

## **Revelation: The Hope of Glory**

How Do We Worship God in His Wrath?

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### **HOW DO WE WORSHIP GOD IN HIS WRATH? Revelation 15-16**

*Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.*

*And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."*

*After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests. And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever, and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.*

*Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God."*

*So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth, and harmful and painful sores came upon the people who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.*

*The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing died that was in the sea.*

*The third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say, "Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!"*

*And I heard the altar saying, "Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments!"*

*The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the*

*name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.*

*The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.*

*The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east. And I saw, coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs. For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. ("Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!") And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.*

*The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found. And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe. (Rev. 15:1-16:21)*

## **A Quick Review...**

If you have Bible and I hope you do, turn with me to Revelation 15. We are now a little over halfway through this series on Revelation, with six out of thirteen weeks left including today. So what I want to do this morning is start with a quick review of what we've seen in Revelation, and a couple of the key things we've talked about when it comes to understanding Revelation. Then from there, I want us to think about what I believe is one of the most difficult yet also one of the most important questions for us as Christians as we read the book of Revelation. So let's start with a quick review.

**The book of Revelation is a series of apocalyptic visions filled with prophetic pronouncements written as a congregational letter.**

We saw from the first week that the book of Revelation is a series of apocalyptic visions filled with prophetic pronouncements written as a congregational letter. Now that's a loaded sentence that sums up the unique nature of this book. It is apocalyptic literature; "apocalypsis" means an "uncovering" or "revelation" of truth through visions. At the same time, this is prophecy about the future that has bearing on the present. This book is the climax of all prophecy in the Bible. And in all of this, it's also a letter written to churches in the first century—and to the church in all centuries—that is specifically addressing life as a Christian in this world.

During the first week of this series, we talked about how the purpose of Revelation is not to create confusion for the Christian or cause division in the church or even to promote speculation about the coming of Christ. Instead, this book was written to give unshakeable hope to suffering Christians, to encourage unwavering holiness amidst a seductive culture, to refute deception in the church, and then to fuel mission among the nations.

The church is under attack, in a sense, from all sides—from opposition on the outside to deception on the inside. John writes this book as a letter to say to persecuted Christians in the first century who are facing threats against their lives and to suffering Christians in the twenty-first century who are in a battle for their faith. John says, “You may think things are out of control as you see beasts coming up out of the abyss to make war with your faith and persecute your lives, but take heart: Christ has conquered Satan, and Christ has conquered hell, and Christ has conquered death, and Christ is in control. He sees your tears, and He hears your cries, and He will raise you up to reign with him as King forever. So fight for your faith, and fight to advance the gospel to the ends of the earth.”

That’s the point of this book. This book is not intended to drive us to charts; this book is intended to drive us to Christ, to one another in the church, and to the Great Commission.

**These visions include various symbols and numbers (which often lead to various interpretations).**

Now all throughout Revelation, as we just said, we have visions. That’s what this book is comprised of—visions that God gave to the apostle John in the first century. As we’ve seen these visions include various symbols and numbers (which often lead to various interpretations). We’ve seen symbols like a Lamb and a dragon and beasts and locusts like horses with human faces and lions’ teeth and wings and tails like scorpions. And we’ve seen numbers like four and seven and twelve and 144,000 and 666—each of these numbers representing different realities.

This is where the book of Revelation seems to open itself up to all kinds of different interpretations associated with these symbols and numbers. Throughout the history of the church, Bible-believing, gospel-preaching men and women have understood some of these things differently, and no one on earth has the corner on truth regarding exactly how all of this book should be understood. Some Bible readers take many of these images to be literal. They believe when John says this or that is going to happen in this way, he is saying these things are going to happen literally in these ways. Other Bible readers take different symbols and attach them to different historical realities, interpreting various parts of Revelation in light of modern day events in Israel and other nations.

As I think has probably been clear, I understand Revelation more symbolically. The way I describe it is based on what one brother said. Greg Beale, who wrote a massive commentary on the book of Revelation, addresses people who ask him why he takes the book symbolically instead of literally and points out how John, in the very first verse of Revelation, using allusions to Daniel in the Old Testament, tells us that this book is going to be filled with symbols. So he says that he takes the book symbolically precisely because he takes John’s words in the first verse literally—when John literally tells us that he’s about to use a bunch of symbols.

And that’s a key point. Just because we interpret something symbolically here in the book of Revelation doesn’t mean we have license, then, to interpret everything in the Bible symbolically however we want. This is a genre of biblical literature—apocalypse—that uses symbols and numbers strategically, in a way that narrative literature, for example, doesn’t. So when you read stories about the Red Sea splitting in half or Mary as a virgin giving birth

to Jesus, we by no means have license to say, "Well, those stories are just symbolic. They didn't literally happen." No, that type of literature in the Bible is clearly recording historical, actual events, and we read them as such. At the same time, other types of biblical literature use symbols strategically. And it's not just Revelation. It's poetry like Song of Solomon, when the writer says to the woman, "Your hair is like a flock of goats, your teeth are like a flock of sheep, and your nose is like the tower of Lebanon." We know, for various reasons, that these things are not literal!

So there's no question that here in Revelation we have a predominant and intentional use of symbols and numbers. Even today, we have seven bowls of wrath that are being poured out upon the earth. Seven is a strategic and symbolic number that we've seen throughout Revelation. Bowls that are filled with God's wrath. Does this mean they're literally filled with liquid wrath that is literally poured out? And all of these images of painful sores and bloody water and sun-scorching heat and people gnawing at their tongues in anguish—are these literal or symbolic? And if symbolic, what do they stand for? So you can see how these symbols and numbers sometimes lead to different interpretations.

Now the point in all of this, and I've tried to mention this time and time again, is that how one interprets Revelation is never a reason for division in the church. I've only gotten a couple of stinging letters and comments in this series, but I hope we're seeing that Bible-believing, gospel-embracing Christians in the same church may have disagreements over exactly what this or that means in Revelation, and that's okay. What I'm trying to do is point out that there are different opinions on this or that among Bible-believing, gospel-embracing Christians, but let's not miss the point. This book of visions was written to encourage its original readers (and hearers) and us to persevere in our faith, to realize who we are in Christ, and to fight amidst suffering for the spread of the gospel, so let's keep coming back to that.

### **These visions are arranged cyclically, not chronologically.**

We've also talked about how these visions are arranged cyclically, not chronologically. Meaning, when John says, just like he does in the beginning of our text today, "*Then I saw another sign in heaven,*" that doesn't mean, "This is what is going to happen next in history." Instead, we've seen how these visions are repeating one another, and they're intensifying along the way.

Think about what we've seen so far, going all the way back to Chapter 2. Since that time, we've seen seven letters, seals, trumpets, visions, bowls. In Revelation 2-3, we see seven letters to seven churches. Then, after a throne-room scene in Revelation 4-5, starting in Revelation 6, we see the opening of seven seals, and at the end of the seven seals, at the beginning of Chapter 8, we see final judgment poured out upon the earth. But then, right after that, we see seven angels with seven trumpets, and judgment starts all over again, seemingly from the beginning.

That leads to the end of Chapter 11, where with the seventh trumpet, final judgment again is poured out upon the earth, and then, right after that, we go back in time to the coming of Christ and the battle of Satan against God, His Son, and His people in human history, with a dragon and beasts and a Lamb and harvest imagery on the earth. And all of that leads to today, where we, in a sense, start over again, with seven angels and seven plagues pictured by seven bowls of wrath, and this cycle repeats itself all over again. So these visions are arranged in cycles like this, and with each cycle, things are intensifying.

Remember with the seals, a fourth of the earth destroyed, and then with the trumpets, a third of the earth impacted. Now, with the bowls, all of the earth is affected. In addition, the

seals and the trumpets often affected people indirectly, but here these bowls are poured out directly upon the people of the earth. So there is an intensification going on here with each of these.

To summarize here, you have seven seals and trumpets and visions and bowls that are chronologically parallel to one another, but at the same time they are intensifying as you progress, almost like a spiral, heading toward the final vision of wrath and judgment and salvation that unfold from this point on in Revelation. This leads to these seven bowls that recap or repeat what we've already seen, except with more all-encompassing devastation. John tells us in Revelation 15:1 that these are the last plagues and "*with them, the wrath of God is finished.*"

By the time you get to Chapter 16, these plagues are described as "*seven bowls of the wrath of God,*" and as each of these bowls are poured out upon the earth, you see reflections of the plagues with which God struck the Egyptians back in the book of Exodus when He delivered His people from slavery. The imagery of bowls crystallizes the theme of wrath. In Old Testament prophecy, God's wrath was described as stored in a cup or a bowl, ready to be poured out upon His enemies who rebel against Him and His people.

So here in Revelation 16, that's exactly what happens. Now again, there are different interpretations on when these things are actually going to happen. Some have said all of these judgments happened symbolically in the first century. Others say that these things are happening in all of history between the first and second coming of Christ (so these things are happening, in a sense, now). And still others say that all of these things will happen only at a time in the future, yet to come. I lean more toward the understanding that these visions are illustrating all that is going on between the first and second coming of Christ, but I also believe that in the days right before Christ returns, these things will clearly intensify in even greater ways.

Regardless of how one views the chronology of all this, the pictures and symbols are altogether devastating. In the first bowl, much like we saw with the first trumpet, the earth is struck and sores come upon the people who bear the mark of the beast. We saw last week that this is a picture of those who have turned aside from the worship of God to worship the things of this world. It's a picture of unbelievers. All who worship the things of this world will eventually experience suffering at the hands of the things of this world.

Then, in the second bowl, just like with the second trumpet, the sea is struck, and "*every living thing*" in the sea dies as its water is turned to blood. Just like with the parallel plague in Egypt, here God strikes down the entire economic life-support system of the world. In the third bowl, God pours out His wrath on the rivers, which also turn to blood. Sinners who have shed the blood of saints and prophets, causing their suffering, are here given blood to drink as God punishes the persecutors of His people.

The fourth bowl is poured upon the sky, specifically the sun, as it scorches people with fire. Again, is this literal? We don't know for sure. We know that this image is more than just having a sunburn; it's fierce fire scorching people with heat. At the very least, it's imagery that is intended to evoke horrifying judgment.

The fifth bowl unleashes torment on those who worship the beast, on idolaters who worship this world instead of God. They are plunged into darkness, separated from the one true God and suffering in anguish. The sixth bowl is not a picture of judgment in and of itself as much as it's a picture of preparation for wrath in the seventh bowl. Here we see in verse 13 the dragon, the first beast, and the false prophet that we saw last week in Chapters 12 and 13.

This unholy trinity here sends out deceptive demonic spirits that call together the forces of this world to fight against God and His people.

All of which leads to the seventh bowl, where cosmic judgment is fully poured out across the earth. The history of this world comes to a close as a massive earthquake and hundred-pound hail falls from heaven upon unbelievers on earth, the rulers and ways of this world finally "*drain the cup of the wine of fury of God's wrath.*" This is the climactic final judgment.

Mark it down: God will one day pour out His wrath fully and finally upon this earth, and all who have turned from Him to worship the things and the ways of this world will drink His judgment forever. This is the point of the seven bowls.

### **A Critical Question...**

All of this leads to a critical question lying behind the book of Revelation. Over and over and over again—in seals and trumpets and visions and bowls—we are seeing the wrath of God toward sin and the judgment of God toward sinners being graphically and frighteningly portrayed and illustrated. People hiding themselves in caves, calling upon mountains and rocks to fall on them. People tormented by killer locusts and horses with fire from their mouths and terror from their tails. People punished with fire and sulfur in such a way that smoke rises from their pain. Now here, hundred-pound hailstones falling upon people.

Yet in the middle of this, particularly here at the beginning of Revelation 15 and right in the middle of Revelation 16, right in the middle of the bowls of wrath, in this scene where the wrath of God is finished, we see a song of worship. Chapter 15 opens up with the saints singing in verse 3, "*Great and amazing are your deeds...for your righteous acts have been revealed*" (Rev. 15:3). And then there's worship in heaven depicted in Revelation 16:5, as the angel says, "*Just are you, O Holy One...It is what they deserve!*" (Rev 16:5). And in verse 7, worship from the altar rings out: "*Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments!*" (Rev. 16:7).

We're going to see the same thing a couple of chapters from now. Go ahead and flip quickly over to Revelation 19. Right after the judgment of God is poured out upon Babylon (a symbol of the ways of this world and those who have rebelled against God), a multitude of voices cry out in heaven. Revelation 19:1, "*Hallelujah! ... The smoke from her goes up forever and ever*" (Rev. 19:1).

So what we've got here in Revelation is God being worshiped in His wrath. And if we really think about it—let the reality of this soak in—it is challenging to comprehend. Number one, it's challenging to comprehend the wrath of God in the first place. We think of God as full of love and mercy and kindness and compassion, and He is full of all these things. But as a result, we have a very hard time thinking of God as also being full of wrath.

So we have a hard time even thinking about God in terms of wrath, but then, on a whole other level, what about worshiping God for His wrath? As God pours out justice and wrath upon sin and sinners, as imagery of unbelievers being tormented fills these chapters, how are we supposed to worship? And what's even more interesting, or challenging, in this whole picture in Revelation, is that back in Chapter 6, we saw Christians who had been slain for the Word of God, crying out for God to show His judgment and his wrath upon those

who dwell on the earth. They were asking God to do this, in view of worshiping God as He does this.

## **How do we worship God in His wrath?**

This is challenging to think about, isn't it? I feel the need pastorally and personally for us to pause in this book and ask the question: how do we worship God in His wrath?

You think about heaven, even. How will we joyfully worship God in heaven while multitudes upon multitudes of people are tormented by God's wrath in hell? This is tough for us to get our minds around, and in a sense, I would say it's impossible for us to get our minds around.

Only God is able to bear the emotional weight and balance of infinite love for sinners and infinite wrath due sinners. But that doesn't mean we should or can ignore this question. This is a very important question. So, how do we worship God in His wrath? Three steps I want to lead us through to understand what's going on here in Revelation as God is being and has been and will be worshiped in his wrath.

### **Start with a high view of God.**

Step number one, we must start with a high view of God. This is where the song of the saints in Revelation 15:3 begins: "*Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty!*" (Rev. 15:3). Let's consider the greatness of God in these verses.

First, God is sovereign over all. We have seen this over and over and over again in the book of Revelation. In the words of Psalm 24:1, "*The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it*" (Ps. 24:1).

God is in control of everything. He is sovereign over the past, the present, and the future. He is sovereign over the sun and the moon and the stars and the skies and the seas. He is sovereign over every animal and every man and woman on the earth. He is sovereign over Satan, the dragon, the first beast, the second beast, and every other demonic spirit. He is sovereign over the persecuted and the persecutors. He is sovereign over suffering and He is sovereign over death. From beginning to end, God is in control. He is Lord God the Almighty, and He governs everything in all the universe now and forever.

Second, God is feared by all. Revelation 15:4, "*Who will not fear you, O Lord?*" (Rev. 15:4). Look at the end of verse 3, for You are "*King of the nations!*" (Rev. 15:3). These verses have strong background in the psalms and prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah and Zechariah, who all foretold the coming day when God would be fully and finally feared among all the nations and all the peoples of the earth.

"*Be still,*" God said in Psalm 46:10, "*and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in all the earth*" (Ps. 46:10). Psalm 86:9-10, "*All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to your name. For you do great and marvelous deeds; you alone are God*" (Ps. 86:9-10). Isaiah 45:22, "*I am God, and there is no other .... To me every knee shall bow*" (Is. 45:22).

God is to be feared by all, and God is to be glorified above all. Here in Revelation 15:4, "*Who will not glorify Your name, O Lord?*" (Rev. 15:4). Later in 16:9, "*Give him glory*" (Rev. 16:9). To come in Revelation 19:1, "*Salvation and glory and power belong to our God!*"

(Rev. 19:1). Revelation 19:5, *"Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great"* (Rev. 19:5). Revelation 19:6, *"Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory"* (Rev. 19:6). God is glorified above all.

Sovereign over all, feared by all, glorified above all. God is holy in all His attributes. Revelation 15:4, *"For you alone are holy"* (Rev. 15:4). Radically set apart from this world. Without error and without equal. Completely separate and perfect pure. Untouched by sin and intolerable of sin. He stands above the world in absolute holiness. His love is holy love, His grace is holy grace, His power is holy power, His knowledge is holy knowledge, and His wrath is holy wrath. God is holy in all His attributes.

And God is righteous in all His ways. Now this seems to be the primary phrase in which God receives praise in these chapters. Revelation 15:4 says that *"all nations will come and worship you"*. Why? And the answer is, *"For your righteous acts have been revealed"* (Rev. 15:4).

Later in Revelation 16:5, the angel sings, *"Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments"* (Rev. 16:5). Verse 6, *"You have given people what they deserve"* (Rev. 16:6). Verse 7, *"Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments"* (Rev. 16:7). God's wrath is a demonstration of God's righteous judgment.

Deuteronomy 32:4, one of the songs upon which Revelation 15 is based, says God *"is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he"* (Deut. 32:4). In the words of Psalm 145:17, *"The Lord is just in all his ways"* (Ps. 145:17). In other words, all God's ways are right. His judgment is fair and good and just and right. He never judges wrongly. Never.

And in the end, Revelation is saying, this will be clear. After the final judgment of man, we will not come away with unanswered questions. Was that really just? Was that really fair? Are sure God the judge made the right call?

On that day, it will be absolutely clear: God is just. God is fair. And God absolutely, always, fully, finally, and eternally makes the right call.

And even in our sinfulness, deep down inside, you and I long for the righteous judgment of God. Even if you are not a believer in Christ today, or even if you don't believe in God, in a sense, you long for this. When you and I see evil in the world, we think, "Surely this is not all there is." We see mass murders in holocaust history, and we think, "Surely, there will be judgment for this. Surely those responsible for this will one day be judged."

I'm reminded of Tim Keller's quote on the resurrection of Jesus, which guarantees that one day we will all be judged, that this world is not all there is. Keller said,

"I always say to my skeptical, secular friends that, even if they can't believe in the resurrection, they should want it to be true. Most of them care deeply about justice for the poor, alleviating hunger and disease, and caring for the environment. Yet many of them believe that the material world was caused by accident and that the world and everything in it will eventually simply burn up. They find it discouraging that so few people care about justice without realizing that their own worldview undermines any motivation to make the world a better place. Why sacrifice for the needs of others if in the end nothing we do will make any difference? However, if the resurrection of Jesus

happened, that means there's infinite hope and reason to pour ourselves out for the needs of the world."

Don't we all have an innate, built-in longing and desire for justice that says, "This world is not the total picture. Shootings and wars don't have the last word. Injustice and evil do not have the last word." Don't we long for a totally good and completely fair God to make everything right in the end?

That is the picture of Revelation: a God who is righteous in all His ways making everything right. In the end, there will be no more injustice. Justice will be complete. God is just in all His judgments, and righteous in all His ways.

Finally, God is loving toward all His creation. You say, "Where is the love of God in all this?" Over and over and over again in the book of Revelation, we have seen people given opportunities by God to repent. He is patient with them. He is gracious and willing to save. He is Exodus 34, "*The Lord, the Lord, a god merciful and gracious, slow to anger*" (Ex. 34:6). It is only by the love of God that sinful man is given opportunity over and over and over again to repent of sin and to receive His mercy.

God is sovereign over all. God is feared by all. God is glorified above all. God is holy in all His attributes. God is righteous in all His ways. God is loving toward all His creation. The clear conclusion is this: God is infinitely worthy of eternal worship. Infinitely worthy of eternal worship.

#### **Move to a humble view of man.**

Start, brothers and sisters, with a high view of God. Then move to a humble view of man. These bowls in Revelation 16, along with the seals and trumpets and the visions and even the letters, graphically depict the depravity of man. The rebellion and wickedness of men and women upon the earth.

See the testimony of Scripture—not only to the greatness of God, but to the sinfulness of man. Behold the portrait of mankind in Revelation 16 (and all over the Bible, for that matter). We have denounced the sovereignty of God. We assert our independence from Him, turning aside from His authority, and asserting ourselves in His place. We offer allegiance to foreign gods instead, whether it's our money, our possessions, our success, sex, worldly pleasures, worldly pursuits, superficial religion, and self-centered living. These are the things we give our allegiance to instead of God.

We have denounced the sovereignty of God, and we have disregarded the fear of God. Remember Pharaoh, the background for all of these plagues in the book of Exodus. Even despite God's judgments toward our sin, even despite the harmful effects of sin in this world, we still do not fear God. Just as with plague after plague after plague in the book of Exodus, Pharaoh refused to fear God, over and over again in these bowls, the Bible says, "People still did not repent." No fear.

And we have defamed the glory of God. Revelation 16:9, "*They cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory*" (Rev. 16:9). Same thing in verse 11, "*They cursed the God of heaven*" (Rev. 16:11). Verse 21, "They cursed God" (Rev. 16:21). This is deliberate slandering of the name of God. The God who alone deserves all glory and honor and praise in all the universe from every nation, we mock.

We have defamed the glory of God, and we have dishonored the holiness of God. To refuse to repent is to refuse to turn from evil ways and sinful deeds. We continue in them, further separating ourselves from the holiness of God in dishonor.

We have despised the righteousness of God. When God pours out judgment on guilty man, we say, "That's not fair. That's not right. That's not just." We're like unquestionably guilty murderers or rapists, robbers or thieves, who upon hearing the sentence of our guilt from the bench, cry out, "Who do you think you are, judge? I'm right; you're the one that's wrong. I'm good; you're not." We have despised the righteousness of God.

And in it all, we have denied the love of God. Despite opportunity after opportunity to repent, despite warning after warning of judgment, man continues to curse God. Man refuses to repent of sin. In the words of Romans 2, "Do you not see the riches of God's kindness, love, and patience? Do you not realize that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?" And sinful man says, "No, God is not loving. God is not good."

We have denounced the sovereignty of God. We have disregarded the fear of God. We have defamed the glory of God. We have dishonored the holiness of God. We have despised the righteousness of God. And we have denied the love of God. The clear conclusion is unavoidable: We are infinitely deserving of God's eternal wrath.

If God is infinitely and eternally glorious, infinitely and eternally holy, infinitely and eternally just, and infinitely and eternally love, then our sin is infinitely and eternally offensive to Him. One sin against God is an infinite offense against God, and infinite punishment is deserved.

Realize this, don't miss this. The measure of sin is determined by the magnitude of the One who is sinned against. Think about this. If you sin against a log, you are not very guilty. If you sin against a man or a woman, then you are absolutely guilty. And ultimately, if you sin against an infinitely holy God, you are infinitely guilty.

Azeem is an Arab follower of Jesus and former member of this church, now back in the Middle East, and he was sharing the gospel recently with a taxi driver in his Muslim country. The driver believed that he would pay for his sin for a little while in hell, but then he would surely go to heaven after that. After all, he hadn't done too many bad things.

So Azeem said to him, "If I slapped you in the face, what would you do to me?" The driver replied, "I would throw you out of my taxi." Azeem continued, "If I went up to a random guy on the street and slapped him in the face, what would he do to me?" The driver said, "He would probably call his friends and beat you up." Azeem asked, "What if I went up to a policeman and slapped him in the face? What would he do to me?" The driver replied, "You would be beat up for sure, and then thrown into jail."

Finally, Azeem posed this question: "What if I went to the king of this country, and I slapped him in the face? What would happen to me then?" The driver looked at Azeem and awkwardly laughed. He told Azeem, "You would die." To this Azeem said, "So you see that the severity of sin's punishment is always a reflection of the position of the person who is sinned against." And the driver realized that he had been severely underestimating the seriousness of his sin against God.

How about you? Are you severely underestimating the seriousness of your sin against God? We likely all are.

Do you know why we have a hard time comprehending the worship of God in His wrath? It's because we have these things totally backward. Instead of a high view of God, we have a low view of God. And instead of a humble view of man, we have a high view of ourselves. We think of man (ourselves) as basically good—nice and kind and deserving of second and third and fourth chances. Man is lovable, with a right to independence from God, worthy of forgiveness from God, and warranting happiness from God in heaven. How can God be good and send man anywhere else? Hell? Torment? Judgment? Wrath? This is hard to understand.

But not when you realize that the only thing man deserves before a holy God is everlasting, eternal wrath. This is abundantly clear in the message of the Bible. But thankfully—praise be to God!—this is not the end of the story!

### **Land on the hope of the gospel.**

Start with a high view of God. Move to a humble view of man. And land on the hope of the gospel.

So what has God done? To man, for man in His sinfulness? The message of Revelation is clear. God has sent a child—His Son, Christ Jesus—born of woman, who lived a righteous life of obedience to God on this earth and then died a sacrificial death for sinners on the cross. This is the message of Christianity. This is what the cross of Christ is all about.

What happened at the cross? Why is the cross so significant? Why is the cross of Christ the central event in all of human history? Here is why: because at the cross, God has expressed His wrath toward sin. God poured out His righteous judgment on sin. At the same time, at the cross, God has endured His wrath against sin. Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath in our place. And in this, at the cross, God has enabled salvation for sinners.

One writer said, "The cross demonstrates with equal vividness both God's justice in judging sin and God's mercy in justifying the sinner." 2 Corinthians 5:21, "*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*" (2 Cor. 5:21). There is no news in the world greater than this. We stand before a holy God in our sin, deserving of holy, eternal wrath. Yet God has sent His Son in our place as our substitute. He lived the life we could not live. He died the death we deserved to die. He conquered the enemy—sin, Satan, and death—that we could not conquer.

So what shall we do? Those who are not followers of Christ, repent and receive the mercy of God before it is too late. Hear the words of Revelation 16:15. Jesus says, "*Behold, I am coming like a thief!*" (Rev. 16:15). The point is if you know a thief is coming, you get prepared. You don't go to sleep, you don't continue on with business as usual, you act. Unbelievers who are not followers of Christ, repent today.

And in a sense, the message is the same for believers who are not following Christ today in some area, or areas of your life. Those who are followers of Christ, walk in purity. This is what this image of being clothed and unexposed means. Don't be caught in sin as He comes back. Be found hating sin as God hates sin.

Walk in purity, and witness with urgency. Jesus is coming, judgment is coming, proclaim the gospel. Walk in purity, witness with urgency, and worship with sincerity. So we come back to our original question: how do we worship God in His wrath? With all sincerity and joy in His character. It is right and good and fitting to praise God for His wrath.

His wrath is evidence not only of His greatness, but also His goodness. Think about it. God's love without wrath would be indifferent. If you love your wife, you will hate all that

threatens her harm. If you love your kids, you will hate all that seeks to hurt them. If you love Jewish people, you will hate the Holocaust. Can you be indifferent in matters of love? Love requires wrath, in this sense. It is good for God to hate that which destroys you and me.

God's justice without wrath would be ineffective. If justice cannot be carried out, executed, if it has no authority, then you have powerless justice, which we've already talked about. The beauty of the Godhead is that all of these attributes come together. God's love, justice, and wrath together are indescribable. Therefore, we worship.

\* NOTE: A list of additional resources to assist you in further study of the book of Revelation and eschatology are available as a PDF download at [Radical.net/Revelation](http://Radical.net/Revelation). Click on the "Materials" button under any message in the series for this and other weekly resources.

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