

## God's least popular attribute

Poets rarely mention it. Preachers seldom talk about it. Christian writers avoid it. Hymns and choruses seldom include it in their lyrics. And it's not likely many of us have included it in our recent prayers of praise, either.

God's wrath is his least popular attribute. We enjoy singing about God's amazing grace. We're drawn to Bible verses that picture the Father's tender love and his eagerness to forgive. But what are we to make of the many Scriptures that emphasize the righteous wrath of God?

The prophet's solemn words make us squirm: "The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord takes vengeance and is filled with wrath" (Nahum 1:2). And contrary to popular misconceptions, God's wrath is not merely an Old Testament concept. The apostle Paul wrote, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men." He continued, "Because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed" (Romans 1:18; 2:5). The final chapters of the Bible vividly portray how God will pour out his wrath on judgment day (Revelation 6:16, 17; 19:15).

As uncomfortable as this topic may be, by studying God's wrath we can actually discover some ways to handle our own anger properly.

*God's anger is righteous.* He's not impetuous, unreasonable, or petty. His wrath is the natural indignation his holy nature feels against injustice. We're angry when a terrorist kills an innocent victim, a molester harms a child, a drunk driver causes an accident, or a corrupt businessman cheats a customer. How could a just God *not* be angry against sin and its devastating effects?

*God expresses his anger at the right time and in the right way.* For example, Jesus made his anger known when hard-hearted legalists preferred their Sabbath customs over a man's healing

(Mark 3:1-5), and when greedy merchants turned the Father's house into a shopping mall (John 2:13-16). Jesus expressed his anger through bold and appropriate confrontations, not wild temper tantrums.

*God lets us know what makes him angry.* You don't have to guess what kind of mood he's in. His character is consistent. The Bible clearly states his expectations and the consequences of rejecting them. Our own anger gets us into trouble when we fail to communicate clearly and appropriately. William Blake wrote,

"I was angry with my friend;  
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.  
I was angry with my foe;  
I told it not, my wrath did grow."

*God's anger is tempered by his other attributes.* Thankfully, wrath is not God's only characteristic. "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve" (Psalm 103:8-10).

*God's anger is avoidable.* Even though his anger is completely justified, God provided a way to satisfy his righteous wrath while at the same time shielding us from the effects of our sin. Jesus came to "rescue us from the coming wrath" (1 Thessalonians 1:10). On the cross, he bore the full force of God's anger against sin. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13).

What will happen if we give more attention to the wrath of God? Yes, we'll squirm. But we will also give God the respect he deserves. We will develop a greater appreciation for his grace. And we will realize more keenly the deep, deep love of Jesus, who died for our sins to bring us home where we belong—at peace with our Father. ■



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