

WILL GOD PUNISH? Part 1

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There are those in the religious world that sincerely believe in the God of heaven. They believe that He sent His only begotten Son to earth in order that man might have the opportunity to gain salvation. However, some of these same people cannot fathom the fact that there is a wrathful side to the eternal Father. Many have read the accounts of Jesus in the New Testament and only see Him as one that went about doing good. They think of Him as one who would never be able to bring Himself to punish human beings eternally.

This concept is completely foreign to New Testament teaching about the Saviour. Not only is it contrary to the teachings about Him, it is contrary to the nature of God as a whole. Jesus clearly spoke about the lost who are in danger of judgment and hell (Mt. 5:22). He told us about those that will stand before the judgment seat and attempt to persuade Him to give them a final chance but will hear, "I never knew you: depart from me" (Mt. 7:23). Jesus taught that the body and soul of the wicked would be destroyed in hell (Mt. 10:28), and He described His role as the King who judges all (Mt. 23:1-46). He also said, "...for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (Jn. 8:24).

While the concept of love should never be minimized, there is another side to the Creator of all things. He is not only a God of love, but a God of wrath as well. "For we know him that hath said, Vengeance *belongeth* unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*" (Heb. 10:30-31).

When the word "wrath" is used, we often do not understand its true meaning. We usually think of someone going off "half cocked" or being completely unreasonable in their anger. It should be understood, though, that the use of "wrath" associated with God does not indicate an impulsive, quick-triggered, emotional reaction as it frequently does with humans. What it does indicate is a deliberate and measured reaction toward sinful rebellion that is completely consistent with the nature of a loving and righteous deity.

The most common Greek word for wrath is *orge*, while the word *thymos* is also used. A distinction between the two are made in that *thymos* indicates a boiling anger while *orge* reflects an abiding and settled habit of mind. The use of these two words in conjunction with one another denote the intense and sustained disposition that God has toward evil and those that have abandoned themselves in it. It is God's habit to have a boiling anger toward sin. That is His habit or nature.

As one reflects upon various passages, the inspired word reveals much about the truths relative to the wrath of God:

The Lord's wrath is not inflicted on a whim. History has repeatedly demonstrated that God exercises "much long suffering" toward those that deserve to be punished (Rom. 9:22). His great patience was clearly seen prior to punishing the pre-flood world with total destruction. This writer once heard the faithful Curtis A. Cates state, "Grace is giving us what we do not deserve while mercy is **not** giving us what we do deserve." We can see the patience of God when we consider grace and mercy. One should understand that when God punishes His creation it is not done without the possibility of pardon. He desired to spare sinful Sodom (Gen. 18:26ff). He revealed Himself to Moses as a God who is "slow to anger" (Ex. 34:6; Psa. 103:8). He was patient with such a godless wretch as

Ahab (1 Kings 21:29). Also, for centuries He showed divine patience toward the rebellious Israelites (Neh. 9:17).

Once God's patience has been exhausted, He will punish the guilty. Paul declared the God of heaven and earth is "willing to shew His wrath, and to make His power known" (Rom. 9:22). This can be seen clearly in the account of the flood when all but eight souls were saved from the great deluge (1 Pet. 3:20). We remember Sodom, Gomorrah, and their sister cities which were turned into ashes because of their refusal to repent and obey God (2 Pet. 2:6). Another excellent example is the nation of Israel which endured three hundred years of alternating between slavery and freedom as a punishment for their sins (Judges).

We will continue next week with the study of the wrath of God and how He does punish His creation when it is necessary.