

Third Sunday in Lent, 1869

*God's Wrath on the Children of Disobedience  
After Christ's Reconciliation*

By C. F. W. Walther (Translated by E. Myers)

Oh God, Thou art a holy and righteous God. Thou art not a God who hast pleasure in unrighteousness. Wicked men do not remain in Thy sight. The boastful do not stand before Thee. Thou art the enemy of all evildoers. Thou destroyest the liar. The bloodthirsty and the false are abomination in Thy sight. Thou art a zealous God who visitest the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Thee. Thou art a righteous Judge, a God who threatens the wicked every day. Thou hast whetted Thy sword and strung Thy bow against them who will not be converted. Thou takest deadly aim. Thou hast prepared Thy arrows to destroy.

Oh holy and righteous God, we confess that our hopelessly corrupt heart forgets Thy holiness and righteousness so often, despises Thy commands and threats, loves the sins Thou hatest, and wilfully abuses Thy grace, patience, and longsuffering.

Oh enter not into judgment therefore with us. Do not cast us away from Thy presence. Do not give us up to the evil lusts of our heart, but awaken and enlighten us so that our lives may be shaken in awe of the majesty of Thy holiness and righteousness. May our hearts be put in fear so we would in true repentance seek and seize Thy grace by faith and thereafter walk sanctified by Thy holy fear.

To that end bless the preaching of Thy word in this hour for the sake of Thy dear Son Jesus Christ, our Savior, Mediator, and Redeemer. Amen.

*Scripture text: Ephesians 5:1-9. Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;)*

Beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus!

One of the chief reasons why unbelievers reject the Old Testament in particular is that God is so often presented on its pages as a wrathful God. They say that a religion ascribing wrath and fury to God could not possibly be the true religion. God, they say, is only love, nothing but a loving father who only loves all men, and who will surely overlook the sins of men, His children, as human weaknesses.

If there is any error as terrible as it is frightful, it is the one that God is not angry at sin. That so many deny this in our day proves that baptized Christendom has now fallen deeper than even the fallen heathen world. For all the heathen always believed that there is a god who is angry at sin.

That is why they tried to reconcile him by certain sacrifices. Concerning the heathen world Paul testifies, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth (that is, their natural better knowledge) in unrighteousness." (Romans 1:18).

That God is angry at sin is written by nature in every man's heart. For why is it that men are restless when they have done evil though no one else may know about it? Their own "conscience...and their own thoughts...accusing or else excusing one another" bear witness that they have angered an invisible, mighty and zealous Judge who will punish them in time or eternity.

Moreover, why is it that death rules the whole world as a king of terror, pitilessly takes the child from the crib and from the breast of its mother, tearing spouse from spouse, fathers from children? Why is it that from the beginning until this hour death, like an avenging angel, ceaselessly stalks all mankind, sparing neither palace nor hut, killing day and night, and has overlooked no one? This is irrefutable proof that all men are by nature sinners and because of God's righteous wrath children of death. That is why Moses exclaims in Psalm 90:7, 11: "For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled. Who knoweth the power of thine anger? Even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath."

Moreover, why is it that the whole world is a vale of tears, full of misery, misfortune, anxiety, tears and sighs? Why have the wisdom and labors of men been unable to change this up to now? Here is irrefutable evidence that the world has fallen away from its Creator, and is a world of sinners who must groan under the curse, wrath and punishment of a holy God because of their sins.

And finally, does not also the history of nations, kingdoms, states and cities show that a God who is angry against sin rules and judges them? What is the lesson of the drowning of all mankind (except eight souls) sunk in all sins and abominations? What is the lesson of the destruction of the bestial, unchaste cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire and brimstone from heaven - cities still covered by the sulphurous and salty waves of the Dead Sea? What is the lesson of the fearful destruction of the murderous city of Jerusalem predicted by Christ 40 years in advance? What is the lesson of the destruction of all the mighty kingdoms of antiquity, following whenever they had filled up the measure of their sins?

Oh blind world! Everywhere the great God reveals His wrath against sin which burns to the lowest hell. Yet the world wants to know only of a god who only loves! But a god who is not angry does not love either. For only he can love the good who hates the evil. The god of the unbelieving world who knows no anger is therefore nothing but an empty fiction of worldly hearts trifling with or even loving their sins. He is a useless idol whose prototype is sinful man himself.

My friends, did not Christ tread "the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God"? (Rev. 19:15). After Christ atoned for the sins of all men and reconciled God through His bloody sacrifice upon the altar of the cross, did God cease to be a wrathful God? No, my friends! It is this earnest truth which the apostle Paul declares through the Holy Spirit in the Epistle of today when he cries out to the believers at Ephesus, "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience." On the basis of these words permit me to present to you today *the truth important also for believers*, that

# GOD'S WRATH COMES UPON THE CHILDREN OF DISOBEDIENCE EVEN AFTER CHRIST'S RECONCILIATION.

Let us consider

1. The Content of this Truth, and
2. Its Importance also for Believers.

## [1. The Content of the Truth that God's Wrath Comes Upon the Children of Disobedience even after Christ's Reconciliation]

After having specified some of the sins which exclude from God's kingdom, the apostle in our text adds these significant words: "Let no man deceive you with vain words; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience."

First of all let us learn the content of this truth.

We learn first that even after Christ appeased God's wrath, it still exists.

This is an earnest truth, my friends. Yet it could not be otherwise. For God is an eternal, perfect Being and therefore not subject to any change whatsoever. "Thou art the same," David by the Holy Spirit says to God. James declares, "With whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." (James 1:17). God's attributes can as little decrease as increase. Imperfect man can lose this or that attribute and still remain a true man. But this is impossible with God. God's attributes are not accidental qualities and virtues which God can have or not have, keep or not keep without ceasing to be God. What are called God's attributes are His very essence. They are God Himself. God's Word not only says that God *has* love, but also that He *is* love; not only that God *has* power, but also that He *is* power; not only that God *has* holiness and righteousness, but also that He *is* holiness and righteousness. Therefore God's love is nothing else but the divine essence, insofar as it is love, the loving God Himself. God's might is nothing else but the divine essence, insofar as it is might, the almighty God Himself. God's holiness and righteousness is nothing else but the divine essence, insofar as it is holiness and righteousness, the holy and righteous God Himself. Therefore, as little as it is possible that God could ever cease being *God*, or that He could lose His *essence*, so little can God cease having the attributes of love, might, holiness and righteousness.

As it is with all of God's attributes, so it is also with God's wrath. Among men anger is mostly a sinful passion which comes and goes. God's anger, however, is something entirely different. When God becomes angry, He does not become emotionally stirred up as men do, but remains the untroubled, perfect, blessed God. For God's wrath is that invariable attribute inseparable from God, whereby God actually and truly is the enemy of sin, hates and abhors all sin, and is so minded against sin that He will and must punish it in time and eternity. Nor is this wrath against sin an accidental condition which God could also lack. Rather divine wrath is also nothing but His divine essence, in short, is God Himself.

Therefore as little as God can cease being God, so little can He ever, even for one moment, cease being a Person who is angry at sin. As long as light retains its nature it must shed light. As long as fire retains its nature it must burn. Likewise, as long as God retains His divine essence He must be angry at sin, angry for all eternity. This also is the reason why there is indeed eternal damnation and punishment.

Therefore no change took place in God even by Christ's atonement for sin. As certain as is the word of the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David, "Thou art the same," so certain it is that to this

very day God is angry at sin, just as He was *before* Christ's reconciliation. Christ Himself says expressly, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." (Matthew 5:17,18).

Hence the Law with its threats was not annulled through Christ's reconciliation, and neither was God's wrath mirrored in His Law [annulled]. In fact, nothing else has revealed more clearly that God is a holy Being who is angry at sin than that He would and could forgive no man's sins unless His only begotten Son sacrificed Himself for the reconciliation of sin, paid for man's guilt to the last penny and drank the very last drop of the cup of wrath. Therefore through His reconciliation God has indeed become a friend of *sinner*s - but not of *sin*. Only the devil is a friend of sin. Only the devil is eternally reconciled to sin.

Therefore whoever believes that after Christ's reconciliation God is no longer angry at sin, a friend of sin and reconciled to it, turns this reconciled God into a wicked god. Yes, terrible to say, he turns God into a devil. And actually the world worships none other but *him*, the devil, as its so-called "dear God," without even suspecting it.

This, then, is certain. Even after Christ's perfect sacrifice the wrath of God, the very highest Lord of lords, still exists.

My friends, the truth which the apostle expresses in our text contains even more. He writes, "Let no man deceive you with vain words," namely, about the sins listed earlier, "for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience." Even after Christ's reconciliation God's wrath against sin is not only present, but really does come upon the children of disobedience. It strikes and consumes them. Through Christ's reconciliation it has not become a dulled sword which God carries in its sheath, nor a hollow thunder without smashing lightning, nor an empty threat. Instead, to this very day God's wrath destroys millions of sinners who have been reconciled by Christ, and gives them up to eternal torment because of their sins.

Will you perhaps say, Did Christ then not really reconcile the sinful world? I reply Far be it to deny this! Christ has indeed perfectly atoned for the sins of all men, even the greatest. But how can this help a person if he rejects this reconciliation? Christ has indeed opened the gates of the prison of sin which had been closed tight by God's wrath. But how can that help a man if he wantonly remains in his prison of sin? Christ indeed triumphantly brought out of His grave a receipt in full for the guilt of all men. But how can this help him who tears up this receipt by his unbelief and tramples it underfoot? Christ has indeed perfectly satisfied and appeased God's wrath. But how can this help him who will not be reconciled with God who is now reconciled to him, but wants to be and to remain God's enemy?

Yes, after Christ's reconciliation the one sin which irredeemably damns a man is unbelief. Christ says, "The Holy Spirit will reprove the world of sin," and immediately adds by way of explanation, "Of sin, because they believe not on me." (John 16:8,9). But how can this help a sinner who remains in unbelief? By his unbelief the sinner, as it were, takes his sins which were nailed by Christ to the cross down from the cross and by unbelief restores their damning power to his canceled sins. A seriously wounded man who rejects the balm which could heal him dies, not because of his wounds, but because he refused the balm and thus dies of his wounds. Even so the sinful world rejecting Christ's atonement dies, not because of his wounds, but because he refused the balm and thus dies of his wounds. Even so the sinful world rejecting Christ's atonement dies, not because of the wounds of sin, but because it rejects the way of salvation, and thus still dies of the wounds of sin.

The unbelieving world may comfort itself with the thought, Why should God be so cruel as to be angry with us because we do not believe what we cannot comprehend and therefore cannot believe? The poor, blind world does not remember that God's wrath does not *come* upon them because of their unbelief, for it already *has come* upon them as a result of their *sin*. Because of their unbelief it merely *remains* upon them. For Christ clearly and solemnly says, "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God *abideth* on him." (John 3:36). So there is no doubt that even after Christ's sacrifice God's wrath not only still exists, but also comes upon the children of disobedience because of their sins. On the Day of Judgment the Lamb of God who carried away the sins of the whole world will appear to them in terror. Then they will say to the hills and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (Rev. 6:16.17).

## **[2. The Importance for Believers that God's Wrath Comes Upon the Children of Disobedience even after Christ's Reconciliation]**

Now that we have learned to know the content of the truth that God's wrath comes upon the children of disobedience even after Christ's reconciliation, let us seek to know the importance of this truth for believers.

When the apostle introduces this truth with the words, "Let no man deceive you with vain words," and when he concludes this truth in the words, "Be not ye therefore partakers with them," we see that these words contain first a serious *warning* for believers as well. For even at the time of the apostle there were baptized Christians who considered themselves in good standing, even though they did not earnestly struggle against sin and lived after the manner of the world. They had heard that Christ had blotted out all sins, reconciled all men with God, and had won complete salvation for all. They had heard that man therefore is righteous before God and is saved by God's grace, without works, through faith alone. Hence they concluded that if they believed they did not need to be so careful about every sin. Where sin abounded, grace would much more abound. God was no longer angry, but was now nothing but love, goodness, friendliness, grace, patience, and forbearance. The result was that these believers finally fell into manifest sins and shame, nonetheless thinking they could comfort themselves with Christ's reconciliation. For the sake of such blinded Christians, and to warn all others, Paul writes in our text, "Let no man deceive you with vain words; for because of these things (sins) comes the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience."

The apostle means that he knew very well that many thought, Is not everything of grace, and are we not and do we not all remain poor sinners and weak men? What is the value of grace if we must still be so careful about sin? Has not Christ fought for us? Why else did Christ fight for us if we must also fight so anxiously? Did not Christ earn salvation for us? Of what value is His work if we must also work out our salvation with fear and trembling? Has not Christ reconciled God's anger? Of what value is His reconciliation, if we still have to fear God's wrath? Who then would and could be saved?

But these are absolutely "vain words," that is, empty, twisted, ungodly words, words with which you vainly try to excuse yourselves. For I say unto you, the very sins which you "Christians" want to allow yourselves are the very ones for whose sake the wrath of God comes upon the children of disobedience. If you become "partakers with them" in these things, then despite your imagined faith, God's wrath will come upon you. As you have loved this world, you will then be condemned with the world.

Would to God there were no such blinded "Christians" any longer today! But sad to say, even in our times, when believers have become so few, there are only too many false, sham "believers" even among them, and I fear our own congregation is not free of them.

Perhaps in no other church is the blessed doctrine of God's reconciliation through Christ, of God's infinite love for sinners, of free grace preached so richly as in ours. But do not such "Christians" also seem to be among us, who suppose that they know the secret of how to be saved quite easily and comfortably, namely, that they need but console themselves with God's grace and salvation cannot elude them?

Thus they live like the children of the world and of disobedience and share their vanities. One secretly serves this and another that sin. One serves greed and covetousness; another eats and drinks to excess; one is proud and haughty; another is envious. One gossips and slanders. Others on occasion indulge in what they call "little white lies," in a little deceit, in their trade and business. Another loans his money at usury, or borrows and does not repay. Yes, God who sees the secret things knows whether many do not secretly live in outright impurity and unchastity, in gross fornication and adultery! And still these unhappy people suppose that, because they convince themselves that they "have faith," and because they also pray, go to church, and to Holy Communion, they are true believing Christians who for Christ's sake are under God's grace and therefore need not fear God's wrath. In addition to preaching the sweet gospel, a preacher may earnestly rebuke their sins. But they suppose that this does not concern them, as they are "believing Christians" dwelling in the house of faith, which the lightning of God's wrath cannot strike. The gospel preached to them by the ministers rebuking them they consider their booty which these ministers cannot easily take away from them again. Thus they do not fear even excommunication, for they think they know the secret means to render even excommunication harmless and to be saved.

But what does the word of the great God in our text say to such an idea? "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words, for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience."

Here it is written, and who will dare erase these words from God's book? Here it is written: Anyone who lives in any dominant sin - be it fornication, or uncleanness, or greed, or whatever - is excluded from the kingdom of God and of Christ. Not God's grace but His wrath rests upon him. Such a one vainly imagines that his faith will help him into heaven anyhow. What folly! His "faith" is nothing but an empty fancy of the mind, for no one can in true faith call Jesus Lord without the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit does not dwell in a soul enslaved by sin! If God's wrath comes upon the children of disobedience because of their sin, how much more will it come upon those who, though living in these same sins, to God's shame boast having faith! "If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" (Luke 23:31).

Oh my friends, be warned! Do not misuse the gospel to dream up for yourselves a god who is not angry at sin. Know rather that God is and remains a holy God who cries also to believers, "I am not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with me." (Cf. Psalm 5:4).

The truth that God's wrath comes upon the children of disobedience for their sins contains not only an important, urgent reminder for those who want to be believers, but also an important, urgent reminder and *encouragement*. For the apostle continues thus in our text, "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord; walk as children of light. (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.)" The apostle obviously wants to say that if you want to escape the wrath of God which comes upon the world, it is your duty not only

not to be partakers of their sins, but also as children of light to walk and shine in this world in true holiness, in all goodness toward God, in uprightness toward your neighbor, and all this in truth and honesty.

Of course, no one is justified and saved before God by his sanctification. But he who does not earnestly seek after ever more perfect sanctification will certainly again fall back under the complete dominion of some sin. Whoever no longer fights is conquered, including the Christian. As a light which no longer burns is finally extinguished altogether, so the Christian, once a child of light, becomes a child of darkness. For in casting aside a good conscience, he suffers shipwreck of his faith. (I Timothy 1:19).

I must admit that the fear often steals upon me that, because of the many comforting sermons we hear, we will be drowned in the flood of the evangelical comfort because of the deceit of our flesh. Ah, never forget that we still live in the great danger that God's wrath may yet be directed against us even after we have truly repented, come to the true faith, and been regenerated and renewed!

*Do not think that you have conquered  
Over wickedness and sin,  
Having gained salvation's treasure  
Which your Savior died to win.  
Oh, work out with fear and trembling  
His salvation of your soul!  
Never, while on earth you're living,  
Think that you have reached the goal.  
Quit yourselves like men, enduring  
To the end, our crown hold fast,  
By God's grace and Spirit's power  
Persevering till the last.*

I repeat once more, God is truly angry to this day against every sin. For he remains what He is, a consuming fire against sin. So, my dear Christian, consider no sin at all, no loveless judgment, no impurity no matter how secret, no sinful thoughts, no evil desires, no idle word, no proud or angry gesture negligible! Every sin, even the seemingly smallest, can in the end hurl you from faith into God's wrath and disfavor just because you consider it small. Be not lazy but zealous without tiring wherever you can serve God, His kingdom, and your neighbor; for without holiness no one will see the Lord. (Hebrews 12:14).

You who consider no sin as trifling, and therefore severely judge yourselves daily, often groaning with Paul because of your sinful weaknesses, "The good that I would I do not: but that evil which I would not, that I do. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7 19,24) -- do not despair! Draw more and more upon the comfort of the gospel, and your hunger and thirst after the righteousness of life will be satisfied. You will learn to fight better and to gain ever more glorious victories, until you will be able to say with Paul: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." (II Timothy 4:7,8)..  
Amen.