

The Present Effects of Trembling at the Wrath of God

by John Piper

The sermon emphasizes the importance of experiencing fear and trembling in response to the wrath of God, which is a sign of humility and contrition, and should be reflected in our worship, parenting, and evangelism.

Duration: 41:30

Scripture: Matthew 28:19-20, John 3:16, Acts 24:25, Romans 3:23, Romans 12:17-21, Ephesians 2:8-9, Revelation 19:15

Topics: "Evangelism", "Salvation"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of sharing the gospel with others. He highlights that no one can be saved without the gospel, which includes the concepts of God's holiness, our sinfulness, the cross of Jesus, and the need for faith. The speaker encourages believers to share the gospel in various ways, whether it be through a short conversation, a written message, or a longer sermon. He also references the apostle Paul's example of reasoning about righteousness, the cross, self-control, and coming judgment when sharing the gospel. The sermon concludes by emphasizing the preciousness of Jesus and his sacrifice for our sins.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God is available at www.DesiringGod.org This morning's sermon text is found in Romans chapter 12, verses 17 through 21. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 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. What glorious reality we have sung and signified at the Lord's table.

It cannot be any greater than the Son of God entering mankind and bearing the sins of His people and satisfying the wrath of God to the uttermost. That we might be justified by faith alone and live forever like Earl and Lawrence in the presence of the King, unafraid. So come and help us to learn as a people how to

tremble in our joy.

Through Christ I pray. Amen. My aim today is straightforward and simple.

I want to show from Scripture that there is a proper emotional effect of the wrath of God now. And then I would like to show the way that emotional effect of the wrath of God works its way out properly in corporate worship and raising children and evangelizing the lost, all of it to the magnification of the supreme value of Jesus Christ. Last time that we were together, we saw that in the Bible, the wrath of God is described as eternal and terrible and deserved and escapable through Jesus Christ alone.

And God was at work among us and He still is today. Now, to move ourselves back into the sense of last week, I want to take one verse from the book of Revelation, chapter 19, verse 15, and simply comment on it for about two minutes so that we feel the weight again of the images that the Bible uses for the wrath of God and then describe the biblical description of its emotional effect. Here's Revelation 19, verse 15.

From His mouth comes a sharp sword. Now, this is describing Jesus at His second coming. From His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations and He will rule them with a rod of iron.

He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. Now, that last sentence is exceedingly terrible. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.

Just make four observations. Number one, God is almighty. We are not dealing here with a mere president of the United States, a mere premier of China.

We're dealing here with a person whose power includes all the power of the political realm and all the power of the electromagnetic realm and all the power of the atomic realm and all the power of the gravitational pull of the biggest stars in the universe and all the power that upholds the universe by the word of His might. We are dealing here with what's called almighty, omnipotence, absolute sovereignty, and He is angry. Second observation is that this almighty God is about to pour out His wrath.

So He is a God of love. The Bible is clear about that. And He is also a God of justice and holiness and wrath.

The Bible is very clear about that. We need to know God as He is, not as we make Him up to be. And the third observation is that this wrath is full of fury.

The fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. It's not a cool opposition. It's not emotionally indifferent.

It is a furiously angry wrath. And the fourth observation, and it's the most terrible, is that it is like Christ treading a winepress in which the unbelieving are under His feet and their blood flows like wine from the winepress. That's the image of the beloved apostle John, among others.

And my point today is this should produce a certain appropriate emotional response in us. Psalm 114, verse 7, Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob. Psalm 119, verse 120, My flesh trembles for fear of you, and I am afraid of your judgments.

That's a very godly man talking. Isaiah 66, 2, This is the one to whom I will look, he who is humble. This is God talking.

This is the one to whom I will look, he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word. God's countenance shines with favorable grace upon trembling people. Or, here's the New Testament testimony that we should all heed.

Philippians 2, verse 12, Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only in my presence, but much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling. To all believers, the Bible says, Get on the road that leads to life, and if necessary, cut off your hands to stay there. Gouge out your eyes to stay there.

This is war all the way to heaven. And as you go, let there be fear and trembling upon this road. This is not something you grow out of as you get more mature as a Christian.

Oh, maybe you start afraid, and then later on, there's no fear and trembling. This is something that immature Christians must necessarily grow into, not something you grow out of. To which you should, perhaps, respond, But doesn't the Bible teach, Fear not! Dozens of places, doesn't it say, Fear not, for I am with you.

Be not dismayed, I am your God. So, what are you saying about the fear not passages, if you're calling us to experience normal Christianity as fear and trembling? What does fear not mean? It means two things. Number one, it means fear God, not man.

And number two, it means, don't fear God as your enemy, fear Him as one who was your enemy, and who is very great. Let me give you a text for each of those. Fear God, not man.

Matthew 10, 28. Do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. Rather, fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Here's the way I would put it. Fear distrusting God. Don't fear displeasing man.

Let it be a terrifying prospect to you to distrust your God. But don't let it be at all a terrifying prospect to you to displease your enemy, who might cut off your head. That's all they can do, is cut off your head.

But God, after the head has been cut off, can cast the soul into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear distrusting God. Fear turning away from God.

Isaiah 8, 12, put it this way. This is a paradoxical verse. Do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread of them.

But the Lord of hosts, let Him be your fear, let Him be your dread, and He will become a sanctuary. It's like when Carsten visited Dick Teagan at age six, my son, and there was this big German shepherd who met him eye to eye in the doorway at age six. And he was very much afraid.

And Dick said, don't be afraid, she's very friendly. We sent Carsten to the car to get something we'd forgotten, and he went trotting out to the car, and this dog comes loping up behind him with a deep rumble in his voice. It did not look like this dog was safe.

And Dick hollered out to Carsten, oh, Carsten, better not run away from her. She doesn't like people to run away from her. And I took mental note, that's going into a sermon.

Because that's exactly the way God is. He's a very friendly God. He just doesn't like people to run away from Him.

And He will lope after you with a deep rumble in His voice. And if you don't heed that rumble and turn and hug His neck, you're going to be history forever. So that's the first text on the issue, don't fear man, fear God.

That is, fear distrustful, running away from Him. Secondly, fear God not as your enemy. I'm talking to Christians here.

If you're not one, you should fear Him as your enemy and become His friend through Jesus. But as a Christian, don't fear Him as your enemy. Fear Him as one who was your enemy.

Here's a picture. You're 50 floors above the Nicolet Mall on a ledge, and the wind is blowing. Don't mind how you got out there, just picture it.

And you feel unbelievably vulnerable. The ledge is narrow, the wind is strong, the drop is 500 feet, and you couldn't be more scared than you are. And the rescue team comes out and snatch you in their firm hands and pull you in, and you are totally safe.

Answer me, has the trembling stopped? Answer, it has not stopped. And it goes on quite a while. If you saw the ledge that you were standing on, and the wrath of God dropping out before you, and how narrow the ledge was, and how many people had fallen off just like you, and how hard the wind was blowing, and how firm was the grasp of Jesus Christ, and how safe you are in His righteousness, you would feel so happy and your trembling would be significant and deep.

Don't tremble as though He is your enemy, Christian, but tremble. Psalm 130 verse 3, If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? That's the ledge situation. That's the ledge.

O Lord, who can stand here? But there is forgiveness with you that you may be feared. Is that strange? We usually think just the opposite. If I could just be forgiven for all my sins that make me so vulnerable to this precipice, I would never be afraid again.

Wrong. There would come into your life a most profound trembling and security. So I say again, there is an appropriate emotional response, and it is a fear and trembling to the wrath of God, even when you're saved from it.

Now, I want to apply this to worship, child-rearing and evangelism, all to the glory of our Savior, Jesus Christ. First thing I would say about worship, corporate worship, what we're doing now is that there should be in worship a profound, deep, emotional response for standing in the face of the Almighty. Worship is the gathering of God's people.

Sometimes there are among us, as there are, no, always there are among us people who are not yet God's people, and we are glad you are here. Worship is designed as a gathering of God's people with guests watching before the face of God. And if those people have discovered what I've been talking about the last two weeks, there is in that room trembling before the face of God.

Psalm 96.9, Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness. Tremble before Him, all the earth. Revelation 14.7, Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come.

Worship Him who made heaven and earth. Revelation 15.4, 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.

So in all three of those texts, trembling or fear is paralleled with worship. Proper worship has in it trembling before the face of Almighty God. And then we must highlight the absolutely amazing, fear-transforming reality of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen.

Have you ever wondered why Christianity from its inception to this very day sings like we sing and in no mosque does anyone sing? Have you ever wondered why Islam is not a singing religion and Christianity explodes with singing? Have you ever wondered? There is a very simple reason. Jesus Christ, crucified and risen for sinners before Allah. And it's the only hope of every person on planet earth.

And they don't believe in Him. So they can't sing. But we can sing.

And there is not anybody but a sinner in this room. And we can sing. The wrath of God hangs over this room, except for one thing, Jesus Christ.

And we can sing. That's how big He is. That's how perfect the shield is.

That's how precious the blood is. That's how magnificent the resurrection is. May Jesus Christ be praised in our worship as the shield against the mighty wrath of God.

And may, oh I want to get to evangelism, but I'll hold it. Someone will say, Pastor John, don't you think we should have fun in worship? Hmm. My response to that is, it's a sad thing in our day, and it's so epidemic, that the best alternative many Christians can think of to fear is fun.

That's the big word. We were having fun in worship. Or evangelism.

We had fun as we went downtown to witness the lost people. I think I know what they're trying to say. I don't want to be too hard.

But it's sad. It's just really sad to me, that the best word we can come up with for an experience of the Almighty, and the trembling, and the glory, and the joy, is the same word we'd use for a day at Valley Fair. That's sad.

That's just sad. Christian hedonists pursue joy with all our might. And Christian hedonists can smell the flames of hell.

And Christian hedonists have felt the ledge. We have felt how thin the ledge was, and how deep the precipice of wrath was, and how strong the wind of justice was blowing against us. And we have felt the firm grip of Jesus.

The word fun won't work for what we do in response to that. It won't work. Get another word.

The difference it makes is that all trifling, all slapstick, all pettiness, all trifling, all joking, all clowning, all levity is gone. Listen to the alternative from Psalm 2, Isaiah, Nehemiah. Psalm 2.11, Serve the Lord with fear.

Rejoice with trembling. Do you do that? Do you know that paradoxical experience? Rejoice with trembling, Psalm 2.11. Or what about this one, Isaiah 11.3, His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. Delight to fear.

Delight to fear. Do you know this experience, Christian? Or what about this one, Nehemiah 1.11, I don't want a valley fair experience. I want a trembling experience.

I want the real God, not a fake image in my own mind's image. I want to know the true God, horrible and terrible as He is towards sin, and how glorious He is in justice and holiness and love and grace and truth. I want the whole God.

I don't want to settle for a puny imitation joy. Don't you? We want this God. We don't want to meet Him and say, I never knew you.

I never knew you. For He might then say, I never knew you. We want to know God.

We don't want to play at church and then call it fun. There's a huge difference between levity and joy and humor. Listen to Charles Spurgeon.

We must conquer, some of us especially, he was a very funny man. We must conquer, some of us especially, our tendency to levity. A great distinction exists between holy cheerfulness, which is a virtue, and that general levity, which is a vice.

There is a levity which has not enough heart in it to laugh, but trifles with everything. It is flippant, hollow, unreal. A hearty laugh has no more levity in it than a hearty cry.

Oh, may God make us magnificently happy as we tremble before Him. If you ask, isn't there a place for lightheartedness in the Christian life? My answer is, not that there's not, but that there is a season for everything under the sun. Turn, turn, turn.

A season for crying and a season for laughing. A season for embracing and a season for refraining from embracing. A season to make war and a season to make love.

And my point is simply, this isn't the place to joke around on Sunday morning. This is serious and tremendously happy. If you don't know the joy of those songs we were singing, that magnificent truth we were singing, repent and ask for a new heart.

Nothing at Valleyfair can compare. Let's talk about parenting for a minute. I have a very simple thing to say here about parents, especially dads.

And I know there's single moms here who have to bear the whole load. I'm talking to you as well, but I'm talking especially dads. There is a way that dads who've tasted the wrath of God, who know the wrath of God, who stood on the ledge, who've been rescued, who are trembling, there's a way to parent that's different.

There's a way to parent that's different. And it's this. Our goal as parents is that our children would tremble with joy in the presence of God.

Now if you don't agree with that, you won't agree with what I'm going to say next. But that's my goal. My goal for my four sons, my goal for my daughter, is that they would tremble with joy in the presence of God forever.

What does that mean for my fatherhood? It means this. I should be the kind of father before whom my children delight to fear me. I should so love them, so kiss them, so hug them, so play with them, and so discipline them, and so teach them that they delight to fear me.

If your children only fear you, you're probably a sick person. And it's wrong and dysfunctional. And if they only enjoy you, it's wrong and dysfunctional.

They need to know God in looking at their fathers. How will a child come to embrace the God who sends people to hell if all they've ever known is approval from their father in their sin and no discipline? Or how will they ever know the God who forgives sins, who sends His own Son at great cost to Himself, if they have never tasted Dad saying, I'm sorry, and Dad not punishing for a particular sin against His authority? Dads, I'm asking you to do the impossible here. Be God for your children until they know you're not.

And then continue in measure to be God for them, so that they see a mingling of justice and a mingling of mercy, that when they meet the Bible and they see the God of the Bible, they'll say, that's like my dad, and I delight to be with him. And they'll believe. Don't make it hard for your children to believe in the God of the Bible, dads.

On the one hand, you hear the Bible saying, whoever spares the rod hates his son, and who loves him is diligent to discipline him. Why is that crucial? It's because it's like God. Hebrews 12, 6, the Lord disciplines the one whom He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives.

And on the other hand, dads, I'm talking to dads, some of you way too mean, and some of you way too pansy-like. Lazy, watching television, the kid disobeys, and mom's got to deal with it because you're a whip. I'm talking to a bunch of kinds of dads here.

The other kind needs to hear this, Ephesians 6, 4, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. It's the discipline of the Lord. They need to see the Lord in the way you do this.

So, may my children, when they're small and then in appropriate ways when they're older, say something like this, Daddy, disobeying you is a fearful thing, and I am so thankful that it is, but oh, what a sanctuary you are to me, and I love to live in the light of your strength and your joy. That's what I want. Let's close with evangelism.

The world is lost, folks, and the wrath of God is on everyone without Jesus. And you have tasted the mercy. I said at the Lord's table, God shows his love for us, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Since therefore we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. Listen, in our evangelizing, we dare not talk about the love of God without making clear to people somewhere, somewhere along the way that the love of God rescues us from the wrath of God. If the people that you are witnessing to know nothing about the wrath of God from his holy justice and opposition to sin, they will never understand the cross.

The cross makes no sense. If God is not a God of justice and wrath, it just looks like divine child abuse, and it grieves me that there are leading evangelicals who use that horrifically blasphemous language, calling the cross divine child abuse. But that's the way it's going to sound at work, unless they understand something of the justice and holiness and wrath of God.

Relationships save nobody. We have become so dominated by relational evangelism, we never look into a person's eyes and say, could we talk for ten minutes about the most important thing in the world over lunch or after work or in the parking lot? Can I just share with you my faith and my life and how I understand God and commend it to you? We just keep relating, doing nice things for people while they're perishing. Nobody is saved without the gospel, and the gospel makes no sense without the justice and wrath of God.

So I'm just pleading, in our evangelism, let's just tell the gospel. The gospel has four pieces. You can divide it into others.

I divide it into six in the tract I wrote, Quest for Joy. But it's simple to remember four. God, sin, cross, faith.

That's the gospel. And you just unpack them. God is holy and just and loving.

He has standards. He has a law. Sin.

We've all sinned and come short of His glory. Wrath is upon us. Cross.

There's a way out. God has sent His Son into the world. Faith.

Believe on Him. You can't work your way to heaven. Just abandon self-reliance.

Fly to Jesus. Cleave to Him. And you'll escape the wrath.

You'll know the joy. That's the gospel. I did it in one minute.

Do it in ten. Do it on a napkin. Do it in a letter.

Do it in an email. Do it. Do it.

Tell the truth. Tell it often. Tell it well, Bethlehem.

They're lost. To claim to be loving people and not tell the gospel is a self-contradiction. Let me close with a word about the Apostle Paul and then Isaiah.

Paul had one chance. He just had one chance with Felix. Remember? You're a prisoner.

I mean, Jesus said, They will take you before governors and you will be a witness to me. So here's Paul fulfilling the word of Jesus. And he's got one chance before the governor.

What will he say? Well, among other things, Luke tells us he said this. He reasoned about righteousness. Oh, I would love to know how he unpacked that and the cross.

And he reasoned about self-control. Isn't that an interesting choice? And thirdly, he reasoned about coming judgment. So here you are.

You're in prison. You're taken before the king. You get five, ten, fifteen minutes.

Have a long. He'll let you talk. What are you going to say? Among the many things that you might say, One of them should be judgment is about to come upon you, Felix.

That might get your head cut off. But you will have quitted your dutiful love. Well, you will stand before the king.

Give you a new head. And you will feel deeply thankful that he gave you the grace to tell Felix the truth. Doesn't all of this make Jesus precious? That's where I want to end.

I just want to end what we were singing, what we were symbolizing, and what I've been saying. Jesus is magnificent. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.

Yet we esteemed him stricken. Stricken by God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions.

He was bruised for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole. And with his stripes, we are healed.

All of us, like sheep, have gone astray. We have turned, every one of us, to our own private, I will do it my own way. And the Lord has laid on him the wrath and the iniquity of us all.

And as we huddle in his arms before that window, that dropping away of wrath, we tremble and are so happy. We can't hardly stand it, how happy we are. Christian hedonists are the kind of people who anticipate where Earl and Lawrence are today.

We anticipate a happiness so big that if God did not give us supernatural enablement, it would crush us. That's how big the happiness is. The little happinesses that you have experienced in this life, they are the minutest little echo of what big H happiness is meant to be in heaven someday.

And if God didn't prepare us for it, it would crush us. It is so big. But he promises in John 17, 26, that he will, in fact, enable us to love and delight in him with the very love and delight that the Father has for the Son and the Son has for the Father.

And that is infinite. So, do we believe in joy? Do we believe in happiness? We believe in happiness like you never dreamed. If you are without Christ this morning, if you came in here saying, Oh, good night.

I want to hear about the wrath of God. I hope that you've heard good news and not damnable news. It is damnable.

It's awful. But, oh, the center of Christianity is Christ. And the center of Christ is the cross.

And the point of the cross is to bear sins and absorb wrath. So, please, please leave invited. Please leave invited.

One last application. Tuesday nights here, meeting right out there in the commons, there are some warriors who do evangelism and teach evangelism. I have an email from Keith, who is one of the most wild-eyed, wonderful evangelists in this church.

And I just want to read an invitation from him to you. It goes like this. It's one paragraph, and then we'll pray.

We meet every Tuesday night in the commons, 6.30. It's an invitation to everybody. It goes until about 8.30. Our goal is to help equip Christians to be able to evangelize to anyone within the first hour of training. We are biblical and practical.

We're equipped to deal with any faith and can share our practical experience in dealing with common objections to Christianity. We have some very good evangelists who are bold and loving and disciplined. We help give a foundation to anyone who is willing to step out of their comfort zone, first through encouragement, then instruction, then implementation.

We help give icebreakers for evangelistic encounters and work one-on-one with newcomers. We specialize, as Sherard Burns says, getting from the topic of a shoe to Jesus Christ. We have lots of resources, gospel tracts, evangelism, books, literally dozens of instructional videos, demonstrating a practical method which we support but don't force anyone to use.

We welcome any evangelistic style, as long as it's biblical. We see God work miracles every time we go out and put our trust in Him, and we want others to see Christ work the way we do every Tuesday night. Let's pray.

Father, as we go now, some to Sunday school, some home to ponder these things, perhaps some to pray here at the front, at the end, some to fill out a little piece of paper and say, Call me this week, and others just to sit quietly for a few more minutes while they deal with you. Wherever we're headed in the next minute, I ask that you'd not let anyone go without feeling the love of God pursuing them, the love of God pursuing them to rescue them from the wrath of God. And so, God, draw near now and complete the work you began last Sunday for some folks and complete the work that you began today for other folks and complete the work that you began when some of these folks were nine years old, and they've neglected it for 35 years.

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