifference to sin is a moral blemish, and He who hates it not is a moral leper. How could He who is the Sum of all excellency look with equal satisfaction upon virtue and vice, wisdom and folly? How could He who is infinitely holy disregard sin and refuse to manifest His severity toward it? How could He, who delights only in that which is pure and lovely, not loathe and hate that which is impure and vile?”²

II. To understand God’s wrath we also need to comprehend God’s impassibility

- A. God is immutable or unchanging
 - 1. All of God’s attributes are and have always been – God is.
All that pertains to God today has always been and will always be.
 - 2. God is never changed by something external to Himself. He is not reactive because nothing happens that He has not ordained.
 - a. For example, God doesn’t fall in love. God *IS* love. For God, love is not a stirring of the affections by something external to Himself. Rather, God’s love is a sovereign act of His Divine will. God loved us because He chose to love us, not because He saw something lovely in us.
 - b. Quite simply, God does not experience emotional changes as a man does.
- B. God’s wrath is not an emotional response
 - 1. A man becomes angry. His emotions are stirred to anger by something external to himself. Something perturbs him and makes him angry and he is changed from the state he was in before he became angry.
 - 2. Sometimes we attribute the emotions of man to God. These are called anthropopathisms. But we err if we pretend there is an exact correlation.
 - 3. God’s wrath is not a change in God’s state due to something that happens external to God. Rather, God’s wrath is His just judgment upon all that is not holy. Thus, God’s wrath is a holy display of His perfect justice.

² A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), Page 83.

- C. God's attributes are eternal aspects of His divine being.
1. God has chosen to display His attributes in different ways. For example, we say God created all things for His own glory. God's glory is a display of His divine excellence—His attributes. In creation God displays His power, sovereignty, beauty, wisdom, goodness, etc. All of these attributes were always God's divine being, but He displayed them in creation.
 2. Some of God's attributes are displayed in the context of sinful men. These attributes are eternal aspects of God's nature, but only put on display in the context of sinful men.
 - a. God has always been merciful, and yet His mercy was not displayed until He sovereignly manifested it towards the elect
 - b. The same is true of God's justice – God is just by His nature, yet His justice is on display as He judges sinful men.
 3. God's wrath is His anger against those condemned by God's justice. It is not an emotional reaction but a sovereign display of justice. Anger in man is a passion. Anger in God is the effect of His justice. God's wrath puts on display His holy character.
Romans 9:22 NAU - "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?"
 4. Sam Renihan writes: "God's love, mercy, and anger are not human love, mercy, and anger. They cannot be provoked, abated, stimulated, or extinguished. What we perceive as changes from one to the other, from anger to love, from mercy to judgment, or vice versa, are different effects brought about in created order by the execution of God's singular, eternal will."³

III. From what have we been saved? – Paul makes it clear that our salvation is deliverance from the wrath of God.

1 Thessalonians 1:10 NAU - "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."

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

A. God's wrath is His just action upon all that is not holy. God reveals His wrath in the context of sin.

Romans 1:18 NAU - "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness"

1. All of humanity can gaze upon God's revealed wrath.
 - a. We can see it revealed in the suffering of this fallen world. People struggle with reconciling how a good and loving God can allow suffering in the world. That presumes that God's goodness and love can be separated from His justice. It also presumes that we live in a world unaffected by sin.

³ Samuel Renihan, *God without Passions, a Reader*, (Palmdale: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2015), Page 38.

- b. We can also witness the wrath of God revealed through the human conscience. The very existence of human religion reveals that human beings are seeking to be reconciled with God. In their fallenness they presume they can forge the way—like Adam’s attempt to make a covering to hide his shame.
 - c. There is no greater revelation of the wrath of God than to see the Savior hanging on the cross, suffering under the wrath of God.
 - 2. God’s wrath clings to those who have sinned – they are the children of wrath, the vessels of wrath.
 - 3. God’s wrath is fierce and fearful
Revelation 19:15 NAU - "From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty."
 - 4. It is eternal – Hell is the eternal display of God’s just judgment upon sin. His wrath will never cease to be kindled upon Satan and his followers.
 - 5. This is why the return of Christ is such a fearful thought.
- B. Jesus Christ has delivered us from God’s wrath
 - 1. He took our sins and bore them as He hung upon the cross. He drank the full cup of God’s wrath.
 - 2. Jesus thus rescued us from the wrath of God
1 Thessalonians 1:10 NAU - "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."

Conclusion:

- 1. As a sinner, you are justly under the wrath of God. It is kindled against you. It is omnipotent wrath. It is a divine fury of an infinite nature.
Romans 2:5 NAU - "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,"
- 2. All of the enjoyments of this life are under the hidden wrath of God’s judgment. Thomas Adams wrote: “How terrible is his anger! What comfort can any find in all the prosperous fortunes upon earth, with whom God is angry in heaven? . . . That is but a wretched prosperity upon which God looks in anger. If our house were paved with a floor of gold, and walled with pearls and diamonds, and yet the roof wide open to the violence of heaven, would these shelter us from storms and tempest? Would we like to be so lodged in winter nights? Or were our homes roofed with cedar, and the walls hung with tapestry, yet if the floor be rotten and under it a bottomless pit, could we sleep in quiet? There can be no safety when God is angry. His wrath may come thundering from heaven, and suddenly sink rebellious sinners into hell.”⁴

⁴ Thomas Adams, *The Works of Thomas Adams, Vol.3*, (Eureka: Tanski Publications, 1998), Page 268.

3. What can be done? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved—saved from God’s infinite wrath.
John 3:36 NAU - "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."
4. If you are a Christian, you have the sweet comfort of peace with God.
If you have been justified by the blood of Christ, the wrath of God will never touch you. You have been delivered from the wrath to come.
You can have glorious confidence at the coming of our Lord. It is a sweet comfort to you. You can await His coming with expectation as you consider a loved one returning from a long journey. You can look forward to His words of approval and comfort.
5. If you are a Christian, deliverance from God’s wrath must cause you to rise up within your soul unceasing gratitude and praise.
A. W. Pink – “Great will be the rejoicing of the saints in that day when the Lord shall vindicate His majesty, exercise His awful dominion, magnify His justice, and overthrow the proud rebels who have dared to defy Him.”⁵

⁵ A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), Page 85.