

God's Wrath: Vengeance Is Mine, I Will Repay, Says the Lord

by John Piper

The wrath of God is a just and righteous response to sin, and it is eternal, terrible, and deserved by all who experience it.

Duration: 47:52

Scripture: Daniel 12:2, Mark 9:43, Romans 12:19-21, Revelation 6:15-16

Topics: "Gods Wrath", "Salvation Assurance"

Description

In this sermon, John Piper discusses the eternal wrath of God. He emphasizes that God's wrath has no end and is described as unquenchable fire. Piper also highlights that God's wrath is terrible beyond human comprehension and is deserved, making it just and right. However, he emphasizes that there is a way to escape God's wrath through the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. Overall, Piper urges listeners to take refuge in Christ and find assurance of salvation and peace.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God Ministries is available at www.DesiringGod.org. Today's sermon text is coming from Romans chapter 12, verses 19 through 21. Romans 12, 19 through 21.

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God. For it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord. To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him.

If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Let's pray together. Say, I'm so right, Father, You are wrathful and You are merciful. And we want to be found under the mercy and not under the wrath.

And the shield from the wrath is one alone, Jesus Christ, perfectly righteous and perfectly damned on the cross in our place. Would you come and gather unbelievers in this room under the shield of Jesus and out of wrath? And would you establish your saints with fear and trembling in their place of safety so that they do not treat anything that you have touched as trivial? Call no man unclean. Call no man trivial.

Everyone is headed to an everlasting horror or an everlasting joy. There are no trivialities in God and what He has done. O God, help me speak of the wrath of God in a saving, humbling way, a healing way, an empowering way, a liberating way, a joy producing way.

In Jesus name I pray. Amen. So if you look at verse 19, you will see that we have before us now the phrase wrath of God.

Never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God. For it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord. The last time we were together in this text, the focus was on the psychology of this verse.

That is, how it works that wrath can mentally make you a loving person. How it is that because God will take up your cause in justice and vindication, you don't need to take up your cause. You can lay it down and give water to your enemy who is thirsty and food to your enemies who are hungry or a hand or a help or whatever enemy love calls for in your life right now.

That's what we talked about. How is it that that wonderful word for works psychologically? That was our focus last time to focus today is on how the reality. Underneath the psychology looks, what is the reality of the wrath of God that when you are confident, God will exercise it perfectly on your behalf, enables you to be a loving person.

What is it? Leave it, Paul says, to the wrath of God. Then I believe giving us help with the definition, he takes up the word vengeance. Vengeance is mine.

So wrath is, among other things, vengeance. Vengeance implies something's been done that should be avenged. And so sin is implied in justice wrong in the world is eliciting vengeance and wrath.

And then you have the word repay. I will repay. That implies that something is there that needs to be paid.

Something has been done and a debt has been created and wrath is the funds which must be paid. And so here's my definition on the basis of that verse of the wrath of God. The wrath of God is God's settled anger towards sin expressed in repayment of suitable vengeance on guilty sinners.

Say it again. The wrath of God is God's settled anger towards sin expressed in the repayment of suitable vengeance on guilty sinners. Now, the reason I brought up the word anger.

Alongside wrath as a defining element. Is because in the Bible, those two words wrath and anger or gay and through Moss in Greek, if you just track those through the Bible, they occur together over a hundred times. And anger overlaps with wrath and becomes indistinguishable from it at times.

For example, Psalm six, verse one. Oh, Lord, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath. There's a parallel structure, right? We know about this, how the Psalms are written and the same thing is said in parallel.

Here's another one. Psalm 90, verse seven. We are brought to an end by your anger, by your wrath.

We are dismayed or Hosea 13:11. I gave you a king in my anger and I took him away in my wrath. Or Romans two, verse eight.

For those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and anger. Now, as I read dozens of these texts where they occur together, it seemed to me that 80

Robertson is right when he distinguishes them like this. He says, anger, this thumos word.

Is the vehement fury or boiling rage of God and wrath, he says, is his settled indignation or his settled anger. In other words, the note in the word anger falls on the emotional intensity and the note in the word wrath falls on the directed, considered focus of application of that anger. But don't don't make any artificial distinctions here because they overlap.

His anger is always under the wise control and direction of his wisdom and his righteousness. It is never out of control like much of our anger is. And his wrath is never a cool, merely intentional or deliberate action.

It is always a well-directed fury. And then after the word anger in the definition comes the word repay and vengeance. In other words, wrath is a response to sin.

God never pours out vengeance on the innocent when he repays. Something has been done that deserves the repayment. He is meticulously just in all of his dealings.

So let me say the definition again. The wrath of God is God's settled anger towards sin expressed in his repayment of suitable vengeance on the guilty sinner. Now, what shall we say about that? And I want to say four things about it from the Bible.

Number one. God's wrath, when you contemplate it at the end of our lives, at the end of the age, not just its expressions in history, is eternal and there is no end to it. Secondly, it is terrible beyond expression and indeed beyond human comprehension.

Third, it is deserved and therefore always perfectly just and right. And fourth, it is and will prove to have been escapable through one means alone, the blood and the righteousness of Jesus Christ and our simple taking refuge in it as our most precious treasure. So let's talk about those four things.

Number one. The wrath of God is eternal. Has no end.

Daniel, chapter 12, verse two. God promises that the day is coming when, quote, many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake. Some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

The contempt will be everlasting. Jesus spoke of the eternity of his own and his father's wrath in numerous ways. Consider three of them.

Number one. This is Mark nine forty three. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off.

It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell.

If your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. So the first way that the Lord Jesus tells us that his wrath will be eternal is by calling the fire of it unquenchable.

It will never go out. Second, Mark three twenty nine. Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness.

But is guilty of an eternal sin. That is an absolutely startling sentence. It sweeps away with one simple statement.

All thought of universal salvation that many people believe in with the help of people like George MacDonald and others who say, yes, there's a hell and it'll burn the hell out of you eventually and all will be saved. That won't work with this verse. There is a sin.

Jesus says there is sinning that is an eternal sin. It never has forgiveness. There is no end to the hell punishing that sin.

It will never be forgiven. That's a very powerful statement. Let it have its appropriate effect.

Third, Matthew twenty five, the parable of the sheep and the goats, you know, the parable, the king comes, all the nations are gathered. The sheep are on the right and the goats are on the left. And Jesus, speaking as the king says, the king will say to those on his left hand, depart from me, you cursed into eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

And then verse forty six, these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. And that's very important because you see the parallel. Try to play with this word eternal.

On the judgment side and you wind up playing with it on the life side. If you want to say eternal means a little bit of time and then after that, the age is over, then their salvation. What are you going to do with this word eternal over here with eternal life? It's the same phrase.

It's the same word. These go into eternal life. These go into eternal punishment.

It means that punishment never ends. This is almost incomprehensible for our human minds to imagine. But there it is.

And let us tremble as we hear the Lord speak it to us. Never ending. Then the apostle Paul joins Jesus in the teaching.

Second Thessalonians one seven. The Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.

Eternal destruction. Don't play with that word destruction and say, oh, destruction means obliterate out of existence. So he's talking about annihilation.

That's not what he's talking about. And many texts will not fit it. The word destroy, in fact, in the Bible almost never means obliterate.

You come against an army and destroy that army. There's soldiers everywhere, either dead or in chains. They're not out of existence.

The word destroy a poly me does not mean put out of existence. It means nullify defeat, remove all grounds for gladness, put into complete misery forever. Eternal destruction does not mean annihilation.

It means come under the wrath of God forever. And then finally, on this first point, let the apostle of love speak. I remember reading an editorial in the Tribune years ago.

In fact, I wrote a star article about it. In fact, I wrote an article and sent it to the Tribune about it and they didn't print it. But this guy was so totally out of touch with the Bible.

He said, Paul wrecked Christianity on the anvil of logic, hammering out long arguments about wrath and justification in books like Romans. And what we really need is to get back to the apostle of love, John. Have you read? Have you read what John said? Paul doesn't come close to the language of John on the horrors of hell.

And they print that stuff. Like he's some scholar or something. It's incredible.

So, here's John. Revelation 14, 11. The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever.

And they have no rest day or night. Revelation 19, 3. The smoke from her goes up forever and ever. The reason I quote those two verses is because in the New Testament, in the Greek language, there is one way to express with the most strong language eternity.

And that's it. It comes over into English as forever and ever. Why does it say forever and ever? It's because John was grasping for the most powerful, strong, clear, unmistakable language of never-ending duration.

That's why it comes over that way. So, my first statement about the wrath of God is it is and it will be eternal. Second, it is terrible beyond words and involves indescribable pain.

Consider some Bible pictures of the wrath of God poured out on sinners. And when I say them, be careful here. Because I remember teaching students at Bethel years ago.

And when we got to the doctrine of hell, almost inevitably, a hand would go up and say, but isn't fire a symbol? Isn't brimstone a symbol? And I say, beware of that folly. Because it won't work for you. That is, it won't accomplish your purposes.

Your purpose in asking that question, at least this was their purpose, is it's not that bad, is it? It's only a symbol to which I generally responded by pointing out the nature of symbolic language as you use it and as the Bible uses it. Do people use symbols of horror because reality is less horrible or more horrible? I don't know anybody who uses symbolic language for horrible realities when literal language would make it sound more horrible. You know anybody that uses language that way? People grasp for symbols of horror or beauty because the reality they're trying to describe is worse.

They can't find adequate language or better and they can't find adequate language. So if I say about my wife, Noel is the diamond of my life. Would you be proper in responding, oh, that's only a symbol.

So she's not as valuable as a diamond. Would anybody in this room think that way about my choice of the word diamond? Oh, it's only a symbol. So she's less valuable than a diamond.

I mean, that's crazy. Nobody thinks that way except people trying to escape language about reality in the Bible. No, I chose the word diamond.

It's the most precious jewel I can think of. And it implies that she's that and more. Language is inadequate.

You write poems and you choose metaphors and symbols because reality is either so terrible or so beautiful. Language, literal, won't work anymore. And you try to get at the greatness of the reality another way.

Honestly, honest symbols are not used because they go beyond reality, but because reality goes beyond words. So when the Bible speaks of hell fire and you say it's only a symbol, isn't it? Realize that you may be saying something you don't want to say. Namely, it really is worse than that.

And that's the best that the apostles could find or Jesus could find. And I do believe that is, in fact, the case. So let's see how Jesus speaks of this terrible reality.

Matthew 13, 41, the son of man will send his angels. They will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all lawbreakers and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

So he shifts from the picture of harvest to the real gather of lawbreakers, not wheat lawbreakers. Into the fiery furnace, which is not merely a picture anymore because it's gnashing of teeth in there. Here are three more images that Jesus uses to help us get at the reality of wrath.

He pictures a master returning and finding a servant who is disobedient. That's the way the second coming will be for many people. And he writes, Master will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites.

And in that place, there will be gnashing of teeth. So he gropes for words and says it will be like hewing someone in pieces. But their teeth will still be able to gnash.

Second, he pictured is as darkness. The sons of the kingdom will be thrown into outer darkness. In that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 8, 12. Picture yourself blind forever and ever and ever. You don't know where the next blow from some ugly demon and saint is coming from.

Third, he quotes Isaiah 66, 24 about worms. Their worm does not die and their fire is not quenched. Here's here's the verse he was quoting Isaiah 66, 24.

And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die and their fire shall not be quenched. And they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.

That's Jesus with four images, fire, cutting in pieces, darkness, being eaten by worms forever. Those are Jesus words. That's Jesus talking.

If you wonder whether Paul created the doctrine of hell, Paul never mentions the word hell. In fact, Jesus is the one who names it 12 times and the other writers don't use the word. They just use wrath.

So here's John again, the love apostle. Chapter 6, verse 15 of the book of Revelation. The kings of the earth.

The great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful. And everyone slave and free. Hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling on the mountains and rocks to fall.

Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne and from the wrath of the lamb. From the wrath of the lamb. We sang this morning, who'd ever thought that a lamb could save the world? You know why it says that at the end of the age, the lamb will take wrath on the world? I think it's because there will be a crystal clear reminder.

He didn't always show up this way. He showed up once in the middle of history as a real lamb. Let himself be ripped to shreds, mocked, spit upon, dishonored, hung on a stick, treated like dirt.

In order to rescue us from the wrath of his father. And it was God's idea. And when he comes a second time, it will be so plain.

This is the crucified lamb with the sword coming out of his mouth, hearing people in pieces who would not have him. Know your Christ, Christian, and tremble with joy. It's going to be so terrible.

Suicide will be sought everywhere. One last picture of the terribleness of it. Revelation 20:14, then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.

This is the second death, the lake of fire. Chapter two, verse 11 of Revelation, says that those who conquer will not be hurt by the second death. That is by the lake of fire, implying those who do not conquer will be hurt by it.

So it's not just for the devil and death and Hades. It's for everyone who does not conquer by faith. This is the victory.

This is the conquering that overcomes the world. Our faith. And if you will not have faith in Jesus, you will be thrown into the lake of fire.

Revelation 20, verse 15. If anyone's name is not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. Verse 10.

They will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Very calmly, without any lifting of my voice. I say it is a gentle understatement to say that the wrath of God at the end of the age will be terrible beyond words.

Number three, the wrath of God will be deserved by all who experience it. That is totally just and totally right. All you have to do here to see how crucial this is to the Apostle Paul is to read the first chapters of Romans again.

We don't need to leave Romans here. Romans 1, 18. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven.

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. And then he goes on, you remember, and he unpacks carefully, meticulously, how it is that we know the truth. No one will be escaping because they say, I didn't know there was a God I had to deal with.

I didn't know there was a God I had to worship. No one on planet earth, in any tribe, anywhere, will be able to say that because of the argument that Paul unfolds in verses 18 to 23 of Romans 1. Everyone knows and all suppress and are ungodly and will perish unless they hear the gospel and believe in their Redeemer. And therefore, God is just.

Or, consider Romans 2, 5. Because of your hard and impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath. When God's righteous judgment, righteous judgment, righteous judgment will be revealed. Every act of indifference to Christ, every preference for anything over God, every quiver of affection in your heart for sin, every second of our dull affections for God are mounting up mountains of guilt.

Storing up every day, we store up more and more warrant for the just wrath of God to fall upon us if there is no shield. Or consider Romans 3, 5 and 6. If our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, meaning in His judgment, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? I speak in a human way. Paul was so jealous not to bring any reproach upon the name of God for His justice that he stuck in this little parenthesis, I'm speaking in a human way, just to even talk about the possibility that God could be seen as unjust.

And then he adds, by no means. For then how could God judge the world? He had two massive confidences. One, God is just.

And two, God will show wrath on this world. And they were not in conflict. And he labored in verses 1 to 8 of Romans 3 to show that that was so.

And so, wrath will be deserved. If you're sitting there thinking, well, I can think of a lot of people who deserve that, like Hitler or Idi Amin, or the guy that abused me when I was little. But, frankly, I don't think I'm that bad.

Consider four things. Number one. One sin alone brought down this world.

And what you look at all over the world in terms of immorality and futility and tsunami and flood and famine and poverty is the result of one sin and the judgment that fell upon this world because of it. God consigned the entire universe to futility because of Adam's sin. And then think about the fact that you haven't committed one sin.

You've committed tens of thousands of sins. And try to make sense of the justice of the wrath of God. Or consider, secondly, James 2.10. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

Which means that of those tens of thousands of sins that all of us have committed, each one of them was the breaking of the whole law. And compute your merit. Third, consider Galatians 3.10. For all who rely upon works of the law are under a curse, for it is written, Cursed is everyone who does not abide in all the things written in the book of the law to do them.

Which means the curse falls for one breach. One. And the curse falls.

Or consider, finally, this. A sin against an infinitely worthy God is an infinitely heinous sin. And deserving of infinitely long punishment.

Because some of you, having read books, perhaps would say, How can it be just for there to be an eternity of punishment for only 70 years of sin? Isn't that out of proportion? How do you call that just? Here's the flaw in that thinking. It is simply dealing with one aspect of sin that aggravates it, namely its duration. A long lasting sin deserves more punishment than a short sin.

That's not the main way sin becomes infinitely culpable. It's not its duration. It's the one against whom it is being performed.

If you commit an offense against a toad, you're not very liable for punishment. If you commit a serious offense against a human being, you are very liable to punishment. And if you commit a sin and an offense against an infinitely valuable, honorable, glorious God, you have committed an infinite offense and duration is not out of proportion to that when it lasts forever.

So don't try to run away from what the Bible plainly says. Don't logicize the Bible away. Don't let your emotions govern you here and say, It just can't mean forever.

It does mean forever. It does mean terrible. And it does mean deserved.

It is just and it is right. Last point, fourth. And oh how crucial it is.

How beautiful it is. How precious it is. I almost wish I could invert this service.

Because I had this sermon in my head while I'm standing down there singing those songs. And I can't help myself when I sing those kinds of songs, those glorious gospel songs, knowing what I know about this message. We just got to get this thing turned around.

Maybe we could do that in the next hour if we wanted to. So let me end with this point. At the end of the age, when you die or when the Lord comes, the wrath of God impending will have been escapable.

It will have been escapable for everybody. We're Calvinists. Don't ever think that Calvinism teaches that anybody who believes in Jesus is excluded.

We preach the gospel indiscriminately to the whole world. Whosoever will, let him come. I just read at the end of the Bible this morning.

Let those who thirst come to the waters. Let him who desires drink of the water of life without price. That's true.

The blood of Jesus Christ was shed to bear all the weight of punishment. The righteousness of Christ was performed to fulfill every duty we failed. And we will have that on our side if we go to Him.

And we won't if we don't. That's clear in the Bible. Jesus is the one shield.

The one asbestos righteousness. So that as we fly to Him and say, I have no merit. I have no works.

I have no worth. I am just scared. And I need a Redeemer.

And you are beautifully adequate. I come to you, my Lord, my Savior, my Treasure. Will you hide me and love me? I tell you, He never has turned away a person.

Nor will He right now. Now is the day of salvation. Now is the day of hope.

Nobody has to leave this room liable to the wrath of God. Nobody. So if you ask, how can it be that a debt that is infinitely deserving of eternal punishment can just go away like that? You are telling me, before I leave this room it can just go away? Yes.

And I say it to the glory of the infinite worth of the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. In fact, I got to this point in my sermon, and I'm done. And I thought, I'm not done.

I've got to talk about some more things. So here's what we're going to do next week, God willing. We're going to talk about the wrath of God and worship.

We're going to talk about the implications of the wrath of God and evangelism. We're going to talk about the implications of the wrath of God and parenting. I've got big ideas about that.

And we're going to talk about the wrath of God and the glory of Christ. Because picture it. He didn't, in those 33 years and those 3 hours at the end, simply take your infinite desert of eternal punishment on Himself.

He did it for millions and millions of people. How can one man, in a matter of hours, drain the cup of God's wrath that would have taken an eternity to pour out on me? How can that be? And if you understood how that can be, you would sing those songs differently. You would fly out of here.

I'm saved! I'm saved! What a Savior! What a Savior! Would you be able to keep your mouth shut tomorrow about this Savior, if you saw the magnitude of His worth bearing millions of sinners eternal? Let's pray. Oh God, I pray for any in this room now who is unbelieving. God, nobody gets scared into heaven.

But we do get scared to look for the way into heaven. Many of us can remember the days of our youth when a sermon like this was so frightening to us that we had a hard time sleeping at night. And I pray for the little children who have heard me talk, that when they talk to Mommy and Daddy tonight, Jesus would be so precious.

Jesus who never sleeps would be so powerful. That wonderful, wonderful depth would come into families because of this message. So Lord, come.

Now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you, really gracious to you. May the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you the assurance of your salvation and the sweetest peace that passes all understanding for the sake of this world who is on their way to destruction without us.

And all the people said, Amen. Thank you for listening to this message by John Piper, pastor for preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Feel free to make copies of this message to give to others, but please do not charge for those copies or alter the content in any way without permission.

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