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John Gill's

A BODY OF DOCTRINAL DIVINITY

Book 1—Chapter 17

**OF THE ANGER AND WRATH OF
GOD.**

Besides the love and kindness of God, his grace, favour, and good will, his mercy, pity, and compassion; and his longsuffering and forbearance; which flow from the goodness of his nature; there are other things to be considered, which may come under the notion of affections; as anger, wrath, hatred, &c. The anger and wrath of God are often used promiscuously in Scripture, to signify the same thing, and yet they sometimes seem to be distinct; and according to our notion of them, as in men, they may be distinguished: anger is a lower and lesser degree of wrath, and wrath is the height of anger; and accordingly I shall distinctly consider them, as in God.

1. The Anger of God. And shall, first, show that it belongs to God; and in what sense, and on what account. And, secondly, with whom he is angry; or on whom his anger is exercised.

1a. First, That Anger belongs to God, or may be predicated of him. This is denied by some philosophers of the Cynic and Stoic sects, because it is a passion; they allow grace, good will, and beneficence in God to men, but not anger; this they suppose to be a weakness, and even a sort of madness, and what is unbecoming a wise and good man, and much more unbecoming Deity. The Epicureans deny that either is in God; neither favour and good will, nor anger and wrath; for they imagine he has no concern in the affairs of men, and neither regards their good actions, nor their bad ones; and so is neither pleased nor displeased with them; and is neither kind and favourable to them; nor is angry with them, nor resents what is done by them. But the scriptures everywhere ascribe anger to God; and often speak of it, as being kindled against particular persons, and against whole bodies of men; and give many

particular instances of it: to produce the whole proof of this, would be to transcribe a great part of the Bible. But then anger is to be considered not as a passion, or affection in God, as it is in men; and especially as it may be defined from the etymology of the Latin word for it "ira", as given by a learned grammarian, deriving it from "ire", "to go"; as if a man, when in anger, goes out of himself; and when he lays it down, returns to himself again; this cannot, in any sense, be ascribed to God: rather it may be, as if it was "ura", and so is "ab urendo", from burning; or rather from the Hebrew word **הרה** which signifies to burn; and the anger of God is compared to fire in Scripture, and is often said to be kindled; but then we are not to imagine, when God is said to be angry, that there is any commotion or perturbation in God's mind; that he is ruffled and discomposed, or that there is any pain or uneasiness in him, as in human minds; so it may be in finite created spirits, but not in an infinite and uncreated one, as God is: and much less is this to be considered as a criminal passion in him, as it too often is in men; for God is a pure and holy being; without iniquity: besides, there may be anger in men without sin; we are exhorted to be angry and sin not, (Eph. 4:26) and it is certain there was anger in the human nature of Christ, in whom there was no sin, nor was he conscious of any, (Mark 3:5) and so there may be in the divine mind, without an imputation of weakness or sin. Anger in God is no other than a disgust with sin, and with sinners, on account of it; it is often said in Scripture, that such and such a thing displeased him, or was evil, and not right in his sight (Num. 11:1; 2 Sam. 11:27; Ps. 60:1; Isa. 59:15). All sin is displeasing to God; he cannot take any pleasure in it, nor look upon it with delight; it is so contrary to his nature, and repugnant to his will, he cannot but have an aversion to it, and an abhorrence of it; and there are some sins more especially which provoke him to anger; as the sins against the first table of the law, particularly idolatry; which, of all sins, is the most provoking to him: since it strikes at his very being, and robs him of his glory; see (Deut. 32:16, 21; Judg. 2:12, 13; 1 King 16:33). Likewise distrust of the power and providence of God, murmuring at it, and complaining of it; which was often the case of the Israelites; and by which they provoked the Lord to anger; so perjury, false swearing, the taking of the name of God in vain, and blasphemy of it; profanation of the Lord's day, and neglect of his word, worship, and ordinances: and not these only, but sins against the second table of the law, are highly displeasing to God, and resented by him; as disobedience to parents, murder, adultery, theft, false witness, covetousness, and every evil thing (see Isa. 5:24, 25). Now "who knoweth the power of God's anger?" (Ps. 90:11) nothing can resist it, nor stand before it; not rocks and mountains, which are overturned and cast down by it; nor the mightiest monarchs, nor the proudest mortals, nor the stoutest and adamant hearts; none can stand before God when once he is angry, (Job 9:5, 13; Ps. 76:7; Nah. 1:6).

1b. Secondly, The objects of the anger of God, or on whom it is exercised. "God is angry with the wicked every day", (Ps. 7:11) because they are daily sinning against him; their whole lives are one continued series and course of wickedness; all they do is sin; their very actions in civil life, the ploughing of the wicked, is sin; and all their religious services are but "splendida peccata", "shining sins", and so are displeasing to God, and resented by him; their sacrifices, brought with a wicked mind, without

a right principle, and a right end, are an abomination to him, (Prov. 21:4, 27) being in the flesh, in an unregenerate state, they cannot please God, nor do the things which are pleasing in his sight; being destitute of the grace of God, and particularly of faith; "without which it is impossible to please him." These, though God is angry with them continually, yet they do not always appear under the visible and public tokens of his resentment; the "rod of God" is not on them; nor are they in trouble, as other men, and have more than heart can wish; oftentimes their families, flocks, and herds, increase; and they spend their days in health, wealth, and pleasure, (Job 21:7-13; Ps. 73:3-12) and seem as if they were the favourites of heaven, and think themselves to be such. But though God is slow to anger, as he is often described, moves slowly to express his anger; yet he will most certainly do it in the issue of things; and though men may promise themselves impunity in sin, and fancy they shall have peace when they walk after the imagination of their evil hearts, and add sin to sin; yet at length God will not spare them; but his anger and jealousy shall smoke against them, and all the curses written in the law shall come upon them, (Deut. 29:19, 20).

Moreover, God is angry with his own special people, holy and good men; we read of his anger being kindled against Aaron and Miriam, for speaking against Moses; and against Moses and Aaron, for not sanctifying him before the children of Israel; insomuch that neither of them were admitted to enter the land of Canaan; and against David, Solomon, and others, for sins committed by them. And this is not at all inconsistent with the love of God unto them: anger is not opposite to love; there may be anger in the nearest and dearest relatives; and where there is the most affectionate regard to each other: the anger of Jacob was kindled against his beloved Rachel; a father may be angry with his son, and chastise him for a fault, and yet dearly love him; and a son may be angry with a father, as Jonathan was with Saul, yet bear a true filial affection for him. God loves his people with an everlasting and unchangeable love, and never alters and varies in it; and yet may be angry, that is, displeased with them, and show his resentment at sin committed by them, by his chastisement of them, and still continue his love to them; for even that is done in love. Besides, the anger of God towards them, is often only in their sense and apprehension of it; when God goes forth towards them, in some dispensations of his, which are not agreeable to them, they conclude he is angry with them; and when these dispensations are varied, then they suppose his anger is turned away from them, (Isa. 12:1) so when he hides his face from them, and unbelief prevails, they interpret it, putting them away in anger, and shutting up his tender mercies in anger, (Ps. 27:9, 77:9) when he seems to turn a deaf ear to their prayers, and does not give an immediate answer to them; this they call being angry against the prayer of his people, (Ps. 80:4) and when he afflicts them, in one way or another, then they apprehend he comes forth in anger against them; and "they have no soundness in their flesh, because of his anger; nor rest in their bones, because of their sins", (Ps. 38:3) but when he takes off his afflicting hand, grants his gracious presence, and manifests his pardoning love and grace, then they conclude he has turned himself from the fierceness of his anger (Ps. 85:2, 3). Now this apparent anger, or appearance of anger, "endures but for a moment", (Ps. 30:5) a very short space of

time indeed; though God hides his face from his people, and chides them for their sins: yet he does not keep anger for ever: this is the criterion by which he is distinguished from other gods, in that he retains not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy, (Ps. 103:9; Mic. 7:18) and in this the anger of God towards his people, differs from his anger to wicked men, since the one is but for a moment, and the other is continual.

2. The Wrath of God is the heat of his great anger, (Deut. 29:24) it is his anger not only kindled and incensed, but blown up into a flame; it is the "indignation" of his anger, the "fury" and "fierceness" of it, (Isa. 30:30, 42:25; Hosea 11:9) and it seems to be no other than his punitive justice, and includes his will to punish sinners according to the demerit of their sins in strict justice; his threatenings to do it, and the actual execution of it; which is the vengeance that belongs to him, and he will recompense; even his vindictive wrath, or vengeful judgment; "What if God willing to show his wrath", &c.? (Rom. 9:22). Now the wrath of God may be considered,

2a. As temporary, or what is executed in the present life; of which there have been many instances and examples, and there will be more; and a brief review of them will give a more enlarged idea of the wrath of God. Not to take notice of the apostate angels, whom God has cast down to hell; where, though they may not be in full torment, yet are dreadful instances of the wrath of God against sin; since not one of them have been spared, or have shared in pardoning grace and mercy. I shall only observe what examples of it have been, or will be, among men. The first instance of it is in the condemnation of Adam, and all his posterity, for the first sin, and for only one single sin of his. How great must that sin be! what sinfulness must there be in it! how greatly must the divine Being be incensed by it! in that, for it, he has caused death, that is, his wrath to pass in judgment on him, and all his offspring; so that, in consequence of it, all the children of Adam are the children of God's wrath. The next is the drowning of the old world, when full of violence and corruption; so that God repented he had made man in it, and it grieved him to the heart; and in his wrath he determined to destroy man and beast in it; and which he did, by bringing a flood on the world of the ungodly. Then follows another, though not so general; but limited and restrained to a part of the world; the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and others of the plain; whose inhabitants being notorious sinners, provoked the eyes of God's glory to such a degree, that he rained fire and brimstone from heaven upon them; and set them as an example and emblem of mens' suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. The plagues inflicted on the Egyptians, for not letting Israel go, when demanded of them, is another instance of the wrath of God; for by inflicting these on them, he not only made a way to his anger, to show it forth, as the Psalmist says; but, as he also observes, "he cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, wrath, indignation, and trouble", (Ps. 78:49, 50). The children of Israel themselves often provoked the Lord to wrath; and brought it down upon them, for their sins; as at Horeb, when they made the calf; at Taberah, Massah, and Kibrothhattaavah, where they murmured against the Lord, (Deut. 9:8, 19, 22) as they did likewise at the report of the spies, concerning the land of Canaan; when "God swore in his wrath, they should not enter into his rest." And again, upon the

affair of Korah, and his accomplices, when wrath went forth from the Lord, and the plague began, (Num. 14:23, 16:46). Witness, also, each of their captivities; particularly their captivity in Babylon, through their mocking at, and misuse of the prophets of the Lord; so that wrath arose against them; and there was no remedy; and their last captivity, and destruction, by the Romans; when wrath came upon them to the uttermost; and under which wrath, and in which captivity they are to this day. Whenever the four sore judgments of God, the sword, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts, have been exercised in the world, as they often have been; they are always in wrath; and these with earthquakes, and such like uncommon events, are presignifications, and foretokens of greater wrath yet to come; and in a little while, the seven vials full of the wrath of God, will be poured forth on antichrist, and on the antichristian states; and the judgment of God will come on Babylon in one day. And when the end of all things is come, the earth, and all in it will be burnt with fire, and the heavens melt away with fervent heat; the day of the Lord will burn like an oven, and the wicked, like stubble, will be burnt up by it, and will have neither root nor branch left: all which will be expressive of the great wrath of God. But there is no greater instance of it, or what more fully demonstrates it, than what our Lord Jesus Christ suffered and endured as the Surety of his people, in their room and stead; when, their sins being imputed to him, were found on him, and he was stricken for them; the sword of justice was sheathed in him; the vindictive wrath of God was poured forth upon him, to the uttermost of the demerit of sin; God spared him not: how inconceivably great must his wrath be against sin, when God spared not in the least his own dearly beloved Son, but suffered him to be put to the most exquisite pain, both in body and soul, for the sins of his people!

2b. There is the wrath of God that is yet to come: the Scriptures speak of future wrath; wrath that will take place in the life which is to come; which in part, commences at the death of wicked men; and will be complete at their resurrection from the dead (Matthew 3:7; 1 Thess. 1:10). This is expressed by fire, than which nothing is more intolerable; even devouring fire and everlasting burnings, not to be endured; this is no other than the curse of the law that is broken; which not only reaches to this life, but to that which is to come; it is the same with the second death; which lies in a separation from God, and, in a sense of his hot displeasure; it is called hell and hell fire; the word for which, in the New Testament, is taken from Gehinnom, or the valley of Hinnom; where the Jews burnt their children in sacrifice to Molech; and which place, from the beating of drums in it, that the shrieks of the children might not be heard by their parents, was called Tophet; of which the prophet says, as an emblem of hell fire, or the fire of divine wrath; "Tophet is ordained of old--the pile thereof is fire, and much wood: the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it", (Isa. 30:33) which is an awful representation of the wrath of God. And by whatsoever term this state of wrath is expressed, it is always spoken of as what will continue for ever: it is called everlasting fire, everlasting punishment, everlasting destruction, "the smoke of torment, that ascends for ever and ever"; and for the commencement of which, in its full extent, there is a day fixed, called, "the day of wrath, and righteous judgment of God";

until which time God reserves wrath for his adversaries; it is laid up in store with him, among his treasures, and will be ever laying out, and pouring forth.

As to the objects of this wrath, seeing it is revealed against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men; it lies against all that are unrighteous and ungodly; and as all have sinned, and are under sin, all are "children of wrath", (Eph. 2:3; Rom. 1:18, 3:9, 23) but there are some particularly described, on whom this wrath comes, and they are called "children of disobedience", (Eph. 5:5, 6; Col. 3:5, 6) such who are disobedient to the light of nature, rebel against it, and hold truth in unrighteousness, which that discovers; and so as they sin without law, they perish without law, (Rom. 1:18, 19, 21, 28, 2:12) and who also are disobedient to the law of God, break it, and are convicted by it, as transgressors, whom it pronounces guilty, and is the ministration of condemnation and death unto them; and who are disobedient to the gospel of Christ, obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, and are slaves to their sinful lusts and pleasures; on these come indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish; even on every soul of man that does evil, (2 Thess. 1:8; Rom. 2:8, 9) they are also represented as unbelievers: "He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him": he that does not believe that Christ is the Son of God, that he is the Messiah and Saviour of men, the sentence of wrath, which the law has passed on him, as a transgressor of that, remains; and since he denies divine revelation, rejects the gospel scheme, and disbelieves Christ as a Saviour, and salvation by him, there is no help for him; wrath is on him, and that without remedy, it must abide: now it is not any sort of unbelief for which this wrath is, and abides; not for that which is through the want of the means of faith, such as in heathens; for "how shall they believe on him of whom they have not heard?" (Rom. 10:14, 17) nor which is through the want of the special grace of faith, which is the gift of God, and peculiar to his elect, and which he only can give, and yet denies it; and which, without his grace vouchsafed, they can never have: but it is the disbelief of the report of the gospel, by such who have the opportunity of reading and hearing it, and yet either attend not to the evidence of it; or, notwithstanding that, reject it; they receive not the record God has given of his Son, and so make him a liar, than which nothing is more provoking to wrath (1 John 5:10). This was the case of the Jews of old, (John 3:19) and is of the deists of the present age. In short, the wrath of God comes upon men either for their sins against the light of nature, or against the law of God, or against the gospel of Christ.

There are some on whom no wrath comes here, nor hereafter; who are the vessels of mercy, afore prepared for glory: concerning whom Jehovah says, "fury is not in me"; and to whom he is all love, "love" itself, (Isa. 27:4; 1 John 4:16) being sinners indeed, and transgressors of the law of God, they are children of wrath as others, (Eph. 2:3) which phrase not only means that they are serving of wrath, but that, as they are sinners, they are found guilty of it; and not only found guilty, but are condemned unto it; they are really under the sentence of wrath, condemnation, and death; they are obnoxious to the curse of the law, which is no other than the wrath of God; they are liable to it, and in danger of it; and being so near it, how is it that they escape it, and are secured from it? They are secured from it by the decree of

God, who has appointed them not to wrath, but to obtain salvation, (1 Thess. 5:9) which decree is unfrustrable by the oath of God, who has sworn that he will not be wrath with them, (Isa. 54:9) which is immutable: by the suretyship engagements of Christ for them, to bear it in their room; and till that was done, God forbore to execute the sentence; called the forbearance of God, (Rom. 3:25) by Christ's actually bearing the chastisement of their peace; by being made a curse for them, and enduring the wrath of God in their room; whereby he delivered them from wrath to come, (Ps. 89:38; 1 Thess. 5:10) and by his righteousness imputed to them, through which, being justified, they are saved from wrath, (Rom. 5:9) though even these persons may have, at times, some apprehensions of the wrath of God; as, particularly, under first awakenings, and convictions of sin; when the law works a sense of wrath in them, and leaves in them a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation; when they flee to Christ, from wrath to come, and say, "Lord, save us, or we perish"; and afterwards, when under the hiding of God's face, or his afflicting hand is upon them, they imagine that the wrath of God lies hard upon them, and his fierce wrath goes over them, (Ps. 88:7, 16; Lam. 3:1) but in reality, there is no wrath comes upon them now; their afflictions and chastisements are all in love; and there will be no curse hereafter; but they shall always see the face of God, and be "in his presence, where are fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore" (Rev. 3:19, 22:3, 4).