

Episode 252

Speaker 2

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. As many of you know, we've been doing a series on the attributes of God, and this is actually the final episode in that series, so joining me as they did in the previous episodes in the series is Gwen. She's an associate editor and also the manager of volunteer services, and Nelson, our director of video content. So Gwen, Nelson, thank you for joining me again today.

Shea Houdmann

And we didn't really plan it this way. If I had to do it again, maybe I would have ended with a different attribute, but today we're going to be covering the wrath of God. Before we dive in, I'll say a debate about whether wrath is actually an attribute of God. Some people will define the attributes as, these are what God was in eternity past, before there was anything, before it was when it was just the Trinity. Well, what could God possibly be wrathful or angry towards when he was the only one who existed? So for some, that eliminates this, but as wrath is a response to God's holiness, his righteousness, his justice being violated. But whether it's technically an attribute or a response to his attributes, the Bible does say that God can be wrathful, that God does get angry at sin in violation of his character. So again, the technicality of whether it's an attribute or not I don't think is the main point. This is something that we need to know and understand about God and how it applies to us, so we're going to cover it today. So Gwen, why don't you start us off? What does it mean that God is wrathful?

Gwen Sellers

Well, I'm not sure necessarily that I'll start with the meaning, but the last time when we ended, Shea mentioned, wow, wouldn't it feel like whiplash to go from talking about God's patience to talking about his wrath? And so I guess, yeah, here is a meaning for that of, yeah, it's just the sense of indignation and anger. In Hebrew, the word has to do with nostrils, so like a flared nostril against. And when we talked about patience, we said that it meant like long in the nostril. So it's kind of this long time to take action against something, but God's wrath does come.

Gwen Sellers

So Second Peter actually kind of has that same whiplash that we talked about last time. I'm going to start in verse eight. It says, but do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is a thousand years and a thousand years is one day. The Lord is not as slow to fulfill his promise as some

counsel on this, but as patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. And then the heavens will pass away with a roar and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

Gwen Sellers

And then it goes on to say, since all of these things are going to be dissolved like that, what kind of holy lives should we live? And then it goes back to, but count the patience of the Lord of salvation. So there's this idea that God is really patient and does want all to come to salvation, but there is judgment. And you know, that really goes back to our previous conversations about God's justice. If a sin is that which is against God and brings death, he can't just leave it unaddressed. And so there is wrath and anger toward that. Nelson, how would you define God's wrath or how do you interact with it?

Nelson Domingues

When I think about God's wrath, I think my just personal definition is wrath is God's response to sin, which is rebellion. And so we know that sin is rebellion against God. When we choose to sin, we are effectively telling God that his ways is the wrong way, that he's not right. We in essence are attempting to kick him off his throne and seat ourselves in his place and tell him what is right, what is good, what should be done, and what shouldn't be done. And as expected, as our rightful ruler and creator, the person who created us to be with him and to love us for all eternity and enjoy his presence together, to have his creation then turn around and say, you're wrong. I don't want to follow what you're doing. I don't want to do what you are telling me to do. I just want to choose my way. I mean, pride, right, is really one of the roots of real evil. And it's that pride in us that will, again, attempt to take God's throne and attempt to say to him, I don't want to do it your way.

Nelson Domingues

And so God's wrath is a response. It's his response to us physically standing up to his face and telling him, I'm not going to do what you want me to do. I'm not backing down. I'm going to choose my own way. And what kind of God would then allow that kind of action to move forward? Not only against himself, but also against all others in the universe, right? I mean, if we could just stand up to God and just say, nope, I declare a new way is right. I mean, it would be insane. It'd be absolute chaos. God's standards are holy. They are unchanging. We've been talking about his attributes for several weeks now, and we know that these are consistent, and that's one of the beauties about his attributes is their consistency. And so for us to stand up to God and say, no, I'm not going to do what you're asking me to do, or I'm choosing my way

instead of yours, wrath is his justified response. So I am not surprised that God is a God who experiences and has anger and wrath when his creation, whom he loves dearly, chooses to rebel against him.

Shea Houdmann

We've gone through this whole series. We talked about how the different attributes of God are comforting to us. For me, the wrath of God isn't the easiest one to but to know that God, to me, it goes into his justice as well, in that God doesn't allow sin to go unpunished, that God will pour out his righteous and just wrath against sin. To me, that's a tremendous comfort, and Scripture is filled with examples of God getting angry or bringing punishment for sin, and sometimes that happens to us, and we'll talk about how God's anger relates to the Christian a little bit later, but just knowing that God does not allow sin to go unpunished is a comfort. That's something God could not be just if he did not react in this way. God cannot be wholly set apart if, when his holiness is violated, he has no reaction to that.

Shea Houdmann

So you see how these attributes of God work together, how they, yes, God is love and God has wrath. Both are equally true. They do not contradict one another. God responds in love in situations, and God responds with wrath, anger in the situations, and yet God is still loving God, and God is still angry at sin, even when he's showing what seems to be the opposite attribute. But no, the wrath of God is not. If you list your 10 favorite attributes of God, I doubt this one's going to make very many people's lists, but maybe it should because it reminds us of who God is, how he's holy, and how he does respond to injustice, to evil, to sin in the world. And even God's wrath is intended to be a comfort. It's a good thing for us to know about God.

Gwen Sellers

You know, the other attribute that comes to mind for me is God's jealousy. Sometimes in the Old Testament, when you're reading about God's, kind of like his anger burned against Israel, it's when they're falling into idolatry. And as we talked about in that podcast episode of God being jealous for us, it's like he loves us so much. He wants our good and our best. And when we run to something that's fake and false, and yeah, like we are defying his holiness, and he should have a reaction to that. But it is also for us of he doesn't want us to continue in sin and that which brings death. He wants us to live his ways. And so I think wrath can kind of wrap into that a little bit as well.

Nelson Domingues

Yeah. I mean, could you imagine for a moment, like as a parent or a friend, if one of your loved ones were hurt or being abused or in some way put in danger, and we wouldn't respond, even if we had the power to respond, if we

didn't get angry to stop that, you know, injustice, that wrongful hurt that's going on, that would not be a loving thing to do. And to have a God who's loved, people, I think, consistently kind of talk about, I want God just to be love, and I want the God of the New Testament, they think. And they think the God of the Old Testament is a God of wrath, and the God of the New Testament is a God of love. And of course that's not correct. We see moments of God's grace and God's love all throughout all of scripture, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. And we see God's wrath, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. We see it even in the beginning of the church in Ananias and Sapphira, when they're lying against the Holy Spirit, they suffered the wrath of God immediately in that situation. And so, in many other situations, we see it.

Nelson Domingues

So, wrath is, I think, a proper balance, you know, with justice and with God's love as well. And I think there is a comfort in it in knowing that it belongs on the side of justice, that God's wrath is an act of justice, because whoever he's directing his wrath towards is fully deserving and he never is wrathful against someone doing good. He isn't angry with us when we are doing as he calls us to do. And so, his wrath is always for a purpose.

Nelson Domingues

And again, we talked about last time to think, you know, God's emotions aren't swinging haywire. He doesn't come in one day and in a bad mood, and the next day he's in a great mood, depending on, you know, things that might've happened, other parts in the world or whatever. God treats each of us balanced with love and again, with justice. And his wrath is only truly exposed when it needs to be. He doesn't pull it out as a card to force people to do things. It's not used as a threat. You know, if you don't do this, I'm going to hurt you or do that. That's not what his wrath. That wouldn't be loving. His wrath is a consequence of our actions, of our sin, and it's intended for justice. And in the case of a Christian, it's intended for their good. And it's intended to draw them back as discipline, to draw them back to the ways and purposes of God in our life.

Shea Houdmann

I love what you said about God's wrath being present in the Old and New Testament. Frequently, you get questions or a part of the question will be, the Old Testament God is a God of anger and wrath and judgment. In the New Testament, Jesus is all about love and peace and grace and mercy. Think of when Jesus cleared the temple. I mean, Jesus was clearly angry. He's driving people out with a whip. Or when he's rebuking the scribes and Pharisees, he uses some very angry language towards them. Or even maybe the ultimate one, Revelation 19, where he's talking about the second coming of Christ,

very violent terminology. So God's grace and love and mercy are present in the Old Testament. God's wrath and anger are present in the New. It's the same God, just revealing his attributes at different times in different ways.

Shea Houdmann

Maybe the most frequent question I see about God's wrath is often related to Christians, children of God, people whom God has forgiven. So what is my relationship to God's anger now? I get it, and I'm okay with God being angry with the unsaved, those who are continuing to sin and rebel against him. What about my relationship with God as a Christian whose sins are forgiven? What is to be my expectation? You get the people who are like, I can't get the idea of God being imposing and angry with me out of my mind. So maybe Gwen, how do we answer questions like that where someone is a Christian, a believer, and they're really struggling with God's anger to the point it's actually hindering their walk with Christ?

Gwen Sellers

You know, I think there's really multiple ways about it. One thing, you know, I think for us that's different. So Nelson talked about there being purpose and patience. And I think about that with God's, how we see his wrath expressed against unbelievers is like you think about Pharaoh in the Old Testament, and he kept hardening his own heart until finally God started hardening him to make him an example. Or in Revelation, you know, God is sending all these like plagues and things and the people still don't repent. So they know and they choose not to repent. And the same in Romans 1, you see that just God giving them over.

Gwen Sellers

But for Christian, we have not been given over. There's an Ephesians that talks about we were by nature children of wrath, but God being rich in his mercy has, you know, by grace you've been saved through faith. So the wrath of God for us has been poured out on Christ and borne by him. So I think sometimes the way we would answer a questioner is being able to come to that understanding of, can you look at who God is and trust that who he is?

Gwen Sellers

And also I think sometimes the impetus for that question is really, is our own interactions with other people or our own expectations for ourselves.

I mean, I know I had a period in my life where I was kind of trying to live in a perfect box. You know, I thought, okay, this is what you're supposed to do. And I sort of had this idea of, and God's waiting for me to mess up so that he can, you know, like write me a ticket, like a police officer or something. And that's not what God is doing. What he does is recognize where we are and he sanctifies us and grows us. So I think coming to grips with, wow, I really am a

sinner in need of salvation. And then actually receiving that in a way of, oh, and God has fully saved me. It's not about self-effort. It wasn't when I got saved and it isn't about self-effort through the sanctification process either.

Gwen Sellers

And then the other aspect like Nelson brought up before is God does discipline the one he loves, but I mean, that's a parent toward a child. That's a, let me help you grow. Let me stop you now. That's not like the wrath of God on you. You're never not going to be his anymore.

Nelson Domingues

I think if someone's really walking around, if their day-to-day life is very concerned about God's wrath, and if they ask me a question in some way regarding that, one of the things I would ask them in return is like, is there something in your life that you feel like you're walking in disobedience with? Is this the reason why you just are waiting for the discipline of God or for the wrath of God because you are choosing to disobey him in some area? Because if that's the case, if there's something in your life that you know that you're doing that sinful, that you know that God's word speaks against, yes, you should be expecting correction in some form.

Nelson Domingues

For a believer, as Gwen was mentioning, we talked about, now it's going to come in the form of discipline. You know, God is a God of mercy and a God of grace and a God of patience. And he gives us time to understand our wrongs and to move into the right path. But there is a point where he does enact discipline like any loving parent would do. It's not like, as a father, it's not like I wait in the corner of the room for my kids to do something wrong so I can punish them. I don't want to. I hate punishing them. I don't want to do it at all. I don't enjoy it. I feel terrible, but I do it because I know they need it. But what I'm trying to say is it's reserved. It's put away. I'm not thinking about doing it. I'm not waiting for the moment. Instead, I'm waiting to give grace. I'm waiting to show them love. I'm waiting to show them mercy and be with them. And that's exactly how God is. He wants to be with us. And so for fearing his wrath, that's just not who he is. He's not in the corner waiting for you to do something wrong. He longs to be with you and have a relationship with you.

Nelson Domingues

However, if you have known sin in your life, then yes, I can understand that there might be feelings of guilt and feelings of worry. And for that person, I would say then you need to do something about that. Clearly, you know you're doing something wrong. Clearly, you know it's against God's will, and you know how he will eventually act towards that sin. And so this is the opportunity

he's given you to confess the sin and be forgiven of the sin completely and put it away.

Nelson Domingues

I love that the scripture tells us that God separates us from our sin as far as the east is from the west. That is such a peaceful reminder that acknowledges and helps me to have peace in my life, that knowing even when I mess up, as bad as it may be, that when I truly confess that sin, that God is loving and just, and a God who forgives, and he tosses that sin away, meaning he will never punish me for it. And we move forward in grace and in love. And so I would try to encourage the person to do a little self-examination. Why are you so worried about God's wrath in your life?

Shea Houdmann

That's an excellent point. Often, the way we feel, our emotions, or even when they're not biblical, are God poking at us in a certain area of our mind. The reason you're feeling this way is because of those sorts of things. I mean, as I was thinking through this episode, I'm thinking a lot about is the wrath versus the discipline. Is wrath only for the unbeliever and discipline only for the believer? Is there any place in scripture where it specifically says that God expresses wrath towards Christians? And I'm not prepared to say God is never angry or wrathful towards Christians, but it does seem to be primarily focused on those who do not believe. I mean, I look at 1 Thessalonians 5:9, referring to Christians, for God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. So I don't think we need to be concerned that God is seething in anger towards us, that God is just waiting to pour out his wrath on his children.

Shea Houdmann

With that said, Hebrews 12, long passage about God's loving discipline towards us. So whether it's wrath, anger, or not, our sin does still result in God's taking action. Even for Christians, he does not ignore our sin. I think that's helpful to remind us. But no, we've had a lot of questioners over the years who have an unhealthy view of God's wrath to the point it is actually hindering. But I like what both of you said about examine yourself. Like, why are you feeling this way? But also remember we were children of wrath, but now God shows us grace through Jesus. I think that's a very healthy attitude for us to have.

Nelson Domingues

John chapter 3, verse 36 reminds us, whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him. Those are the remains on. And in Romans chapter 2, verses 5 through 6, it says, but because of your hard and impotent heart, you are

storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. Verse 6 says, he will render to each one according to his works.

Nelson Domingues

And that judgment comes at the moment that nonbelievers are judged for their sin. Of course, yet I'm not saying that God can't enact in a wrathful way towards believers. But biblically speaking, we talk about when God's wrath is on someone, it generally means that it's an unrepentant sinner who has God's wrath awaiting them. And that wrath will be according to their life, to their actions, to their disobedience, their sin and rebellion against God.

Nelson Domingues

But again, when you put all those verses in reverse and look at it from the other side, if you're a believer, that wrath is not on you. It's not being stored up against you. You have eternal life. It's not waiting there as a punishment in the future. And for you, it's just the opposite. For you, we have an eternity with God in his presence, not wrath, not that type of judgment at all.

Shea Houdmann

When I look at God's wrath and God's anger, I remember in the Old Testament, we talked about this last week when we were talking about patience, Exodus 34:6, where the Lord passed before him, referring to Moses and proclaimed, the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and gracious, but steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but by no means will clear the guilty. I think this is such a powerful verse on God's wrath and anger, but then also looking at James 1:19. Know this, my beloved brothers, let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. So God is slow to anger. God is slow to express his wrath. Therefore, we are to be the same. We are to be slow to anger.

Shea Houdmann

We do a whole episode on the relationship of a Christian and anger. Truly, anger is something a lot of people struggle with. A lot of people, think they have righteous indignation or the godly anger when everyone who's observing them is like, no, that's not what's going on here.

Shea Houdmann

But following God's example and being slow to anger, and God is anger, is wrath, is holy, is righteous, it is perfect, is just. And even God could be angry at sin in a moment and it would still be right. Yet God chooses to be slow in expressing his anger, wanting people to come to repentance. How much more should we follow his example on that? And being quick to forgive, slow to speak, slow to become angry. And I think that's the big takeaway for me on

this. I'm not generally an angry person. I struggle with it just like everyone else does. But remembering that the reason I should be slow to anger is because that's how God is with us and with others. And that's something we are to be imminently thankful for.

Nelson Domingues

So I think when sometimes we struggle with anger, and some people, I'm not saying this would be the conclusive answer to your anger problems, but a lot of times it's a lack of patience on our part when we're very, very angry at someone. Because we want to see justice enacted quickly. And if that justice were enacted as quickly as we wanted it to happen, and God did the same thing towards us, I mean, it would be unbelievable. We would truly learn that lesson very quickly about being patient, and being kind, and loving, and waiting for people to be repentant.

Nelson Domingues

But at the same time, it's trusting God and His justice that He will act. I mean, Romans 12, verse 19, it's just one of the verses I always remember. It's just, you know, Beloved, never avenge yourself, but leave it to the wrath of God. For it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord. And so, vengeance and wrath belong to God. And it's His, in His ultimate perfect judgment, it's up to Him to hand out. Well, when it's time, when the patience has run out, when the act is deemed worthy of it, God will do those things. And we just need to be patient, and caring, and loving enough.

Nelson Domingues

And in fact, we should be praying for those, because we shouldn't want anyone to experience God's wrath. In fact, we should be praying for just the opposite, for their salvation, so that the wrath of God can be removed from them, so they can see their sin, for they can rightly ask for forgiveness. Even if you've been really hurt, and you really want someone to suffer judgment and wrath, it would be far better for that person to come to know God as their Lord and Savior, to seek forgiveness from the Lord, and then to seek forgiveness, perhaps even for the things from you that they've hurt you for. That would be so much better, and feel so much better to you, than just seeing them get locked up, or being put in jail, or whatever. Not to say that they don't have to pay for their crimes, because you do. Even when there's forgiveness, you still break laws, and people still deserve to face the penalties of the countries that they're in. But when it comes to revenge, it's far greater to forgive, and to allow God to take care of those things.

Gwen Sellers

And I think one thing about anger, I mean, I do think that it's something, as we mature, and like you said, grow in patience. And I think a lot of that does have

to do with that self-reflection of, wow, how much do I need God's patience for me, or other people's patience for me, or, you know, recognize, I've heard it called the fundamental attribution error. When we mess up, we assume we have the best intentions, but when somebody else does, you know, we think something's seriously wrong with them. So getting that wider perspective. And I think that happens the more we get to know God and connect to his heart. And I think the same for making our anger righteous.

Gwen Sellers

I'm thinking about the Psalms of, you know, what do you do when you are angry and know you shouldn't act on it, is you pray about it. I mean, you can bring that anger to God and say, I am so angry at this, help me see. And then, you know, like, you remind yourself of God's character or those things of, all right, I'm leaving the vengeance to the Lord. And then remember, oh, but I know what that really means. So actually, God, your desire is that all would come to you. So I'm now praying for this person's repentance. And then, yeah, you can wrestle it through with God in prayer of take your own emotions to him and also pray for that person or that situation that you're angry about. And then hopefully, like, let it go.

Shea Houdmann

A great application, Gwen, in terms of recognizing the reality of who we are and always, not always the best judge of either our intentions or other people's intentions and therefore being in control, slow to anger, much easier to say than do, but vitally important in some very consistent message in scripture.

Shea Houdmann

So here we are at the end of our series on the attributes of God. I don't remember how many even episodes has been. We've covered all the very clear attributes of God and a few ones that kind of like wrath debate whether it's actually God or not. But so let's kind of conclude today just with throughout this series, what's an attribute or something we've discussed that's particularly stood out to you. And Nelson, how about you go first and Gwen, then I'll close this off. What's something in this attributes of God series that particularly impacted you?

Nelson Domingues

I think being reminded that we men and women were created in the image of God. And of course, it's natural then because of that, that we are capable of loving, of offering grace, of offering mercy. It's the reason that we can have these attributes that God that we've all talked about. And all these attributes of God are ones that we aspire to even wrath in a way that is loving and kind and draws a person to repentance. Meaning we're not looking to enact wrath

on them, but we get angry and we have to direct our anger in a loving, purposeful way. And the fact that we get angry again, reveals that I'm made in the image of God. God gets angry too. And that's okay. It's what we do with our anger that truly matters. And scripture talks about be angry, but yet do not sin.

Nelson Domingues

And so remembering all of these things, remembering all of these attributes of God, I've just been reminded how we see the image of God in the people all around us, through the love, their acts of kindness, through the grace they show, through the mercy they show. And I think that's a really beautiful thing to see in a church, to see in a loved one, and something we could aspire to within ourselves, to look at the attributes of God and to look at how we can ourselves better match those attributes.

Gwen Sellers

Yeah, that's great. I think for me, I've always known like, oh, studying the attributes of God is a good thing. But, but wow, when you really actually do study them and talk about them, I think I just love God all the more. And really some of, you know, some of those like harder attributes, like anger, or even jealousy, realizing, no, like, I want to know the God who is not the God who I make up in my mind. And that ultimately, all of God's attributes really are comforting. So yeah, I guess just for me, the fruitfulness of the depth of study, and how great it is to be reminded of who God is, and that he is all of these things. I mean, we serve a God who's so big. And yeah, I mean, like Nelson said that we are made in his image. So of course, he's like, humans are super diverse. So of course, God is big and even bigger than the diversity reflects within humans.

Shea Houdmann

I love both of what you shared. Yes, study the attributes of God we get to called the communicable versus the uncommunicable, or the attributes that humanity can have just to a different degree than God does. But then also kinda what Gwen was getting to, the fact that we study the attributes of God because we want to get to know God better. We want to know the God who is, not the God we make up in our minds. Both of those are great applications to this series.

Shea Houdmann

For me, one of the first topics we covered was how God is infinite. One of the things we discussed was that God, every attribute of God is too infinite to God possesses them infinitely. God is infinitely loving. God is infinitely just. Then today God is infinitely wrathful. And what does that actually mean? To me, a study of hell, eternal separation from God. That is where people who rejected

all God's other attributes, His grace, His mercy, His love get to experience the infinite wrath of God for all of eternity. So while all the other attributes are perhaps more comforting, but see how every attribute of God, God loves me infinitely. God is perfectly, infinitely just in all of his decisions.

Shea Houdmann

But on the other side, how much more should we want to share the Gospel. To declare the message that can rescue people from experiencing God's wrath to an infinite degree for eternity. So not only getting to know God, but wanting people to experience for eternity the love of God rather than the wrath of God. A much better eternity. For sure.

Shea Houdmann

So Gwen, Nelson thank you for joining me for this series. I truly enjoyed our conversations even like the 6 week break we took because stuff kept happening and so forth. I learned a lot through this. I learned from both of you. I truly enjoyed our conversation. So I hope this episode on the wrath of God and the entire attributes of God series has been encouraging and edifying to you our listeners. Gwen, Nelson, I need to decide which series we are going to do next. So stay tuned for that. We'll be back for sure. Got questions? The Bible has answers and we'll help you find them.