

# The Anger of God and the Bible

Robin Calamaio 2008 – Edit 2020

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There is only *one* reason God becomes angry. Sin. It is truly that simple. Where sin is absent, God's anger is absent. Unfortunately, "*this present evil age*" (Gal 1:4) is a cauldron of sin. Not only are there *thousands* of different kinds of sins ... there are *billions* of individuals committing them. And there are varying degrees of culpability for each sin committed. For example, under the Law, the sacrifices were for sins done in ignorance. There were *no* sacrifices for deliberate sin - just prescribed punishment. Fortunately, the One sacrifice that can actually expunge human sin (to Whom the entire sacrificial system pointed) includes the power to pay for deliberate sins. This one little difference in the sacrifices, is the difference between eternal life ... or death.

## Terminology - And His Ultimate Response

In both Testaments, several words express God's anger. Many of the Hebrew words are ... colorful. One means, "*to blow hard in the nostrils.*" Another, "*to be burnt to a red-hot coal.*" Another, "*to smoke.*" And another, "*to breathe short; to foam*" (*Old Testament Word Studies*, by William Wilson; Kregel Publications, 1978). Of the several Koine Greek words, the two most prevalent are "*thumos*" and "*orge*." One linguist states, "**Thumos** indicates a more agitated condition of the feelings, an outburst ... from inward indignation, while **orge** ... is less sudden in its rise than **thumos**, but more lasting in its nature" (*An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, W. E. Vine, Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966). "*Thumos*" is more of an outburst, and "*orge*" an attitude or disposition. Babylon of Revelation receives both - as God gives her the cup "*of His fierce (thumos) wrath (orge)*" (Rev 16:19). And Jesus Himself, when returning to strike down the nations, comes in "*the fierce (thumos) wrath (orge) of God, the Almighty*" (Rev 19:15). Before I became a Christian, I saw a painting of Jesus driving the money-changers from The Temple. I thought, "*I didn't know He ever got mad about anything.*" Well, ... He does.

Each sin is a direct offense against God (See Ps 51:1-4). Envision each one forming a pipeline directed at God. At some point, His response will come back through that pipeline ... an arrow destined for "*the heart of the King's enemies*" (Ps 45: 5). No man, or angel, will survive this heavenly response. But, when one responds positively to the Gospel message, each pipeline is bent hard left, and its arrow ... diverted. Jesus takes each one - dead center - on that Roman cross. One way - or this other - every sin is going to be met by the wrath of God. "*He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross*" (1Pet 2:24) and "*was crushed for our iniquities*" (Isa 53:5). Opt for ... "*this other*" way each of our sins will be addressed by God.

## "I Kept Silence ..."

I realize that many who have just read the foregoing material ... don't believe a word of it. That is not new. God once said to His audience, after listing a whole series of sins, "*These things you have done, and I kept silence. You thought that I was just like you*" (Ps 50:21). Many errors we make in life are not that big a deal. This error ... is not among that number.

## **Punishment vs. Discipline - God's Anger ... Two Opposite Purposes**

For the finally impenitent, God's anger ... is strictly *punishment*. It will not cause corrective behavior. To the extent that Hell contains weeping, it will be "*the sorrow of the world (that) produces death*" - not the sorrow that "*produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation*" (2Cor 7:10). On the other hand, God's anger toward the Christian (or Christian-to-be), is designed to correct behavior. It is *disciplinary* - with the one so struck, becoming more Christlike. Let's look at this disciplinary motive behind God's anger.

*"His anger is but for a moment, (but) His favor is for a lifetime"* (Ps 30:5).

### **The Christian-To-Be**

Elihu told Job that man is "*chastened with pain on his bed, and with unceasing complaint in his bones ... his flesh wastes away ... and his bones which were not seen stick out .... God does all these oftentimes with men, to bring back his soul from the pit, that he may be enlightened with the light of life*" (Job 33:19,21,29,30). God did not refute Elihu's assertion. Similarly, Psalm 107 has several scenarios of this type of activity by God. But a classic example involves the Christian-killer, Saul. "*... a light from heaven flashed around him, and he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying ... 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'*" After some instructions, he got back up, "*and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing*" (Ac 9:3,4,8). This is the beginning of the Christian life ... of the Apostle Paul. But, this encounter could have just as easily ended like Herod's a few chapters later: "*an angel of the Lord struck him ... and he was eaten by worms and he died*" (Ac 12:23). The difference between the two? God's purpose behind His anger. Paul will be the first to affirm this assertion.

### **The Christian**

*"Do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord ... He scourges each one He welcomes as a son .... All discipline, for the moment, seems ... sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness"* (Heb 12:5,11). When He has decided a change in direction is needed - He acts. But, as sin is the genesis of this action, it is error to assume sin has not elicited negative emotions from God. That is to deny the power and reality of sin - and relegate it to some philosophic, intellectual, theoretical exercise. To be sure, sin does bring forth more than just anger from God. Sometimes, it causes Him grief (Eph 4:30), regret (Gen 6:6), and even patient endurance (Ro 9:22), but eventually, all sin is on a one-way course to meet His anger. And oftentimes, that may be ... the only response.

### **His Anger - "For Our Good"**

God says our earthly fathers "*disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them ('according to their pleasure'), but He disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share His holiness*" (Heb 12:10). Natural, earthly fathers usually (maybe always?) discipline *from self-interest*. Maybe the child embarrassed them, or otherwise angered them. But God disciplines *with our interests* in mind. His anger is designed to drive out sin - making the recipient more righteous. A specific example is the Corinthian believers. "*When we are judged,*

*we are disciplined that we might not be damned along with the world”* (1Cor 11:32). Many were made “*weak, sick and a number sleep*” - died ... with the assumption they repented before their exit.

### **As An Aside ...**

This understanding has affected the way I have raised my daughters - and the children I worked with in several children’s homes. The goal is to discipline over matters that will negatively affect *their* future success *from God’s viewpoint*. Wisdom from God is required in such a quest. One must know what behaviors must be confronted, when, and by what method - so as to accomplish the necessary change. This requires self-control, reflection and seeking God. But, the reward is unparalleled. By the way, this is also one of the goals behind the church discipline pattern of Matthew 18:15-17. All of this is worth effort to learn about, brethren.

### **Conclusion**

Originally, it was my intent to discuss more deeply the difference between God’s anger (“*thumos*” - an outburst) and His wrath (“*orge*” - a disposition). And, I still know it is useful to examine these different words in their contexts. But, as this Article developed, the reality of *any* kind of anger by our Creator ... began eclipsing a clinical dissection of it. To be on the receiving end of God’s displeasure is never a pleasant experience - even when designed for one’s good. Fire is still fire. When roused, the target of His anger ... never prevails. While I should seek to live right before Him out of appreciation for what He has done - is doing - and will do ... if I am too immature to operate in “*a perfect (mature) love (that) casts out fear*” (1Jn 4:18), I hope that fear of Him will prevail over my stupidity. I prefer this firewall ... over fire.

I am certain the chosen angels (1Tim 5:21), who are not infected and defected by sin, see these two different applications of God’s anger activity ... and stand astounded at Him. They know He is “*too pure to approve evil*” (Hab 1:13), yet, He uses its occasion with two entirely separate aims in mind. At His discretion, His anger may be designed to punish, or be a blow of wisdom penetrating a resistant, complex human nature ... ending in an eternal, righteous change. This astounds me - and I am one still seeing through “*a mirror dimly*” (1Cor 13:12). But, I am glad I am looking. Any sight in these matters ... is better than none.

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In 1977, Robin Calamaio became a Christian. BA, Bus Admin (Milligan College '90) and Master of Divinity (Emmanuel School of Religion '92).