

A God Who is Angry About Sin

2Chronicles 6:36-42 -

By Russell Muilenburg

Sunday, 27 June 2010 00:00

2 Chronicles 6:36-39 *A God Who is Angry About Sin* □ **Why We Minded In Church** <<Intro video with church staff sharing memories of being scared into behaving at church>>

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One of the custodians at our church is a gregarious, mischievous 70 year-old who loves to tell stories about growing up in rural Minnesota. One day during coffee break he told a story about why he behaved in church as a child.

Allen's mother took he and his siblings to a little country church where a man named Mr. Parker attended with his six children. The Parker children were always the best behaved kids in church. If ever they misbehaved, Mr. Parker would take them out of the sanctuary, they would be gone about 30 seconds, and then they would come back. Allen said no one knew what happened while they were gone, but the child would always come back in and behave perfectly.

So in order to get her children to behave, Allen's mom always told them that if they acted up, they'd have to go out with Mr. Parker.

So, whenever Allen went to a church event—whether it was a picnic or a worship service or a prayer meeting—the first thing he did was check for Mr. Parker. If Mr. Parker was there, Allen was on his best behavior. If Mr. Parker was not, Allen was likely to get a little rowdy.

After a few years, Allen's father decided to start going to church and took the family to a new congregation. They were there a couple weeks when Allen looked up and—who else had decided to change churches?—Mr. Parker.

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I want to thank the members of the staff for sharing their memories. The idea for that video came one day when we were on break and we started talking about how our parents got us to behave in church. And I got to thinking about how for many people, that might be their image of God—a stern disciplinarian, grouchy, touchy, ready-to-get-you if you so much as think about slipping up.

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For those of us on staff, of course, we recognize today what our parents were trying to do—teach us reverence and respect for God (as well as for the people worshipping around us.) But some people never get past this idea that God is perpetually angry, ready to smack us down at the slightest mis-step.

A singer named Butch Hancock, a member of the country/folk band the Flatlanders, described growing up in church like this: “We were taught two main things: God loves you and He’s gonna send you to hell, and sex is bad and nasty and dirty and awful and you should save it for the one you love.” (found in Mark Buchanan, *The Holy Wild*, p. 96) Sometimes the fear of God is put into people as children, and they grow up believing God is fickle, demanding, out-of-touch and primitive.

In fact, churches are so sensitive to this image of God that they sometimes go overboard in emphasizing the loving nature of God. The emphasis is placed on His mercy and His compassion. We want people to know that God loves everybody, accepts everybody, has a second-chance for everybody. Modern Christianity prefers a kinder, gentler version of God.

Our own church puts an emphasis on God’s joy. To be honest, I’d much rather have you picture God as the father welcoming home the prodigal than as the God who got so fed up with the human race that He had the whole earth wiped out in a flood.

But the truth is: both are Biblical portraits of God.

And while we might be squeamish talking about God’s anger today, it is a part of His character.

The Way Solomon Sees It

We are in the midst of a sermon series where we are looking at some of the different attributes of God. It is a series suggested by the first line of this section of scripture, the beginning of Solomon’s prayer of dedication where he says: “O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven or on earth.” We have been using this prayer as a guide as we look at the

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glory of the unmatched and unrivaled God of the universe.

Already we have seen that our God is a God who keeps His promises; a God who is great and yet near; a God who forgives; a God who hears the prayers of all people, and a God who upholds the cause of His people.

Now, today, we are going to use this prayer as a springboard into another attribute of God—one that isn't talked about as much these days but one which is no less true—God's anger. Today, we are going to get a picture of a God who is angry about sin.

Here it is, in black and white, 2 Chronicles 6:36:

36

“When they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin—and you become angry with them and give them over to the enemy, who takes them captive to a land far away or near.

Here's how Solomon sees it: People sin. There is no one who does not sin. And when people sin God becomes angry about it.

God is angry about sin.

That doesn't mean He is an unpredictable, foot-stomping tyrant. It doesn't mean He's an abusive bully who blows His top over every petty infraction. But it does mean He has standards. And when we fall short of those standards—and everyone does—He has a righteous indignation over the evil we commit.

Another word the Bible uses is wrath. God is a wrathful God.

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And if we want to know God well, then we need to understand that anger over sin is a part of His character.

Let's consider, for a bit, what Solomon is getting at.

Throughout this prayer we have seen that Solomon is nothing if not a realist. We have heard him pray about many problems Israel may face--drought, famine, plagues, enemy attacks, and so on--and in each instance he recognizes that if God allows such things to occur it will be because of the sin of the people. Solomon knows that when people turn away from God problems are certain to follow.

Now, at the end of verse 36, Solomon anticipates that the day may come when the people of Israel will be defeated by their enemies and carried off into captivity. But Solomon does not suppose that this will happen because the Israeli army is weak or because her rulers are inept. Rather, he knows that if exile comes, it will be for one reason and one reason alone: because God is angry about sin.

In verses 37-39 he goes on to talk about what the Israelites can do if this captivity ever occurs. He talks about having a change of heart and repenting of sin and calling on God for forgiveness. Solomon never loses sight of God's mercy.

But before we rush to look at God's grace, we need to camp out in verse 36 for awhile: God is angry about sin. When we sin, it offends God. And He burns in wrath over it.

This is hard for us to fully grasp. Too often, we place sin and injustice on a sort of sliding scale. If everyone is doing it, if it isn't being done against us, if we can't see the effects of it—then we conclude it isn't that bad. We look at a lot of things the Bible calls sin, and we wonder what the big deal is. Nobody is getting hurt, we say, so it shouldn't matter.

But God is different than you and me. He sees sin for what it is—an affront against His reign

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and rule. That's why Solomon says: "When they sin against you." He knows that all human sin—even when it's done merely in our thoughts—is ultimately a sin against God. It's a violation of His laws. (cf. Psalm 51:4)

And God sees the consequences—the darkness and despair and death—that sin brings about in people's lives. Joshua Harris writes:

You and I have no idea how connected and consequential our sin is. We see most of our sins as insignificant—a small match dropping on the grass or at worst a tiny brush fire. God sees what the small flames lead to. He sees the forest fire that devours the countryside and ravages homes and takes lives. (

Dug Down Deep,
103-104)

God sees how bad sin really is. What it all adds up to. And in His perfect justice, He is angry about it.

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A Biblical Point of Emphasis

As I said, the wrath of God is not an attribute of God we talk all that much about. And while it hardly seems possible that talking about God's anger has ever been popular, it does seem to be a Biblical point of emphasis. In fact, if you would do an index study of the Bible, you would find that there are more references to God's anger, fury and wrath than there are to his love and tenderness. (A. W. Pink, quoted by J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 135).

Consider the following examples:

The prophet Nahum wants us to see that just as God is good to those who trust Him, He is also terrible to those who do not. He writes:

The Lord is a jealous and avenging God, the LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The LORD takes vengeance on his foes and maintains his wrath against his

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enemies. The LORD is slow to anger and great in power; the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished...Who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his fierce anger? His wrath is poured out like fire; the rocks are shattered before him. The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him. But...he will pursue his foes into darkness. (Nahum 1:2-8)

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 talks about the coming day

when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.

8

He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

9

They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power

10

on the day he comes to be glorified.

And other examples of God's anger towards sin could be cited as well, from the banishment of Adam and Eve from the garden, to the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians, to the great turmoil and punishment of the final judgment.

Clearly, then, the Biblical writers have no inhibitions in ascribing anger to God. Wrath towards sin is one of God's attributes.

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Thoughts from a Couple of Theologians

So, what is God's wrath? If Solomon is telling us that God is angry over sin and the rest of the Bible is describing a wrathful God to us, what are we supposed to understand that to mean?

Theologian Wayne Grudem writes:

If God loves all that is right and good, and all that conforms to his moral character, then it should not be surprising that he would hate everything that is opposed to his moral character. God's wrath directed against sin is therefore closely related to God's holiness and justice...God's wrath

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means that

he intensely hates all sin.

(
Systematic Theology
, 206)

Joshua Harris writes:

Some people are repulsed by the idea of God being a god of wrath. But if you think about it, a God who doesn't hate evil is terrifying. True goodness hates evil. True righteousness and justice must stand in opposition to injustice and unrighteousness. God's wrath, writes John Stott, “

is in fact his holy reaction to evil.”

(
Dug Down Deep,
103)

And J. I. Packer says:

The wrath of God...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. (

Knowing God
, p. 139)

In other words, in order for God to be a truly good God who upholds all that is right and pure, He must hate all that is unrighteous and wicked. A holy and just God must necessarily be angry about sin.

His wrath is not fickle, nor is He prone to fits of temper, but nevertheless He is angry about sin. His wrath is a righteous indignation directed against all that offends Him.

The Benefits of Knowing About God's Wrath

So, why is it necessary for us to have a picture of a God who is angry about sin? What difference does it make to us? Here are 4 reasons why it is important for us to know about God's wrath:

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1) It is truth.

First, we need to know about God's wrath because it is truth. This is part of the Biblical description of God. If we want to know God well, then we need to know this. The reason Solomon describes God as being angry about sin is because that is a true and accurate picture of God. And for that reason alone it is necessary for us to know.

The Bible says that the heart of true wisdom is to know and fear the LORD (Psalm 111:10 et al). And to truly know the LORD means you don't get to pick and choose among the attributes you want Him to have. If God is truly a God who is upset with sin, then there is little wisdom in thinking of Him only as a God of love.

Yes He is a God of love, but He is also a God of holiness and justice who cannot tolerate, but must punish, sin. If you run away from the idea of God's wrath--if you say, I don't like to think about a God who is angry about sin--then you run away from truth, and you run away from wisdom, and, worst of all, you run away from the deepest kinds of love.

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2) It is a reason to thank and praise God

Second, the fact that God is angry about sin is a reason to thank and worship Him. God's wrath is actually a part of His glory.

Now this may not seem immediately obvious. Wrath, after all, seems like such a negative concept. It seems more like a reason to fear and dread God than to worship and praise Him.

And yet, we must ask ourselves, would we want a God who is not angry about sin? If God did not hate sin, then He would be a God who delighted in sin or at least was not troubled by it. As

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the quote from Joshua Harris said earlier, a God who doesn't hate evil is terrifying.

Would you really want a God who winks at sin? 10-year-old girls are being sold into prostitution in Bangkok. The entire nation of Haiti is being held in poverty due to the corruption of its government. Could you worship who is not angered by the buying and selling of young girls? Would you admire a God who isn't ticked off about poverty?

Of course, if we want God to be angry about stuff like that, why shouldn't we also expect Him to be angry about our own outbursts of temper or our tendencies to deceive? A God who does not react adversely to evil in His world could not be a morally perfect God. And such a God would not be worthy of our worship.

I read a story recently about a man whose younger brother has Down's Syndrome. One day, when they were boys, some kids surrounded his brother and started calling him names, shoving him from one to the other. His round, thickset face grew taut with fear and bewilderment. The older brother, watching this, was at first afraid. Then he got angry. Right good and angry. He wasn't physically big, and he was badly outnumbered; but in his anger he grew, and his strength multiplied. He waded in and whipped the whole lot of them. (Buchanan, *Holy Wild*, 100)

When we hear stories like that, we applaud the anger of the older brother. We know it was good and right and noble of him to be angry about the injustice being inflicted on his brother.

And, truth be told, we need God to have a similar anger about evil. "Unless it's true that in God there burns a holy anger toward bullies and tyrants and merchants of evil, then He is not God at all." (Buchanan, *Holy Wild*, 100)

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3) □ It warns us away from the horrors of Hell

Third. It is important for us to know about God's wrath because it warns us away from the horrors of Hell.

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Unfortunately, for some people the fear of judgment may be the only motivation to consider trusting Christ as Savior.

Now, to be sure, there are better reasons to come to God than to escape hell. But if fear is the only thing that will shake a person loose from his bondage to sin and cause him to consider Christ, then, for love's sake, so be it. There are better reasons for a child to obey his daddy than the fear of a spanking. But if that fear is the only thing that will keep him out of the street, then, for love's sake, so be it.

Jesus Himself said:

I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. (Luke 12:4-5)

Author Mark Buchanan paraphrases like this: "Fear Him who, when you're dead, isn't done with you yet." (p. 97)

God is angry about sin, and the punishment for sin is terrible. For the sake of love, we must be very clear about this. We ignore God's wrath at our own peril. We should all throw ourselves upon divine mercy.

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4) □ It helps us appreciate the grace of Jesus Christ

Fourth and finally, knowing that God is angry about sin helps us to appreciate the grace of Jesus Christ. Knowing the magnitude and justice of the wrath of God against sin causes us to see the great grace of the cross of Jesus and to love it, cherish it, feast on it, and share it as never before.

The facts of the matter are this: we are all sinners, every sin is an offense against God, and God is justifiably angry about that sin. Justice demands our punishment.

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And yet, God has offered us protection against His wrath. That's why Jesus came, that's what the gospel is all about.

The Bible says that God's wrath is poured out like fire. It is all-consuming (Heb. 12:29). But there is a place for us to take shelter from the fire-storm.

When the early pioneers were making their way across the continent, they encountered lush prairies where the grass sometimes reached high above the hoops of their wagons. It was wild and lush, beautiful and pristine. But sometimes wildfires would catch in the grass and the strong, stiff wind of the prairie would push the flames before it like a locomotive.

If the pioneers were caught before one of these conflagrations, they had only one hope of escape. They could not outrun the fire, they had no chance of putting it out. Instead, they would light a fire themselves and burn the patch of ground where they stood. Then they waited on the burned-over earth. And when the prairie fire swept up to the edge of the patch the pioneers had burned, it would find nothing to consume and pass by.

"Later, the fire proved a gift to the earth. It burned what was already dead, and its ashes nurtured new life.

Jesus Christ burned the earth with His cross. God poured out His wrath on His Son. If we take our stand there, the wrath to come will pass us by, and in its time will renew the very earth it devours." (Buchanan, p. 109)

God's anger is great, and His judgment terrible.

But that makes the grace of Jesus Christ even greater.

Don't take it for granted, don't forget it, and never stop clinging to the cross.

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