

THE GOSPEL OF WRATH

Introduction

God's mercy and justice are non-competing twins of His divine character. They are amazing virtues that beckon understanding. Heaven's exhibition of these "traits" gives deeper insight into the excellence of His righteousness.

- Intriguingly, a generous portion of John's apocalyptic theme is devoted to justice, seen as the "wrath of God" (e.g., Revelation 6:16-17, 11:18, 16:19, 19:15).
- These warnings are tied to "decisive acts," which usher in the eschaton.¹
- This is also appealed to elsewhere in the New Testament (Matthew 3:7; Romans 2:5, 8-9; Ephesians 5:6; Colossians 3:6). Flaunting God's wishes actuates God's justice at the time of the end.

Based on expressions of God's character, it is interesting that expositor White compartmentalized that time into two key periods:

- "The ***season of God's mercy*** will soon be ended. The call for sinners to repent and be converted will soon be heard no more.... [God] will soon rise in His anger to punish transgressors. ***Dare we think what the wrath of the Lamb means?***"²
- "***We must persuade men everywhere*** to repent and flee from ***the wrath to come***. They have souls to save or to lose. Let there be no indifference in this matter. The Lord calls for workers who are filled with an earnest, decided purpose. Tell the people to be instant in season and out of season. With the words of life upon your lips go forth to tell men and women that the end of all things is at hand."³

"His long forbearance with the wicked emboldens men in transgression, but their punishment is nonetheless certain and terrible because it is long delayed. 'The Lord shall rise up as in Mount Perazim, He shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that He may do His work, His strange work; and bring to pass His act, His strange act.' Isaiah 28:21. ***To our merciful God the act of punishment is a strange act.*** 'As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.' Ezekiel 33:11. The Lord is 'merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, ... forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.' Yet He will 'by no means clear the guilty.' 'The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked.' Exodus 34:6, 7; Nahum 1:3. ***By terrible things in righteousness He will vindicate the authority of His downtrodden law.*** The severity of the retribution awaiting the transgressor may be judged by the Lord's reluctance to execute justice."⁴

¹ Osborne, Grant R.; *Revelation* (Baker Book House; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 561.

² White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, December 1, 1896 (emphasis added).

³ White, Ellen G.; *Evangelism*, p. 217.

⁴ White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 627 (emphasis added).

“The **great day of the Lord** is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly” (Zephaniah 1:14). And before the coming of this last great day, we are to proclaim **the last message of mercy** to a fallen world, to prepare men and women for the Lord’s second coming.⁵”

A provocative question confronts the “love–mercy aficionados” of solely that side of God’s character:

- Is the message of God’s wrath to be incorporated into the gospel message?
- If not, why is it such a prominent part of the Biblical record?
- If so, when?

Intriguingly, the Seven Last Plagues or Vials are to be poured out sequentially on the wicked right at the end. These are specifically identified as the “wrath of God” (Revelation 15:7, 16:1). Since a cry, “It is done” (Revelation 16:17) comes out of the temple during this fearful period, some kind of consummation has occurred. Since the end of that great “apostate coalition” (the false trinity) comes to its end during the seventh Plague (Revelation 16:19), some type of culmination has occurred. A morally irreversible point in earth’s history would have come.

- Are those “stories” to be part of the final message to the world?
- Or are they “ancillary” themes for “whenever”?
- Why is it that so often when the third angel’s message of Revelation 14:9-12 is addressed, verse 12 is emphasized and not verses 9–11?

The “Gospel of the Kingdom” (Matthew 24:14)

Jesus said that the universal proclamation of the gospel would mark the end (Matthew 24:14; cf. Romans 11:25-26, II Peter 3:9-15, Acts 1:6-11).⁶ What “end?” When the Second Coming would occur (cf. Revelation 1:7).

- Jesus did not suggest that all people would be converted but, contextually, that the kingdom could not come in its fullness until all have had the chance to embrace or reject Him.
- “The gospel” (*to euaggelion* – G) is often summarized by a list of Christocentric restoration themes called the “good news” or “good tidings.” It includes the blessed hope of seeing Christ and being with Him (Titus 2:13).

Within **that gospel** heaven’s saving power is revealed to everyone who believes (Romans 1:16b). How this information brings salvation is in its amazing revelation that God’s righteousness is awarded to all who have faith (Romans 1:17a). That was even conveyed through an Old Testament promise before the Cross (Habakkuk 2:4). Redemptive words often seen:

⁵ White, Ellen G.; *The Upward Look*, p. 261 (emphasis added).

⁶ Keener, Craig S.; *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 572.

1. Believe (*pisteuo*) – puts confidence in – a verb – are saved
2. Faith (*pisteos/pistis*) – attained an experience – a noun – are saved

There is ***an active experience*** in putting trust in God that brings the “legal” award of “righteousness.” All this is given as a loving and amazing gesture by God, by accepting the perfect merits of “Christ”! There is a caveat, however, and scholar Moo articulates it precisely:

One can never come to grips with the importance of that saving gospel message, or ***even be motivated to urgently proclaim it***, until the ***truth of God’s consequences to sin*** is integrated into it.⁷ Notice the sequence:

- *“For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith”* (Romans 1:17).
- *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth by their unrighteousness, because what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them”* (Romans 1:18-19 – NET).

The righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel (vs 17). This revelation alludes to an eschatological hope.⁸ ***The wrath of God is motivationally linked to that message.*** Should that be a surprise?

“Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows” (Hebrew 1:9).

- A link between our love for God and hatred of sin is distinct.
- It activates a “holiness” gesture by God in our favor!

That love/hate is unique. One without the other would portray a strange view of who He is! In fact, God’s love cannot be fully appreciated if we don’t see that He hates sin. Or, can we understand His deep wrath against sin unless we see Him through the lens of unselfish love?

God’s wrath is riveted through its highest expression at the Cross.⁹

“What a truth is presented as we gaze upon Jesus in connection with the cross of Calvary, as we see this Wonderful, this Counselor, this mysterious Victim, stooping beneath the amazing burden of our race! That the transgressor might have another trial, that men might be brought into favor with God the Father, the eternal Son of God interposed Himself to bear the punishment of transgression. One clothed with humanity, who was yet one with the Deity, was our ransom. ***The very earth shook and reeled at the spectacle of God’s dear Son suffering the wrath of God for man’s transgression.*** The heavens were clothed in sackcloth to hide the sight of the Divine Sufferer.”¹⁰

⁷ Moo, Douglas J.; *The Epistle to the Romans* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Grand Rapids, MI; 1996), p. 98.

⁸ Schreiner, Thomas R.; *Romans* (Baker Academic; Grand Rapids, MI; 1998), p. 84.

⁹ Barnhouse, D. G.; *Romans*, vol. 1, p. 219.

¹⁰ White, Ellen, G.; *Lift Him Up*, p. 153.

“Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart. **The wrath of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation.** All His life Christ had been publishing to a fallen world the good news of the Father’s mercy and pardoning love. Salvation for the chief of sinners was His theme. **But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father’s reconciling face.** The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt.”¹¹

The Gospel Amplified

The concept of a contrasting “wrath” to such love seems foreign, out of place, so unnecessary to consider. But its inclusion in earth’s last warning is an inherent requirement of God’s last witnesses. In John’s Apocalypse, there are stunning, contrasting **wrath messages**:

*“Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for **the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time**” (Revelation 12:12).*

*“And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is **filled up the wrath of God**” (Revelation 15:1).*

An important part of the “**gospel message of consequences**” is missing in many gospel discourses. Yet, it is part of God’s “**motivational warning**” mechanism even with a time alarm.

Romans 1:18, as we previously alluded to, “changes the tone of the argument, for Paul shifts from speaking of the revelation of God’s saving righteousness to the revelation of God’s wrath.... **The wrath of God is part of the righteousness of God that is revealed in the gospel, so that the wrath of God (like the righteousness of God) is also disclosed in the gospel.** (see, e.g., Luther 1972:9; Cranfield 1975: 109-10; Wilckens 1978: 102-3; Lincoln 1995; 136-37).

“The righteousness of God consists of both his saving and judging righteousness (cf. Byrne 1996: 57-58, 65-66). The saving and judging righteousness of God find their resolution, as [Romans] 3:21-26 illustrates, in the gospel. **The revelation of God’s saving righteousness exposes the full wickedness of human sin and the depth of God’s wrath against it.**”¹²

Is it any wonder that the cry of the saints, fully aware that God’s judicial wrath brings an end to sin, is “How long, Oh Lord, how long?” (Revelation 6:9-11)! They recognize that the marvels of His loving character will be vindicated through the time of His wrath!

¹¹ White, Ellen, G.; *A Call to Stand Apart*, p. 39 (emphasis added).

¹² Schreiner, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-78 (emphasis added).

“The inhabitants of all worlds **will be convinced of the justice of the law** in the overthrow of rebellion and the eradication of sin. When man, beguiled by Satan’s power, disobeyed the divine law, God could not, even to save the lost race, change that law. God is love, and to change the law would be to deny Himself, to overthrow those principles with which are bound up the good of the universe. The working out of the plan of salvation reveals not only to men but to angels, the character of God, and through the ages of eternity the malignant character of sin will be understood by the cost to the Father and the Son of the redemption of a rebel race. In Christ, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, all worlds will behold the marks of the curse, and angels as well as men will ascribe honour and glory to the Redeemer through whom they are all made secure from apostasy. The efficiency of the cross guards the redeemed race from the danger of a second fall. The life and death of Christ effectually unveils the deceptions of Satan, and refutes his claims. The sacrifice of Christ for a fallen world draws not only men, but angels unto Him bonds of indissoluble union. **Through the plan of salvation the justice and mercy of God are fully vindicated**, and to all eternity rebellion will never again arise, affliction never again touch the universe of God.”¹³

Justice in Stages

God’s justice will be portrayed at the end through:

1. Indignation of a holy God against sin before He returns (Matthew 3:7; John 3:36; Romans 9:22, 12:19; Ephesians 4:31; I Timothy 2:8, Hebrews 3:11; Ephesians 2:3; Colossians 3:6).
2. Judicial wrath (Romans 2:5, 5:9; Revelation 6:17) – His executive judgment¹⁴ and, finally, through fire after the Millennium (Revelation 17:16, 18:10, 18; 19:3, 20; 20:4, 10, 14; 21:8).

Wrath must be so **righteously revealed** that all excuses for rejecting salvation are eliminated. That’s merciful! Humans become culpable at the end, however, for their eternal destiny.¹⁵ The final responsibility of the last witnesses, calling for repentance, is weighty – a study that encourages the deepest thought!

Intriguingly, in Paul’s writing, he warned regarding that day of wrath (Romans 2:5, 8; 3:5; 9:22; Ephesians 5:6; Colossians 3:6; I Thessalonians 5:9). He warned:

*“But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath for yourselves in **the day of wrath, when God’s righteous judgment is revealed!**”* (Romans 2:5). There’s that stunning contrast within God’s character again!

“That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm” (Zephaniah 1:15-16). “Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, ... to lay the land desolate: and He shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it” (Isaiah 13:9).

¹³ White, Ellen G.; *Messenger*, June 7, 1893 (emphasis added).

¹⁴ *Gingrich Lexicon*.

¹⁵ Schreiner, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

When approaching that “final day,” White observed in greater detail:

Before probation closes: “Strictly will the cities of the nations be dealt with, and ***yet they will not be visited in the extreme of God’s indignation*** [mercy still lingering] because some souls will yet break away from the delusions of the enemy, and will repent and be converted, while the mass will be treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath.”¹⁶ (Likely, the first four Trumpets).

After probation closes: “Men are prone to abuse the long-suffering of God, and to presume on His forbearance. But there is a point in human iniquity when it is time for God to interfere; and terrible are the issues. ‘The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked’ (Nahum 1:3). The long-suffering of God is wonderful, because He puts constraint on His own attributes; but punishment is nonetheless certain. Every century of profligacy has treasured up wrath against the day of wrath; ***and when the time comes, and the iniquity is full, then God will do His strange work. It will be found a terrible thing to have worn out the divine patience; for the wrath of God will fall so signally and strongly that it is presented as being unmixed with mercy;*** and the very earth will be desolated.”¹⁷ (Alluding to the Seven Vials.)

We will now discover that God’s wrath is to be part of the terminal message that goes to the world. Its inhabitants are to be fully aware of this part of God’s character. It is embedded within the gospel and detailed in the third angel’s message (Revelation 14:9-12). Though foreign to the thinking of many expositors, this “theme of understanding” is ***inaugurated*** within the first angel’s message (Revelation 14:6-7).

First Angel’s Message (Revelation 14:4-8)

This angel proclaims an “everlasting gospel” (KJV) (*euaggelion aionion* – G) that is to be given to the whole earth. The usual understanding of this encapsulates the “good news of the saving death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah.”

- But here there is no article (“the”) preceding the word “gospel”!
- This is the only place in the New Testament where this is absent.

The active verb *euaggelisai* (proclaim) occurs only here and in Revelation 10:7. It is a rare word.¹⁸ What is this urgent “gospel” message? It is found in verse 7.

- “He declared in a loud voice: ‘Fear God and give him glory, ***because*** the hour of his judgment has arrived, and worship the one who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water!’” (14:7 – NET).
- This is an appeal to be right with the Creator God – to fear – worship – give glory – because a judgment hour has arrived!

¹⁶ White, Ellen G.; *Our Father Cares*, p. 318 (emphasis added).

¹⁷ White, Ellen G.; *Selected Messages*, vol. 2, pp. 372-373 (emphasis added).

¹⁸ Aune, David E.; *52B World Biblical Commentary; Revelation 6–16* (World Books; Dallas, Texas), 1997, p. 825.

The critical nature of this call is **not** related to a Pauline type of pastoral appeal. The cry from the midst of heaven is one of earth's last warnings of mercy, shouting to all earth's inhabitants, "Do you know that a judgment has begun! This is your last chance to return to God!" A graphic judicial outcome is vividly painted in the third angel's message for those rejecting this appeal!

This **first angel's warning** emphasizes a deeply theological issue. It is a very different gospel from the one found elsewhere in the New Testament. The name of Jesus is not mentioned, His sacrifice for sin is absent and there is no call to repentance (but implied). Instead, the world is called to honor the Creator God in light of that judgment.¹⁹

- "Fear God" suggests self-humiliation and self-surrender.
- "Give God glory" is an idiom of repentance so God can be honored (16:9).²⁰

The hour of judgment assigns the reason for this heightened worship experience. The "hour" (*hora* – G) is a fixed time. "Has come" (*el then*) is a dramatic moment aorist state, suggesting that it is **at the point** of being realized.²¹

- It is the last chance to recognize God as the Creator God.
- How is that divinely purposed? "*Remember the Sabbath day*" "*For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it*" (Exodus 20:8, 11).
- This is coming to the "earth-dwellers" – those who to this point have chosen Satan over God (cf. 10:11, 11:9, 13:7).²²

The "gospel" that is being emphasized carries dire consequences if it is rejected (cf. Romans 1:16, II Corinthians 2:14-16, Acts 17:18-32). That judgment suggests that a final review has arrived. When completed, God reacts.

- It is the last chance to recognize the Creator God of the universe – He is making up His kingdom.
- The second and third angels messages (14:8-12) underscore that that gospel call will include a penal aspect.
- ***This understanding of the first angel means that it is mainly a message of pending wrath.***²³

"Romans, the book of Scripture which has most to say about the gospel, also emphasizes the wrath of God. In that book, the good news is placed in the setting of judgment to convince us that all are judged by the gospel itself. See Rom. 1:16-18; 2:16; 3:19. And those who reject the mercy of God receive His wrath. Sin must be abolished, every jot and tittle of it. Either one

¹⁹ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 534.

²⁰ Thomas, Robert L.; *Revelation 8–22 – An Exegetical Commentary* (Moody Press, Chicago, 1992), p. 204; Bauckham, Richard; *The Climax of Prophecy* (T&T Clark Ltd; Edinburgh, Scotland; 1993), pp. 286-289.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 535.

²³ Beale, G. K.; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary; The Book of Revelation* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999), pp. 748-749 (emphasis added).

gives it up to the Lord by penitence and confession, or one dies with it, and in it. Said Jesus, 'Except ye believe that I am he ye shall die in your sins' (John 8:44)."²⁴

Angel One – Deeper Still

David E. Aune, in his monumental work on Revelation, concludes that the noun *euaggelion* in Revelation 14:6 is best translated “a message” rather than “the gospel,” based on its usage in the LXX. That “message,” in context, suggests that “the message proclaimed is purely eschatological; i.e., it announces the necessity of repentance and conversion in view of the judgment of God and ***the imminent end of the world.***²⁵

- The phrase “The hour of His judgment” is unusual, though the “day of judgment” is common.²⁶
- This appears to distinguish an elevated, final decision-making “process.” Mankind’s eternal decisions are underway! Executive punishment, threatened by the third angel, is in sight (14:9-11; cf. Matthew 10:15; 11:22, 24; 12:36; II Peter 9, 3:7; I John 4:17).

This *final call* is of compelling concern for God’s people to teach and preach. Its urgency to make a spiritual commitment “right now” must be persuasive.

- Perhaps this is portrayed by the sweet and bitter experience John had in eating the open book in Revelation 10.²⁷
- Eternal hope brings “sweetness” to the soul; God’s wrath and eternal loss bring bitterness and loss.

Since there is a message of “judgment,” some divine process, initially highlighted in Daniel 7:9-10, is coming to an end. The first angel’s “testimony” is a warning of man’s pending accountability before God – a living phase noted in Revelation 11:1!

Summary

That “hour” (Revelation 14:7) points to a fixed moment in time of which God’s last “evangelists” will be fully cognizant!²⁸ The verb “has come” (*el then* – G) is a dramatic expression showing that they can convincingly warn that this point in time is being realized²⁹ – it has arrived.³⁰

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad”
(II Corinthians 5:10).

²⁴ Ford, Desmond; *Crises*, p. 596.²⁴

²⁵ Aune, *op. cit.*, p. 828.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 826.

²⁷ Beale, *op. cit.*, p. 748.

²⁸ Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

²⁹ Bullinger, E. W., D.D.; *The Apocalypse or “The Day of the Lord,”* (second edition, 1909), p. 452.

http://www.bibleunderstanding.com/The_Apocalypse-E._W._Bullinger.pdf

³⁰ Aune, *op. cit.*, p. 828.

- This is a unique declaration. The last call is embedded in a timing message!
- The season of the harvest is now pending (Revelation 14:15):

How is the bearer of this message able to confidently say that that judicial hour has come?

- There is only one way!
- Having a knowledge of the timing prophecies of Daniel 8–12, linked with Revelation 10 and 11.

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