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THE JUSTICE OF GOD
BY GORDON MURRAY

We have reached a topic in our series that disturbs many. We like that God is great - infinite, eternal and unchangeable. We want God to be wise and powerful. We have to agree that God is different to us and that he is therefore holy. But do we want God to be just? This one worries us.

It's bad news for us because we are sinners. If God is just then we have a negative message for mankind about our standing before God by nature. But it's not a negative message about God. That God is infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his justice is a matter that brings great glory to him.

God's Perfect Justice

The whole idea of justice is that of being judged by a perfect standard. If we hold up a standard of perfection then God meets all the criteria absolutely. This is the idea that John has when he writes 'God is light and in Him is no darkness at all' (1 John 1:5). There is no imperfection

in God. He is right. He is perfect. He is the very definition of good. And regarding that teaching he says that our joy should be full because of it (1 John 1:4). It should fill us with joy that God is perfect.

Therefore God demands perfection from his creatures. He is not happy with faults and failings and screw-ups and sin. He abhors wickedness. Murder, rape, adultery and stealing are uncountenanceable for God. Idolatry, sabbath-breaking and blasphemy all are chalked up against the account of the man or woman who commits them. They are all sins which will be paid for when God will have justice to be done.

That is why the last day has come to be known as Judgement Day. It is the day when God will right all wrongs and right and good will be re-established in the world and creation will be restored to its former glory.

And every one of us ought to be filled with fear and dread of that judgement because every one of us has sinned. Every one of us, when we are measured up to the standard of perfection,

which we call the Moral Law or the Ten Commandments, are far from the perfection that God himself displays.

Even the best of men is a sinner. ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery’ is one of God’s commands. Jesus explains that the commandment stretches to mean that not only is an extra-marital affair a sin but to look on a woman and lust after her is to break the seventh commandment. Can you show me a man who hasn’t? That’s Jesus’ point. To hate your brother is to break the command not to murder. Guilty. Everyone.

So all of us are afraid of the Justice of God. We know that if God is perfect and will judge all sin that means that his hand of justice will strike every one of us! At the judgment people will cry for the hills to cover them and the mountains to fall on them. As Jonathan Edwards put it, we will be ‘sinners in the hands of an angry God’.

And yet there is a very positive side to God’s justice. One which even the worldly man must admit is good.

On Wikipedia you can see a list of unsolved murders in the UK. Nine of them took place in the past four years. It is a great injustice that allows those guilty of these murders to walk free. Some of them will never be brought to justice by our courts. But God knows. And God is just.

Many women have suffered rape at the hands of cruel wicked men and they have never breathed a word about it to a living soul. These women should report the men who have assaulted them. But for some it is too difficult to contemplate. Those men are walking around as though nothing happened. But God knows. And God is just.

Modern politics, just like ancient politics, is full of corruption. And many corrupt politicians throughout our world walk around held in the highest esteem and protected by government. But God knows. And God is just.

The Church is full of hypocrites. That’s true. God knows. And God is just. We won’t get away with a thing. And that’s good.

Just and the Justifier

It is especially good because God has done something wonderful in the Gospel. He has preserved his justice and yet made a way of saving sinners.

In the book of Daniel an interesting phrase appears written on the wall. It’s where we get the common phrase ‘the writing’s on the wall’, meaning that a reckoning is coming. The phrase is MENE MENE TEKEL UPHARSIN. You have been weighed in the balances and you have been found wanting. If we are all sinners and God is just then we all will be found wanting when we are

weighed in the balances of God’s just judgement at the end of time.

The catechism tells us that ‘sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God’. The Ten Commandments reveal to us God’s moral standard for humanity. And they all find us wanting and transgressing. We have all sinned.

And we are due God’s just judgement. And God is perfect in justice. But God offers us a way out. He offers to save us in the Gospel.

Jesus has dealt with the sin of the Church. The wages of sin is death. And Jesus died for his Church. We deserve Hell but Jesus has suffered Hell on the cross for his Church.

In the Old Testament Israel offered sacrifices for sin. In order to take away the offence of their sin a river of blood flowed from the Temple. Adam and Eve were given animal skins to cover their nakedness in Genesis. Animals had to be sacrificed to provide these. Dealing with sin meant death and bloodshed. All of this was in John the Baptist’s mind when he declared the Lord Jesus Christ to be ‘THE LAMB OF GOD’ who would take away the sins of the world. The Old Testament had been waiting for Jesus and the New Testament writers all look back to him. He has come to be the sacrifice for sin. He has come to bear

the brunt of God’s justice for his Church. Jesus was the spotless sinless sacrifice God made in order to satisfy his justice and at the same time have mercy upon sinners.

Because Jesus died God can let his Church go free. There is now no condemnation for the Church. And God remains just.

A just God can be trusted; trusted to deal with sinners and trusted to forgive his Church on the basis that Christ has died for sin. You believe in Jesus as your saviour and God cannot punish your sin. It is gone. Dealt with. Forgiven. You are free.

Now that’s good news!

You want proof? It’s there, or rather not there, on the resurrection day. Christ is risen from the dead. How do we know God’s infinite, eternal, unchangeable justice is satisfied with Christ’s sacrifice? We know because on the third day death had to let him go. The wages of death had been paid. And for the Church death becomes a hopeful thing. An entrance into new life. An entrance into glory. Not because we deserve glory, but because Christ has purchased glory for us by satisfying God’s unerring justice on the cross.

Praise God for his glorious justice!

THE UNNECESSARY BLINDFOLD

BY CATHERINE MACKENZIE

Doreen Lawrence has received rewards and recognition for her active campaigning against racial injustice – but I'm sure she would exchange all of these just for the opportunity to turn back time, to have her nineteen-year-old son back in her home, or even to be holding the grandchildren that will now never be. Her son, Stephen Lawrence, who was murdered in the 1990s would now be in his forties, if he had lived. But one racial attack and an institutional miscarriage of justice resulted in this bereaved mother taking on an active campaign to bring her son's murderers before the courts. Not something you would have thought necessary in a just democracy. But it was. It took a further nineteen years before two of the original suspects were given life sentences.

As a result of Doreen's fight against injustice, a judicial enquiry concluded that the Metropolitan Police were institutionally racist; a major contributing factor towards the failure of the police to solve the crime.

The murder of Stephen Lawrence revealed injustice not only of racism in

society, but also in the very institution we associate with law, truth and legitimacy. Those whom we would assume had an obligation to justice were exposed as being as unjust as the criminals they were employed to prosecute.

Our reaction to stories like this is often 'How unjust; How inhuman.' However, humanity is not by nature just... but selfish. Our first protest on the playground is often 'It's not fair.' But these words are less about true justice and more about getting our own way. That's why, in ensuring that there is justice in our nations, we require impartiality. This has been recognised as an important part of the justice system for centuries. But it wasn't always the case.

The Statue of Lady Justice stands outside the Old Bailey Courthouse in London with a sword in one hand and a set of scales in the other. She also stands outside the Old Supreme court building in Hong Kong – but there is one difference. Both statues hold scales to symbolise fairness. Both hold a sword to

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represent power and enforcement. It is only the statue in Hong Kong that has a blindfold to represent objectivity or what is also referred to as blind justice.

Humanity struggles to maintain justice – so much so that it is necessary to go against our own personal inclinations and bias in order to achieve it. However, the source of true justice is, thankfully, very different... Our Lord doesn't need the blindfold.

Yes, our Lord holds the scales.
'A just balance and scales are the Lord's; all weights in his bag are his work.'
Proverbs 16:11. 'He loves righteousness and justice' Psalm 33:5 'The Lord works

righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed' Psalm 103:6.

And our Lord holds the sword.
'For by fire will the Lord enter into judgment and by his sword, with all flesh' Isaiah 66:16. 'There is one Lawgiver, which is able to save, and to destroy' James 4:12. 'But it is God who executes judgment, putting down one and lifting up another.' Psalm 75:7

But for the one who is all-seeing and perfectly just ... the blindfold is simply unnecessary and non-existent.

He sees everything.
'The Lord looks down from heaven; he

sees all the children of man.' Psalm 33:13. 'He sees 'the heart and the mind' Jeremiah 20:12.

He is impartial and right.

'But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere' James 3:17. 'And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.' 1 Peter 1:17 'God shows no partiality' Romans 2:11. 'Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.' Psalm 97:2

But God is not just Just. As Charles Price says, 'What makes the cross of Christ necessary are two things in the character of God: God is just and God is merciful.'

And we are sinners!

Without God's forgiveness sinners must face his justice: eternal punishment, the second death, hell. The only deliverance from this is to have both justice and mercy. How can God be both just and merciful? Justice is what we deserve. Mercy is what we don't deserve. How are those two conflicting characteristics reconciled?

In the cross.

'In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself.' 2 Corinthians 5:19

On the cross the just demands of a Holy God were met by the death of the sinless Son of God – Jesus Christ. God's mercy towards us caused him to send his son to the cross. So when as sinners we see how dearly we need salvation we can thank God for his mercy and appeal to his justice. God is obligated to forgive us because Christ has already paid the price. Justice and Mercy do not conflict with each other in his character. He is just. He is merciful.

'The Lord exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.'
Isaiah 30:18.

***KID'S CORNER:
THE OLD BAILEY
BY CARINE MACKENZIE***



The chief criminal law court in London is called The Old Bailey. In that building are several courtrooms in which criminal cases are tried. In each of the courtrooms there is a public gallery, so ordinary members of the public can go there to watch and listen to a trial taking place.

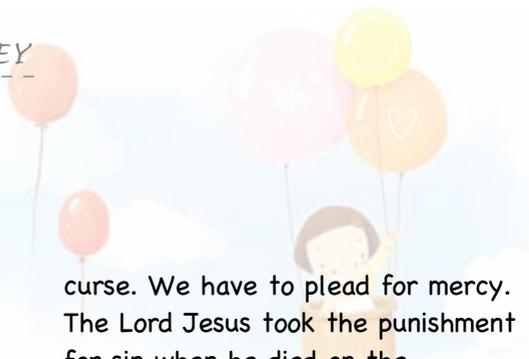
A recent visit there gave us many things to think about. The procedure is very solemn and serious and there are officials all around to make sure that no one misbehaves.

When you peep over the balcony of the public gallery you can pick out the accused man in the dock, the Judge presiding over all the dealings, the members of the jury who have to decide whether the accused is guilty or not guilty and the lawyers acting for the prosecution and the defence.

Looking at the Judge in his robes and wig, we are reminded that one day each one of us 'must stand

before the judgment seat of Christ' (Romans 14:10). 'It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment' (Hebrews 9:27). That is an appointment that we must all keep. Many crimes are committed in this country that are never solved and never brought to judgment. But nothing is hidden from God and all things are known to him. His judgment is perfect, just and true. No mistake is ever made.

The jury have a very difficult job. They have to listen to both sides of the case and decide, on the evidence presented by the witnesses, what is true. Sometimes the evidence is confusing and not truthful, so making the task of the jury even more difficult. God knows our hearts. We cannot lie to him. His word can 'discern the thoughts and intents of the heart ... all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.' (Hebrews 4:12-13).



For the man in the dock, accused of a crime, the proceedings of the court are vitally important. If he is found 'guilty' he will be punished perhaps by imprisonment. If he is found 'not guilty' he will be set free. So the judgment of the Judge and jury will dramatically affect his life.

For us at the Day of Judgment, the sentence of the great Judge will affect us for all eternity. How awful to hear the words, 'Depart from me, ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.' But how wonderful to hear, 'Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'

Before the judgment is passed a lot of work and preparation is done by many people - detectives, policemen, advocates and lawyers - all working towards the judgment.

What must we do before the Judgment Day? We have to plead guilty. We have to acknowledge that we deserve God's wrath and

curse. We have to plead for mercy. The Lord Jesus took the punishment for sin when he died on the cross. Our sins deserve the death sentence and the death sentence has been executed on the very Son of God. What an amazing event! He died to take the punishment that we deserve.

During this visit to The Old Bailey we saw a young teenage girl sitting on the stairs leading to one of the courtrooms. She was alone and quietly crying - just a picture of misery. Obviously someone she loved was in trouble, and the procedures of justice were causing her a great deal of pain and anguish. One could not help feeling sorry for her but could do nothing to help.

Our sin has brought us misery in this life and Jesus tells us that hell is a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. But if we ask for mercy the Lord will save us from this miserable state. He will bring us at last to heaven to be with himself and shall wipe away all tears from our eyes (Revelation 7:17).

Quiz
The initials of your answers will spell out the subject of the story. The answers to these questions come from the King James or New King James version of the Bible.

Your answer

1. Who came to save his people from sin? (Matthew 1:21).
2. Who was sentenced to death for touching the ark of God? (2 Samuel 6:6)
3. What is the wages of sin? (Romans 6:23)
4. What was Haman hanged on? (Esther 7:10)
5. David sings of judgment/justice along with what else? (Psalm 101:1)
6. God brings every work into judgment whether it be good or _____. (Ecclesiastes 12:14).
7. The men of which city will rise in judgment to condemn those who do not repent? (Matthew 12:41).
8. What has God prepared for judgment? (Psalm 9:7)

*THE ACCUSED**BY JOHN ROSS – EDINBURGH*

The accused was constantly under attack. “Expert witnesses,” came from far and wide with their theories and accusations. They even wrote learned books to try and prove their point. Some rotten ruthless rulers used the scorching flames or live burials or attacks by ferocious animals and a host of lesser evils to intimidate and hopefully destroy forever those befriending the accused. Witnesses were hounded and hated, many were lynched yet surprisingly saying, they would gladly die.

The accused seemed to be indestructible, immovable, impeccable in all respects, never silenced, never a blush rather a most noble dignity. Some people wanted to give their worship but the answer was always the same, no, worship The Lord.

All these witnesses for the defendant, the clerks stopped counting them. All ages, full range of abilities. Some of them could barely answer yes or no, others were the brightest of the bright and then every ability in between. All proclaiming the innocence of the accused, and gladly giving a character reference when asked, plus numerous examples of how they and others were helped on any number

of occasions and so many saying their lives were turned around for good by the occupant of the dock.

The case still runs.

Once again the formalities are gone through.

Name please? “The Holy Bible.” Some faces freeze, others glow with delight and approval.

A long, long time ago when this case was first initiated, word came down from the highest court in the universe, which in effect said, stop wasting your time, make the accused your supreme guide or you will be crushed by it forever.

This lower court hopes to win so convincingly that the populace will not even believe in the existence of the highest court. Surely, the blindest folly. Even if all were deceived, a thing that will never happen, it would make absolutely no difference to the truth of the case.

*The Bible never dies
Never fades away.
It very clearly says,
He who made me,
Is greater than me.
Believe me,
Worship Him!*

*John Ross, Edinburgh APC, wrote the above after reading
Jeremiah ch 36 where Jehoiakim burns Jeremiah's Scroll*

THE WRATH OF GOD

BY A. W. PINK

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

Yes, many there are who turn away from a vision of God's wrath as though they were called to look upon some blotch in the Divine character, or some blot upon the Divine government. But what saith the Scriptures? As we turn to them we find that God has made no attempt to conceal the fact of His wrath. He is not ashamed to make it known that

vengeance and fury belong unto Him. His own challenge is, "See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no god with Me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal; neither is there any that can deliver out of My hand. For I lift up My hand to heaven, and say, I live forever, If I whet My glittering sword, and Mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to Mine enemies, and will reward them that hate Me" (Deut. 32:39-41). A study of the concordance will show that there are more references in Scripture to the anger, fury, and wrath of God, than there are to His love and tenderness. Because God is holy, He hates all sin; And because He hates all sin, His anger burns against the sinner: Psalm 7:11.

Now the wrath of God is as much a Divine perfection as is His faithfulness, power, or mercy. It must be so, for there is no blemish whatever, not the slightest defect in the character of God; yet there would be if "wrath" were absent from Him! Indifference to sin is a moral blemish, and he who hates it not is a moral leper. How could He who is the Sum of all excellency look with equal satisfaction upon virtue and vice, wisdom

YES, MANY THERE ARE WHO TURN AWAY FROM A VISION OF GOD'S WRATH AS THOUGH THEY WERE CALLED TO LOOK UPON SOME BLOTCH IN THE DIVINE CHARACTER, OR SOME BLOT UPON THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT. BUT WHAT SAITH THE SCRIPTURES?

and folly? How could He who is infinitely holy disregard sin and refuse to manifest His "severity" (Rom. 9:12) toward it? How could He who delights only in that which is pure and lovely, loathe and hate not that which is impure and vile? The very nature of God makes Hell as real a necessity, as imperatively and eternally requisite as Heaven is. Not only is there no imperfection in God, but there is no perfection in Him that is less perfect than another.

The wrath of God is His eternal detestation of all unrighteousness. It is the displeasure and indignation of Divine equity against evil. It is the holiness of God stirred into activity against sin. It is the moving cause of that just sentence which He passes upon evil-doers. God is angry against sin because it is a rebelling against His authority, a wrong done to His inviolable sovereignty. Insurrectionists against God's government shall be made to know that God is the Lord. They shall be made to feel how great that Majesty

is which they despise, and how dreadful is that threatened wrath which they so little regarded. Not that God's anger is a malignant and malicious retaliation, inflicting injury for the sake of it, or in return for injury received. No; while God will vindicate His dominion as the Governor of the universe, He will not be vindictive.

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

It was revealed when the sentence of death was first pronounced, the earth cursed, and man driven out of the earthly paradise; and afterwards by such examples of punishment as those of the Deluge and the destruction of the Cities of the Plain by fire from heaven; but especially by the reign of death throughout the world. It was

proclaimed in the curse of the law on every transgression, and was intimated in the institution of sacrifice. In the 8th of Romans, the apostle calls the attention of believers to the fact that the whole creation has become subject to vanity, and groaneth and travaileth together in pain. The same creation which declares that there is a God, and publishes His glory, also proclaims that He is the Enemy of sin and the Avenger of the crimes of men . . . But above all, the wrath of God was revealed from heaven when the Son of God came down to manifest the Divine character, and when that wrath was displayed in His sufferings and death, in a manner more awful than by all the tokens God had before given of His displeasure against sin. Besides this, the future and eternal punishment of the wicked is now declared in terms more solemn and explicit than formerly. Under the new dispensation there are two revelations given from heaven, one of wrath, the other of grace.

Again; that the wrath of God is a Divine perfection is plainly demonstrated by what we read of in Psalm 95:11, "Unto whom I swear in My wrath." There are two occasions of God "swearing": in making promises (Gen. 22:16), and in denouncing threatening (Deut. 1:34). In the former, He swears in mercy to His children; in the latter, He swears to terrify the wicked. An oath is for solemn confirmation: Hebrews 6:16. In

Genesis 22:16 God said, "By Myself have I sworn." In Psalm 89:35 He declares, "Once have I sworn by My holiness." While in Psalm 95:11 He affirmed, "I swear in My wrath." Thus the great Jehovah Himself appeals to His "wrath" as a perfection equal to His "holiness": He swears by the one as much as by the other! Again; as in Christ "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9), and as all the Divine perfections are illustriously displayed by Him (John 1:18), therefore do we read of "the wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. 6:16).

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

OUR READINESS OR OUR RELUCTANCY TO MEDITATE UPON THE WRATH OF GOD BECOMES A SURE TEST OF HOW OUR HEARTS' REALLY STAND AFFECTED TOWARD HIM. IF WE DO NOT TRULY REJOICE IN GOD, FOR WHAT HE IS IN HIMSELF, AND THAT BECAUSE OF ALL THE PERFECTIONS WHICH ARE ETERNALLY RESIDENT IN HIM, THEN HOW DWELLETH THE LOVE OF GOD IN US? EACH OF US NEEDS TO BE MOST PRAYERFULLY ON HIS GUARD AGAINST DEVISING AN IMAGE OF GOD IN OUR THOUGHTS WHICH IS PATTERNED AFTER OUR OWN EVIL INCLINATIONS.

delivered us from "the wrath to come" (1 Thess. 1:10).

Our readiness or our reluctance to meditate upon the wrath of God becomes a sure test of how our hearts' really stand affected toward Him. If we do not truly rejoice in God, for what He is in Himself, and that because of all the perfections which are eternally resident in Him, then how dwelleth the love of God in us? Each of us needs to be most prayerfully on his guard against devising an image of God in our thoughts which is patterned after our own evil inclinations. Of old the Lord complained, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether as thyself" (Ps. 50:21), If we rejoice not "at the remembrance of His holiness" (Ps. 97:12), if we rejoice not to know that in a soon coming Day God

will make a most glorious display of His wrath, by taking vengeance on all who now oppose Him, it is proof positive that our hearts are not in subjection to Him, that we are yet in our sins, on the way to the everlasting burnings.

"Rejoice, O ye nations (Gentiles) His people, for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and will render vengeance to His adversaries" (Deut. 32:43). And again we read, "I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God; For true and righteous are His judgments: for He hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of His servants at her hand. And again

IF A PRINCE HATH AN ENEMY GOT INTO ONE OF HIS TOWNS, HE DOTHT NOT SEND THEM IN PROVISION, BUT LAYS CLOSE SIEGE TO THE PLACE, AND DOTHT WHAT HE CAN TO STARVE THEM. BUT THE GREAT GOD, THAT COULD WINK ALL HIS ENEMIES INTO DESTRUCTION, BEARS WITH THEM, AND IS AT DAILY COST TO MAINTAIN THEM. WELL MAY HE COMMAND US TO BLESS THEM THAT CURSE US, WHO HIMSELF DOES GOOD TO THE EVIL AND UNTHANKFUL. BUT THINK NOT, SINNERS, THAT YOU SHALL ESCAPE THUS; GOD'S MILL GOES SLOW, BUT GRINDS SMALL; THE MORE ADMIRABLE HIS PATIENCE AND BOUNTY NOW IS, THE MORE DREADFUL AND UNSUPPORTABLE WILL THAT FURY BE WHICH ARISETH OUT OF HIS ABUSED GOODNESS.

they said Alleluia.” (Rev. 19:13). Great will be the rejoicing of the saints in that day when the Lord shall vindicate His majesty, exercise His awful dominion, magnify His justice, and overthrow the proud rebels who have dared to defy Him.

“If thou Lord, shouldest mark (impute) iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?” (Ps. 130:3). Well may each of us ask this question, for it is written, “the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment” (Ps. 1:5). How sorely was Christ’s soul exercised

with thoughts of God’s marking the iniquities of His people when they were upon Him! He was “amazed and very heavy” (Mark 14:33). His awful agony, His bloody sweat, His strong cries and supplications (Heb. 5:7), His reiterated prayers (“If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me”), His last dreadful cry, (“My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”) all manifest what fearful apprehensions He had of what it was for God to “mark iniquities.” Well may poor sinners cry out, “Lord who shall stand” when the Son of God Himself so trembled

beneath the weight of His wrath? If thou, my reader, hast not “fled for refuge” to Christ, the only Saviour, “how wilt thou do in the swelling of the Jordan?” (Jer. 12:5)?

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

Then flee, my reader, flee to Christ; “flee from the wrath to come” (Matt. 3:7) ere it be too late. Do not, we earnestly beseech

you, suppose that this message is intended for somebody else. It is to you! Do not be contented by thinking you have already fled to Christ. Make certain! Beg the Lord to search your heart and show you yourself.

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

THE WRATH OF GOD UPON THE CROSS OF CHRIST

BY REV. CHARLES R. BIGGS

Remember the Apostle Paul's words in Romans 1:17 when he quotes Habakkuk chapter 2: "The righteous shall live by faith." In God's grace he has ultimately and consummately manifested his wrath in order to save his people because of his graciousness. The wrath of God was revealed in all its devastating consequences as God's righteousness was revealed throughout history to Israel and all the nations...but it was all the more so devastating that God's wrath was revealed at the cross, revealing not only God's righteousness and holy justice against sin, but in his great love for his people that he delivered up his Only Begotten Son so that His only Son would taste his wrath and the death that comes from sin.

Christ received the wrath of God that had been stored up in the divine anger against every sin that had ever been committed by his people in cosmic rebellion against him. God delivered up his son to taste the torments and afflictions of hell on our behalf. What love, what righteousness, what justice, what wrath, what love that the Father bestowed upon us that we should be

children of God...and that is what we are!! (1 John 3:1-3).

When Christ was delivered over to the Romans to be crucified, he did not merely die a painful death by crucifixion - that indeed would be painful enough! In addition to the pain of crucifixion, Jesus took upon himself the absolute, deliberate, unmitigated wrath of God upon himself. He was as close as he could possibly be to our sins without being tainted by our sins; he became sin for us as our representative (Rom. 5:12-21).

1 Corinthians 5:21 teaches us that "He made [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." God forsook Christ on the cross and turned away his face from his son. God said, "The LORD curse you and make his face turn away from you," rather than the LORD bless you and keep you and make his face shine upon you (cf. Deut. 6:4-6). God's righteous wrath was so intense, so severe that even the Son of God himself prayed that if it be possible to allow God's cup of wrath to pass from him; not "my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42-46).

This cup that Christ drank on our behalf - the wrath of God and the death because of sin, Christ now invites his people to partake in a cup of life - the life of his blood shed for the remission of sins. This is the true righteousness and holiness and justice of God revealed in his wrath. God's patience from the time Adam sinned, in his forbearance, or the holding back his wrath upon a sinful people, he now displayed upon his most righteous and holy Son whom he loved - and this all for us.

It is because God poured out his wrath on Christ as our propitiation, our substitute for our sins, that we can boldly come into the throne room and not tremble as the Israelites at Mt. Sinai. For we have not come to a mountain burning and rumbling with fire and thunder, but to the Holy City, the New Jerusalem (Heb. 12:18ff). Read Romans 3:19-26. God could be just in punishing sin, but also the justifier of those who believe by faith in Jesus.

Romans 3:23-26 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 26 It was to show his righteousness

at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

The righteous truly do live by faith in Jesus Christ! Not so the wicked! The wrath of God abides on all unbelievers, that is those who depend on their own works of righteousness that is as filthy rags (Is. 1; cf. John 3:36). For those who do not believe in the only Son of God whether Jew or Gentile, have trampled the Son of God underfoot and there is no other sacrifice for their sins. As God revealed his righteousness throughout history, so he revealed his wrath and hatred of sin among both Jew and Gentiles (Rom. 1:17ff). Now in the time after which Christ has come, God not only has ultimately revealed his righteousness in Christ, so he has revealed his wrath from heaven against sin on the cross and in the eternal torment of the wicked in hell. May we never trust in our own righteousness, but only in the righteousness that comes from Christ, by grace, through faith.

Remember on the last day, at the Judgment Seat of Christ, there will be some there that claimed Christ as Savior, who did mighty deeds in his name, but if they were looking merely to their accomplishment of the Law and not the accomplishment of Christ living the Law through them, they will hear the most terrifying words known to man: "Depart

IT IS BECAUSE GOD Poured OUT HIS WRATH ON CHRIST AS OUR PROPITIATION, OUR SUBSTITUTE FOR OUR SINS, THAT WE CAN BOLDLY COME INTO THE THRONE ROOM AND NOT TREMBLE AS THE ISRAELITES AT MT. SINAI. FOR WE HAVE NOT COME TO A MOUNTAIN BURNING AND RUMBLING WITH FIRE AND THUNDER, BUT TO THE HOLY CITY, THE NEW JERUSALEM (HEB. 12:18FF). READ ROMANS 3:19-26. GOD COULD BE JUST IN PUNISHING SIN, BUT ALSO THE JUSTIFIER OF THOSE WHO BELIEVE BY FAITH IN JESUS.

from me you wicked—I never knew you.” Our righteousness is not our own, it is Christ’s given to us or imparted to us.

As 1 Corinthians 1:30 teaches us, Christ is indeed our only righteousness, sanctification and redemption and therefore because those who do not trust in Christ will be forever banished to hell and experience the eternal torments of the wicked. You could say that if Christ was not in your place on the cross receiving the wrath of God, and you have not believed this by faith, then you will receive what Christ received upon the cross, and then some; you will receive God’s wrath upon your sins eternally!

Regarding those who do not believe, those who do not know God’s righteousness through faith in Christ,

they will be permanently removed from the presence of God and his people (Mt. 25:31-46). The wicked, unrepentant unbelievers must come to Mt. Sinai that cannot be touched, that burns with fire, and blackness, and darkness, and tempest (Ex. 19:16-19; Deut. 4:11,12; 4:24; 5:4,23-25).

The wicked will not strut with chins held high (Ps. 12:8) as they approach the Mountain of Sinai: the mountain of thunder and lightning, thick clouds of smoke, trumpet blasts, and fire, to be consumed by the wrath of God because they will have no mediator to save them (cf. Heb. 12). So fearful will be the appearance of this mountain that they will quake with fear and trembling and they will not be able to endure his just judgment; the wicked will not stand in

the judgment nor in the congregation of the righteous (Ex. 19; Ps. 1:5).

The wicked will no longer plot against the LORD and against his anointed one (Ps. 2:1); they will no longer prosper but will be brought low, cut down like the grass and wither as the green herb, both the fool and the workers of iniquity in the fiery furnace of God’s wrath (Ps. 37:1,2; 73:3). This is because salvation is far from the wicked (Ps. 119:155) who are like ships on the tossing sea; the breath of God’s lips will slay them (Is. 11:4; 57:20). The wicked will die for their sins (Ezek. 3:18) although they have been warned by the clear revelation of God’s wrath, they will continue to be wicked (Dan. 12:10; Rom. 1:18; 1 Cor. 6:9; cf. Rev. 22:11).

The wicked must remember the warning of 2 Thessalonians 1:7ff, that the Lord Jesus Christ will not return as the meek Lamb to live the life as a servant and to die a heinous death upon the cross. When the Lord Jesus Christ is revealed again, he will be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus (1 Thess. 9,10). As Hebrews 10:31 says, “It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

Be warned and do not wait any longer, today is the day of God’s salvation (2 Cor. 6:2), look upon the Christ who has been held up upon the cross and experienced God’s wrath- -and believe. Believe on the only Begotten Son of God who has tasted death and hell on your behalf and do not ever look to your own righteousness again. If you have believed upon the LORD Jesus Christ, then by His Spirit he will teach you to say no to unrighteousness, he will produce the good fruits of the Spirit by faith as you walk and grow in his knowledge by his grace, and he will ultimately deliver you from the wrath to come. That is why all the believers at God’s throne in Revelation 4 and 5 are praising God and the Lamb both day and night.

In God’s presence, these saints know and realize how much God loved them by not overlooking their sins, but by punishing the Lamb of God in their stead- - in their place. God’s wrath on the Last Day will consume the unbelieving and those who have rejected Christ- - the whole creation will be in agony as God’s wrath in fire will melt the firmament and the heavens with the heat from his nostrils in order to bring about a New Heavens and a New Earth wherein dwell righteousness; where God and the Lamb will be with God’s people forevermore. O, the wisdom and love of God, that even in his wrath he restores his people and all creation unto himself in Christ.

THE WRATH OF GOD AGAINST UNGODLINESS AND UNRIGHTEOUSNESS

BY JOHN PIPER

Romans 1:18

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

"There Is None Righteous"

Today we take a major turn in the letter of Paul to the Romans. Romans 1:16-17 is the theme of the letter: the gospel is the power of God to save believers from the wrath to come. And this gospel - this good news of Jesus' death and resurrection - has that power to save believers from God's wrath, because in the gospel, day by day, week after week, year after year, God keeps on revealing his righteousness as a gift to be received by faith and for faith, so that those who have their righteousness from God (and not themselves) will not perish but have everlasting life.

Now having described the greatness of his theme, which he will come back to and unpack in wonderful and profound ways in future chapters, Paul enters on a description of human sin and God's wrath in Romans 1:18-3:19. In Romans 1:18 to 32 Paul speaks of the condition of the gentile world apart from the gospel and apart from saving grace. Then in Romans 2:1-3:8 Paul deals more or less directly with the Jewish condition. Then in Romans 3:9-10 he draws his summary conclusion like this: "What then? Are we [Jews] better than they? Not at all; for we

have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE." That is the point of Romans 1:18-3:10. Then Paul piles Scripture upon Scripture in Romans 3:10-19 to support his point of universal sinfulness and guilt and rebellion against God in every human heart.

He wraps up the section with this summary in Romans 3:19, "Now we know that whatever the Law [the Old Testament Word of God] says, it speaks to those who are under the Law [the Jewish people], so that every mouth [all the nations, all the Gentiles] may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God." We will talk later in this series about why God chose to silence the world by dealing mainly with the Jews. But that is the truth. Paul seems to mean if the Jews, with all their advantages of divine revelation, have not been righteous before God, but only sinful and guilty (3:9), how much less will the Gentiles be able to open their mouths and protest that they have been righteous before God.

Then Paul explains in verse 20: no matter how beneficial the Law of God should have been, when it is misused the way many in Israel misused it, it only compounds the problem of sin. He says, "[Jews and all the world are under silence in their guilt] because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified

in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin." Neither Jewish Law nor Gentile idolatry gets anybody right with God.

Then in Romans 3:21 Paul returns to the theme of 1:17, "But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested." You see how similar this is to Romans 1:17 - in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. And from here on Paul is unpacking the greatness of the gospel of God's gift of righteousness.

So what we have in Romans 1:18 to 3:20 is a demonstration of sin and guilt in the heart and life of every human being, both Jew and Gentile. The beginning of that section is what we are taking up this morning at Romans 1:18.

Why Several Sermons on Sin?

Now what should I respond if someone were to say, "Oh no! We are going to be slogging our way through sin and guilt for months. This is going to be really oppressive"? To that person I want to say three things:

1. Superficial diagnoses lead to false remedies.

Superficial diagnoses lead to false remedies and no cures. If you want to find true remedies for a disease, and if you want to bring a lasting cure to the

people who are diseased, then you need more than a superficial grasp of the disease itself. Those who care most about a cure for AIDS or cancer, spend almost all their time studying the disease.

2. Understanding sin and wrath will make you wiser.

Profound understanding of sin and wrath will make you a far wiser person about human nature - your own and others. And if you are wiser about the nature of the human soul, you will be able to fight your own sin more successfully, and you will be able to bless others more deeply with your insight and counsel. I have pled with women and men in this church in recent months that what we need to nurture and cultivate here at Bethlehem over the next decades is sages -men and women who ripen with years into deeply sagacious people: wise, discerning, penetrating, deep lovers of people and deep knowers of human nature and God's nature, who can see deeply into the tangle of sin and sacredness that perplexes the saints and threatens to undo us. If you run away from the study of sinful human nature - if you say, I don't like to think about sin - then you run away from yourself, and you run away from wisdom, and, worst of all, you run away from the deepest kinds of love.

3. Knowing the nature of sin and wrath will cause you to cherish the gospel.

Probably the most important thing I would say, and the most firmly rooted in Romans 1:18, is that knowing the true condition of your heart and the nature of sin and the magnitude and justice of the wrath of God will cause you to understand the mighty gospel, and love it, and cherish it, and feast on it, and share it as never before. And this is crucial because this is the way the gospel saves believers. If you don't understand the gospel, if you don't cherish it and look to it and feed on it day after day, it won't save you (see 1 Cor. 15:1-3; Col. 1:23). Knowing sin and wrath will help you do that.

“For . . . “

Which brings now to the beginning of Romans 1:18. Look at the connection between verses 17 and 18 (which the NIV inexcusably omits), namely, “for” or “because” - Verse 17: “[In the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, **“BUT THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.”** (18) For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” Why does Paul introduce verse 18 with the word “for” or “because”?

He does this in order to show that everything he is going to say about sin is meant to support the gospel of verse 17.

He does not mention the gospel for the sake of sin. He deals with sin for the sake of the gospel. Understanding sin is the foundation that upholds the preciousness of the gospel, not vice versa. His main aim is not to lead us from gospel to sin, but from sin to gospel. If you have been caught in a crime and are facing trial, and I say to you, “I have a letter here from the Hennepin County Court that they have dropped the charges against you, because you were guilty and liable to severe punishment,” what's the point? The point of saying that you were guilty is to help you understand and cherish the good news that the charges are dropped. That's the point of “for” at the beginning of verse 18.

So the way I hope to deal with all the sin in Romans 1:18-3:20 is to let it point us back again and again to the preciousness and the glory and the necessity and the freeness and the joy of the gospel of the gift of God's righteousness. My prayer is that we would escape superficial diagnoses, and that we would cultivate a profound understanding of fallen human nature (which we all struggle with), and that we would come back again and again to the necessity and beauty and freeness of the gospel of justification by faith alone. If these three things can happen, I don't think our time in these chapters will be oppressive, but rather gospel-exalting, hope-giving, and love-producing, as we grow to know ourselves

and our God and our gospel more and more deeply.

We Need the Gospel Because the Wrath of God Is Being Revealed

Now how does Paul begin this section in verse 18? He begins it by giving the reason that gospel and a gift of God's righteousness is necessary. It's necessary “because the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” We need the gospel of Romans 1:16-17, we need the gift of God's righteousness, because God's wrath is right now being poured out on the whole world of ungodliness and unrighteousness. Notice the double use of the word “unrighteousness” in verse 18. God's wrath is being revealed against “unrighteousness” and the truth is being held down in “unrighteousness.” Surely Paul means for us to see that in relation to the revelation of the righteousness in verse 17.

In other words, the reason we need God to reveal HIS righteousness to us in the gospel and give it to us as a gift through faith is because we are unrighteous and resist the truth in unrighteousness and, therefore, God's wrath is against us. We need righteousness. We don't have it. God's wrath is being poured out on us in our unrighteousness. Is there any hope? Yes, the gospel is the power of God to save because in it the righteousness of

God is revealed from faith to faith. We can have a righteousness that is not our own, namely, God's.

Three Ways the Wrath of God Is Being Revealed

Now we should ask, "How is the wrath of God being revealed?" The first thing to notice is that the word "is revealed" is the very same word and tense as in verse 17. There "the righteousness of God is being revealed." Here "the wrath of God is being revealed." In both cases it is a present tense, continuous action. In other words it is happening now, not just in the future. There is a day of wrath coming (Romans 2:5, 8-9; 5:9). But in advance of that final outpouring of wrath, God's wrath is also present.

How? In three ways at least that we learn about in Romans.

1. Universal human death is revealing the wrath of God.

From Romans 5 we see that universal human death is a revealing or a manifestation of the wrath of God. Death is the judgement of God on the ungodliness and unrighteousness of the human race rooted in Adam. In the middle of Romans 5:15 we read, "by the transgression of the one [namely Adam] the many died." Then in the middle of verse 16 death is called a judgment and a condemnation: "For on the one hand the

judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation." So you can see that death is seen as a judgment and a condemnation, that is, as an expression of God's wrath against sin. Then in the middle of verse 18 you see it again: "Through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men." So the first answer is that the wrath of God is being revealed against human sin in universal human death.

2. Universal futility and misery are evidence of God's wrath.

From Romans 8 we see that universal futility and misery are evidence of God's wrath against human sin. Start at Romans 8:18: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (19) For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. (20) For the creation was subjected to futility." Stop there and consider what that means before we read on.

I think it means that the sufferings he speaks of in verse 18 are inevitable in this fallen world. And specifically it means that you may plan well for retirement, and the year before you plan to enjoy it you have a stroke, and all the planning seems futile. You work with your own hands for years to build a simple home, and the week before you move in, lightning strikes, and it burns

to the ground. You labor all during the spring to plant your crops and when the grain is just ready to sprout, a flood takes it all away. The creation was subjected to futility. In verse 21 it's called "slavery to corruption."

Now read on in Romans 8:20 to see where that subjection to futility came from: "The creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope." This means that God subjected the creation to futility. Satan and Adam could not be the one who did this, because Paul said it was done "in hope." Neither Satan nor Adam in the Garden of Eden was planning for the hope of the human race. They simply sinned. But God showed his wrath against sin and subjected creation to futility, not as the last word, but in hope. There would come a day when the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). But the misery and futility of the world we live in is owing to God's subjecting creation to futility, and is a testimony to his wrath against sin.

3. The sinking degradation of human behavior reveals the wrath of God.

So the first way God's wrath is revealed against ungodliness and unrighteousness is in universal human death. The second way is in the futility and misery and suffering of creation. The third is the one most immediately in Paul's mind

here in Romans 1, namely, the sinking degradation of human thinking and behavior. You see this three times in Romans 1:24-28.

After describing the ungodliness and unrighteousness of man in Romans 1:19-23 Paul says in verse 24, "Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them." In other words, God reveals his wrath against sin by giving people up to be more sinful. Again in verse 26: "For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions." And again in verse 28: "And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper."

So these are three of the ways that the wrath of God is being revealed now in this age against the universal (3:9) ungodliness and unrighteousness of man. He has consigned all to death, he has subjected all to futility, and he has given many over to the degradation of their own minds and hearts.

Wrath Mingled with Mercy

There remains time perhaps for one burning question: Is that God's only response to the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men? The answer to that question is No - neither in the case of unbelievers or believers.

Take the case of unbelievers. Wrath is always mingled with mercy in this age of hope. Look at Romans 2:4-5. Here he speaks to those who are missing this great truth: “Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? (5) But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.”

Yes there is kindness in the midst of wrath. God is always doing more than one thing. Jesus said, “He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:45). Paul said to the pagans of Lystra, “[God] did not leave Himself without a witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17). He said this to people who were dying and suffering and sinning under the wrath of God.

God warns with his wrath and he woos with his kindness. He speaks both languages: severity and tenderness. Do you recall how Jesus interpreted the coming of John the Baptist as a severe, leather-girded, locus-eating, desert-living, adultery-condemning prophet, on the one hand, and his own coming as a party-going, wine-making, child-healing,

sin-forgiving savior, on the other hand? He said, “We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.” Instead, you said, “John has a demon and Jesus is a glutton” (Matthew 11:17). The gospel came with both languages, but they would not hear.

O, unbeliever, God is speaking to you in your pain to warn you, and God is speaking to you in your pleasure to woo you. Don't misread the voice of God.

Death and Suffering and Sin in the Life of a Believer

And to believers, what is our case? According to Romans 1:17 we have the gift of God's righteousness by faith. God's punishment of us was poured out on Jesus who died in our place (Romans 8:3). Romans 8:1 says, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” 1 Thessalonians 5:9 says, “God has not destined us for wrath.” What then are our death and our suffering and our sin? Are they still the wrath of God against us? If not what are they?

The answer is that death and suffering and sin are not the wrath and condemnation and punishment of our heavenly Father. Each one is fundamentally altered by the gospel of Christ crucified in our place.

1. Death is a gateway into paradise.

For believers, the sting and victory of death have been removed. “O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:55-57). For believers, death is not the wrath of God toward them; it is the last gasp of a defeated enemy who unwittingly opens a door to paradise.

2. Futility and suffering are pathways to holiness.

For believers, futility is removed from suffering. For those who love God and are called according to his purpose “all things work together for our good” (Romans 8:28). Punishment is transformed into purification. Destructive forces become disciplinary forces. And the seeming chaos and futility of life's calamities become the severe, but loving, hand of our Father in heaven, as we learned last year from Hebrews 12.

3. The power of sin is replaced with a love of righteousness.

Finally, not only is the sting of death replaced with hope; and the futility of suffering replaced with meaning; but the dominion and degrading power of sin is replaced with a love of righteousness (the

point of Romans 6). God does not give us over to a depraved mind, he gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore let us awaken to the truth of Romans 1:18 that the wrath of God is being revealed now in this age against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of man. We can't understand the world or the gospel without that truth. But let us also awaken to the truth that God is revealing something else at the same time. He is revealing the gift of righteousness for all who will believe on Christ. And with that righteousness there is no wrath or condemnation on us anymore. For you (whoever you are!), who believe, death becomes a gateway to paradise; suffering becomes a pathway to holiness; and sin becomes a dethroned enemy that we fight by the power of God's Spirit.

So let us flee the wrath of God, and take refuge in the precious power of the gospel of God. Amen.

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GENEROUS JUSTICE: HOW GOD'S GRACE MAKES US JUST

BY TIMOTHY KELLER

Justice is currently undergoing a renaissance in interest, in both academic and wider public concern. So it is no surprise to see Timothy Keller publish his latest work, entitled 'Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just'.

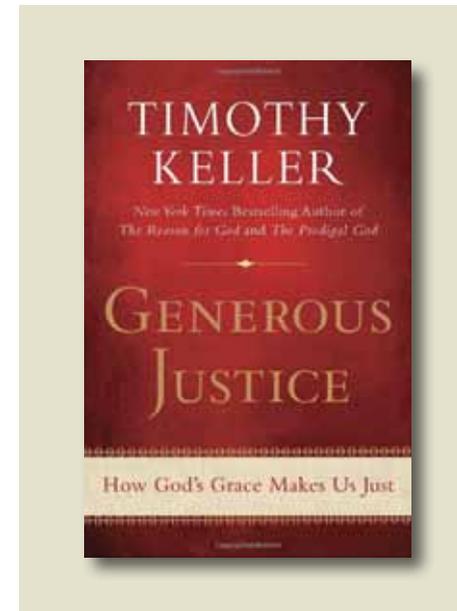
Yet Keller, in his introduction, boldly asserts that the Bible is a book devoted to 'justice in the world from first till last' (p. xiv). While many people would concede justice is an important concept, and a biblical one, could we term the Bible a book devoted to justice? Keller is evidently set upon dispelling preconceptions, and *Generous Justice* aims to both dispel evangelical assumptions and inform our understanding on this issue.

However, the intended scope of the thesis may prove problematic for the audience. Keller clarifies in his introduction that he is writing to inform both believers and non-believers. This is the book's intended purpose. Is the book evangelistic or more formative for Christians in approach?

Or is Keller attempting to do both at the same time? Ultimately, the book tends to be at parts more of an in-depth commentary on key Bible passages, more instructive for Christians in their approach to justice than a book encouraging non-believers to put their trust in Christ.

Moreover, this dual purpose raises questions concerning the overriding narrative and structure. Chapter 4 provides an expanded sermon, drawing out characteristically perceptive comments on the parable of the Good Samaritan. For the next few chapters Keller labours on contemporary human rights discourse and justice related jurisprudence—drawing on scholars such as Nicholas Wolterstorff, Richard Rorty, Michael Sandel, and Aristotle. Is Keller really certain of his audience? Like Keller's *The Reason for God* (New York: Dutton; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2008), *Generous Justice* distinctly targets his Manhattan professional audience. Yet does this exclude those who have not received a tertiary level education from fully engaging with Keller's insights?

Generous Justice challenges every person



to generate a new thesis about justice. He writes, 'if a person has grasped the meaning of God's grace in his heart, he will do justice' (p. 93). Justice follows justification. 'For when the Spirit enables us to understand what Christ has done for us,' Keller writes in his introduction, 'the result is a life poured out in deeds of justice and compassion for the poor' (p. xiii). The Christian's response to grace offered in the cross of Jesus Christ is one of justice, both in thought and deed.

Moving from theory to practice, the reader is given a practical chapter on how we should do justice, moving from self-focused to a societal view encompassing the work of the church as central to social justice in the community. Keller's appreciation of

justice is an all-encompassing one, containing all spheres of life and all of society. For a Christian a life poured out in doing justice for the poor 'is the inevitable sign of any real gospel faith' (p. 189). Further to this, *Generous Justice* evokes a response from the reader: Keller's vision of biblical justice finds application for every Christian. Keller draws a standard here—any Christian failing to meet this standard fails 'to live justly and righteously' (p. 112).

Generous Justice seeks to dispel myths and critique assumptions. One way it effectively does this is through Keller proposing a different way to understand evangelism and social justice. Keller's understanding is that the concepts should exist in an 'asymmetric, inseparable relationship' (p. 139). He formulates a critique of the relationship concerning evangelism and social justice aimed at Christians, and he criticises Christians who suggest that justice should be performed only as a means to the end of evangelism. For Keller this is inherently wrong. Justice is not simply a means to an end. Rather, justice should be the natural action of a saved believer, not just something done for

the sole purpose of evangelising others. At the same time, Keller believes that there is no better way for a Christian to lay a 'foundation for evangelism than by doing justice' (p. 142). This is because if someone is to share their faith with a person yet does nothing to meet that person's practical and material needs through deeds, this 'fails to show Christ's love' (p. 143). First John 3:16–17 is rightly brought to mind.

Yet would justice not entail evangelism? Here, once again, Keller controversially separates the two concepts. Adamant that the concepts should be separate, Keller draws the concept of grace into the argument. Keller defines grace as 'giving the benefits that are not deserved' while justice 'is giving people exactly what they do deserve' (p. 49). Grace entails that evangelism and discipleship cannot be effective without meeting the practical and material needs of those we meet (for example, caring about the conditions they live within). Social justice is a key calling of the Christian life, a fact that many churches and Christians often forget. Once again Keller should be commended for the way he dispels myths and provides a thoroughly biblical

account of justice incorporated into life, all in a relatively short book. Clear biblical teaching is needed to provide questions and answers on this subject. *Generous Justice* gives a timely reminder of the importance of social justice, providing clear challenges, questions, and answers for every Christian.

James P. Gould
University of Exeter, School of Law
Exeter, Devon, UK
http://thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/review/generous_justice_how_gods_grace_makes_us_just

WRATH AMONG THE PERFECTIONS OF GOD'S LIFE

BY JEREMY J. WYNNE

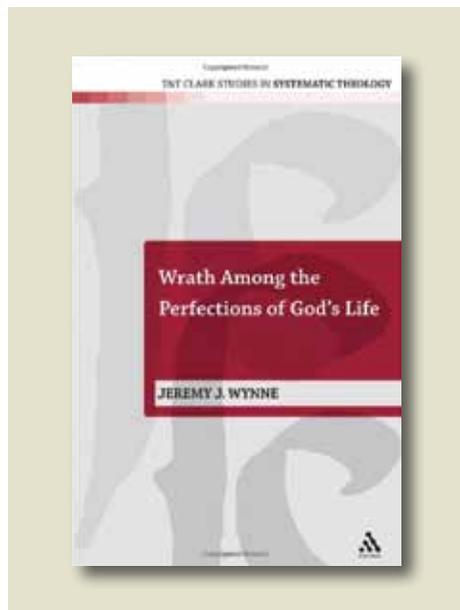
The topic of divine wrath has been neglected in modern theology despite its prevalence in Scripture and relation to other key doctrines. Wynne's revised dissertation not only calls readers back to this significant topic but guides them down both theological and exegetical roads.

He argues, "a biblical-dogmatic interpretation of God's wrath in the Old and New Testaments is more adequate to the extent that it treats wrath not as a perfection of God per se but rather as a mode of divine perfection and, more specifically, as a mode of God's singular righteousness" (p. 112). The book is decidedly modern, Reformed, and focuses on Schleiermacher, Barth, and Bavinck though others such as Lactantius, Calvin, Turretin make an appearance as well.

The book is divided into two parts. The first could be said to be primarily theological whereas the second is exegetical. Wynne, however, assures the reader that "the research of part two was

present in complete—if rough—draft prior to part one" (p. 13) and is convinced that "exegetical decisions are inextricably intertwined with both theological presuppositions and implications" (p. 149). Therefore, this may be said to be an exercise in dogmatics and theological exegesis, or exegetical theology, if one must provide a label.

Part One (chs. 1-3) offers an extended discussion on the divine perfections (i.e., attributes) in relation to God's wrath. The perfections are properly seen in relation to the living God and must be rooted in the "prevenient abundance of God's life" (p. 23). Instead of an anticipatory approach, his "responsive theology" works from revelation and in response to God's gracious gifting of his name, allowing the subject matter to determine its content and criteria. Chapter 3 develops an account of providential and redemptive modes of divine perfection in relation to Turretin, Schleiermacher, and Barth's approach to the divine perfections. All three give minimal attention to divine wrath though Barth has particular problems since he argues that wrath "originates in [God] Himself" (see p. 108). In the



is the righteous judge. “God infallibly and with surety judges and destroys sin, while staying true to the flourishing of his righteous order” (p. 137). For example, in Isa 5, both “are legible as one concrete moment within the larger plan of creation and redemption God is One for whom wrath will not in and of itself have the last word because it is a mode of his righteousness” (p. 140). Furthermore, the decisive moment of God’s self-revelation in wrath is to be found on the cross. Divine wrath, justice, and righteousness are present in God’s aim to restore creation through self-sacrifice. Any form of reductionism that requires one to choose between a merciful or judging God must be rejected, especially since the patience of God demonstrates that his wrath is not a mere reaction that occurs apart from the enactment of other perfections: “the righteous God is Lord too of his wrath” (p. 183). As such, his patience “signals most fully and forcefully the [patient] character of his wrath” (p. 182). Finally, Wynne convincingly displays the unity of the cross and final judgment, which “even at its most severe, obviates neither hope for God’s mercy nor the gospel call to repentance” (p. 188). This leads to the conclusion that judgment may remain on some for the purpose of training in righteousness (e.g., Heb 12:11; Rev 3:18).

end, the divine perfections must not only “attend to the fullness God has from himself, but correspondingly to describe God, first, in his relation to that which is not God and, second, to give an account of God as he is for and among those creatures who in their willing and acting are set against him” (p. 111).

Part Two (chs. 4-6) further develops the thesis by focusing on three sets of biblical passages: Matt 20:1-16 and Is 5:1-7 (ch. 4); Rom 3:21-26 and Ex 34:6-7 (ch. 5); Rev 14:14-20 and Amos 3:2 (ch. 6). In disagreement with various scholars, Wynne demonstrates that wrath and righteousness do not conflict since God



In the end, what is divine wrath? Wynne is clear that it is “not an illegitimate swerving of God from his natural or proper action” (p. 49). As a mode of divine righteousness, wrath is not the way in which God “knows himself from eternity but [is] an identity description of the God who is fully himself in the work of judging and doing away with sin and rebellion and so in the work of redeeming creatures” (p. 113). In short, wrath is not what some might call an essential or eternal attribute. Nevertheless, it is true of God’s character because it exists as a mode or form of his righteousness.

While the book has many strengths, Wynne could have helped the reader better understand why wrath belongs with righteousness and not holiness or love (cf. pp. 113-14). Also, it is not clear why Wynne did not make more use of Gunton’s Act and Being (Eerdmans,

2003) or Holmes’s Revisiting the Doctrine of the Divine Attributes (Peter Lang, 2007) in Part One. These criticisms aside, Wynne is a mature theologian who has clearly wrestled at length with the primary and secondary sources. While most theologians remain uncertain about God’s wrath (see p. 112) or neglect the issue altogether, Wynne clearly argues for wrath as God’s mode of righteousness that will help propel the discussion forward. Scholars and graduate students will greatly benefit from this work and its implications have significant potential for the church.

Jordan P. Barrett
Wheaton College
Wheaton, Illinois USA

http://thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/review/wrath_among_the_perfections_of_gods_life

Edinburgh

The two Lord's day services, Sunday School and the Bible Study on Wednesday continue. Transformers is on Friday during the School term. The food bank is open for three and a half hours three times a week. Current details of all the above are posted on Facebook @ Burdiehouse Southhouse Community Church.

We are deeply grateful to the excellent volunteers for their help, they come from various congregations and some from none. Pray that the Christians are a light to the latter.

We also have to say a very big thank you to all who support the work by prayer, material giving and by words of encouragement. Church work is indeed a team effort. We humbly and earnestly covet your prayers for God's blessing here.

The APC, Blythswood Care, believers, neighbouring and distant ministers of a similar outlook as ourselves are vital to our work.

The food bank is supported by a wide and mixed community. The closing of the charity shop two years ago is still lamented by those who used it. Both give the opportunity to witness, which is all important to the work of the church. Witnessing is a great challenge, which needs constant help and forgiveness from The Lord. It is all too easy to miss or make very little of an opportunity.

A very dark shadow was cast over our community, when a young girl tragically

lost her life, because an interior wall at school collapsed. Pray for her family and all affected.

We did a bible study over three weeks in Spring, on the subject of Poverty and saw from Scripture that the worst poverty and the greatest riches are spiritual. Everyone is spiritually bankrupt because of sin and guilt and yet whoever will put their faith in Christ as Saviour and Lord has everlasting treasure in heaven. This is all important when so much is said about material poverty with never a mention of spiritual poverty. Many Christians have been and are "dirt poor" and yet in Christ, they are rich beyond anything imaginable. Pitiful and deceived is the person who would not choose Christ, whatever the cost.

The causes of poverty are. The Fall of our first parents into sin which brought all kinds of suffering, including poverty, into the world. Then poverty can come because of what people do to their fellows: The misuse of authority in church or state; War and wickedness generally. Natural disasters can affect anyone. Lastly, poverty can be self inflicted by a foolish lifestyle.

How should we treat the poor? Kindness is a fruit of the spirit, and we are to do good to all people so these two truths should dispose us towards helping the poor. Then when we have a banquet we are to remember the poor and not just those who can repay us. Plus there are verses and passages where we are exhorted or commanded to be kind and considerate to the poor and not to take advantage of them. Both Old and New Testament have much

to teach the 21st century with regard to the poor. It is important to steer clear of party politics with such a subject, as regardless of party, we have to follow God's word. John Ross

Some of these References were used and were very enlightening.:
Mat 13,44-46; Mark 10,17-31; Luke 12,13-21; 15,11-32; Ephesians 2,11-13; Revelation 14,15-22; Mark 4,19; 1 Timothy 6,6 -10,

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The UK tax authorities have asked charities to amend the Gift Aid declaration form for those contributors who make offerings to the God's work. The General Treasurer of the Scottish Presbytery, Mr Laurence Mackenzie, respectfully asks that Congregational Treasurers ensure that all contributors have signed the new forms and mailed them to him at the following address:
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17-19; Ephesians 1,18; 3,8; Hebrews 11,24-26; James 2,5; 2 Corinthians 6,10; 8,9; Revelation 2,8-11; Genesis 1, 28,29,31; 3,13-19; Psalm 82; Luke 20,45-47; Proverbs 28,3; Psalm 10,1-10; Amos 5,10 -12; James 2,6; 5,1-6; Judges 6,1-6; Proverbs 6,6 -11; 13,18; 21,17; 23,19 -21; 28,19-22; Galatians 5,22; 6,9; Luke 14,12; Ex 22,21-27; Ex 23,6,10,12; Leviticus 19,9,10; 23,22; Deuteronomy 15,1-11.

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Clark Walls, Treasurer (APC News)

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Mr. Clark Walls
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CONGREGATIONAL DETAILS

DUNDEE

Rev. Donald C. Macaskill
238 Arbroath Road, Dundee,
DD4 7SB
Tel: 01382 451798
email: donandmargo@me.com
www.apcdundee.org.uk
Dens Road Church
11 Dens Road – Sunday 11am &
6.30pm; usually Wed 7pm

EDINBURGH

Rev. John Ross
6 Frogston Grove, Edinburgh EH10
7AG
Tel: 0131 466 6247
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Sunday11:30am and 5pm
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Tel: 01549 402176 email:
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Tel 01571 855279 or
Mrs I Macaulay
Tel: 01571 855214

OBAN

Rev. Archibald McPhail
Fernhill, Polminister Road,
Oban PA34 5TN
Tel: 01631 567076
Email:
archibald.mcphail@virgin.net

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Rev. Dr Wayne Pearce
Bruach Taibh, 2 Borve, Arnisort,
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Tel: 01470 582421
Email:
wayne.pearce66@btinternet.com

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Rev. Ross Macaskill
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