

Introduction...

This is the 6th week of our study titled **Behold Our God** where each week it has been our goal to focus on some aspect of God's character and nature so that we can grow in our knowledge of God and in our love for God. But some may think that our topic today will be detrimental to that growth because our topic for this morning is the justice and wrath of God and there is probably no Christian doctrine that is more offensive in our culture than that of divine judgment.

Tim Keller writes in his book **The Reason for God** about two commonly held views on this subject.

A graduate student from Germany is quoted saying, "I doubt the existence of a judgmental God who requires blood to pacify his wrath. Someone had to die before the Christian God would pardon us. Why can't he just forgive?"

Another person responded saying "I have an even greater problem with the doctrine of Hell. The only God that is believable to me is a God of love."

In the eyes of many Americans today the judgment of God, the wrath of God and the eternal punishment of sinners in Hell is unthinkable and it leads them to reject the God of the Bible.

Even within the church this doctrine of divine justice and wrath is avoided, ignored or denied altogether. Most pastors would rather not talk about it, much less preach on it. Of the books that have been written on the subject in recent years the most notable has been a book that boldly denies the traditional Christian teaching on Hell and this is not a new trend.

A. W. Pink was addressing the same sentiment all the way back in the 1930's.

It is sad indeed to find so many professing Christians who appear to regard the wrath of God as something for which they need to make an apology, or who at least wish there were no such thing. While some would not go so far as to openly admit that they consider it a blemish on the divine character, yet they are far from regarding it with delight; they like not to think about it, and they rarely hear it mentioned without a secret resentment rising up in their hearts against it. Even with those who are more sober in their judgment, not a few seem to imagine that there is a severity about the divine wrath that makes it too terrifying to form a theme for profitable contemplation. Others harbor the delusion that God's wrath is not consistent with His goodness, and so seek to banish it from their thoughts.¹

Transition...

The subjects of God's justice and wrath are among those we seldom talk about or even think about, but if we are going to know God and understand how He looks upon the world, then we are going to have to understand the role that His justice and wrath play in the big picture. And just so we're clear the subject of God's justice and wrath can be seen as early as Genesis and it doesn't come to an end until Revelation 20. The whole book shows us that God's justice and wrath is not only a reality but a just response to the sin of mankind.

The flood in Genesis 6 was a display of Divine justice and wrath. The sacrificial system was about justice and wrath. The burning of Sodom and Gomorrah was about God's justice and wrath. The Israelite wars against the pagan nations were about God's justice and wrath.

¹ Pink, Arthur W.. The Attributes of God (pp. 87-88). Unknown. Kindle Edition.

The wrath of God is not like all the other attributes of God; wrath is a secondary attribute. It is a response to something that has occurred in creation. If there were no sin or rebellion against God, then there would be no wrath for God to unleash. But now that sin has entered creation the wrath of God is being stored up in Heaven and one day it will be unleashed.

Romans 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth...

Sermon Focus...

I. God's Wrath is an Extension of Divine Justice

II. God's Wrath will be far worse than the metaphors used to describe it

III. God's Wrath is accounted for in the case of those who believe

I. God's Wrath is an Extension of Divine Justice

It is a common joke that in the OT God was like a cranky old man who wanted people to get off His lawn. The flood, the destruction of Sodom, the plagues in Egypt and the conquest of Canaan have caused many people to assume that the God of the OT had a real anger problem. Then when you turn to the NT we see a different picture of mercy, grace and love that has caused many to assume that either God had undergone a radical change between the old and new Testaments, or some have even suggested that we are dealing with two separate gods.

But this misconception is born out of a faulty understanding of the fact that God rules over creation as the rightful and righteous Judge of all the earth. In fact, the whole discussion of God's wrath is couched in the fact that as the creator of all things, our Holy God stands as Judge over all that He has made. He made it and He can do with it whatever He wants.

In **Genesis 2** it was God who set forth the rules for how Adam and Eve were to interact with His creation and in **Genesis 3** it was God who judged Adam, Eve and the Serpent when they broke those rules. In Noah's day it was God who judged the sinful intentions of the thoughts of man and it was God who rendered the verdict that they were all guilty and deserved death. We could look at every stage in Israel's history and see evidence of God's rightful role in establishing the rule of law for His people and his role as the just judge who renders to each man what he deserves.

But God's role as judge is not just an OT concept it continues on into the NT and it actually intensifies. The NT gospels are filled with parables, stories and references to the seriousness of the human condition as the certainty of the universal day of judgment approaches. In fact, the first words out of Jesus' mouth in the gospel of Mark make it clear that the time has come to stop playing religious games and to get right with God before the day of Judgment comes.

"The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel (**Mk 1:15**)."

And from this point onward Jesus doesn't in any way back off on His teaching about the judgment to come. **No one speaks more clearly or more frequently about Hell than Jesus.** In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus mentions Hell 3 times as a way to motivate His audience to take their sin seriously. In Luke, Jesus tells a parable about a rich man and Lazarus and the setting for the entire story is the torment and anguish that the rich man is experiencing in Hades. In the Revelation, Hell plays a

prominent role as the place where God's divine judgment is poured out on all those who rejected Christ in life including Satan and the demons that rebelled with him.

From the OT to the NT, we see the consistent theme of God's function as the judge of all the earth and the One who has the right and authority to carry out punishment against sin. By the way, in the NT it is revealed that the One appointed to judge the living and the dead is none other than Jesus Himself.

John 5:22 For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, ²³ that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

²⁵ "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

Jesus is the Divine Savior sent into the world to rescue us from our sin and He is the Divinely appointed Judge who will judge even the secret thoughts of men with perfect justice.

But what gives Jesus the right to judge?

1. All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to Him (Matt 28:18) - As our creator God owns us and has the authority to do with us whatever He chooses. He has the authority to make laws and to reward us according to whether or not we keep those laws. Christ has been given authority over all creation and that makes Him the rightful lawgiver and judge over all creation.

2. He is a righteous Judge (2 Pet 4:8) - "An unjust judge, one who has no interest in seeing right triumph over wrong, is by Biblical standards a monstrosity (Packer)." But Jesus is not a cold and uncaring judge. He is filled with love and compassion, He is motivated by righteousness, justice and fairness. He shows no partiality, He hates evil and loves what is good and will execute judgment in the perfection of holiness.

3. He is wise and knows all things - There will be no jury in Heaven, a jury will not be needed. He will examine the deeds of men. He will question us and when he is done there is no one who will be able to declare that His judgment was inaccurate.

4. He will right all wrongs. - Every injustice, every act of oppression, every heinous crime, every wicked act of violence, every violation of human dignity, freedom, and nature will be perfectly charged to the guilty and their sentence will be carried out in full.

When Christ carries out the final judgment upon the world we can be certain that we will be held accountable for our deeds and the true justice that our hearts long for will be carried out. Don't miss the fact that the Biblical view of justice means that history is moving toward a goal and that goal is the triumph of good over evil. Judgment means that evil will one day be disposed of authoritatively, decisively and finally. It also means that those for whom Christ died will enjoy the reward purchased for us by Christ himself.

II. God's Wrath will be far worse than the metaphors used to describe it

First of all, it is important that we define God's wrath and how it is different from our wrath. The term itself is problematic for us because when we think of wrath, rage or fierce anger we have in mind a person who has completely lost control. Wrath brings to mind the idea of wholly irrational reaction that is out of place. But that is not the picture the Bible paints of God's wrath. Like the other attributes of God, God's just wrath is *perfect. It is the perfectly right and necessary reaction to the sin committed by man.*

God's wrath is not unusually cruel; it is not immoral in any way. It is not over-the-top, or out of proportion to our crime. The fullness of God's wrath is in exact proportion to what each person deserves.

"God will see that you shall not suffer beyond what strict justice requires (*Jonathon Edwards*)."

But how do we reconcile this with the descriptions of God's wrath that we see in the Bible? In the OT, God's wrath (divine punishment) is described in this way:

Nahum 1:2 The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord is avenging and wrathful; the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies.

³ The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.

⁴ He rebukes the sea and makes it dry; he dries up all the rivers; Bashan and Carmel wither; the bloom of Lebanon withers.

⁵ The mountains quake before him; the hills melt; the earth heaves before him, the world and all who dwell in it.

⁶ Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken into pieces by him.

⁷ The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him.

⁸ But with an overflowing flood he will make a complete end of the adversaries, and will pursue his enemies into darkness.

In the NT, the descriptions are perhaps even more graphic and fearsome. Hell, the place where God's wrath is poured out is described as an unquenchable fire like a furnace, a place of smoke and deep darkness, a place that burns with fire and brimstone, a place prepared for the devil and his angels, a place where the fire is not quenched and the worm does not die. It is a place of eternal, conscious torment.

Oddly enough, some people will read these descriptions and use them to soften the reality of hell because they assume that the reality can't be as horrific as the illustration. But that is not the way to handle biblical metaphors and illustrations. **The illustrative force of these descriptions is seen in that the illustrations always fall short of the reality.** That's the way Biblical symbols work.

"The function of symbols is to point beyond themselves to a higher or more intense state of actuality than the symbol itself can contain." – RC Sproul²

When John describes heaven to us in the Revelation we have to understand that his description falls woefully short of the reality, because there are simply no words to describe the beauty of heaven. The Beauty of Heaven is to some degree indescribable so that words don't do it justice. The same

² RC Sproul *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith* (pgs 285-6)

logic applies to hell. The reality of hell will not be less intense than the biblical illustrations, it will in fact be more horrific than our words can describe.

And to make matters more serious, One of the things we learn from Jesus' teaching is that no one seems to be prepared for Hell. In the parable of the Rich man and Lazarus, the rich man believed like everyone else that his wealth and success was a sign of God's blessing. But to his great surprise he lifts up his eyes in Hades to see Lazarus enjoying the comforts of Heaven that he was expecting for himself while he experiences the conscious torment in Hell.

In Matthew 7, Jesus refers to a group of very religious people who can give evidence of their involvement in religious works; but in the end they are left to suffer God's wrath for their sin.

(Illus...In May of 2007 a Gallup poll revealed that virtually all of the people who believed in the existence of Heaven also believed that Heaven would be their eternal destination. No one expects that they will end up in Hell, until it is too late.

I believe that one of the reasons that Jesus describes Hell in such horrifying ways is so that we would wake up and be motivated to pursue Heaven at all costs.

Hell is real! Hell is Eternal! **Hell is a place from which there is no comfort or escape, but Hell can be avoided.** Jesus has come to rescue us from the guilt and power of sin; He died on the cross to pay the price for our sin so that we don't have to pay that price ourselves. He came to rescue us from the awful reality and divine justice of Hell.

"There is glad escape from eternal condemnation in the safety of the Savior who has taken the condemnation for sins upon Himself and conquered death and Hell – yes, for even you, if you want Him." – Jared Wilson *The Storytelling God* pg. 102

III. The Justice of God toward all who believe

Why did Jesus die on the cross? Was it an act of divine love? Yes, the greatest ever displayed. But that is not all. It was also an act of divine justice. The most incredible display of God's justice and wrath took place on a hill outside Jerusalem when the Son of God was nailed to a cross and gave up His life to accomplish the Father's plan. The cross was a display of God's justice and wrath.

(Illus. Let me try and paint the picture that Paul uses in the book of Romans to teach us about the legal transaction that results in our being saved from the wrath of God. Paul uses legal terminology throughout the book and he does this because he is writing to the church in Rome. The city of Rome is the legal capital of the empire and the citizens of that city would have high regard for legal rhetoric/language. So Paul engages them on their level and he builds the case as it stands against us.

In chapter one he calls us to step out into the courtroom of God where God the Father sits as judge and the law reads the charges against us.

The charge against us is rebellion. We are charged with being traitors who have turned against the God of the land. Though we knew Him as God, we did not worship Him accordingly; but we suppress the truth and worship and serve the creatures rather than the creator. We worship money, success, family, leisure, status, pleasure, power and freedom; and we deny the truth about God. Our charge is that we are sinners who deserve a sinner's wages.

Then our accuser stands to present the evidence against us and makes his case before the judge. Satan points out all of our sins over the years. He points out the times we lied, the times we were angry and broke out in rage at our friends and family, He points out the times we gossiped about those we should have loved and the times we coveted their beauty, talents and possessions. Satan would go on to talk about the times we cheated others, the times we failed to care for the poor and less fortunate.

He would dredge up the lust that ruled our private thoughts and the times we sought satisfaction in the pleasures of the world. He would point out the times we shook our fist at the Heavens and blasphemed the name of God. He would point out the times we boasted in our morality and became prideful over our self-righteousness. He would point out the times we knowingly hurt and attacked those we loved and how we had broken every one of God's laws.

Then fully pleased with himself, he would sit down with a grin across his face.

The focus then turns to us and we have no choice but to plead guilty of all charges. The law has not wavered in its honesty and the Accuser has presented his case with skill. And under the weight of the charges and in the sight of God we have no place to stand. We are guilty as charged and to deny this would only bring more charges to our account. So we enter our plea of guilty.

The accuser then calls for the full penalty of the law and demands the judge to order a sentence of death and judgment for our crimes. For the wages of sin is death.

But before the gavel falls an expert witness comes to the stand. He raises his hand and strides into the courtroom and He is none other than Jesus himself. He is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he comes to judge... ¹² His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. The armies of Heaven follow behind him in pure white robes...On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

He comes forward and declares that His death paid the price for our sin. Jesus tells the court that upon the cross he shed his blood as a ransom price for the accused and he declares that our debt has been paid in full. Jesus presents his evidence and points out that his own blood satisfies the eternal debt against us. In point of fact he turns, faces the Judge and shows the scars in his hands as evidence that our sin was nailed to the cross and we bear it no more.

There is a hush in the courtroom until the accuser opens his mouth again. Like he did with Job he turns and asks the judge to simply let us go back into the world because he knows that even though our sins have been paid for we could never be righteous enough to earn our way back into God's presence.

But once again he is interrupted and silenced by Jesus who walks over to us and clothes us with a robe of His righteousness. And he quotes the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness (**Isaiah 61:10**)."

Then he explains to the court that in the same way that Adam's sin was charged to all mankind, and in the same way that the sin of all believers was credited to Christ upon the cross; the righteousness of Jesus Christ the sinless son of God has been credited to all who by faith have entered into relationship with God.

**With Satan cowering, Christ standing for our defense and the Holy Spirit standing by our side as our advocate, God the Father and Judge stands to deliver his verdict...Justified.
There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**

Conclusion...

Friends, this is the picture that Paul paints for us in the book of Romans of God's justice toward those who believe. This is the drama of our salvation that plays out in God's Word. God's justice has been satisfied by the person and work of Jesus and we stand in Him by faith to receive the gifts of God's grace and the absolute assurance that we have right-standing with God.

There is not one sin ever committed that will go unpunished. Either you will endure the just wrath of God, which you deserve, in Hell for eternity; or you will take shelter in Jesus Christ who endured the wrath of God on your behalf upon the cross. The Christ who will one day judge the world is the same Christ who died to save you from that judgment.

"Run from him now and you will meet Him as judge then...but if you will seek Him as Savior now you will find Him (Packer)."