

Week 4: Wrath

"In the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage." (John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath)

Wrath is one of the most overtly destructive forces a human being is capable of harnessing.

By its very definition ("strong, stern, or fierce anger; vengeance or punishment as the consequence of anger"), wrath is bent on unleashing devastating force against another person. Drawing from a vivid analogy once used by Dan Rather, wrath is the spiritual equivalent of a tornado in a trailer park. It has the distinct ability to transform wholeness into utter carnage in a matter of moments.

Accordingly, God does not mince words when it comes to wrath:

- Ephesians 4:31: *"Let all...wrath, anger...be put away from you, with all malice."* (NKJV)
- Colossians 3:8: *"But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath..."* (NKJV)
- James 1:19-20: *"So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be...slow to wrath, for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God."* (NKJV)
- Galatians 5:19-21: *"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are...outbursts of wrath...and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."* (NKJV)

Why Wrath Must Be Put Away

Let me suggest 5 reasons that wrath is to be purged from the life of a Christian:

1. Wrath assumes the right to avenge oneself. Romans 12:19 plainly states the following: "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord." (NKJV)

When we become wrathful, we bluntly retort, "Vengeance is actually *mine*, I will repay."

Nowhere in Scripture are we granted free reign to avenge ourselves at will. Though we may desire to do so, we are not given that right. God has reserved that right for Himself, and we do nothing but blatantly defy His authority when opt to dish out our vengeance.

2. Wrath is destructive. This point has already been stated, but it is one of the most prominent features of wrath. By its very nature, wrath is given to harming its target. It is the ultimate flexing of one's destructive muscles, with no other intention than to see its enemy reduced to rubble.

3. Wrath is impulsive. Wrath lives by the mantra, "Ready, fire, aim." It explodes now and asks questions later.

Proverbs 12:16 confirms this: "A fool's wrath is known at once, but a prudent man covers shame" (NKJV). There is wisdom in working through one's emotions "behind closed doors." Wrath, though, throws the doors wide open and announces itself in all its naked shame.

Impulsivity goes hand-in-hand with foolishness and wrath bows down to both: "He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, but he who is impulsive exalts folly" (Proverbs 14:29, NKJV).

4. Wrath is addictive. One can gain a reputation for being a hothead rather quickly. This is due to the fact that wrath is habit-forming. The explosive release of emotion is captivating and quickly takes hostage anyone foolish enough to embrace it.

As Proverbs 19:19 says, "A man of great wrath will suffer punishment; for if you rescue him, you will have to do it again." (NKJV)

5. Nothing good comes from wrath. If one's goal is to bear the fruit of the righteousness of God, wrath is the precise way *not* to do so. Period.

"...for the wrath of man *does not produce the righteousness of God*" (James 1:20, NKJV).

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In the end, Christians are commanded to be people of unmistakable self-control (Galatians 5:22-23; 2 Peter 1:5-6). There are few characteristics that more flagrantly defy this directive than wrath.

We would do well to flee from it.