

need to. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). The gift of God is life. And so, the wrath of God is this: God, with tears in His eyes and pain in His heart beyond any pain imaginable, must give up the wicked, must turn them over to the sin of which they have refused to let go. And that sin will bring us death. Consider an illustration:

The date was May 18, 1980. I was playing basketball at a friend's house on the South Hill of Spokane, Washington. It was the middle of a warm afternoon when the sky suddenly began to darken. A mountain had just blown its top and fine particles of ash from the eruption were being carried our way by the winds. It soon became so dark that you needed headlights to drive. Many people thought, "Judgment has come!" But not yet. It was just Mt. St. Helens letting off steam.

A man named Harry Truman lived at the base of Mt. St. Helens. Harry Truman loved his place so much that, even though he was warned over and over and over again to evacuate the area, he turned away from the warnings and admonitions and declared, "I know this mountain. It's my home. And I'm not leavin'." After days and weeks of fits and starts, Mt. St. Helens finally blew sky-high on May 18, 1980, and all that was left of those majestic forests was a pile of sticks. The blast left a lunar landscape and no one could even find where Harry Truman had ever lived. No trace was left.

The Mt. St. Helens volcano is an illustration of what sin will do if we don't leave it and walk away. God is beckoning us through the gospel right now: leave sin; separate from sin; depart from sin; forsake sin; let go of it!—*it* will destroy you. But we are comfortable with sin, just as Harry Truman was comfortable in his own home. We like sin; we want to be with sin. It is the only thing we know. BUT, the gospel of Jesus Christ is more powerful than the lure of *any* iniquity. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Romans 5:20). And God "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20).

### Summary

There is going to come a time when every eye will see God as He truly is. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, some with hearts bent on rebellion and destruction, others with a sincere desire to love and serve Christ forever. Make your decision today. Confess Jesus as your Lord today and make Him your eternal salvation. Then sin shall not have dominion over you and you will be delivered from its power to destroy. Amen.

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#### STUDY 12 OF 13

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# GOD'S LAST MESSAGE TO THE WORLD 12

Our study of the three angels' message in Revelation 14, proclaiming the everlasting gospel, has led us to one of the more perplexing issues of the Bible: the wrath of God. "And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever; and they have no rest day nor night who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name" (Revelation 14:9-11).

In a previous study we considered a power called Babylon, symbolizing an historic and end-time, religio-political system that will enforce worship of the beast. Everyone will choose whom they will serve, on pain of economic boycott or death. Then God comes along and says, as it were, "You may not be able to buy or sell; you may even be killed and persecuted. *But*, if you worship the beast, I'm going to torture you day and night forever and ever." Is this in harmony with what we've understood the everlasting gospel to preach? First Babylon says, "You can't buy or sell or I'm going to persecute you and you're going to die!" Then God follows with a far more fearful, more ominous warning. And the greater threat causes us to say, "OK." Right? Not quite! There has to be something more here than that. There must be something deeper, some essential truth yet to understand concerning the wrath of God.

What is the wrath of God? What is the wine of the wrath of God? We want to focus, in these last two studies of this series, on the biblical evidence that helps answer these questions.

## The Wrath of God <sup>Part 1</sup>

Revelation 14 Study Guides

## God's wrath is the act of His giving mankind up to the consequences of their sins. It is sin itself and not God that brings disease and death.

Isaiah 55:8-9 says, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord." Just how different are God's thoughts from our thoughts? "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." When we think of the wrath of God, we automatically equate that *wrath* with the wrath of man—in man's definition, on man's terms. But in James 1:20 we find that the wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God (that is, does not achieve it, does not bring it about, does not produce it). The wrath of man and the righteousness of God are two very different concepts. And in Revelation 16 we are told that, even as God's wrath is being poured out, the angels and the created beings of the Universe will say, "True and *righteous* are Thy judgments" (verse 7). So, if our wrath does not achieve God's righteousness, then there must be a difference between the wrath of man and the wrath of God. We will find in this study that, yes, there is a life-or-death difference. Man's wrath imposes; God's wrath releases. Man's wrath is vindictive; God's wrath is consequential. Man's wrath violates free choice; God's wrath honors free choice. God's wrath and man's wrath are exact opposites.

Consider one of the clearest definitions of the wrath of God found in the Bible. In Romans 1:16-17, the apostle Paul unfolds the mystery of God's wrath: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed." We find that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel. Paul then turns around in the very next verse and says, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Romans 1:18).

Now why did Paul flip-flop there? For the same reason that John flip-flopped in Revelation 14. Revelation 14:6 talks about the everlasting gospel. Then the very next verse calls us to "Fear God, give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment is come: and worship Him." First we read these beautiful gospel truths; then, suddenly, the third angel's message points directly to God's wrath. Why? Because the wrath of God is related to the gospel as snow is related to water. There can be no wrath of God without a revelation of the gospel of Christ. What we are going to find through this study is that the gospel *is* the wrath of God to those who reject it.

Paul says this is why the gospel is preached—to everyone. Let's read his words in Romans 1:18-23: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which

may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are *clearly seen*, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are *without excuse*. [When the gospel is understood to reveal what God is like, man has no excuse for not knowing God.] Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things."

How do we turn the image of God into the image of man? By teaching that God is a vengeful tyrant, that He is vindictive. But does that concept come from the heart of God? No, it does not. It comes from man, from man's sinful lust for revenge and retaliation. We have turned the glory of God, the character of God, into an image like unto corruptible, fallen man.

Notice, as we continue, Paul says that what may be known about God has been made plain to men; the invisible things of Him are clearly seen. How is that? He gives "to all life, and breath, and all things . . . for in Him we live, and move, and have our being . . . for we are also His offspring" (Acts 17:25, 28). God gives life to *all*. He gives breath to *all*. We live and move in Him. The whole world lives and moves and has its being *in* Him. So, the gospel is clearly seen *in* mankind, no matter who they are, saints or sinners, because they are living and breathing. That life came to them through the cross. The sacrifice of Jesus has given the saint *and* sinner every breath of life, every morsel of food, every drop of water. He makes His sun to rise on the evil and the good; He sends rain on the just and on the unjust (see Matthew 5:45).

Let's continue in the book of Romans for an explanation of how the wrath of God is "revealed from heaven." Romans 1:24-27 says, "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves: who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet."

Now notice that these verses are specifically speaking of same-sex relationships. The misunderstanding that some Christians have today

is that AIDS is an *arbitrary* judgment from God—that God abhors homosexuals and has therefore inflicted this disease upon them. But is that what the Bible teaches? No. God hates sin, but He loves the sinner. God's wrath is the act of His giving mankind up to the consequences of their sins. It is sin itself and not God that brings disease and death. God's gift is life; sin's wage is death and destruction—taking every form we see in our world today. Death is authored by sin, not God.

But just in case we are inclined to place homosexuals in some kind of "they are greater sinners than we are" category, Paul continues to list sins in Romans 1 of which all of us are guilty. The apostle would convince us that we all deserve death. Notice Romans 1:28-32: "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful [Now, if none of these have hit you yet, don't give up!]: who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have *pleasure* in them that do them."

Notice the definition of the wrath of God in Romans 1. *God gave them up*. It doesn't say that God burned them up. It doesn't say that God cursed them. It doesn't even say that God hurt them. It says that *God gave them up*. This definition of God's wrath is repeated three times so as to make it very, very clear. God gave them up; He gave them up; He gave them over to their own choices, or preferences, if you will. This is the biblical definition of the wrath of God.

And that is why, when the seven last plagues are poured out, when probation closes, nature goes haywire (see Revelation 16). Who is keeping nature in check right now? God is. Darkness comes upon the seat of the beast. Why? Because men loved darkness rather than light (see John 3:19) and God will eventually give mankind up to that which they love. God must honor their freedom of choice. This is the wrath of God.

The seat of the beast is scorched with heat from the sun. Why? Because the followers of the beast have chosen to worship the sun. And God has held back the results, the consequences of that choice. But, finally, in the full revelation of the character of God, He will have to honor the choice and freedom of every individual and give them that which they have persistently chosen. God is not adding some extra, hidden, fine-print judgments to the consequences of sin. He doesn't