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RIGHTEOUS WRATH

With the New Year well upon us, we return to our study of God's attributes. We've explored His eternal and sovereign self-existence, His unlimited holiness, power, knowledge, His everlasting wisdom, love, grace, and much more. We've examined God's providence as He works out His will. We turn now to more somber subjects. God is redeemer, but He is also the judge of all mankind.

Theologian SJ Lawson notes, "the wrath of God is a necessary extension of His holiness, because God is infinitely pure. He hates sin and loves righteousness. He cannot be neutral toward sin. There is in God a determined indignation against all that is unholy. His divine wrath by necessity must react against all that does not conform to the purity of His holiness." The all-knowing and all-holy God is your Judge.

1- God's wrath is abiding - ready to be released in terrible judgment. Somehow we know this inside, that we are wrong and will be found out. Romans 1:18-20 says *"the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."* God reveals Himself to all mankind through creation, so that we *"are without excuse."* The issue is clear: *"whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him"* (John 3:36).

God's wrath is necessary, because God is just, righteous, and holy. Whatever contradicts His perfect nature is "sin," which cannot exist in the perfect purity of His presence. We so easily excuse our sin, but fail to realize how utterly it opposes the righteous character of God. That's why God is "right" to judge sin. His grace and love never contradict His justice and holiness (Isaiah 30:18, Deuteronomy 32:4, Psalm 5:6, 7:11). It's like a dazzling diamond which shines ever brighter on a black velvet background. In the same way we cannot truly comprehend God's grace apart from the reality of His wrath against sin. Both are part of His perfect divine nature.

God's wrath is also consistent throughout the Bible. The eight words for degrees of anger in the Old and New Testaments contrast in dozens of references with His everlasting love for His people (Numbers 25:3, Zechariah 1:15 etc). God's wrath in Scripture is often pictured in anthropomorphic terms, that is, framing the concept in ways we humans can understand. His wrath is intense fury, a fierce oven, lethal venom, or the flaring nostrils of an attacking animal. But not in wild abandon. God's holy nature never changes, and He is always in control of His anger (unlike us). Lawson says that's why God's wrath is so scary. And so right. His wrath against sin is a righteous expression of His love. How could you worship a God who would not or could not deal with sin, and make everything right? A sovereign who does not right wrongs is not worthy of the title. Thankfully, God is just and righteous. Even in His wrath.

2- God's wrath is abandoning - leaving sinners to what they demand. Speaking of the ungodly who suppress the truth about God, expressing their rebellion in futile thinking and foolish, even filthy, behavior, Romans 1 says *"God gave them up"* to what they wanted, the lusts of the flesh that dishonor their bodies. RC Sproul notes, "we experience the grace of an infinite God, but grace is not infinite. God sets limits to His patience and forbearance. He warns us over and over again that someday the ax will fall and His judgment will be poured out." What a terrifying prospect, to get just what you wanted, and deserve.

God's wrath is consequential, so that people get the natural result of their disobedience, the outcome of sin. *"The wages of sin is death"* (Romans 3:23, 6:23). *"God is not mocked, you will reap what you sow"* (Galatians 6:7, Hosea 8:7). You earn your own judgment. God is good and gracious but time cannot wait forever for you to repent. Proverbs 1:28, *"They will call upon Me but I will not answer, because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord and despised all My reproof. Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way, and have their fill of their own devices."* Refuse His saving grace, run the clock out on His mercy, and God in effect says, "OK then, have it your way." You're turned over to your own sin.

Next time we'll look at the catastrophic reality of God's wrath, along with good news. God's wrath is also atoning, because Jesus bore the punishment for sin, in His own body. So the redemptive and eternal and eschatological aspects of God's righteous wrath give us great hope. Because Jesus!