



Wrath Has Come Upon Them

1 Thessalonians 2:14-16

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Overview: Paul's letter to the Thessalonians—to this point full of thanksgiving and effusive in praise—takes a different tone as he reflects on their sufferings at the hands of their countrymen. It is not clear what event Paul has in mind as he describes wrath coming upon their tormentors, but it is clear why: they persecuted the church, they killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and they drove out the apostles, all in an attempt to prevent anyone from being saved. Such actions stemmed from their hatred of the gospel and resulted in their sins finally meriting God's judgment. Consequently, it was not unchristian of Paul to celebrate their downfall since his rationale was theologically sound, he was innocent of their blood, and their removal opened the door for further evangelization. Although we should be cautious in our celebration of God's wrath today, we cannot dispense with this all-important doctrine lest we deny that God's wrath will come upon those who are not in Christ.

01. The wrath of God is consistent with His character, necessary for justice, and appropriate in its application; therefore, let us recognize God's wrath as evidence of His goodness, love, and holiness.

02. The wrath of God is not always immediate nor always discernible; therefore, let us be cautious in our declarations and humble in our explanations of God's wrath in this world.

03. The wrath of God is entirely avoidable for those who repent from their sins and turn to Jesus Christ by faith; therefore, let us worship the One who has taken God's wrath upon Himself.

STANDING FAST IN THE LORD

1. In what way does Paul's tone change in this letter? What is the occasion for this change in tone? Does it seem out of place for him to celebrate the wrath of God? How does this attitude towards those who are hostile to the gospel inform us about the preciousness of the gospel?

2. What reasons does Paul give for the wrath of God coming? What encouragement might the expectation of God's wrath bring to those who are being persecuted for the faith? How does their cry for deliverance underscore God's promise of justice? Other than God's wrath coming upon those who persecute the church, what other ways can we pray for persecutors of the faith?

3. Recall that Paul himself once persecuted the church. Why was he shown mercy? How did this change of heart transform his life with respect to laying his life down for the gospel rather than taking the lives of those opposed to the gospel? How, then, are Christians to respond to persecution today – by taking the lives of others or laying our lives down?

4. Paul speaks specifically about the wrath of God coming upon those who reject the knowledge of God in Romans 1:18-32. He is not as clear in 1 Thessalonians 2:17 as to what type of wrath has come upon those who oppose the gospel. How do these and other passages help us to appreciate the reality of God's wrath while instilling humility about what that wrath may look like in this lifetime?

5. If someone objects to the wrath of God on the grounds that it is unbecoming of God to be angry at sin or to judge people for their "shortcomings," how would you respond to them? Is it possible to even explain the gospel without referring to the wrath of God? Pray for opportunities to share the gospel, namely that Jesus Christ has taken our sin upon Himself in order that we might be saved.

For Further Reading: Chris Morgan and Robert Peterson, eds. *Is Hell for Real or Does Everyone Go to Heaven?* (Zondervan, 2011)

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