



UNDERSTANDING GOD PART 9: The God Who is Angry

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On July 8th, 1741 a man named Jonathan Edwards took up his pulpit in Northampton, Massachusetts and preached one of the most well known sermons in American History. The message was famously titled: Sinner in the Hands of an Angry God. So shocking was the tone and content that members in his church began weeping having become convicted of the enormous danger which was theirs outside of faith in Christ. If there were ever a fire and brimstone sermon, this would have been it.

I'm guessing that even in public schools, many of you growing up were familiar with the is sermon. It began to typify what some have often called a "puritanical" God. A God who is angry at sin, and therefore always angry towards his people. It is this view of God which has led many people to write off Christianity site unseen. How can we be loved or come to love a God who is so angry? How do would you answer questions from co-workers or neighbors regarding God's anger?

In our modern culture is it more apt to disregard his anger and instead focus on his love and his grace? I think that inside of today's church there is a tendency to do just that. I asked Google: "Is God Mad at Me?," and without even having to scroll down on my page let me share with you some of the titles, all of which are from Christian-based web sites: "God is Not Mad at You," "God is Mad at Me and Other Myths," "Is God upset with me? One of Satan's biggest lies," and "Is God Mad at Me? Lies Young Women Believe."

What are we to do with the doctrine [belief] of God's anger? Do we attempt to create a narrative where God was never angry? Or that God has matured in his standing towards men? He is now more civilized, in Jesus God realized love was better than wrath. Well certainly Jesus changed things, but even after Jesus came we see Paul writing to the church saying: **Eph 5:6**. Though we are in the Old Testament book of Isaiah, four times today we will hear the reprieve: "For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still." We cannot ignore God's anger, but the Bible helps us to understand it.

Think of it this way. Let's role play with a little bit of ethics: Is it right and good for me to act angrily towards my son when he is distracting me from watching football? Is it right and good for me to act angrily towards a man attempting to assault my son? I'm guessing that you aced this quiz. The first question was probably a clear no, the second most likely an overwhelming yes. So what is the difference between the two? The anger was the same, but the context or the situation was different. Perhaps we wrestle to understand, and therefore become awkward with the idea of an angry God because we do not understand the situation or context of God's anger. To say this another way: we do not understand sin.

If we want to rightly understand, and therefore rightly communicate to our children, our friends and our neighbors the reality of God's anger we must first understand three things: the root of sin, the end of sin, and the relief from sin. A right view of *sin makes sense of God's anger because God's anger is the sensible response to sin*. This is in essence what we are going to see in Isaiah today. As we walk through this I want you to consider two questions: Is God angry towards me? Why?

If you remember the context of this book, we find two warring nation brothers. In the North there is the Tribe of Israel who has made alliances in order to come against the Southern Tribe of Judah. Isaiah then is the prophet tasked with proclaiming God's word to this worried and stressed tribe of Judah. God has promised that Israel will not destroy Judah, and as we have seen in the past two weeks God has given a sign of this promise: a child will be born and he will signify the deliverance of Judah and defeat of Israel. Now in our passage today God is going to outline the defeat and judgment of Israel. Today's passage is good news for Judah, and bad news for Israel. But in looking at this we will begin to understand more about sin and God's anger towards it. What we are going to see today is **God's wrath will destroy the arrogant and the unjust, always**. God is not an emotional

roller coaster who is inconsistent and unpredictable with his anger. God's anger is responsibly turned against the prideful and the oppressive.

We see this initially in our first point today: **God is angry towards the arrogant**. As we look at this text I want us to soberly assess our own hearts. If the God of the universe, the God who wields the ability to punish eternally, is angry towards the arrogant, we should want to make sure that we are not the arrogant.

So let us listen closely to Isaiah's words in **Is. 9:8-12**.

Did you see the problem of their arrogance? God has promised to bring against Israel destruction, but in their foolishness they see their destruction as an opportunity to become greater. God may have brought down our bricks, but we will rebuild with polished stones, he may have cut down our fig trees, but we will rise with cedars. Their arrogance exposes their ignorance, for here is this nation thumbing their nose at God saying, "You can't stop us," all the while they are surrounded by their enemies. This physical threat is the result of God's anger towards them.

Now, perhaps you are like me when I read this passage. Sure, I see that God is mad at Israel, but it seems a little over harsh. Where is God's appreciation of the human spirit? Here is Israel wanting to rise from the ashes and rebuild stronger. This passage almost embodies the American idea of pulling yourself up by the bootstrap. Isn't this a good thing? They are after all part of God's people.

Here we see an arrogance, but God is going to reveal to us the heart of the arrogant. To rightly understand God's anger we must understand the heart of sinful actions, and Isaiah is going to show us an anatomy of the arrogant heart in **Isaiah 9:13-17**.

The heart of the arrogant, and the root of all sin is a prideful failure to turn back to God. It is a systematic lack of repentance. God hates the arrogant, because the arrogant hate God. They see no need for him, because they are blind to him. God's anger doesn't burn towards Israel because they want to rebuild, God's anger burns towards Israel because they refuse to repent. They refuse to realize this judgment is a punishment and a kindness meant to reveal to them the error of their ways. God had afflicted them in hope that they would turn to him and realize the danger of sin.

In our world today we face a similar challenge in humanism. Humanism is the ideology that what is it what is. All we are is human, and all that happens is merely something which happened to humans. There is no larger meta-narrative in life, there is no story to figure out, there is no deeper meaning, no soul-searching, no cosmic importance. There is only this.

But this mindset is a full scale rebellion against what God designed. God created the world so that he might receive praise and we might receive the joy of right relationship with him. But the first sin we committed was that we doubted God's goodness. We rejected reality and created our own narrative, a world where we know what is best and we have a greater capacity to experience and create good. But because we are not God, we fail to realize that we spend our whole lives rowing upstream in a world running towards the glory of God. The end of all things will be the glory of God, God will be glorified, he will be praised among the nations, he will punish the arrogant. And everything which happens in our life is part of God's grand plan to be seen as this great God.

Everything you encounter or experience is encountered or experienced in order to expose you to the plan and person of God. **Eph. 1:9-10**, see also **Acts 17:26-27**. If everything we encounter is a signal to turn to God, then every aspect of our ignorance is an active rejection and a cosmic rebellion against the God who is due all obedience and worship.

This is our greatest problem. That we do not see God rightly and therefore do not repent. We see the weight of this problem in **Isaiah 9:17**. There is a tension in our passage today. Here we see God is not going to have compassion on the most vulnerable in Israel, the widows and the orphans. And yet in this same text later God is

going to condemn men for not having compassion on the widows and the orphans? The same God who will not pardon the wicked for ignoring the oppressed will not also pardon the oppressed if they remain unrepentant. We should not be so arrogant to think that our greatest problem is our poverty or fatherlessness. Our greatest problem is that we have rejected God and have earned his due anger.

The root of sin, and the heart of arrogance, is that we willfully refuse to see God as Lord over our lives and therefore refuse to repent of our sin, and turn back to God. To reject the advice of a doctor is foolishness. To reject the rule of the government is rebellion. To reject the Lord God is damnable. Every sin committed towards God starts here with willful and arrogant unbelief. You may build monuments and modify behavior, but at the end of the day, if you do not repent for your sins and change your ways, God's anger will not turn away from you, and his hand is right now stretched out against you.

It is for the good of God that he is angry towards sinners. But, it is also good for us. Though the root of sin is unrepentant hearts, the end of sin is not merely harm towards God, it harms man. Let's look together at **Isaiah 9:18-21**.

Our second point today is that **God is angry towards the wicked**.

I would hardly find someone who would have a problem with this truth. We want wickedness destroyed. But we almost never consider ourselves the wicked. Yet this text shows the subtly of unrepentance is that it starts as an offense towards God, but it cannot stay between God and man. When men run from God, men will harm men. This is wickedness. Look at this harming of one another in **Is. 9:19-21**.

God is angry towards the wicked, because wicked men refuse to worship God, and wicked men will never be good for humanity. This is the end of sin. There are sixteen prophetic books in your Bible which provide for us windows into the life of Israel and Judah when they turn away from God. The results of their turning never leads to a flourishing culture. In fact in all except for three of those books their rebellion from God ultimately turned itself into an activity of injustice towards one another. The same is true in our passage today. Look at **Isaiah 10:1-4**.

There is a lot in this text which resonates with the culture in modern America. How are we to care for the unborn in our society, how are we to care for women and refugees? How are we to understand the interactions between politics, race and reconciliation? These are all questions of justice. Each seeks to identify what is wicked and wrong and eliminate it. The traditional idea has been that institutions or power structures are the root of most wickedness. From Planned Parenthood to the church, slavery and sex trafficking, from communism, to capitalism, we are all able to point and identify what we would think of as evil institutions. But what if institutions are only a symptom of our problem?

In 1919 a man named Wilbur Little returned from a tour in WWI to Georgia only to be killed by a mob angered that he wouldn't take off his military uniform. Wilbur Little was a black man who had survived WWI only to be killed in Blakely, Georgia 56 years after slavery was abolished. Slavery wasn't the problem, wickedness was. Wickedness can be institutionalized but it is not an institution, it is an infection opposed to the good of humanity. It is a symptom of hearts far from God. Only God can change our wicked hearts. Only God can bring true justice and end oppression. And God intends to do that by eradicating the disease. God will destroy the wicked.

If you desire justice. If you hate injustice, if you are filled with rage towards oppression and hate. You cannot afford to do away with God's anger. If God were not angry at sin, he would not be a good God. If sin were not ultimately punished God would be cruel and unjust. God's anger towards sin and his promise to destroy sinners is what keeps God from being cruel.

The people of Judah know this. They hear this message of destruction coming towards Israel and they rejoice at it. God is going to end the oppression, vengeance will be his, righteousness will be executed, justice will roll like a river. Because our God is an angry God we can take heart in knowing that there will not be one violent

offender who will escape judgment. There will be no fugitive Nazi's who go unpunished. No sophisticated criminal who goes unnoticed. No predator unopposed. God will destroy the wicked and they will reap their reward.

This is good news. And this is terrible news. For the very same things which Israel is being destroyed for are also the very same issues Judah itself was riddled with. **Isaiah 3:15, 1:16-17**. Judah may rejoice at the destruction of Israel, but a wise man would tremble, for he would see he stands condemned for the same crime. And if the chief sin of the heart is treason towards God, so too do we stand. To quote Jonathan Edwards, in that infamous sermon: **"The bow of God's wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready on the string, and justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow, and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood."**

We have seen that it is a good thing that God is angry. But if you are a human, the fact that we are sinful at any level means that our good God is good and angry towards us. Towards me. Towards you. For all this his anger is not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still. So how is it that we are able to sing songs to God knowing attributes like love and mercy? How is it that Judah is not also destroyed?

Because God had promised Judah a sign. We saw this last week. A child would be born, and he would lead Judah into a new relationship with God. He would be God with them, restoring their hearts to God. He would be the prince of peace the one to establish justice and righteousness forever. Judah was saved because God was going to redeem them through a promised messiah. God was going to momentarily overlook the sins of Judah because of the promised messiah. This is what Paul meant in the new testament when he said: **Acts 17:30-31**.

That messiah is ultimately Jesus. And it is only through Jesus that we can fully understand and appreciate the anger of God towards us. This is our final point today: **God's Anger Has Not Turned Away From Jesus**. God's anger must and will destroy sin, and that's why we need Jesus.

I recently watched a film documenting the systemic sexual abuse by one particular Catholic priest in the 70's. The amount of young children he harmed, the lies and wicked deviations he performed, and all in the name of Jesus made me sick to my stomach. I was, for right reasons angry. So you can imagine my frustration as we discovered that he died before any real conviction or punishment came for his crimes. I remember thinking that night, "I hope he didn't have one of those death bed confessions. I want him to suffer for what he has done."

But I realized in that moment the error of my thoughts. I wrongly assumed that if this wretched man were to seek God in his dying moments that he would somehow cheat justice. That he would get to live his life without ever having to deal with the consequences and shame of his decisions. That he would get a free pass, he would escape God's anger.

Yet, if we rightly understand the cross, we know this is not the case. For if this man were to be saved, his sickness would not go unpunished. He would not get a reduced sentence, his shame would not be covered. But instead it would have been put on the perfect and spotless Son of God on the cross of Christ. All of the anger of God towards that sin would have been drained fully, justly, and with destructive force on God's own son. Later in Isaiah this is exactly what God prophesied concerning Jesus: **Isaiah 53:3-6**. . It is right to think that Jesus was made an enemy of God, and he was made an enemy for your rebellion. He was made a sinner for your sin. He was made a substitute for your good.

In God's anger we see the depth of God's love because he refused to turn his righteous wrath even from Jesus Christ. Grace is free, but it is not without cost. When we understand God's anger over our sin, we realize that there are two places we may hide. We may attempt to hide among the fallen like those in Isaiah's text, hoping to avoid our punishment. Or we may stand behind the cross of Jesus as he absorbed in its totality the full effect of God's punishment for our sins.

If we feel awkward with the idea of God's anger we will never feel comfortable with the cross.

If we downplay God's anger we belittle Jesus. What is more hopeful? The blindly optimistic and dishonest truth that God is not angry with sinners? Or the beautiful biblical truth of **Romans 5:6-10**?

Romans 8:1 says that there is now therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. If that is to be true, if that is to be helpful, we must know the role Jesus played in God's condemnation, in his judgment. Romans 8:1 is not saying that God put his anger on a chain so that it might not bite us. Romans 8:1 says that all the destruction of Isaiah 9 was unleashed on the Christ so that it may never find need among God's redeemed.

If you are in sin is God angry with you? Yes! If you are in Christ is God angry with you? No! Why? Because God was angry with Jesus on my behalf. Now God's anger means two things to the believer, first it is a safe sign that all the wicked that has hurt us will one day be consumed by God's righteous judgment. And second, it is the hot updraft of air which causes our hearts to rise in worship towards Jesus' substitutionary work on the cross. It carries us to full unending worship at the lamb who for us was slain. It is the work of Jesus which takes us from Isaiah 9:12, "For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is outstretched still," to **Isaiah 62:5b**, "as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you." We do not fear God's wrath because it has been emptied on Jesus.

For the believer, God's wrath towards arrogance and wickedness causes us to feel overwhelmed at the cross. But for you in here who neither see the weight or the end of your sin, my prayer is that like Israel you may begin to feel the wrath of God which is drawn against you. We pray, and we hope as the members of this church, that today will be the day in which you turn back to God. That you confess your sins of arrogant unbelief and turn to the one who died so that you might know only God's love instead of his anger.