

Preaching— an awesome task

Wrath, Final Judgement, Hell and the Glorious Gospel

Eryl Davies



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Originally published 1984 as *The Wrath of God*, this edition has been revised and expanded.

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Preface: second edition

The contents of this book originally formed the substance of addresses delivered at the annual Ministers' Conference of the Evangelical Movement of Wales at Bryn-y-groes, Bala, North Wales in June 1981. To many ministers in Wales and England, the 'Bala' Conference² continues to be a precious time of instruction, prayer, fellowship and conferring. I am grateful to the 1981 Conference members for the gracious way they received these talks and their request for them to be in print.³

Were it not for the request in the summer of 2015 by a young pastor in England to re-print the book, it is very likely that this new edition would never have appeared. He discovered the book (long out of print) on a bookshelf in a minister's study in Northern Ireland and found it helpful. At that point he contacted me to request a reprint because he wants more pastors to read it. I appreciate his support and thank him for writing a commendation.

I have resisted the temptation to expand the theme and detailed aspects of the subject⁴ unduly in order to keep this as a small book which can be easily read and consulted by preachers and Church members. That fact has been impressed upon me by pastors and publisher alike. However, I have edited the contents in a few places. I have updated the book by inserting references to more recent writings. While adding a few sentences I have also deleted others.

There are four further changes from the 1984 edition which can be noted. One change is that the chapters have been divided so there are now twelve chapters rather than the original five. This is intended to make the book more user-friendly. Another change is that study questions are included at the end of the chapters to stimulate further reflection on the subject.

A third change is a brief but new penultimate chapter which was originally part of an address I delivered to the Westminster Conference in 1991 on the Lord's handling of the doctrine of divine wrath and hell. I have included this biblical study here because it complements earlier chapters and I suspect many younger preachers are unaware of the material. Furthermore, even though preachers often struggle in preaching the doctrine of wrath, judgement and hell yet we rarely examine the way that the Lord Jesus Christ communicated the subject in his own ministry on earth. Obviously there is much for us to learn here.

The last change is that in the final chapter I outline and highlight a Gospel sermon preached in 1963. It is a sermon which has moved me deeply in recent years as I have read and re-read it in print. I am gripped by the passionate and biblical manner in which the preacher proclaimed the message of Christ. The chapter was needed in order to relate the truths of wrath, judgement and hell even more to the infinite and glorious love of God in Christ. It is surely amazing grace and 'tis mercy all! Hopefully too this final chapter

will challenge and excite us further concerning the nature and necessity of Gospel preaching.

Readers will quickly discover that this book is not an abstract, boring study of biblical doctrine but rather an attempt to elucidate and apply biblical teaching in the urgent context of evangelism and the preaching of the gospel.

May our triune God be pleased to stir preachers in the faithful, prayerful discharge of their responsibilities in what are exciting but challenging days of opportunity. Can I plead with congregations and pastors to engage more fervently and persistently in private and corporate prayer to our gracious God for his blessing and help in the proclamation of the gospel?

Eryl Davies
Cardiff.
February 2016

Chapter One

God's wrath

Several writers have remarked that there are more references in the Bible to the anger and wrath of God than to the love of God.⁵ There are also in the Old Testament alone over twenty Hebrew words used to describe the wrath of God, and these words are used nearly six hundred times. Contrary to popular opinion, the New Testament retains and develops this emphasis so that one writer claims with justification that 'the Bible could be called the book of God's wrath, for it is full of portrayals of divine retribution, from the cursing and banishment of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 to the overthrow of "Babylon" and the great assizes of Revelation'.⁶

Definition

Wrath describes *the controlled and permanent opposition of God's*

holy nature to all sin. Such hatred of sin on God's part is not a whim or an arbitrary decision, nor is it uncontrolled temper or capriciousness, as some imagine. Rather it is the consistent and necessary response of God's perfect, clean nature to sin. For this reason, wrath is as basic to the divine nature as is love; and without wrath God would cease to be God.

Wrath, therefore describes God's permanent opposition to sin, an opposition which has been and is still being revealed in the world. In his exegesis of Romans 1:18, Professor Tasker rightly observed that this revelation of divine wrath is not a 'prophetic present' (that is, a wrath which 'is going to be revealed' in the final day of wrath, as in Romans 2:5); nor is it a 'strict present' (namely, a wrath which 'is at this moment being revealed' with its manifestation being restricted to Paul's day). Rather, insists Tasker, it is a 'frequentative present', that is, a wrath which 'is continually being revealed'.⁷

Expressions of God's wrath

Both the Bible and history confirm the correctness of Tasker's exegesis. For example, the disharmony within nature and the existence of pain and death are eloquent testimonies to the divine wrath, as were the Flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. When Israel disobeyed God, whether in the wilderness or in the period of the Judges or under the prophets prior to the exile in Babylon, God's wrath was regularly stirred into activity against their sin. The destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in AD 70, involving the massacre of many Jews and the dispersing of others, must be similarly understood (Luke 21:23).

On the other hand, this wrath is sometimes expressed differently as in Romans 1:24, 26 and 28 when God withdraws in varying degrees his restraints from sinners, allowing them uncontrolled indulgence in the most detestable and hideous forms of sin. While

such indulgence is temporarily attractive, yet God's justice and wrath ensure that sinners reap what they sow. Suffering, disease, violence, strife, anarchy, wars, immorality, crime and unhappiness follow necessarily in the wake of such sin as the manifestations of God's wrath (Galatians 6:8–9).

Governments, magistrates, God-honouring laws, godly parents, a holy church, the knowledge and preaching of the Word are some of the means God uses to restrain and control sin. Through such means God exercises a preventing and restraining influence upon sinners, with the result that they are often unable to indulge in the grosser sins which rage in their hearts. In this way sin is curbed and the standards of justice and morality maintained within a stable society. There are times, however, when the holy God withdraws these restraints and in his wrath abandons people to the pursuit of their evil desires and plans. The contemporary situation in the West can be understood in this light.

The day of wrath

The wrath of God, however, is not only manifested in the 'frequentative present' (Romans 1:18). The Bible also teaches that this divine wrath will burst in like a flood upon the ungodly in the final 'day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgement of God'. It was this fact that John the Baptist referred to in Matthew 3:7 before he urged upon them the necessity of true conversion as the only means of escaping this wrath which is symbolized in terms of 'fire' in verses 10 and 12.

Some of the Lord's parables stress this point like the imagery of the final 'harvest' at the end of the world (Matthew 13: 24–30). Similarly the apostle Paul, speaking of his own people, writes: '... you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgement of God' (Romans 2:5). Unbelievers are 'children of wrath' (Ephesians 2:3) and if they do