



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

2 CORINTHIANS 5:21; ROMANS 8:32

MAY 2016

Is God Angry?

With all the anger being exposed in recent months toward what is happening in the world as well as in our own country, many so-called spokesmen for God are declaring that his anger has been stoked to an all-time high.

According to them, God has had just about enough of our shenanigans. God's wrath is bubbling hot in the cauldron of justice and will soon be poured out in prophesied fashion. There are so many holes in that thinking that we can't deal with now, but it does bring into question the nature of God's wrath. Is God angry?

The bigger question is: What is God really like? A superficial reading of the Bible has led some to conclude that the God of the Old Testament is angry and the Jesus of the New Testament is nice. Either God has morphed in time or he has a dual personality. Maybe he is playing the "bad cop/good cop" game. Is he the father who sends his son to do the dirty work while he is secluded from the nastiness of sin? Is he the personified authority figure who sends his son after another beer or the morning paper? Did Jesus have to step in to prevent his anger from

destroying everything? I am sure some whose model of fatherhood has been colored by abuse or absence have images of God that are vastly perverted. I see some religious addicts trying to make excuses for God the way abused children often try to pretend their abusive fathers are not really bad, just misunderstood. They have a phantom father.

Since the Garden of Eden, humans have been speculating as to the true nature of God. Adam and Eve once had full access to him. After their choice to distrust him, they were filled with shame and started the never-ending human effort to cover themselves. Figuring that some kind of appeasement was necessary, various cultures found ways of offering sacrifices to appease the gods of their imaginations. Appeasement thinking is destructive. Think of all the religions that started out offering trinkets and ended up with

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child-sacrifice. It is logical. If the offense is extremely grievous, it takes a more valuable sacrifice. Trinkets will no longer do. Children must be offered. The Canaanite cultures were centered around such horrendous religious practices.

Abraham lived in such an environment. It was common to expect one of the gods to demand the sacrifice of a child. God had miraculously given Abraham and Sarah a son in their old age. This son

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was to be the key to the ultimate solution of sin. He represented the final Son who would save God's people. Strangely God tells Abraham to go up a mountain (religious high place) and sacrifice his son, Isaac. The scripture says it was to test Abraham. The test was not just to find out if Abraham would do it, but to infuse into Abraham the difference in his God and the gods around him. Abraham prepared the altar and placed Isaac on it. Just before the slaughter, God stopped him and showed him a ram caught in the thorns. God provided the sacrifice and named the place: God Provides. What a difference! God provided the sacrifice rather than Abraham.

Who needs the sacrifice, God or mankind? Is it appeasing God or redeeming

sinful people? Let's go back to the Garden. God was not hiding from Adam and Eve. He was looking for them. They were the ones hiding. He slew animals to cover them, not to satisfy his anger at them. As we follow the story of the Bible we find God always making the initiative to be with his people. He didn't want to live in heaven separated from them. He lived in a tent just like they did. He provided the whole sacrificial system to show both the seriousness of sin and unbounded grace toward them. He had multiple opportunities to unfurl his anger if he wanted to destroy everything that deserves punishment. He loves his creation and especially the people he made in his own image.

Let's pause and consider the current application to what we are dealing with. Unaided by the special revelation of the New Testament gospel, mankind will erroneously conclude that God needs our sacrifice. We suppose that something is required of us if he is to be appeased or pleased. Like Adam and Eve we try to cover our own shame with whatever we can find. (Fig leaves are neither comfortable nor permanent.) And we wonder what it takes to get God's favor and prevent his wrath.

My own experience of being "called to preach," as we referred to it then, revealed a very immature perspective of God. I had wanted to go into medicine with some good and some not so good motives. I could not get any inner peace about that, and needed to decide before choosing the college I would attend. I offered my first sacrifice: I vowed to spend my medical career as a foreign missionary so as to not get rich

or powerful. Still no peace. Finally I figured that my sinful hypocrisy required a bigger sacrifice and agreed to go into vocational ministry. To me it meant I would be pretty boring and out of the mainstream of society. Lots of funerals, weddings, and board meetings. I “surrendered” to the call. I had no real concept of the privilege of speaking the words of God to people whose lives could change. (I am so glad that God doesn't wait until our understanding is complete or our motives are pure before he directs us in his destiny.) It was some months later that I came home from school for a weekend with my parents and went to church with them. It was a small country church. The piano was a little out of tune, and we were singing a little off time, but I was captured by the words of an old hymn that I had sung for so long.

*“I love to tell the story
of unseen things above,
of Jesus and his glory,
of Jesus and his love.
I love to tell the story,
for some have never heard
the message of salvation
from God's own holy word.
I love to tell the story;
'twill be my theme in glory
to tell the old, old story
of Jesus and his love . . . ”*

My eyes began to open. I had not made a sacrifice to a God demanding it for my sins. I had been given the unfathomable privilege of telling the story of God.

I fear that too many of us perceive of

God as demanding something from us that will appease him and divert his wrath. We try to pay for favor and cover our own shame with our own devices. It is bad religion.

But what about wrath? What is it? This is my own definition, but I think it gets at the heart of it. **God's wrath is the white-hot passion of God's love directed at the sin that perverts the joy he has prepared for his people.** Notice it is directed at sin. Only when people will not accept his grace and instead insist on holding on to sin does wrath come upon them.

In West Texas a father and son were sitting by a campfire opposite each other. The father saw that behind the boy was a rattlesnake coiled and ready to strike. All of a sudden the father leapt toward the boy with eyes ablaze and slapped the snake away. The boy jumped back, not from the snake but from what he could see of an angry father. The father took the bite, and the boy was saved. There was anger there, but it was directed at the snake, not the son.

“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)

Sin was personified in Jesus and was condemned in his death. God in Christ took the poison of sin in his own person and killed it. The wrath of God expressing the love of God came out with full force to stop what was enslaving his people. When Jesus looked into the cup of wrath that he

was to drink, he could see the pain, suffering, alienation, fear, and degradation that sin had wrought. Sin had invaded the paradise of God's creation as a murderer, a thief, and a cruel taskmaster. Sin perverted human potential, stymied creativity, and introduced jealousy, greed, sexual perversion, senseless idolatry, cruelty, bitterness, and severe lonely alienation. It is

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more than an act of rebellion. It is a power stronger than human will. It has stolen the innocence of children, husbands from wives, peace from the human heart, and joy from all people. It has instigated useless wars that have left millions homeless, and has turned brother against brother. It had to be killed. Jesus stepped in and actually became sin so that the wrath of God could be fully emptied upon sin. In his death God himself was suffering the pain so that those he redeemed could be free. *"In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself"* (2 Corinthians 5:19). Jesus drank the cup of wrath dry.

Before his crucifixion Jesus had picked up another cup and explained that it was the cup of the New Covenant. In it were the blessings of God on Jesus' obedience. He took the poison of the cup of wrath so that he could offer the cup of salvation to his own. His blood was pure, and when trusted, it separates the sinner from both

the penalty and power of sin. Now sinners can be reconciled to God—not by any sacrifice they make, but by that which God has provided. Reconciled people have the privilege of seeing what before was beyond their horizon. They have been given the very life of God so they can share in the fellowship of the Father and Son. They have been freed—not just from the dread of wrath, but freed to trust again. They know that God could do nothing more to show how much he loves us. He gave himself as the recipient of wrath through his Son. Will he not then freely give us all things? (See Romans 8:32.)

What else would God have to do to convince you to trust him?



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