

TRUTH

“. . . Your word is truth” (John 17:17)

July 2024

THE WRATH OF GOD

The God of heaven is described to humans in the pages of His inspired word, the Bible. God is described as omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, etc. He is also described as all-loving; in fact, the Bible plainly states, “*God is love*” (1 John 4:8,16). But the Bible also speaks often of the wrath of God. Romans 11:22 cites both the love **and** wrath of God: “*consider the goodness and severity of God.*” What is the proper understanding of God’s wrath? To answer this question, we must turn to the Bible.

There is a great deal of misunderstanding relative to the wrath of God. Skeptics and infidels claim the Bible’s depiction of the wrath of God is evidence that God does not exist. Particularly, regarding hell as punishment for the wicked, skeptics often say a *loving* God would not consign souls to eternal punishment.

Even among those professing Christianity, many struggle with the concept of God’s wrath. Some even “reconcile” the difficulty by ascribing multiple personalities to God. The God of the Old Testament is portrayed as vindictive and violent, almost eager to mete out punishment to humans, while the God of the New Testament is a pushover, tolerating any and all behavior from those claiming to believe. Though few express it as such, many religious folks believe the God of the Old Testament, sometime between Malachi and Matthew, “got religion” and suddenly became tolerant of any and everything from mankind.

In studying the wrath of God, it is important to remember two key points. **First, The God of the Old Testament is the same as the God of the New Testament.** The Bible clearly teaches there is but one true, living God. In the Old Testament, God told Israel, “*I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God*” (Isaiah 44:6). It is to this same God that Paul referred in Athens, saying, “*He is Lord of heaven and earth*” (Acts 17:24). In Ephesians 4:6, Paul said there is “*one God and Father of all.*” Hebrews 1:1-2 also clearly teaches that the God who spoke by the prophets is the same God who now speaks through His Son. Furthermore, the one God of the Bible clearly says, “*For I am the LORD, I do not change*” (Malachi 3:6). The God of the Old Testament is one and the same as the God of the New Testament.

Second, the love and wrath of God are depicted in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Just a few examples will suffice.

- (1) *God’s love and wrath are seen in the Patriarchal Age.* Adam and Eve were lovingly placed in the paradise of Eden and had direct fellowship with God (Genesis 1-2). But when they disobeyed, they were driven from Eden and cut off from the tree of life (Genesis 3). The patriarch Noah “*found grace in the eyes of the LORD*” (Genesis 6:8). As God’s wrath was executed in the flood, His love was seen also, saving obedient Noah and family.
- (2) *God’s love and wrath are seen in the Mosaic Age.* In love for the Israelites, God delivered them from Egyptian bondage. Though Israel was blessed and aided by God, God’s wrath was executed several times upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians (Exodus 2:23-14:31). In great love for them, God delivered Israel (Deuteronomy 4:37). But when they forsook Him and refused to return, He “*poured out His fierce anger*” (Lamentations 4:11).
- (3) *Today, in the Christian Age, both God’s love and wrath are taught in the New Testament.* Jesus said God sent His Son to give everlasting life (John 3:16), but he also said those who reject His words will be judged (John 12:48). Paul said Christians are saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8), but he also wrote of “*everlasting destruction*” to those who refuse God (2 Thessalonians 1:8,9).

In every dispensation, God’s love and wrath both are seen. Over and over, Scripture shows God’s love poured out on those who obey and His wrath poured out on those who refuse and rebel. God is all-loving, but He is also just. He sent His Son to satisfy His justice and atone for sin (1 Peter 2:21-24). Jesus’ atoning death means God can be just and yet still save sinful humans who are “*in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 3:23-27). Those who refuse Jesus have God’s wrath abiding on them (John 3:36), and Christians who turn away from Jesus also stand in danger of facing God’s wrath (Ephesians 5:1-8). Dear reader, come to God through Jesus for, “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*” (Hebrews 10:31)!

-- Chad Dollahite

TAKEAWAYS FROM EXODUS 18-19

In these two chapters, we see Moses reunited with his wife and sons, Moses' father-in-law giving him some practical suggestions, and Israel arriving at Mount Sinai. There the Israelites will prepare themselves to receive the instructions of God's law.

18:2-4 – Moses' wife and sons – This is one of only two places in the Bible where both of his sons are named (Eliezer and Gershom). It is interesting that the Bible's message focuses more on the sons of Aaron, with very little said about Moses' two boys. Moses served as a leader of God's people, but there is no indication that Gershom and Eliezer played such a role. Each of God's children are individuals. If one of them does not fill the same role that one or both of his parents did, that does not mean the second generation has failed or that the children are not as important.

18:7-12 – Jethro as a servant of Jehovah – The Midianite father-in-law of Moses was a Gentile, yet he was a servant of the Lord. After Moses shared with him what the Lord had done, "*Then Jethro rejoiced for all the good which the LORD had done for Israel . . . And Jethro said, 'Blessed be the LORD . . . Now I know that the LORD is greater than all the gods'*" (18:9-11). That is not all. "*Jethro . . . took a burnt offering and other sacrifices to offer to God. And Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God*" (18:12). In the Old Testament, we do not often read about Gentiles serving the Lord, but Jethro was such a person.

18:15-27 – Moses accepted and implemented Jethro's wise suggestions – When Jethro saw how Moses handled the judgment cases that Israel brought to him, he advised him to change his approach. What had Moses been doing? He was the sole listener and judge of every single case, which caused the people to stand before Moses from morning until evening. This had the potential to wear out everyone involved.

After Jethro observed what Moses was doing, he told Moses there was a better way to do it. He suggested that he get others involved and delegate authority to them to hear smaller cases (18:17,22,23). Before Jethro offered his advice to Moses, Moses was doing a *good* work. Sharing the responsibilities and getting more people involved made it a *better* work. Sometimes changes need to be made in the Lord's work in order to improve the effectiveness of a particular effort.

Jethro's words reminded Moses that no single person can do all of God's work! Moses was a leader, but he needed assistance. When Moses reached out to others to help him carry out the work, that was not a sign of weakness on Moses' part; rather, it was a sign

of wisdom. Jethro appealed to Moses to select faithful men to serve with him (18:21). Moses accepted that suggestion and put it into practice (18:24-26). The new approach was a blessing to Moses and Israel, too.

19:1,2 – Israel's arrival at Sinai – They came to Sinai in the third month after leaving Egypt (19:1). They did not know it at the time, but the Israelites would be at the mount of God for nearly one year (cf. Numbers 10:11,12). Many things would transpire at Sinai which held a special place in Israel's history.

19:3-6 – Israel was blessed greatly by God – God had delivered Israel from Egypt, and He had high expectations for His people. The Lord's message to them was, "*Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*" (19:5,6). God wanted His people to be distinct from all others. He wanted them to be committed to obeying Him in all things. The specific laws of the covenant will soon be revealed to them, but the Israelites needed to have a heart that was ready to hear God's voice, regardless of what He said.

19:7-9 – Moses the mediator – Moses stood as a communicator and connector between Jehovah and Israel, both in the giving of the law (Galatians 3:19) and in other matters. In this passage, we see Moses communicating in two directions: "*So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the LORD commanded him . . . So Moses told the words of the people to the LORD*" (19:7,9).

19:10-20 – Unforgettable, fear-instilling sights and sounds at Sinai – As the Lord spoke to Moses on the mount, He told him to inform the people to be ready to hear Him speak on the third day (19:3,10,11). God wanted Israel to come *near* to the mountain (19:13), but He forbid them to *touch* it: death would result if they did (19:12,13). On the third day, when thunderings, lightnings, smoke, and a trumpet's loud sound came, "*all the people who were in the camp trembled*" (19:16). It is easy to understand why they would react that way! This memorable occasion is mentioned in Hebrews 12:18-21.

19:17 – "*And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God*" – Let us make three modern-day applications: (1) Bring people to *meet* the Lord (like Andrew brought Peter to Jesus, John 1:40-42), (2) bring people to meet Him in *worship*, and (3) bring people to *heaven* to meet with Him *forever*.

What comes next in Exodus? The giving of the law.

-- Roger D. Campbell

Overcoming Bitterness

Bitterness, to one extent or another, can seep into the heart of any person, including faithful followers of Jesus. “Bitter” is defined as “a resentful, angry feeling” [www.vocabulary.com]. A second online source states: “Someone who is bitter is angry and unhappy because they cannot forget bad things that happened in the past” [https://dictionary.cambridge.org].

God’s attitude toward bitterness is set forth with clarity in Ephesians 4:31, where we read, “*Let all bitterness . . . be put away from you.*” In simple terms, a bitter spirit is unacceptable to God, and it must go!

Christians are instructed to pursue peace and holiness, “*looking carefully . . . lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled*” (Hebrews 12:15). From this statement, we learn two things about bitterness: (1) it causes *trouble* and (2) it causes people to be *defiled*. Bitterness is like poison that ruins all that it touches.

Some folks are bitter because a colleague was given a job promotion instead of them. Others are bitter because of the way their parents raised them, they feel betrayed by a business partner, the church’s leaders did not accept their suggestion, or they currently are suffering with a deadly disease.

We all face disappointments in life. What can we do to avoid and overcome a bitter spirit when we go through unpleasant experiences? Reflect on Jesus’ example and strive to imitate it (Philippians 2:5). Though He was mistreated, Jesus never became bitter. Second, accept the reality that we do not always get what we desire in life. If I am disappointed in some aspect of life, this gives me no right to “take it out” on God or others by acting like a resentful person who more resembles a hateful heathen than a saved saint.

Next, remember the kind of example that one sets before others when he manifests a bitter disposition. If you and I have an unpleasant, bitter attitude, are we really prepared to say that we want our kids, grandkids, and others who observe us to act like we do? Our light cannot do much shining when we are eaten up with bitterness (Matthew 5:16).

Fourth, if someone has done us wrong and sought our forgiveness, we need to be willing to forgive them and not hold it against them any longer. While forgiveness certainly is a blessing to the one who has injured us, forgiving them from the heart (Matthew 18:35) *really* helps the one who does the forgiving!

Finally, if you recognize a bitter disposition taking root in your heart, take it to God in prayer to seek His help and forgiveness (Hebrews 4:16; Acts 8:21-23).

-- Roger D. Campbell

What Jesus said about MDR . . . Does it apply to non-Christians, too?

There are many positions today regarding God’s legislation on marriage, particularly when dealing with divorce and remarriage. One position that has sustained popularity is that the law of God concerning marriage, given in Matthew 19, applies only to Christians, to those who are in a covenant relationship with God. This belief holds that when a Christian marries a non-believer, or, when two non-believers marry, God’s law and its consequences are not binding upon those relationships. At best, this is a misunderstanding of the Scriptures. From a much darker outlook, this is an attempt to justify those who are choosing to disobey God to please themselves. There are several situations in the Bible that will help one to see how this belief cannot be defended.

Marriage did not originate under Christianity. It is not a New Testament institution. God gave marriage and laws governing marriage from the beginning (Genesis 2:18-25). Remember this: when Jesus was asked about the lawfulness of a man divorcing his wife for any reason, He referred to God’s regulations of marriage which were instituted “*at the beginning*” (Matthew 19:4).

Marriage was regulated among the Israelites in their covenant relationship with God. Continuing to read in Matthew 19 reveals the further question from the Jewish Pharisees: “*Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?*” (Matthew 19:7). Again, Jesus takes them back to understand God’s marriage laws “*from the beginning*” (Matthew 19:8). God’s laws concerning marriage did not begin with the law that Moses delivered to Israel.

Gentiles were not under the Law of Moses. They were not in the covenant relationship that God made with the Israelites. But, we read many times in Scripture of the Gentiles violating God’s law. This is stated in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 when Paul writes that “. . . *Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you . . .*” (emphasis dl). The same laws governing sexual sin and marriage were for everyone.

If space allowed, we could consider other passages which further illustrate that God’s laws of marriage, divorce, and remarriage are the same for all, whether one is a Christian, or not. God’s design and regulation of marriage were given at the creation of male and female. God never intended for divorce and remarriage to become the normal practice of any society.

-- Dave Leonard

THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS

Jesus spoke this parable to His apostles, and it is recorded in Matthew 25:1-13. In the story, ten virgins waited for a bridegroom to come to his wedding feast. Five of them had sufficient oil for their lamps, but five did not. When the bridegroom arrived, only the five who were ready were allowed to go in with him to the wedding. Jesus used this parable to teach something about the Son of man's coming (25:13).

As Jesus left the temple with His disciples, He predicted its destruction (24:1,2). On the Mount of Olives, Jesus answered the apostles' questions about the destruction of Jerusalem, His coming, and the end of the world/age. Our Lord pointed out that no one knows the time of His final coming (24:36,42-44).

What we read in Matthew 25, including the Parable of the Ten Virgins, was a continuation of that same conversation that the Christ was having with the apostles. Chapter 25 contains three stories of Jesus, all of them connected with His second coming and judgment: the Ten Virgins (25:1-13), the Talents (25:14-30), and the Judgment Scene (25:31-46).

Whom and what are represented by the people and their actions in the Parable of the Ten Virgins? The bridegroom who comes is Jesus (John 3:29). His coming (25:10) stands for the Christ's second coming (the context of Matthew 24:36-51). The ten virgins are those who are in the kingdom, that is, Jesus' disciples (25:1). The ten virgins waiting indicates the church waiting for Jesus to return (1 Thessalonians 1:10). The oil in the lamps indicates preparation for the Lord's coming (25:4,10). It is interesting that the bride is not mentioned in the story. Instead, emphasis is placed on *what is expected of the virgins*.

This is one parable in which the main point is easily identified. What is it? Be prepared for Jesus' final coming. We learn this from verse ten, where it is written: "*And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut*" (emphasis mine, rdc). Being ready was the key! After Jesus finished this story, He added this exhortation: "*Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming*" (25:13).

In connection with this parable's theme, there are three important questions in life to which every person needs to know the answer. First, *what should I do* before Jesus comes again? Answer: Prepare (25:10,13). Second, *what does such preparation involve*, that is, what do I need to do to be ready? Answer: Obey the Lord so His blood can cleanse me of my sins (Luke 6:46; Ephesians 1:7). Third, *when should I prepare* for Jesus' return? Answer: I should

be ready now, in this life, at all times. "*Now is the day of salvation*" (2 Corinthians 6:2). And today just might be the day of judgment, too! The question is not, "Was I ready in the past," or, "Would I be ready if I lived for many more years?" The pressing question is, "*Am I ready right now?*"

When Jesus described the ten virgins in the story, He distinctly declared, "*Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish*" (25:2). The difference in the two kinds of people was not in their educational background or their lamps. The difference was having enough oil or not. The wise ones prepared sufficient oil for their lamps; the foolish ones did not. There is no indication that the foolish were unwise due to immorality, laziness, or false teaching. Their fault was a lack of preparation.

What do we learn from this story about Jesus' second coming? There is the *certainty* of His coming, which is seen in the fact that "*the bridegroom came*" (25:10). What about the *timing* of the Christ's coming? The wording is that "*the bridegroom was delayed*" (25:5), so Jesus' coming would not be immediate. The virgins knew the bridegroom was coming, they just were not certain when that would be. In the same way, while we know our Lord will return, He has not revealed exactly when that will be. Again, He said, ". . . *you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of man is coming*" (25:13).

From this parable, we also learn that when the Christ/Bridegroom comes back, at that point it will then be too late to get ready. The unwise virgins were "left out" because they tried to make spur-of-the-moment preparation. That did not work. In a separate story of the Master, a rich man learned that the time to prepare is in this life, before death or judgment comes (Luke 16:19-31).

Another sad reality seen in the story of Ten Virgins is this: the door will be shut to many who thought they would be inside celebrating with the Lord. The bridegroom came, the ready ones went in with him to the marriage, and the door was shut. When the five foolish virgins arrived, they cried out for the Lord to open to them, but his response was, "*Assuredly I say to you, I do not know you*" (25:12). That is what will transpire at judgment (7:21-23). No, not everyone who calls Jesus "Lord" is "going in."

What about *you*? Are *you* ready for His coming?

-- Roger D. Campbell

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