

The Other Side of God

The Banquet Table of Consequences – Part I

Romans 1:18a

Introduction

Sometimes the truth of Scripture is a candle, bringing warmth and comfort; other times it is a blowtorch, cutting through steel. Sometimes it is a warm crackling fireplace; other times it is a raging forest fire. Sometimes the Word tosses a firecracker of truth into our hearts that rattles our windows and jolts us awake; other times it sends armored tanks rumbling and crashing right into the living room of our hearts and minds.

The apostle Paul will deliver, in the sixty four verses from the book of Romans chapter 1, verse 18, through the middle of chapter 3, the terrifying, deafening, devastating truth of God's wrath, and the danger that all of humanity is in. In these verses, we are brought face to face with the fury of God.

An Unpopular Attribute – The Wrath of God

We are about to see, not only the depraved nature of condemned mankind that we would really rather not review, but we will discover another side of God Himself that we would really rather not discuss. We will face the truth about the anger of God. We will uncover the reality that, while God is a God who loves, He is also a God who hates; while He is a God of mercy, He is also a God of justice; while He created an eternal heaven, He also created an eternal Hell. We will discover, as well, that mankind is not only His cherished creation; they are also His condemned and fallen creation.

The apostle Paul, by way of inspiration, takes us into a courtroom. And, over the next few chapters of

this letter to the Romans, Paul will bring, before the bench of God's holiness and justice, four different categories of people. They are:

- The unbeliever who has never heard the gospel;
- The moral man who thinks he has impressed God;
- The Jew who thinks he was born into the kingdom;
- The Gentile who thinks he is good enough to get in.

However, the divine gavel crashes down and the jury of God's holiness delivers the verdict, "Guilty!"

We are told in Romans, chapter 3, verse 10 and verse 23,

*... There is none righteous, not even one ...
for all have sinned and fall short of the glory
of God*

All of humanity is condemned and defenseless before God's holy wrath, righteous anger, and terrible fury. Is it any wonder that the wrath of God, the fury and anger of God would be an unpopular attribute?

You have heard a lot of sermons that tell, "God really loves you," but have you ever heard one that said, "God is really mad at you"? We do not think about God being mad, furious, angry, or wrathful. That, I believe, is part of Satan's strategy. He knows full well that if people ever found out, they might cry out for God's mercy and pardon.

I find it interesting that this attribute of anger is the beginning point of Paul's formal teaching to the Romans. He has ended his introduction and has

concluded his personal remarks of deep affection for the Roman believers, as well as his statements of passion for the gospel. Now, he begins, in chapter 1, verse 18, with the body of his letter. He begins by writing the terrifying words,

For the wrath of God is revealed . . .

You might think, “What a terrible way to start. Why not start with the grace of God? Paul is going to turn everyone off. This is not the way to begin evangelizing anyone. It would be better to start with something like, ‘God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.’”

I heard a song on the radio, recently, that promised, “Come to Jesus, and all your problems will be solved.”

That is how you win people!

That is one of the strategies of the enemy of Christ’s church, however. He seeks to silence the truth of God’s anger and wrath from the pulpits and ministries of our land.

Harry Emerson Fosdick was one of the leading voices for liberal theology in the 1920’s and 1930’s. He pastored a huge church where he was renowned for his oratorical mastery. He wrote best selling books and influenced seminaries and pastors all across the country with his liberal slant.

He wrote an article for the July, 1928, edition of *Harpers Magazine*, which opened the floodgates for many gullible church leaders. In the issue, he rebuked pastors for actually trying to teach the Bible verse by verse. He wrote,

Preachers who pick out texts from the Bible and then proceed to give their historic settings, their logical meaning in the context, their place in the theology of the writer, with a few practical reflections appended, are grossly misusing the Bible. Nobody who speaks to the public so assumes that the vital interests of the people are located in the meaning of words spoken two thousand years ago.

Oh?? But the words of the Bible are, “sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb,” according to Psalm chapter 19, verse 10. The words of this Book are entirely, “profitable . . . so that the [believer] may be equipped for every good work,” as II Timothy, chapter 3, verses 16 and 17 tells us.

Fosdick, however, was heard and followed by thousands. He was the inventor, in modern church

history, of, what we call today, “seeker driven churches”.

In such churches, the desire to relate to the unbeliever supersedes the desire to convict and indoctrinate. Preaching, in a “seeker driven church,” begins with the needs of the audience rather than the character of God.

In the same article, Fosdick wrote words that spelled out a frightening prophecy of ministry that has become commonplace, even among churches that consider themselves to be evangelical. He wrote,

Who seriously supposes that one in a hundred of the congregation cares, to start with, what Moses, Isaiah, Paul or John meant in those verses. [So the preacher] should not end, but start with thinking about the audience’s vital (felt) needs, and then let the whole sermon be organized around a constructive endeavor to meet those needs. . . . all this is good sense and good psychology.ⁱ

Those who follow Harry Emerson Fosdick’s methods and pseudo-theology are greater in number now than ever before. In fact, the church growth methods popularized today are nothing more than a repackaging of Harry Emerson Fosdick.

One element of this repackaging is found in the writings of the influential pollster, named George Barna. He wrote in his book, *Marketing the Church*, these words that he not only believed, but has convinced thousands of pastors, in our day, to believe as the gospel truth. It is not difficult to hear the echo of Fosdick within his words. Barna championed this thought,

It is critical that we keep in mind a fundamental principle of Christian communication: the audience, not the message, is sovereign. If our advertising is going to stop people in the midst of hectic schedules and cause them to think about what we’re saying, our message has to be adapted to the needs of the audience. When we produce [communication] that is based on the take-it-or-leave-it proposition, rather than on a sensitivity to people’s needs, people will invariably reject our message.

This philosophy has spawned a myriad of ministry techniques and strategies that have nothing to do with truth or scriptural example.

Barna goes on, in his book, to state,

[The apostle] Paul was one of the all-time great tacticians. He studied strategies and

*tactics that would enable him to attract the most prospects and realize the greatest number of conversions.*ⁱⁱ

Nothing could be further from the truth! In fact, the record of scripture says the exact opposite. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, in I Corinthians, chapter 2, verses 1 through 5,

And when I came to you brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.

(In others words, I didn't have any strategy or clever method up my sleeve.)

For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

In other words, Paul said, "When I came to you, the most important thing was not you, but Christ; what mattered was not that I related to you, but that you related to Christ. In fact, I didn't want to know that much about you, in comparison to how much I really wanted you to know about Him! And I delivered to you the truth of Christ crucified; that is, Christ who suffered the wrath of God for the sake of sinners; Christ who paid the penalty of hell on behalf of sinful humanity."

The truth is, preaching about the anger of God and teaching the truth of God's wrath does not hinder evangelism, it enables it; it promotes it. It does not lead to false conversion, it leads to true conversion.

To summarize, the fury of God is an unwanted attribute.

Unwanted by the nature of man

- It is unwanted, first of all, by the nature of man, which is unaccountable to biblical direction. In other words, people want to behave in any way they want.

When you talk of judgment, you have to imply the existence of a judge. So, it is better to not believe in a God, who is a judge, or otherwise, He might do what a judge does and render a verdict.

Instead, let us just talk about His love. Let us emphasize the positive parts of the Bible. Let us

memorize the golden rule and the Lord's prayer. But do not repeat Revelation, chapter 20, verse 15,

And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

We just need to get rid of God. If we can get rid of God as a judge, then there is no enforcer against sin. And if there is no enforcer against sin, there really is not going to be a standard of truth. And if there is no standard of truth, there will be no measurement of right and wrong. So, you can do whatever you think is right for you, no matter what it is.

Should it take us by surprise that, as God's wrath and holiness are abandoned, moral and physical restraints are abandoned as well? And, as a result, human nature is given full reign to act itself out.

In 1950, only 170 teenagers in all of America were arrested for committing a serious crime – that entire year, 170 only. Today, and every day, there are at least 1,600 teenagers serving time in adult jails.

During the next twenty-four hours, more than 35,000 Americans will contract a sexually transmitted disease; thirteen million people this year. Teenagers will contract syphilis at the rate of 623 per day.

We are experiencing the degeneration of society predicted by the apostle Paul in Romans, chapter 1. To read this chapter is to read American history, and the history of any nation who thought that God is not a holy God, who is a righteous judge.

When Paul wrote to the Romans, they were self-destructing. Bulimia was part of their most favored religion, where they worshipped in drunken orgies and then vomited, then feasted again and vomited again, only to repeat the cycle.

Child prostitution flourished and political leaders were known for their pedophilia. Bisexuality was considered balanced. Seneca wrote that the elite socialite women dated the months of their calendar by the names of their husbands.

Rome was shrouded with darkness. Then, Paul's letter arrived, and as a flaming missile, it landed on Italy's shore. The first thing Paul told his readers was something that had already been spoken by the prophets and was a message that Greece and Rome had already mocked for generations. God is a God of wrath; He loves righteousness and hates sin. However, Rome would vote in favor of darkness.

We, in America, are experiencing an encroaching darkness as well. And, we also seem to be voting in favor of it.

In the 1940's, the Public Education System rated their top ten problems. Compare the top five entries of that list with the top five problems of the 1990's.

1940's	1990's
Talking out of turn	Physical assault
Chewing gum in class	Alcohol abuse
Cutting in line	Robbery
Dress code violation	Pregnancy
Running in the halls	Drug addiction

The number one problem in the schools in 1940 was "talking out of turn". Contrast that with the number one problem in 1990 of "physical assault".

And, on the same day a girl in Virginia was barred from reading her Bible on the school bus, 135,000 kids, as on the average every day, brought their guns to school. We seem to be voting in favor of the darkness too.

Unwanted by the religion of man

- Secondly, the wrath and fury of God toward sin is unwanted by the religion of man, which is independent of biblical doctrine.

The nature of man does not want to hear of the wrath of God because man wants to be able to behave in any way he wants. In the same way, the religion of man does not want to hear of the wrath of God because man wants to believe anything he wants.

Give it mediums and astrology; give it relativism and inward journeys; give it yin yang or crystals; give it yoga or astral travel. Man wants the ability to believe whatever he wants to believe without correction or dogma.

The *L. A. Times* ran an article recently, on Feng Shui (pronounced "fung shway"). It is a raging phenomenon on the west coast, luring upscale consumers with the promise that simply rearranging their furniture will bring spiritual peace. It is based on the Chinese philosophy that objects release a force of spiritual energy that can bring good tidings; like health, success, and prosperity. According to *CBS News*, there are over three hundred Feng Shui consultants in Southern California alone. It is a watered down version of Hinduism and encourages people to redecorate their homes and offices, along

the lines of a pagan temple. They are to make things face a certain direction; to be sure the windows open all the way, rather than needing to be slid up and down; to make certain the couch faces the door, so as to not block positive energy when people walk in, etc., etc. . . .

It is interesting that this secular news article "cut to the chase" in the last statement. "Decorating requires less soul-searching than religious study. Furniture won't hold people accountable for their actions. You may have to buy new stuff, but you won't have to change yourself at all."ⁱⁱⁱ

This new, self-styled, self-concocted religion, and others like it, is far more in demand than the "old time" religion. That is because the "old time" religion has a God who holds you accountable, instead of just a sofa for you to rearrange.

If you go back to the last spiritual awakening in America, you will have to travel back to the eighteenth century. Then, you can listen as one influential man preached a sermon that brought a powerful revival. His most famous sermon was entitled, "Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God". Jonathan Edwards preached to his New England congregation,

The pit is prepared. The fire is made ready. The furnace is now hot, ready to receive them. The flames do now rage and glow. The glittering sword is sharp and held over them, and the pit has opened her mouth under them . . . O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in.

When Jonathan Edwards preached that sermon, men wept and women fainted, as they cried out for God's mercy and pardon. They were brought face to face with this other side of God and it caused them to cry out for God to meet their greatest need. When they came face to face with this God, through a biblical description of the fury of God, they repented and all of life, for them, began to revolve around Him, instead of themselves.

However, man's nature resists this truth of accountability to God because man wants to behave in any way he wants. Man's religion resists accountability to the truth of God's Word, because man wants to believe anything he wants. Thus, man's behavior and his beliefs must reject God's wrath and God's Word.

Mankind can tolerate anything but a righteous standard of holiness and the implications that such a standard bring to every human being. So, God's holy

presence must be slowly but surely “erased” from the memory and practice of modern society.

A recent news release that illustrates this “erasing process” was quoted in a recent email to me. It originated from the American Family Association.

In the wake of the U. S. Supreme Court’s recent decision that made school-initiated prayers on public address systems before high school football games unconstitutional, many Christians have responded in a variety of ways. One high school principal, in eastern Tennessee, chose not to pray over the public address system, but instead used the opportunity to remind the football fans why it is important that they should pray. Mr. Jody McCloud, the principal of Roane County High School in Kingston, Tennessee, stepped to the microphone, on Friday evening, September 1, 2000, and spoke. His words were picked up by Agape Press and released.

It has always been the custom at Roane County High School football games to say a prayer and play the National Anthem to honor God and country. Due to a recent ruling by the Supreme Court, I am told that saying a prayer is now a violation of Federal Case Law.

As I understand the law at this time, I can use this public facility to approve of sexual perversion and call it an alternate lifestyle, and if someone is offended, that’s okay. I can use it to condone sexual promiscuity by dispensing condoms and calling it “safe sex,” and if someone is offended, that’s okay. I can even use this facility to present the merits of killing an unborn baby as a viable means of birth control, and if someone is offended, no problem. I can designate a school day as earth day and involve students in activities to religiously worship and praise the goddess, mother earth, and call it ecology. I can use literature, videos and presentations in the classroom that depict people with traditional Christian convictions as simple-minded and ignorant and call it “enlightenment”. However, if anyone uses this facility to honor God and ask Him to bless this game with safety and good sportsmanship, Federal Case Law is violated.

Apparently we are to be tolerant of everything and anyone, except God and His commandments. Nevertheless, as a school principal, I frequently ask staff and students to abide by rules with which they do not

necessarily agree. For me to do otherwise would be inconsistent. For this reason, I shall “render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s,” and refrain from praying over the public address system. However, if you feel inspired to honor, praise and thank God, and ask Him in the name of Jesus to bless this event, please feel free to do so by yourself. As far as I know, that’s not against the law – yet!^{iv}

An Undeniable Attribute – Is Revealed From Heaven

While the fury of God is an unwanted attribute, it is, however, an undeniable attribute.

Paul continues, in verse 18 of Romans, chapter 1, to say,

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven . . .

Now you need to know the difference between God’s anger and man’s anger; God’s wrath and man’s wrath. They are worlds apart.

There are two primary words in the New Testament for wrath or anger. One word is the Greek word “thumos” (θυμος), which gives us the English-transliterated words “thermos” and “thermometer”. It is rarely used in relation to God, and in fact, Paul never uses it when he refers to God’s anger, which he speaks of ten different times in the book of Romans.

The word “thumos” refers to red hot, uncontrolled anger. “Thumos” is the word that we would use to refer to, what is called, “road rage”. It is the feeling that you get every morning on our nearby highways. The root word literally means to “rush along fiercely”. That does sound like you on the interstate, doesn’t it?! It could be translated, “to be in a heat of violence” or “panting rage”. The point of “thumos” is that it usually refers to someone who is reacting with rage, with an uncontrolled emotion, even with temporary insanity.

I can remember one moment of “thumos” in my childhood. I was in the back yard with a boy who was at least one hundred pounds heavier and stronger than I was. I do not remember what he was doing, but whatever it was, he was not provoking me to love and good works. I remember taking all I could and then, balling my hand up into a little pint-sized fist and, the next thing I knew, he was holding his bloody nose. There was that awkward moment of, “What do I do now?”

I could see, in that instant, the look in his eyes, which meant I was in deep trouble. I turned and

began to run. He was right behind me. At the edge of the yard was a chain-link fence that was about four and a half feet high. The only thing between me and a happy childhood was that fence. I never even touched it. He, on the other hand, ran into it and huffed and puffed over it, but, by then, I was gone. I was running on to the wonderful prospect of a longer life.

“Thumos” is a problem. The anger of man is often uncontrolled and disastrous. You do not always escape the consequences either.

The word that is used for the anger of God, however, is the Greek word, “orge” (οργη). It refers to “settled conviction”. It is, John Murray wrote, “holy revulsion of God’s, being against that which is the contradiction of His holiness.” It is an abiding hatred of evil; an anger that is never out of bounds, but motivated by holy righteousness.

The Old Testament account

The Old Testament records this aspect of God’s character. For example:

- Psalm, chapter 90, verse 11, says,
Who understands the power of Your anger and Your fury, according to the fear that is due You?
- Psalm, chapter 76, verses 7 through 9a, say,
You, even You, are to be feared; and who may stand in Your presence when once You are angry? You caused judgment to be heard from heaven; the earth feared and was still when God arose to judgment . . .
- Psalm, chapter 2, verses 1 through 5, say,
Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed, saying, “Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!” He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them. Then He will speak to them in His anger and terrify them in His fury . . .

Skip to verses 10 through 12.

Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; take warning, O judges of the earth. Worship the Lord with

reverence and rejoice with trembling. Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!

Study, at some point, the illustrations of God’s wrath in the Old Testament. Look at the account of the garden and God’s judgment on Adam and Eve, and all of creation, in Genesis, chapter 3. Also, study the flood in Genesis, chapters 6 and 7, where God drowned the entire human race, except for eight people who believed His word and got on the ark. Then, study God’s fury unleashed in Genesis, chapter 19, on the perverted cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

In the Old Testament, there are more than twenty words that refer to God’s wrath. In fact, there are six hundred passages on the subject of God’s anger.

This led Authur Pink to make the observation that, if you look in your concordance, you will find more references in Scripture on the anger and fury of God than on His love and tenderness.

J. I. Packer once said, “One of the most striking things about the Bible is the strength with which both Testaments emphasize the reality and terror of God’s wrath.”

The New Testament account

Thus, in the New Testament, the wrath of God is an undeniable fact, just as it was revealed in the Old Testament. For example:

- John writes, in his gospel, in chapter 3, verse 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.
- Paul writes, in Ephesians, chapter 5, verses 3 through 6,
But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for

because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

- Again, to the Colossians, in chapter 3, verses 5 and 6, Paul writes,

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience.

You might say, “But I don’t see God’s wrath being demonstrated against evil today. It seems to me that evil men are having their way and the wrath of God is a distant Old Testament or New Testament event.”

Whether you can see it or not, feel it or not, experience it or not, the fury of God has come, is coming, and will come with unleashed terror one day.

Donald Grey Barnhouse told the story of an editor who answered wisely to someone who did not believe in God’s wrath. And, he answered with a single sentence.

In this story, the godly farmers in a western community were greatly shocked, one spring Sunday morning, when they drove up to their little church in the country. They saw that the man who owned the forty acres across from the church was in the midst of plowing. The people went into the church, but could hear the rise and fall of the noise of the tractor as it approached and then went to the other side of the field. This farmer worked other fields during the week, but always came to the field by the church on Sunday in order to show his disdain for their worship of God.

All through the spring, summer, and fall the farmer plowed, disked, dragged, fertilized and cultivated his field on Sunday. Finally, that October, he harvested his crop of corn and then, wrote an open letter to the editor of the local weekly paper. In his letter, he pointed out that he had done all of the work on Sunday, and yet, he had the highest yield per acre of any farm in the county. He asked the editor how the Christians could explain this. The editor printed the letter, but followed it with one simple statement. The editor wrote, “God does not settle all His accounts in the month of October.”

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 2/11/2001 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Harry Emerson Fosdick, quoted by John MacArthur in Ashamed of the Gospel, p. 76.

ⁱⁱ George Barna, Marketing the Church, quoted by John MacArthur in Ashamed of the Gospel, p. 76.

ⁱⁱⁱ L. A. Times quoted in World Magazine (Oct. 7, 2000).

^{iv} Jody McLoud, Roane County High School, Kingston, Tenn.