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Attributes of God

by A. W. Pink

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About the Author

Arthur W. Pink was born in Nottingham, England in 1886, and born again of the Spirit of God in 1908. He studied at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, USA for only six weeks before beginning his pastoral work in Colorado. From there he pastored churches in California, Kentucky and South Carolina before moving on to Sidney, Australia for a brief period, preaching and teaching. In 1934, He returned to his native land, England, and in 1940 took up permanent residence on the Isle of Lewis, Scotland, remaining there until his death twelve years later in 1952. Most of his works, including *The Attributes Of God*, first appeared as articles in the monthly *Studies In The Scriptures* published from 1922 to 1953.

Chapter 17

The Love of God to Us

BY “US” WE MEAN HIS PEOPLE. ALTHOUGH WE READ OF THE love “which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:39), Holy Writ knows nothing of a love of God *outside* of Christ. “The LORD is good to all: and His tender mercies are over all His works” (Psa 145:9), so that He provides the ravens with food. “He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil” (Luke 6:35), and His providence ministers unto the just and the unjust (Mat 5:45). But His *love* is reserved for His elect. That is unequivocally established by its characteristics, for the attributes of His love are identical with Himself. Necessarily so, for “God *is* love.”

The love of God in Christ

In making that postulate it is but another way to say God’s love is like Himself, from everlasting to everlasting—immutable. Nothing is more absurd than to imagine that anyone beloved of God can eternally perish or shall ever experience His everlasting vengeance. Since the love of God is “in Christ Jesus,” it was attracted by nothing in its objects, nor can it be repelled by anything in, of, or by them. “Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end” (Joh 13:1). The “world” in John 3:16 is a general term used in contrast with the Jews, and the verse must be interpreted so as not to contradict Psalms 5:5; 6:7; John 3:36; Romans 9:13.

The chief design of God is to commend the love of God in Christ, for He is the sole channel through which it flows. The Son has not induced the Father to love His people, but rather was it His love for them which moved Him to give His Son for them. Ralph Erskine said:

God hath taken a marvelous way to manifest His love. When He would show His power, He makes a world. When He would display His wisdom, He puts it in a frame and form that discovers its vastness. When He would manifest the grandeur and glory of His name, He makes a heaven, and puts angels and archangels, principalities and powers therein. And when He would manifest His love, what will He not do? God hath taken a great and marvelous way of manifesting it in Christ: His person, His blood, His death, His righteousness.

“All the promises of God in him [Christ] are yea, and in him. Amen, unto the glory of God” (2Co 1:20). As we were chosen in Christ (Eph 1:4), as we were accepted in Him (Eph 1:6), as our life is hid in Him (Col 3:3), so are we beloved in Him—“the love of God which is in Christ Jesus”: in Him as our Head and Husband, which is why nothing can separate us therefrom, for that union is indissoluble.

God's love to the saints

Nothing so warms the heart of the saint as a spiritual contemplation of God's love. As he is occupied with it, he is lifted outside of and above his wretched self. A believing apprehension fills the renewed soul with holy satisfaction, and makes him as happy as it is possible for one to be this side of heaven. To know and believe the love which God has toward me is both an earnest and a foretaste of heaven itself. Since God loves His people in Christ, it is not for any amiableness in or attraction about them: "Jacob have I loved." Yes, the naturally unattractive, yes, despicable, Jacob—"thou worm Jacob." Since God loves His people in Christ, it is not regulated by their fruitfulness, but is the same at all times. Because He loves them *in* Christ, the Father loves them *as* Christ. The time will come when His prayer will be answered, "that the world may know that thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved Me" (Joh 17:23). Only faith can grasp those marvelous things, for neither reasoning nor feelings can do so. God loves us in Christ. What infinite delight the Father has as He beholds His people in His dear Son! All our blessings flow from that precious fountain.

God's love to His people is not of yesterday. It did not begin with their love to Him. No, "we love him, because He first loved us" (1Jo 4:19). We do not first give to Him, that He may return to us again. Our regeneration is not the motive of His love, rather His love is the reason why He renews us after His image. This is often made to appear in the first manifestation of it, when so far from its objects being engaged in seeking Him, they are at their worst.

***Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee,
behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread My
skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swear
unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith
the LORD GOD, and thou becamest [manifestatively] Mine
(Eze 16:8).***

Not only are its objects often at their worst when God's love is first revealed to them, but actually doing their worst, as in the case of Saul of Tarsus. Not only is God's love antecedent to ours, but also it was borne in His heart toward us long before we were delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the Kingdom of His dear Son. It began not in time, but bears the date of eternity. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (Jer 31:3).

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1Jo 4:10). It is clear from those words that God loved His people while they were in a state of nature, destitute of all grace, without a particle of love towards Him or faith in Him; yes, while they were His enemies (Rom 5:8, 10). Clearly that lays me under a thousand times greater obligation to love, serve, and glorify Him than had He loved me for the first time when my heart was won. All the acts of God to His people in time are the expressions of the love He bore them from eternity. It is because God loves us in Christ, and has done so from everlasting, that the gifts of His love are irrevocable. They are the bestowal of “the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” The love of God indeed makes a change in us when it is “shed abroad in our hearts,” but it makes none in Him. He sometimes varies the dispensations of His providence toward us, but that is not because His affection has altered. Even when He chastens us, it is in love (Heb 12:6), since He has our good in view.

The operations of God’s love

Let us look more closely at some of the operations of God’s love. First, in *election*. “We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit [His quickening] and belief of the truth” (2Th 2:13). There is an infallible connection between God’s love and His selection of those who were to be saved. That election is the consequence of His love is clear again from Deuteronomy: “The LORD did not [1] set His love upon you, nor [2] choose you, because ye were more in number than any people” (7:7). So again: “In love, having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of His will” (Eph 1:4-5).

Second, in *redeeming*. As we have seen from 1Jo 4:10, out of His sovereign love God made provision for Christ to render satisfaction for their sins, though prior to their conversion He was angry with them in respect to His violated Law. And “how shall He not with him also freely give us all things?” (Rom 8:32)—another clear proof that His Son was not “delivered up” to the cross for all mankind. For He gives them neither the Holy Spirit, a new nature, nor repentance and faith.

Third, *effectual calling*. From the enthroned Savior the Father sends forth the Holy Spirit (Act 2:33). Having loved His elect with an everlasting love, with lovingkindness He draws them (Jer 31:3), quickens into newness of life, calls them out of darkness into His marvelous light, makes them His children. “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1Jo 3:1). If filiations does not issue from God’s love as a sure effect, to what purpose are those words?

Fourth, *healing of backslidings*: “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely” (Hos 14:4), without reluctance or hesitation. “Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it” (Song 8:7). Such is God’s love to His people—invincible, unquenchable. Not only is there no possibility of its expiring, but also the black waters of backsliding cannot extinguish it, nor the floods of unbelief put it out.

Nothing is more irresistible than death in the natural world, nothing so invincible as the love of God in the realm of grace. Goodwin remarked:

What difficulties does the love of God overcome! For God to overcome His own heart! Do you think it was nothing for Him to put His Son to death?...When He came to call us, had He no difficulties which love overcame? We were dead in trespasses and sins, yet from the great love wherewith He loved us, He quickened us in the grave of our corruption: “lo, he stinketh”—even then did God come and conquer us. After our calling, how sadly do we provoke God! Such temptations that if it were possible the elect should be deceived. It is so with all Christians. No righteous man but he is scarcely saved (1Pe 4:18), and yet saved he is, because the love of God is invincible: it overcomes all difficulties.

An application is hardly necessary for such a theme. Let God’s love daily engage your mind by devout meditations on it so that the affections of your heart may be drawn out to Him. When cast down in spirit, or in sore straits, plead His love in prayer, assured that it cannot deny anything good for you. Make God’s wondrous love to you the incentive of your obedience to Him—gratitude requires nothing less.

Chapter 17 The Love of God to Us

First please read chapter 17 in the text.

RESPONSE

The operations of God's love

14. List the four operations of God's love toward us, including Scripture references and key points.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

15. In the last paragraph of the chapter, Pink exhorts the reader to "let God's love daily engage your mind." In response to this exhortation, select two or three Scripture verses pertaining to God's love that especially touch your heart. Write these verses on 3 x 5 cards, memorize them, and recite them frequently during the week ahead.

At the end of the week, please record how these verses impacted any difficulties you experienced this week. What are the verses?

Lesson 11 *The Wrath of God*

Chapter 18

The Wrath of God

IT IS SAD INDEED TO FIND SO MANY PROFESSING CHRISTIANS who appear to regard the wrath of God as something for which they need to make an apology, or who at least wish there were no such thing. While some who would not go so far as to openly admit that they consider it a blemish on the divine character, yet they are far from regarding it with delight; they like not to think about it, and they rarely hear it mentioned without a secret resentment rising up in their hearts against it. Even with those who are more sober in their judgment, not a few seem to imagine that there is a severity about the divine wrath that makes it too terrifying to form a theme for profitable contemplation. Others harbor the delusion that God's wrath is not consistent with His goodness, and so seek to banish it from their thoughts.

God does not conceal the facts.

Yes, many there are who turn away from a vision of God's wrath as though they were called to look upon some blotch in the divine character or some blot upon the divine government. But what saith the Scriptures? As we turn to them we find that God has made no attempt to conceal the facts concerning His wrath. *He* is not ashamed to make it known that vengeance and fury belong unto Him. His own challenge is:

See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no god with Me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal; neither is there any that can deliver out of My hand. For I lift up My hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever. If I whet My glittering sword, and Mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to Mine enemies, and will reward them that hate Me (Deu 32:39-41).

A study of the concordance will show that there are *more* references in Scripture to the anger, fury, and wrath of God, than there are to His love and tenderness. Because God is holy, He hates all sin; and because He hates all sin, His anger burns against the sinner (Psa 7:11).

Now the wrath of God is as much a divine perfection as is His faithfulness, power, or mercy. It *must be* so, for there is no blemish whatever, not the slightest defect in the character of God; yet there *would be* if "wrath" were absent from Him! Indifference to sin is a moral blemish, and he who hates it not is a moral leper. How could He who is the Sum of all excellency look with equal satisfaction upon virtue and vice, wisdom and folly? How could He who is infinitely holy disregard sin and refuse to manifest His "severity" (Rom 11:22) toward it? How could He, who delights only in that which is pure and lovely, not loathe and hate that which is impure and vile? The very nature of God makes Hell as real a necessity, as imperatively and eternally requisite, as Heaven is. Not only is there no imperfection in God, but there is no perfection in Him that is less perfect than another.

The wrath of God is His eternal detestation of all unrighteousness. It is the displeasure and indignation of divine equity against evil. It is the holiness of God stirred into activity against sin. It is the moving cause of that just sentence which he passes upon evildoers. God is angry against sin because it is a rebelling against His authority, a wrong done to His inviolable sovereignty. Insurrectionists against God's government shall be made to know that God *is* the Lord. They shall be made to feel how great that Majesty is which they despise, and how dreadful is that threatened wrath which they so little regarded. Not that God's anger is a malignant and malicious retaliation, inflicting injury for the sake of it, or in return for injury received. No, though God will vindicate His dominion as the Governor of the universe, He will not be vindictive.

That divine wrath *is* one of the *perfections* of God is not only evident from the considerations presented above, but is also clearly established by the express declarations of His own Word. "For the wrath of God is revealed *from heaven*" (Rom 1:18). Robert Haldane comments on this verse as follows:

It was revealed when the sentence of death was first pronounced, the earth cursed, and man driven out of the earthly paradise, and afterwards by such examples of punishment as those of the Deluge, and the destruction of the Cities of the Plain by fire from heaven, but especially by the reign of death throughout the world. It was proclaimed in the curse of the Law on every transgression, and was intimated in the institution of sacrifice, and in all the services of the Mosaic dispensation. In the eighth chapter of this epistle, the Apostle calls the attention of believers to the fact that the whole creation has become subject to vanity, and groaneth and travaileth together in pain. The same creation which declares that there is a God, and publishes His glory, also proves that He is the Enemy of sin and the Avenger of the crimes of men...

But above all, the wrath of God was revealed from heaven when the Son of God came down to manifest the divine character, and when that wrath was displayed in His sufferings and death, in a manner more awful than by all the tokens God had before given of His displeasure against sin. Besides this, the future and eternal punishment of the wicked is now declared in terms more solemn and explicit than formerly. Under the new dispensation, there are two revelations given from heaven, one of wrath, the other of grace.

Again, that the wrath of God is a divine perfection is plainly demonstrated by what we read in Psalm 95:11: "Unto whom I swear in My wrath." There are two occasions of God's "swearing": in making promises (Gen 22:16), and in pronouncing judgments (Deu 1:34ff). In the former, He swears in mercy to His children; in the latter, He swears to deprive a wicked generation of its inheritance because of murmuring and unbelief. An oath is for solemn confirmation (Heb 6:16). In Genesis 22:16 God says, "By *Myself* have I sworn." In Psalm 89:35 He declares, "Once have I sworn *by My holiness* ." While in Psalm 95:11 He affirms, "I swear *in My wrath* ." Thus the great Jehovah Himself appeals to His "wrath" as a perfection equal to His "holiness": He swears by the one as much as by the other! Again, as in Christ "dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col 2:9), and as all the divine perfections are illustriously displayed by Him (Joh 1:18), therefore do we read of "the *wrath* of the Lamb" (Rev 6:16).

The importance of reflecting upon God's wrath

The wrath of God is a perfection of the divine character upon which we need to frequently meditate. First, that our hearts may be duly impressed by God's detestation of sin. We are ever prone to regard sin lightly, to gloss over its hideousness, to make excuses for it. But the more we study and ponder God's abhorrence of sin and His frightful vengeance upon it, the more likely are we to realize its heinousness. Secondly, to beget a true fear in our souls for God: "Let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:28-29). We cannot serve him "acceptably" unless there is due "reverence" for His awful Majesty and "godly fear" of His righteous anger; and these are best promoted by frequently calling to mind that "our God is a consuming fire." Thirdly, to draw out our souls in fervent praise for our having been delivered *from* "the wrath to come" (1Th 1:10).

Our readiness or our reluctance to *meditate* upon the wrath of God becomes a sure test of our hearts' true attitude toward Him. If we do not truly rejoice in God, for what He is in Himself, and that because of *all* the perfections which are eternally resident in Him, then how dwelleth *the love of God* in us? Each of us needs to be most prayerfully on his guard against devising an image of God in our thoughts which is patterned after our own evil inclinations. Of old the Lord complained, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as *thyself*" (Psa 50:21). If we rejoice not "at the remembrance of His *holiness*" (Psa 97:12), if we rejoice not to know that in a soon-coming Day, God will make a most glorious display of His *wrath* by taking vengeance upon all who now oppose Him, it is proof positive that our hearts are *not* in subjection to Him, that we are yet in our sins, and that we are on the way to the everlasting burnings.

God's justice exercised through His wrath

"*Rejoice*, O ye nations [Gentiles] with His people, *for* He will avenge the blood of His servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries" (Deu 32:43). And again we read—

I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous are His judgments: for He hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of His servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia (Rev 19:1-3).

Great will be the rejoicing of the saints in that day when the Lord shall vindicate His majesty, exercise His awful dominion, magnify His justice, and overthrow the proud rebels who have dared to defy Him.

"If thou, LORD, shouldest mark [impute] iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (Psa 130:3). Well may each of us ask this question, for it is written, "the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment" (Psa 1:5). How sorely was *Christ's* soul exercised with thoughts of God's marking the iniquities of His people when they were upon Him!

He was amazed and very heavy (Mark 14:33). His awful agony, His bloody sweat, His strong cries and supplications (Heb 5:7), His reiterated prayers ("If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me"), His last dreadful cry ("My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me?") all manifest what fearful apprehensions He had of *what* it was for God to "mark iniquities." Well may poor sinners cry out, "Lord, *who* shall stand," when the Son of God Himself so trembled beneath the weight of His wrath! If thou, my reader, hast not "fled for refuge" to Christ, the only Savior, "how wilt thou do in the swelling of the Jordan?" (Jer 12:5).

When I consider how the goodness of God is abused by the greatest part of mankind, I cannot but be of his mind that said, The greatest miracle in the world is God's patience and bounty to an ungrateful world. If a prince hath an enemy got into one of his towns, he doth not send them in provision, but lays close siege to the place, and doth what he can to starve them. But the great God, that could wink all His enemies into destruction, bears with them, and is at daily cost to maintain them. Well may He command us to bless them that curse us, who Himself does good to the evil and unthankful. But think not, sinners, that you shall escape thus; God's mill goes slow, but grinds small; the more admirable His patience and bounty now is, the more dreadful and insupportable will that fury be which ariseth out of His abused goodness. Nothing smoother than the sea, yet when stirred into a tempest, nothing rageth more. Nothing so sweet as the patience and goodness of God, and nothing so terrible as His wrath when it takes fire (William Gurnall, 1660).

Then "flee," my reader, flee to Christ; "flee *from* the wrath to come" (Mat 3:7) ere it be too late. Do not, we earnestly beseech you, suppose that this message is intended for somebody else. It is *to you* ! Do not be contented by *thinking you have* already fled to Christ. Make *certain* ! Beg the Lord to search your heart and show you yourself.

A Word to Preachers

Brethren, do we in our oral ministry, preach on this solemn subject as much as we ought? The Old Testament prophets frequently told their hearers that their wicked lives provoked the Holy One of Israel, and that they were treasuring up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath. And conditions in the world are no better now than they were then! Nothing is so calculated to arouse the careless and cause carnal professors to search their hearts, as to enlarge upon the fact that "God is angry with the wicked every day" (Psa 7:11). The forerunner of Christ warned his hearers to "flee from the wrath to come" (Mat 3:7). The Savior bade His auditors, "Fear him, which after He hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him" (Luk 12:5). The Apostle Paul said, "Knowing therefore the *terror* of the Lord, we persuade men" (2Co 5:11). Faithfulness demands that we speak as plainly about hell as about heaven.

Study Questions: Lesson 11

First please read chapter 18 in the text.

RESPONSE

God does not conceal the facts

1. In your own words, explain what God says about His vengeance and fury toward sin. Include the Scripture reference.
2. Is God's wrath a divine perfection? Explain.
3. What is God's response to evil and unrighteousness?
4. Why is God angry against sin?
5. a. What does God's Word say about where His wrath is revealed? Include the Scripture reference.
b. What is the prime example of God's wrath originating from this place?

The importance of reflecting upon God's wrath

6. List the three reasons why it is necessary to meditate frequently on God's divine wrath toward sin. Include Scripture references and key points with your answer.
7. How is a reluctance to meditate on God's wrath a true test of one's attitude?
8. What is the danger in devising an image of God according to our own inclination? Include Scriptures and key points.

God's justice exercised through his wrath

9. a. Why will God's people be full of rejoicing one day? Include Scriptures and key points.
b. What will the Lord do in that day?
10. a. What question does Pink implore the reader to ask? Include Scripture references and key points.
b. Have you fled for refuge to Christ, the only Savior? Have you responded to the warning in Matt. 3:7 -- "flee from the wrath to come?" If so, when? If not, why not?

REFLECTION

11. Take a few minutes to review this lesson. Did you discover, as a result of this study, that your attitude toward God's wrath was something other than scriptural? Explain.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

12. In the section *God does not conceal the facts*, Pink points out that there are more references in Scripture about God's anger, fury, and wrath than there are about His love and tenderness. Refer to your concordance, select two or three Scriptures concerning God's anger, fury, or wrath that are important to you, write these verses, and include your thoughts about each one.