

Is God angry with us?

R. Stanley, 10 May 2020

Of the 250 countries in the world, over 210 have been affected by the unstoppable outbreak of Coronavirus. Civil authorities and Health workers are doing all they can to control the spread. 70 Research groups worldwide are working on preparing a remedy. But the extreme uncertainty continues. More than one expert has predicted that the COVID-19 will not leave us, but we must learn to live with it! To start with, it was an epidemic; now it is a pandemic; it is all set to become an endemic. At the onset of this virus outbreak, some Christian preachers were pointing their fingers at the initially-affected nations and commented that it was God's punishment on them because of their anti-Christian attitude and activities. The fallacy of such hasty judgmental statements became evident too soon as the virus virulently spread to countries irrespective of their religion. The crisis is there in Communistic, Buddhist, Hindu, Moslem, Christian countries, and even in Israel the Holy Land so-called! As on date, 16500 positive cases and 250 deaths are reported in Israel.

Among the numerous questions that arise in people's minds, the most worrisome one is, "**Is God angry with us?**" As a Bible Teacher I sought to find an answer from Bible history and Bible prophecy. Sadly what we learn from history is that we don't learn from history! I searched the Scriptures diligently to study this subject. The result is this article. My study started at 2 am on 7 May when I got up from bed with the ringing of the words in my ears, "*Wrath of God!*" Do look at the Bible references in the second reading at least.

Is God angry with us? The Bible speaks of the wrath of God almost as much as it speaks of His love. God's anger is referred to in the Old Testament at least 180 times. Here's just one example: Ex 32:9,10, "The Lord said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them.' " The wrath of God is His justifiable anger against unjust action. It is not uncontrolled anger or indignation or temper. Apostle Paul puts it in a nutshell: Rom 1:18, "The wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."

We witness the first expression of God's anger in the Garden of Eden itself. He spoke angry words of punishment first to the serpent, then to Eve, and finally to Adam (Gen 3:14-19). Then we see God getting angry with Cain, the first son of the first parents (4:11,12). Then comes a series of events when God got angry with individuals like Moses (Ex 4:14), Miriam & Aaron (Num 12:9), Korah (16:19-21,35), Balaam (22:22), Achan (Josh 7:1,26), David (2 Sam 24:1,15), Solomon (1 Ki 11:9), Ananias & Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) and Herod (12:21-23). Then there were cities and nations which came under His wrath. Sodom and Gomorrah are notorious examples (Gen 18:20; 19:24,25; Rom 9:29). Displeased with David who numbered the people, the Lord sent a plague upon Israel, and 70,000 men of them fell (1 Chr 21:14).

Referring to all these destructions, the Lord later spoke through Prophet Zephaniah, "I have cut off nations, their fortresses are devastated; I have made their streets desolate, with none thereby. Their cities are destroyed; there is no one, no inhabitant" (Zeph 3:6). The flood in Noah's time represents God's wrath on the whole world (Gen 6:5, 11-13). The post-deluge promise of God was only that He would never again "curse the land for man's sake, nor would He again destroy "every living thing as He did through the flood (8:21). The rainbow covenant assured forever "seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night" (v22). This is also only as long as the "earth remains." His final destruction of heaven and earth is hinted here (2 Pet 3:10).

The "Love of God" and the "Wrath of God" are the two sides of God's indivisible character. For a broken and repentant sinner the love of God must be presented. For a stiff-necked person the wrath of God must be stressed. Apostle Paul balances these two beautifully in Romans 11:22, "Consider the goodness and severity of God: On those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off." Jesus spoke about the love of God in John 3:16, but about condemnation in verse 18. There are simply too many pictures portraying Christ as the gentle Shepherd with a rod of comfort. But where is the picture of Him driving out businessmen from the Temple with a whip? Moses in his farewell address presented God as "a consuming fire, a jealous God" (Dt 4:24). Then he called Him as a "merciful God" (v31). We are very fond of Deuteronomy 28:1-14 which lists out the numerous blessings of obedience. These are only 14 verses, whereas the rest of the chapter in 54 verses mentions the curses for disobedience! The curses include "fever, inflammation, boils, tumors, scab, itch, madness, blindness, hunger, thirst, nakedness, plague" and so on. This list includes even what's not written in the Book of the Law (v61).

We cannot dismiss the wrath of God as an Old Testament subject or an apocalyptic manifestation. There are numerous references to it in the New Testament. The apostles used the OT incidents to warn the NT Christians about the wrath of God (1 Cor 10:1-11; 2 Pet 2:4-10; Jude 5-7). Even in the Epistle to the Romans which is a book on "Justification by Faith," Apostle Paul frequently mentions the wrath of God (Rom 1:18; 2:5,8; 5:9; 9:22). By nature, we are all the "children of wrath" (Eph 2:3). But now we are delivered from it by the love, mercy and grace of God (vv4,5).

The wrath of God reached its zenith on the Cross when the sin of the whole world came on Christ and He became sin for us (2 Cor 5:21). God vented His anger by shaking the earth and splitting the rocks when His Son died torturously (Mt 27:50,51). Think of a father severely punishing his son for no fault of his! Jesus cried, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (v46). I wonder whether this is the fulfilment of Isaiah 54:7,8, "For a mere moment I have forsaken you; but with great mercies I will gather you. With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you!" "Mercy" and "Grace" are opposites of "wrath" (Lam 3:22; Eph 2:3-5; 1 Tim 1:13,14; Heb 4:16). God's "mercy" allows Him to withhold merited punishment; His "grace" allows Him to freely bestow unmerited

favour. “Mercy” means not getting what we deserve, namely, hell; “Grace” means getting what we do not deserve, namely, Heaven!

Deliverance today from the wrath of God is on individual basis: “He” who believes in the Son of God has everlasting life; and “he” who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the “wrath of God” abides on “him” (Jn 3:36). “He” who believes and is baptized will be saved; but “he” who does not believe will be “condemned” (Mk 16:16). Deliverance today from eternal damnation is not on regional or national level. Each person must personally repent of his sins and believe on the sin-bearing Lamb of God to escape the “wrath to come” (Mt 3:7; Lk 3:7; Jn 1:29,36; Rom 2:5,8).

On the Cross, the “wrath of God” came on the “Lamb;” but at the culmination of ages, mankind will have to face the “wrath of the Lamb” (Rev 6:16,17). As God the Creator, He is the Owner and Caretaker of the entire world. People in the world are free to make choices, between good and evil, between God and Satan. God loves the people too much to let them go as they please (Isa 53:6). He gets angry when they refuse to hear His voice. The Bible speaks mainly of 10 acts which kindle His wrath. Let’s study them briefly —

1. Idolatry

No other sin provokes God to anger like idol worship. The very first two of the Ten Commandments speak of this. Murder comes 6th, adultery 7th, and theft 8th! (Ex 20:1-17). Referring to how he received the Ten Commandments, Moses said, “The Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; you heard a voice only ... Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when the Lord spoke to you at Horeb ... Take heed, lest you lift your eyes to heavens, and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to worship them” (Dt 4:12-19). Moses concludes this warning, saying, “The Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God” (v24).

When Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, after receiving the two tablets of the Testimony, written by the finger of God, the people pressurised Aaron and got a gold calf made for their worship. But for the plea of Moses, God would have consumed the people with His burning wrath (Ex 32:10,14). Strict warning against all forms of idol worship has been served all through the Holy Bible to escape God’s wrath (Dt 11:16,17; 2 Chr 34:25; Psa 106:35,36,40). Nothing irritates God like worshipping the creature instead of Him the Creator (Rom 1:18-25). Even “bowing” before a Cross, a Crucifix, any statue, or the original brazen serpent of Moses is idolatry (Ex 20:4,5; 2 Ki 18:4).

The first of the Ten Commandments strictly says, “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Ex 20:1-3). Our pluralistic society by and large is sold out to polytheism. But this is anti-Bible and anti-Christian. Jehovah alone is God (Psa 83:18). He is the “God of gods” (Dt 10:17; Josh 22:22; Psa 136:2). Even Nebuchadnezzar, the king of the idolatrous Babylon, confessed to Daniel, “Truly your God is the God of gods” (Dan 2:47). He is not only the “God of gods” but also “greater than all gods” (2 Chr 2:5). This is Solomon’s earlier confession. It’s from this conviction he backslided, so

the Lord became angry with him (1 Ki 11:4,9). So also King Ahaz (2 Chr 28:24,25). When Ephraim would say, “What have I to do anymore with idols?”, God’s anger would turn away from him and he would grow like the lily and the vine (Hos 14:4-8).

We Christians cannot become slack in our proclamation: “The God of the Bible is the God of gods. His Son Jesus is the only Way to Heaven. There’s no other Name by which we can be saved” (Jn 14:6; Acts 4:12). The society may call us narrow-minded, but it does not matter because it’s the narrow gate that leads to eternal life, but the Broadway leads to destruction (Mt 7:13,14). A Hindu Priest was invited to recite a Vedic Prayer in America on the National Day of Prayer, 8 May 2020. Can a so-called Christian Nation backslide any further? Men of God like Dr. Billy Graham (1918-2018), and Dr. Ravi Zacharias who entered glory on 19 May 2020 at 74, used to lead this Prayer in the earlier years.

2. Refusal to Repent

We often say, “God hates sin, but loves the sinner!” True, but we forget how He gets angry with unrepentant sinners. Here’s a sample text from David: Psa 7:11-13, “God is a just Judge, and He is angry with the wicked everyday. If he does not repent, He will sharpen His sword; He bends His bow and makes it ready. He also prepares for Himself instruments of death; He makes His arrows into fiery shafts.” Can words be more pictorial than these for God’s anger? Solomon’s wisdom tells us why we continue in sin: Eccl 8:11, “Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.” He also adds in Proverbs 29:1, “He who is often reprov’d, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.”

From day one, mankind is mistaking God’s patience. When the wickedness and perversion of man grieved His heart, in the time of Noah, God said, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for indeed he is flesh” (Gen 6:6,3). When God’s patience runs out, there will be total destruction. The reason why He stops contending with us is that He knows that we are too weak to resist Him forever. God says, “I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry; for the spirit would fail before Me, and the souls which I have made” (Isa 57:16). If Jacob does not yield to God, at one point God would strike the socket of his hip where he thinks his strength is. It will make him limp all his life (Gen 32:25,32). Let’s beware! God’s forgiveness is a joyful experience, but it carries with it a frightful responsibility: “Sin no more!” Jesus spoke these words twice, one to a man and the other to a woman (Jn 5:14; 8:11). Let’s give attention to the warning He added: “lest a worse thing comes upon you ...”

Jesus calls not only individuals but also the Christian congregations to repent. The message of Jesus to 5 of the 7 Churches is, “Repent!” (Rev 2:5,16,21,22; 3:3,19). He does not stop with the word, “Repent,” but adds, “or else!” God’s anger for unresponsiveness pronounces removal of the very Church, fight against the members with the sword of God’s mouth, bedriddenness, massacre of children, getting vomited out of God’s mouth, and so on (2:5,16,22,23; 3:16). Though, like Ephraim, we are “a cake not turned” and “a silly dove,” God in His love tells us, “How can I give you

up, Ephraim? My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred. I will not execute the fierceness of My anger” (Hos 7:8,11; 11: 8,9; Jer 31:20). Let’s not despise the grace period!

Go through the sin lists in the Bible for self-examination: Prov 6:16-19 ... 7 things God hates; Mk 7:21-23 ... 13 sins; Rom 1:29-32 ... 23 sins; Gal 5:19-21 ... 17 sins; 2 Tim 3:2-5 ... 19 sins. These are the sins which characterise the “children of disobedience” on whom the “wrath of God” comes (Eph 5:6). How many sermons we hear! How many meetings we attend! How many programmes we watch! How many books and magazines we read! How many Study Bibles we have! No other generation has received so much of spiritual input. For the ignorant, the lashes will be few, but the informed will receive severer punishment (Lk 12:48). Sin confessions should be personal or collective, depending on the nature of the transgression. The penitential Psalms (6,32,38,51,102,130,143) can be profitably used as the prayer of repentance. Knowing the seriousness of God’s anger, David cringed, “O Lord, do not rebuke me in Your anger, nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure” (Psa 6:1; 27:9; 38:1). We might have caused inconsolable grief to the heart of the Father God. But when we return to Him in genuine repentance, music and dance and the Father’s kisses will await us (Lk 15:20,25).

Now, let’s come to cities and nations. It is not enough if tears of repentance drench individual Christians and congregations. God expects cities and countries to acknowledge Him as the Creator and the Saviour. The Gospels record only two instances when Jesus wept openly: one in front of a grave looking at the sorrow that sin had brought into the world (Jn 11:33-35); the other over a city (Lk 19:41). He lamented over Jerusalem, saying, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate” (Mt 23:37,38). He upbraided the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum with strongest words (Mt 11:20-24). He warned them of the “Day of the judgment” and “Hades.” He presented the city of Nineveh as a model of citywide repentance which escaped God’s “indignation” and “fierceness of His anger” (Jon 3:5-10; Mt 12:41; Nah 1:1,6). We know not what the percentage of ten righteous men was in the population of Sodom (Gen 18:32). May be our cities have a lower percentage! “Send us, O God, Evangelists like Philip to drive away demonic activities and bring about great joy in our cities!” (Acts 8:5-8). The two slogans to be shouted aloud again and again around the world: “*Back to God!*” “*Back to the Bible!*”

“O God, will You not visit our cities of Chennai, Bengaluru, Mumbai, Delhi, London, Paris, New York, California, Moscow, Tokyo, Beijing and the like with surging waves of repentance? You have judged our sexual immorality with AIDS, which took away 3,20,00,000 lives. Forgive us, O Lord, for legalizing homosexuality, lesbianism, gay marriage and such perversions” (Rom 1:24-27). There are 6,37,500 sex workers in India, and over 5,00,000 customers visit the red-light areas on a daily basis. Beloved, if we defile our body with sexual sins, God will destroy it with Sexually Transmitted Diseases (1 Cor 3:16,17; 6:17-19). The locusts which are invading Pakistan and Rajasthan is the next threat! (2 Chr 7:13,14). It is predicted that this swarm may be the worst in decades.

3. Unbelief on God

The first sin of the first man and woman was disbelieving what God had told them (Gen 2:16,17; 3:1,17). This is what brought God's displeasure on the entire human race. Suffering, sorrow and death followed. God's call to man from the beginning is to turn to Him and trust Him. "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb 11:6). Unbelief on God and His Word is more serious than other gross sins. We can pray to God for anyone to forgive his sin of murder or theft or adultery and the like, but not the sin of unbelief (1 Jn 5:16,17). Unbelief on Jesus is the sin of sins which brings on the candidate the eternal wrath of God, and he is already condemned (Jn 3:18,36). People go to hell primarily because they have not believed on Jesus to be saved (Mk 16:16). Here's a call to the Christ-rejectors: "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are those who put their trust in Him" (Psa 2:12).

No other incident better illustrates the seriousness of unbelief like God's cancellation of visa for Moses and Aaron to enter Canaan. Moses and Aaron were the chief leaders in bringing the Hebrews out of Egyptian bondage. About Moses, God Himself testified that there was no prophet like him before or after (Dt 34:10-12). When he was backbitten, God defended him saying, "He is faithful in all My house" (Num 12:7b; Heb 3:2,5). Aaron was the first Priest in Israel's history (Heb 5:4; Ex 28:1). He was the spokesman for Moses before Pharaoh (Ex 4:16; 7:1). What was then their big sin? God told Moses and Aaron to "speak" to the rock, but he "struck" it, that too twice (Num 20:8,11). Water came out abundantly of course, but according to God, they did not "believe" Him enough to hallow Him before the people of Israel (v12). He instantly told them that they would not enter the Promised Land. Moses was just allowed to "see" the Land (Dt 32:52). It was like a slip between the cup and the lip! See how much unbelief angers God!

Not only the leaders but also the people could not enter Canaan because of unbelief (Heb 3:19). About them God said, "I was angry with that generation ... So I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest" (3:10a,11; 4:3; Psa 95:11). He lamented that He was "grieved" for forty years with that generation (Psa 95:10a). Feeding so many thousands of people for forty years in the desert, and providing for their needs were nothing short of a miracle. Their clothes and sandals did not wear out (Dt 29:5). Their feet did not swell after so much of walking (Neh 9:21). Unbelievable! In spite of all these blessings, they did not believe in the miracle-working power of God. They kept on asking, "Can God?" instead of asserting, "God can!" (Psa 78:19, 20). The Lord became "furious" and His "anger" came upon them (v21). It was just eleven days' journey from Horeb to the Promised Land (Dt 1:2). But the Lord's "fierce anger" made them wander in the wilderness for forty years, until all the evil generation was gone (Num 32:13,14). Thank God for science and technology, but disbelieving His supernatural power angers Him. Rationalism has not helped us enough in the COVID-19 crisis. There's no greater joy for the Father than to have His children return to Him in simple faith and childlike trust. His mansions await their arrival (Jn 14:1-3).

4. Covetousness

The 5th Chapter of Isaiah mentions 6 “woes” (vv8,11,18,20,21,22). The first “woe” is on those given to covetousness: “Woe” to those who join house to house, who add field to field, till there is no place, where they may dwell alone in the midst of the land” (Isa 5:8). The “anger” of the Lord is aroused against such people (v25a). This is the condition in which the rich become richer and the poor become poorer. Can you believe that the fortune of 600 American billionaires has risen on the average by 15% during Corona lockdown? There is no partiality with God. Apostle Paul teaches “equality” on the basis of how God provided manna, the bread from heaven, during the wilderness journey of the people of Israel (2 Cor 8:12-15; Ex 16:17,18). This principle was voluntarily followed by the early disciples following Pentecost (Acts 2:44,45; 4:32). I do not want to get into the dispute whether or not this practice should be adhered to today, but the fact remains that if God gives us more than what we need, it is in order that we may share it with those in need. Ultimately this is the only way to root out covetousness from our rank and file. It is said that an average American woman owns 19 pairs of shoes! India is racing towards it!

There are so many sins condemned in the Bible, but the “love of money is the root of ALL evil” (1 Tim 6:10). That’s why John the Baptist laid the axe at the “root” of the trees. He thundered, “Every tree which does not bring good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Mt 3:10). While prescribing practical guidelines for bearing “good fruit,” he consistently referred to charity and covetousness (Lk 3:10-14). According to him, saying bye to covetousness is the way of escape from the “wrath to come” (v7). Zacchaeus, who had dodged John’s water baptism, could not escape the Fire-baptizer! When he repented of his covetous practices, the Saviour unloaded in his home His riches of Salvation (Lk 19:8,9).

The Bible speaks of certain individuals against whom God’s anger was aroused because of covetousness. One is Prophet Balaam (Num 22:22). We know the story too well. Apostle Jude quotes him as an example for the error of greediness, and pronounces “woe” to those who run this way (Jude 11). The next one is Judas Iscariot. He was a thief from the beginning, but Jesus trusted him with the money bag, thus giving him an opportunity to change (Jn 12:6). Jesus let the rope loose for over three years. Because of his covetousness, he hanged himself in the same rope! (Acts 1:16-18). He became the son of “perdition” (Jn 17:12c). Apostle Paul later warned that the love of money would “drown men in destruction and perdition” (1 Tim 6:9). Then come Mr. & Mrs. Ananias (Act 5:1-11). This was the first judgment in the early Church, and that was relating to money matter. Instant death of the husband. His funeral without intimation to his beloved wife. The deathbell rang for her in another few hours. Oh, God’s anger poured out on an one-minded couple! Beloved, beware of praying for revival! Such incidents would be commonplace when the fire of the “Holy Spirit” falls on our congregations (vv3,9).

How do we boast that we don’t worship idols? Paul called covetousness as idolatry, and a covetous person an idolater (Col 3:5; Eph 5:5). In both these passages the Apostle speaks of the coming of the “wrath of God” (Col 3:6; Eph 5:6). I do not think

he was overcondemning this sin. I am sure he was well aware of Isaiah 57:17 where God says, “For the iniquity of his covetousness I was angry and struck him; I hid and was angry, and he went on backsliding in the way of his heart.” The testimony of Job must have been fresh in Paul’s mind while he was writing to the believers in Ephesus and Colosse: Job 31:24-28, “If I have made gold my hope ... this would be an iniquity worthy of judgment, for I would have denied God who is above!” Covetousness is worse than Corona in choking us to death (Mt 13:22; Prov 1:19).

5. Lack of Charity

Covetousness is the enemy of charity. If we are interested in saving more and more, we will be giving less and less. In the previous point, I referred to the first of the six “woes” pronounced in Isaiah 5. It’s on those who join house to house and add field to field till there is no place where they may “dwell alone” in the land (Isa 5:8). If I am avaricious to have much more than what I need in a world of limited resources, I am depriving others of their legitimate share. God blesses us to bless others. If He blesses us with many dresses, He expects us to clothe as many clotheless as possible. If He blesses us with plenty of food, He expects us to feed as many hungry people as possible. If He blesses us with comfortable and luxurious homes, He expects us to provide shelter to as many homeless as possible. Those who fail in these areas would come under divine fury. Jesus the King would tell them, “Depart from Me, you cursed, and go into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mt 25:41-46). Those whom we call “blessed” on this earth might be addressed as “cursed” in Eternity! Reversal of values!

Job scored high in this area. He was an extremely rich man in the East (Job 1:3). He was exceedingly rich in charity also. He went to the extent of becoming eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, father to the poor, advocate for the helpless, fighter for the weak and a musician to enthrall widows (29:13-17). What an identification with the poor and the marginalised! He dared to say that if he had not done enough to bless the underprivileged, he was ready to let his arm fall from his shoulder and let his arm be torn from the sockets! (31:16-22). To stress that charity was not an option for him but an obligation, he added that failure here would bring “destruction from God as a terror to him” which he would not be able to endure (v23). Dear reader friend, keep in mind the title of this article, “*Is God angry with us?*” The World Health Organisation (WHO) is trying to investigate wherefrom the Coronavirus came. We will do well to study the Bible to find out who could have sent it! (2 Ki 22:13; Job 12:9,10).

A word to landlords, industrialists and businessmen. I urge you to read James 5:1-6. The opening call itself is threatening: “Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miserias that are coming upon you” (v1). The apostle refers to “riches, garments, gold, silver, treasure, pleasure and luxury.” After warning how this super-abundance would “eat the flesh of the owners like fire” (v3), the writer speaks about the injustice to labourers. Exploitation of labour is common not only in capitalist countries but also in nations like India. The Global Slavery Index-2018 estimated 80,00,000 bonded workforce in India. The number is swelling up in the present crisis. Millionaires take advantage of the unemployment problem, and underemploy and underpay the

workers. The Minimum Wages Act seems to be only on paper. I'm sorry that even Christian Missions don't follow this Act. Remember, the God of the Bible is the God of the poor. The cries of the poor workers and labourers are "reaching the ears of the Lord of Hosts" (v4). Jehovah is called the "Lord of Hosts" innumerable number of times in the Old Testament, whereas only thrice in the New, namely Romans 9:29 and 2 Corinthians 6:18 and here now in this passage, James 5:4. By this I understand that He is a fighter against those who despise the poor. During the current crisis when economy has tripped from slowdown to shutdown, the worst affected is the poorer sections of the society. Even middle class families must double or triple their giving to the poor, as the Macedonian Christians did even when their own economy was in shambles (2 Cor 8:1-3).

Even the secular world is becoming more and more courteous towards the working class. I'm ashamed that this change has not come in Christian families. We are not to call Housemaids as Servants but Helpers. No one should be called Disabled, rather Differently Abled. Not Sweepers or Scavengers, but Sanitary Workers. Not Transsexuals, but Transgenders. And so on. Bonded labour, child labour and the like should not find a place in Christian premises. Never use threatening and disrespectful words while interacting with helpers and assistants. Paul reminds us of "our own Master in Heaven" (Eph 6:9). We can see God in the smile of the poor! (Psa 112:3-5,9; 2 Cor 9:9). There are more than 50,00,000 domestic helpers in India, with over 80% of them being women. Most of them are perennially in debt as they borrow money from households, and in a sense become bonded labourers. I appeal to the Mistresses to write off such debts. You will not become poor by doing so. The Lord's Prayer, both in Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4, speaks essentially about "*debts*" and "*debtors*." But we have cleverly and conveniently changed it to "*trespasses!*" Get it corrected in your family and Church recitations. Read Matthew 18:13-35 and ask God to speak to you.

6. Loveless Relationships

Cain was the first man to be "cursed" by God (Gen 4:11). Technically speaking, Adam and Eve were not cursed but punishment was pronounced on them. Only the serpent and the ground were "cursed" (3:14-19). See how serious God is towards faulty interpersonal relationships! Apostle John writes that "the" message that we have heard from the beginning is that we should "love one another," and we must "not be like Cain" (1 Jn 3:11,12). Cain murdered Abel not because the latter took away anything from the former, or did anything against the former. The only reason for this first murder in human history was that the elder brother's works were evil and the younger one's works were righteous (v12). Bad people because of their badness hate good people for their goodness! John then goes on to admonish us, "Do not marvel, my brothers, if the world hates you" (v13). That's okay, but our problem is not that non-Christians hate Christians, but Christians hate one another (v14). Will not God be angry with a congregation full of murderers? (vv14,15; Mt 5:21,22). Friends, don't get angry with me for this simple and plain interpretation of a Bible text.

God's worry is more about lovelessness and disunity in the Church rather than the spirit of hatred and jealousy that prevails in the society. The world has to learn love

from us the disciples of Jesus (Jn 13:35). There's no fellowship in most of our Fellowships. Alas, social distancing may increase our spiritual distancing! When peace is absent in our Churches, that means that we have lost our saltiness (Mk 9:50). Only when we inside the Church are sprinkled with the salt of peace, we can spray it on the society to bless those outside (Col 4:5,6). Solomon lists seven things God "hates" which are an "abomination" to Him (Prov 6:16-19). Six of these seven refer to relationships. Ideally the Church must be a theocracy, as per the pattern prescribed in the New Testament Epistles, not a democracy. The election system in most of our Churches is definitely not Biblical. Until that goes, the party spirit cannot be driven away, and unity among us will only be a dream. We cannot bring God's sadness of heart to an end. Goats fight, sheep don't!

God's anger over our lovelessness is forthrightly stated in Galatians 5:15, "If you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!" Most of us have passed the "fighting" stage and come to "biting!" Our Church buildings may soon need the "*Beware of dogs!*" signboards (Phil 3:2a). The spirit of vengeance in our hearts is against the God of the Bible. He has repeatedly said, "Vengeance is MINE, I will repay!" (Rom 12:19). Take a Concordance and see how many times this or a similar statement occurs in the Bible. Do not give place to "your" wrath! Give room for "God's wrath" to operate (v19a). "The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (Js 1:20). Jesus has spoken more about hell than about Heaven. The first time He used the word "hell" was while condemning loveless and angry words (Mt 5:21,22). Sustained anger is sin (Eph 4:26; Psa 4:4). Let's tremble before these Biblical observations to escape God's wrath!

7. Excessive Self-confidence

The secular press world releases so many books on how to build self-confidence. No doubt this would develop a positive attitude to face challenges. But excessive self-confidence to the extent of excluding God is unscriptural. Our total and ultimate dependence must be on God only. This is illustrated in the Bible in the context of three fields: (a) Building — "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit" (Zech 4:6); (b) Sports — "It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy" (Rom 9:16); (c) Agriculture — "Neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the harvest" (1 Cor 3:7). Comparing Himself to Vine, and us to the branches, Jesus emphatically said, "Without Me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). Wherever the principle is violated, God's anger is stirred, be it a person or a programme or a project.

God is not against our strength. He is not against our wisdom. He is not against our wealth. These are all from His hand. Self-boasting begins when we think that these are our own and we didn't receive them from God (Jer 9:23). God's Word challenges us, "Who distinguishes you from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you glory as if you had not received it?" (1 Cor 4:7). A Tamil Proverb says, "For a mighty man, even a blade of grass is a powerful weapon!" Can the grass boast of anything? This is pictorially presented

in Isaiah 10:15, “Shall the axe boast itself against him who chops with it? Or shall the saw magnify itself against him who saws with it? As if a rod could wield itself against those who lift it up, or as if a staff could lift up, as if it were not wood?” Even a “worm” can become a mighty “weapon” in God’s hand (Isa 41:14,15). When there’s boastful self-reliance, “The Lord of Hosts will kindle a burning like the burning of a fire. So the Light of Israel will be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame; it will burn and devour his thorns and his briars in one day” (10:16,17). Beloved, beware!

The Tower of Babel is a grim warning against unbounded confidence of man on his undertakings (Gen 11:4). But the Lord came down and scattered their plan (vv5-8). The Babel spirit of building the tallest or the biggest structure in the world is still prevalent. It’s deplorable that such a rat race is there in Christendom also. There cannot be a stronger rebuke than what the Lord has said in Jeremiah 17:5, “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the Lord.” On the other hand, “Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is in the Lord” (v7). The first candidate will be like a “shrub in the desert,” whereas the other man will be like a “tree by the river” (vv6,8). One person comes under the fury of God, and the other one enjoys His favour. The choice is ours.

When leaders boast of their skills and stamina, God gets angry because He is the One who gave them authority to rule people, whether in the Church or outside. Here are two kings scourged by Him because of their pride and self-reliance. Sennacherib the King of Assyria spoke arrogantly, “By the multitude of my chariots I have come up to the height of the mountains, to the limits of Lebanon; I will cut down its tall cedars and its choice cypress trees; I will enter the extremity of its borders, to its fruitful forest ... With the soles of my feet I have dried up all the brooks of defence” (2 Ki 19:23,24). By these words to King Hezekiah, it was the Holy One of Israel who was “reproached” and “blasphemed” (v22). The zeal of the Lord poured out its fury on the Assyrians and killed 1,85,000 of them (v35). Next comes King Uzziah. He fared well as long as he sought the Lord with the guidance of Prophet Zechariah (2 Chr 26:4,5). God helped him against the Philistines, Arabians, Meunites and Ammonites (vv6-8). He had a huge army and he was a strategic builder too. But when he became strong, “his heart was lifted up against God” (v16). God struck him with leprosy and he was a leper till death (vv20,21). It was after the death of this king, Prophet Isaiah got the heavenly vision of the “King of kings” (Isa 6:1,5). The message is clear.

The prophecy concerning Christmas in Isaiah 9:6,7 is the most beloved one in the Old Testament for all of us Christians. We stop our meditation with our sympathy on the lowly Baby in Bethlehem. But look at these words: “Government ... Shoulder ... Throne ... Judgment ... Justice ... Zeal!” Immediately after these two verses we read, The Lord sent a word against Israel. He rebuked their “pride and arrogance of heart.” They kept saying, “We will rebuild ... We will replant!” (vv8-10). The latter portion of verse 12 is one of the most terrifying statements in the Bible: “For all this His anger is not turned away but His hand is stretched out still!” This statement is repeated in 5:25; 9:17,21 and 10:4. In some versions of the Bible, this statement stands out separately after these verses (vv12,17,21; 10:4). Unusual in the whole

Bible! This is the result of the pride and folly of the elders, prophets and leaders (vv15,16). When ministries develop cracks after the times of the founders, the rebuilding efforts of the nextliners will prosper only if they work with utter humility and utmost sincerity.

We congratulate the space scientists for their mind-boggling expeditions and marvellous explorations. Thank God for the benefits reaped in the field of medicine, engineering and the like. But we must beware of using words like “conquering” the space. We cannot! We have already “corrupted” the earth (Gen 6:11,12; Rev19:2). Let’s not try to do it in the other planets also. Prophet Obadiah in his only single chapter book in the Old Testament gives us this warning: “The pride of your heart has deceived you ... You who say in your heart, ‘Who will bring me down to the ground?’ Though you exalt yourself as high as the eagle, and though you set your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down, says the Lord” (vv3,4).

Long-term planners like businessmen and entrepreneurs have a forthright message in James 4:13-16, “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell and make a profit,’ whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.’ But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.” Any comment necessary?

8. Ungodly Leadership

Since God is the ultimate Ruler of all things, earthly authority is derived from Him, whether political or spiritual (Rom 13:1; Acts 20:28). There was always some overlap between political and spiritual leadership in Israel. As such the principles to adapt and the pitfalls to avoid by leadership pointed out in the Bible are relevant for any generation. Whenever God’s warnings were not heeded to, His anger brought about disaster.

One of the earliest commandments to any king was that he must not multiply for himself warhorses, wives and wealth (Dt 17:16,17). This was to prevent pride and self-reliance. God prescribed that a written copy of His rulebook must be available to him for daily reading lest he deviates from God’s direction in ruling the people (vv18-20). History is replete with examples of nations which collapsed because the rulers despised God and His Word. The Kingdom of David and of Solomon got permanently divided when King Rehoboam rejected the council of elders (1 Ki 12). David numbered the people ignoring the brakes applied by his commander Joab (2 Sam 24:1-4). This angered God and He sent a plague which killed 70,000 men (v15). God is always against any leader who trusts in manpower and muscle strength. “The Lord does not delight in the strength of the horse; He takes no pleasure in the legs of a man. He takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His mercy” (Psa 147:10,11). He also warned His people against alliance with ungodly nations, lest they miss His Spirit’s guidance, and add “sin to sin” (Isa 30:1,2). Jesus pointed out the foxy character of Herod who made an alliance with Pilate for convenience (Lk 13:31,32; 23:12).

The *Fortune* magazine of 21 August 1995 published “Asia Corrupt-O-Meter,” giving 10 points to the most corrupt nation and 1.0 point to the least corrupt. India is in the 3rd place with a score of 7 points! “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people” (Prov 14:34). Mahatma Gandhi listed “Seven Social Sins” which characterise our national life: Pleasure without Conscience, Politics without Principles, Prayer without Devotion, Education without Character, Wealth without Work, Science without Humanity, and Commerce without Morality. “O Lord God, have mercy on us and withhold Your anger!” We cannot boast that the number of COVID-19 cases in India is much less compared to other nations. The truth is, we test only 2 persons per 1000, whereas countries like US, Russia and Germany test 50 or more per 1000!

We will next come to spiritual leadership. Priests and Prophets were the religious leaders in the Old Testament period. Now the Church leadership is on Shepherds who are otherwise called Elders or Bishops or Overseers in the New Testament (Acts 20:17,28; 1 Tim 3:1; Tit 1:7; 1 Pet 5:1). Jesus has taught us not to lead God’s people with authoritarianism like the non-Christian rulers (Mt 20:25). The Apostles followed Christ’s teaching (2 Cor 1:24; 10: 8; 1 Pet 5:3). Powermongers exploit people and not empower or equip them. By repeated “woes,” Christ rebuked hypocritical leaders (Mt 23:13,14,15,16,23,25,27,29). Isaiah warned of “devouring” fire and everlasting “burnings” against hypocrisy in Zion (Isa 33:14). Jesus got angry with those for whom traditions were more important than acts of kindness (Mk 3:4,5).

It is the responsibility of Pastors and Christian leaders to stop any form of commercialisation of religion. Let’s not forget the self-made whip in Jesus’ hand which He used twice in the temple premises (Jn 2:14-16; Mt 21:12,13). God judges the preachers who are elated about their oratory skills, and who fail to give God all the glory (Acts 12:21-23). He pronounces woe on Christian leaders who resort to luxurious lifestyle forsaking the simplicity and charitableness of their forefathers (Jer 22:13-16). The curse of Christendom today is overfed shepherds and underfed sheep (Ezek 34:1-3).

9. Rebellion

In the earlier sections we have dealt enough with our sins against God. Here we will talk about rebellion against human authority and leadership.

We’ll begin with parents and children. The Ten Commandments can be divided into two sections: 1 to 4 relate to our duty to God, and 5 to 10 our duty to man (Ex 20:1-17). The second section begins with the duty of children to their parents: “Honour your father and your mother that your days may be long upon the earth” (v12). Apostle Paul quotes it in Ephesians 6:1-3 and says that this is the “first” Commandment with a “promise.” This is also the “only” Commandment with a promise! Do we get the message? Things will not go “well” with the children who disobey their parents and rebel against them (Eph 6:3). See how God viewed disobedience to parents: Dt 21:18-21, “If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or mother ... all the men of his city shall stone him to death.” Jesus obeyed His earthly parents even though He had come from

Heaven and He was God in human form (Lk 2:51). Children are becoming more and more rebellious as we approach the end of endtimes, as predicted by Apostle Paul (2 Tim 3:2). The endtime ministry of Elijah through the Holy Spirit is to “turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I (the Lord) come and strike the earth with a curse” (Mal 4:6). What a sad ending for the Old Testament! This endtime ministry was inaugurated by John the Baptist who came in the spirit and power of Elijah (Lk 1:15-17). God’s anger against rebellious children is stated in Isaiah 45:10, “Woe to him who says to his father, ‘What have you begotten?’ or to his mother, ‘What have you brought to birth?’ ” Dear children, you may not make such daring statements, but what is your attitude?

Next we will look at rebellion against civil authority. Both Paul and Peter speak against it. Romans 13:2, “Whoever resists the (governing) authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.” Read the entire passage (vv1-5). 1 Peter 2:13,14, “Submit yourself to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake.” Man finds loopholes for every rule and law. Compared to the West, we in India are not law-abiding enough. Let us Christians take up this challenge so we may “glorify God” before non-Christians (v12).

Thirdly, we will talk about rebellion against spiritual leadership. The rebellious attitude of Moses’ nextliners, Miriam and Aaron, brought in disastrous results (Num 12:1-15). The anger of the Lord was aroused against them. He withdrew His presence from among them. Miriam became leprous. The journey of God’s people was delayed by seven days. Similarly the rebellion of Korah & Co. against Moses (Num 16). The earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the rebels. A fire from God consumed 250 men. Several such incidents of rebellion are recorded in the history of Israel. “They mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy” (2 Chr 36:15,16; Psa 78:31; Zech 7:12).

Church leadership is on the shoulders of Pastors who are otherwise called Elders or Bishops or Overseers (Acts 20:17,28; 1 Tim 3:1; Tit 1:7; 1 Pet 5:1). Apostle Peter, calling himself a fellow Elder, admonishes youngsters, “Submit yourselves to your elders ... Be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble” (1 Pet 5:1,5). The writer of Hebrews says, “Obey those who rule over you and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you” (Heb 13:17). Paul urges us to show “double honour” to those elders who labour in “Word and doctrine” (1 Tim 5:17). We are well aware of the rebellious members in the congregations who cause divisions. Apostle Jude calls them as “sensual persons, not having the Spirit” (Jude 19). Joining this gang will invite God’s wrath.

10. Backsliding

Backsliding means going back to the old ways, forsaking the life we have enjoyed with God. It can take many forms, but it invariably invokes God’s displeasure and anger. He did not spare even the angels who did not keep their original state but

sinned. He punished them with “chains of darkness” and cast them to “hell” (2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6). One of the earliest calls from God to backsliders is in Jeremiah 3:12,13, “Return, backsliding Israel, says the Lord, and I will not cause My anger to fall on you; for I am merciful, says the Lord, and I will not remain angry forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity that you have transgressed against the Lord your God.” God’s promises in the Old Testament abound to those who returned from backsliding. Hosea 14:1,4, “O Israel, return to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity ... I will heal your backsliding, I will love you freely, for My anger has turned away from you.” These passages speak about national repentance from apostasy.

As we move to the New Testament, the stress is on personal and congregational repentance from backsliding. Various types of backsliding are observed here. Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, backslided because of covetousness. We read that “Satan entered Judas” (Lk 22:3). He hanged himself in the same field which he purchased with the money for which he sold his Master (Acts 1:16-19). Do we have any land called “*Akel Dama*” (= Field of Blood), purchased through our covetous practices in business or ministry? Demas, who left Paul’s missionary team because of worldly attractions, is another backslider (2 Tim 4:10). Love of money has been among the chief causes of backsliding among preachers, especially those with a prophetic gift like Balaam (2 Pet 2:15,16). God’s Word calls it “madness” (v16). The “blackness of darkness” is reserved forever for them (Jude 11,13).

The Jezebel virus of “the lust of eyes and the lust of flesh” has infected several servants of God who will become “bedridden” if they don’t take proper treatment (Rev 2:20-22). Getting out of Egypt seems to be easier than getting Egypt out of us. This greatly arouses the anger of the Lord which burns and consumes the backsliders (Num 11:1,10). Apostle Peter calls them “dogs” and “pigs” whose “latter end would be worse than the beginning” (2 Pet 2:20-22). We are to be watchful lest we are “led away with the error of the wicked” and “fall from our steadfastness” (3:17,18). Referring to backsliding the writer of Hebrews makes some souring statements: “It’s a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God ... If anyone draws back, God’s soul has no pleasure in him ... Do not draw back to perdition” (Heb 10:31,38,39). There are times when God becomes tired of waiting for the backsliders to come back (Jer 15:6).

The next type of backsliding is due to doctrinal error. Falling from grace into legalism (Gal 1:6; 5:4). Restoration of such persons involves birthpain (4:19). The opposite of this has given birth to the popular “hyper-grace” movement (Rom 6:1,2). Those who turn the grace of God into licentiousness are marked out for “condemnation” (Jude 4). Let’s not mistake God’s grace in choosing us as the “vessels of mercy” instead of as the “vessels of wrath” (Rom 9:22,23). Beware of the false prophets and false teachers who secretly bring in “destructive heresies” through “deceptive words.” Their judgment will be fast (2 Pet 2:1-3). Deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons are very much in the air in these last days (1 Tim 4:1). False preachers will outnumber the faithful (2 Tim 4:2-4). Let’s continue to abide in the doctrine of Christ lest we are thrown into fire (Jn 15:6; 2 Jn 9).

Many who were bold and brisk in witnessing for Christ in the early years of their new life become slack and slothful in course of time. It's going to be more difficult in the coming days than now to stand for Jesus. But the words of Jesus cannot be taken lightly: "You will be hated by all for My name's sake, but he who endures to the end will be saved ... Whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father and the angels in Heaven" (Mt 10:22,33; Lk 12:9). We must bless men to the extent we are blessed by God. The earth which drinks the rain from heaven will be "cursed" and "burned" if it does not bring forth fruit (Heb 6:7,8; Lk 13:6-9). In the forthcoming difficult days, there will be several Hymenaeuses and Alexanders who would deny the basic faith on Christ and function as the agents of Satan (1 Tim 1:19,20).

Will God be angry forever?

It had not been easy for me to write this article on this unpleasant subject of the "wrath of God." During the course of writing I was tempted several times to discontinue, but the Spirit of the Lord would not let me withdraw. My fear of God intensified inordinately when I meditated on the 860 verses quoted in this write-up from over 50 books of the Bible. I thank God for that. There's a question the Psalmist asks thrice: "How long, Lord? Will You be angry forever?" (Psa 79:5; 80:4; 85:5). I am comforted by the words of David and Micah: Psa 103:8-10, "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities." Mic 7:18,19, "God does not retain His anger forever because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. He will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea." I conclude with the prayer of Prophet Habakkuk: "O Lord, REVIVE Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy!" (Hab 3:2). Yes, the Coronavirus is paving way for ANOTHER REVIVAL!

(Studies on the "Wrath of God" are rather rare in Christian circles. This Article, though not exhaustive, is good enough for a basic understanding of this character of God as revealed in the Bible. Several readings, with the references, individually or collectively, will immensely benefit you. Share this with your Christian friends everywhere. This article is available in Tamil also. The earlier 15 articles are attached to the Online Letters 127,128 and 129).