

Wrath and Christ's Substitutionary Atonement (New Testament Teaching on God's Wrath)

Wrath is God's hot displeasure and anger against man because of his sins. When God exercises His wrath, it results in judgment against sin.

For example, in the tribulation period, God's wrath will be manifested by the seal, trumpet and bowl judgments. Another example of God's wrath being manifested in judgment is the 70 A.D. destruction of Jerusalem described in Luke 21:23, which will be a time of "wrath upon this people."

Sometimes God's wrath is expressed in this life (such as in the tribulation period or the destruction of Jerusalem) and sometimes God's wrath is expressed in the next life, as sinners will be judged for their sins.

Here are some examples of God's wrath falling upon people in the next life:

Matthew 3:7 and Luke 3:7—John the Baptist spoke to the religious leaders: Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

This wrath is future. It is a "wrath to come," a coming wrath, a future wrath. In the context this judgment is described as chaff being burned up with unquenchable fire (Matt. 3:12).

John 3:36 is a terrifying verse for unbelievers. It speaks of God's wrath abiding on those who refuse to believe on Jesus Christ. Arthur Pink says, "The wrath of a sin-hating God 'abideth' on them. It is upon them even now, and if they believe not, it shall abide on them forever and ever. How unspeakably solemn!" (*John*, p. 153). This is the only time this word "wrath" is used in John's gospel.

Romans 1:18

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold (suppress) the truth in unrighteousness." We certainly cannot limit this wrath to tribulation wrath. This wrath is "against ALL ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." The ungodly and the unrighteous are subject to God's wrath as expressed in God's righteous judgments.

Romans 2:5

"But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." This day of judgment is described as "the day of wrath and revelation (unveiling) of the righteous judgment of God." This final day of judgment for the

ungodly is also described in 2 Peter 3:7 ("the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men") and Revelation 20:11-15.

Hardness: The hearts of men get harder and harder as they refuse to respond to God's goodness and forbearance and longsuffering.

Impenitent: Describes a person who refuses to repent (compare the two criminals on the cross -- one was penitent or repentant and the other was impenitent).

Treasurest up unto (for) thyself wrath = treasuring up wrath, misers of wrath. Instead of laying up treasures for heaven (Matthew 6:19-20), they were treasuring up wrath from heaven (storing it up for that final day).

Romans 2:8-9

“But to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile.”

These verses are describing those who obey not the truth (that is, they refuse to obey the gospel). What will happen to such people? “Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil.” Those who do evil will reap their reward and their sins will be punished.

Notice the structure of these verses (chiasm or inverted parallelism):

Verse 7 -- This is how God will reward those who do good. A1

Verse 8 -- This is how God will reward those who do evil. B1

Verse 9 -- This is how God will reward those who do evil. B2

Verse 10 -- This is how God will reward those who do good. A2

Romans 4:15 - **“the law worketh wrath”**

The law produces only wrath. The law can only produce a curse, not a blessing (Gal. 3:10). Why? Because of my condition as a sinner. A sinner cannot keep God's holy law and thus I am a lawbreaker. God's wrath must fall on me! Lawbreakers deserve death! Lawkeepers deserve life, but how many of us have really kept God's holy law and kept it perfectly all the days of our life? The law does not bring righteousness or blessing or an inheritance but it only brings God's wrath. If man could keep God's holy and perfect law, then the law would bring life and blessing (Luke 10:28). The law works wrath because of sinful man's transgression of the law. Where there is law there is transgression, and where there is transgression there must be God's wrath. The law worketh wrath, condemnation and death (compare 2 Cor.3:7,9). How foolish are those who want to put themselves under the awesome demands of God's holy law. –George Zeller, *Notes on Romans*.

“For the law worketh wrath.” That is, it causes men to be the subjects of wrath. It brings them under condemnation. So far from imparting life, it causes death. –Charles Hodge, *Romans*.

Nobody has ever kept [the law], and because they had broken the law, God’s wrath must fall upon anybody who tried to keep it and failed. –Alva McClain, *Romans*.

“For the law brings wrath.” That is, law inevitably imposes penalties for failure to keep it. –F. F. Bruce, *Romans*.

Conclusion of Romans 4:5. “Wrath” is considered part of the penalty that is imposed upon man for his failure to keep God’s holy law. Because of man’s sins and breaking of the law, man is the subject of God’s wrath. If wrath is part of the penalty for man’s sin, and if Christ paid the penalty as our Substitute, then it follows that Christ’s substitutionary death involved bearing the wrath of God.

Romans 9:22

Here those who die without Christ are referred to as “vessels of wrath.” The elect are referred to as “vessels of mercy” (v. 23). The Scofield note says, “All have sinned; all need mercy; God offers it to all, but some refuse it, and thus become fit only for God’s wrath.”

There is no mistaking the meaning here. Those who enter glory are objects of God’s mercy; those who die in their sins are objects of God’s wrath and hot displeasure. God’s wrath is the portion of the unregenerate. This has nothing to do with earthly wrath or tribulation wrath. This has to do with the final destiny of all men: objects of mercy or objects of wrath. A person is either saved by God’s mercy (Tit. 3:5) or he is destined to face God’s wrath. To say that God’s penalty against sin has nothing to do with God’s wrath makes no sense in light of such a clear passage.

Romans 12:19 – **“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.”**

"Avenge"=get revenge (to exact satisfaction for a wrong by punishing the wrongdoer). Don't get your revenge! "Give place unto (the) wrath"--give the wrath of God an opportunity to work out its purpose. Step aside and leave the matter to God and leave the matter with God. Yield and hand the person over to God’s wrath which will take care of it at the right time and in the right way. Compare Ephesians 4:27--do not give the devil a chance or opportunity to exert his influence; don't give him an opening. God wants an opportunity to take care of wrongs done to His children, and it is His right to do so. God is the avenger of wrath! God is much more angry at sin than we are! He is also much more longsuffering than we are! God will straighten things out. The wicked will not get away with anything. I do not need to get even, but God will.

Man is not the dispenser or distributor of God’s wrath; God is.

Romans 13:4 **“For he [the ruler, the governmental authority] is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.”**

This passage is important because it demonstrates that executing wrath is equivalent to inflicting punishment. The government, acting on God’s behalf, is serving God when it punishes evildoers. The governmental authorities execute wrath upon an individual, and this simply means that they enforce the proper punishment, whether it be capital punishment or some lesser penalty. So this passage demonstrates that it is Biblically proper to use the term “wrath” to convey the idea of inflicting penal punishment. As many other passages show, God Himself executes wrath upon those who do evil.

Ephesians 2:3 - **“children of wrath”**

There are two ways to interpret this phrase. These unsaved children of disobedience (v.2) are described by the word “wrath.” Is this wrath referring to the wrath of these unsaved people? In other words, is it saying that these unsaved people are characterized by wrath and anger? It’s certainly true that sinful wrath and anger are part of the works of the flesh, and are characteristic of many unsaved people. There are, however some unsaved people who are very mild-tempered and would not be considered to be wrathful people.

The second option is that this phrase is referring to God’s wrath. They are children of wrath because God’s wrath belongs to them. It is abiding on them (John 3:36). It is what they deserve. It is what they will someday receive if they fail to be saved. I strongly favor this option for this reason. There are two other places where the phrase “children of disobedience” is connected with God’s wrath. Both were written by Paul, probably on the same day.¹ These passages are 1) Ephesians 5:6—“for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.” 2) Colossians 3:6—“For which things sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience.” Thus it seems certain that those described as “children of wrath” are those “children of disobedience” who will experience the coming of the wrath of God upon them because of their sins.

William Hendricksen comments on this passage as follows: “[God’s wrath] is *settled indignation*, the attitude of God toward men viewed as fallen in Adam and refusing to accept the gospel of grace and salvation in Christ. ‘By nature’ must mean ‘apart from regenerating grace.’ It refers to men as they are in their natural condition, as descendants of Adam....‘Children of wrath’ means objects of God’s settled indignation now and for all time to come (John 3:36), unless God’s marvelous grace intervenes” (*Ephesians 2:3*, pages 115-116).

If the children of disobedience be the objects of God’s wrath and settled indignation, then it must follow that Christ, when He took the place of sinners and was “made sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21), also became the object of God’s wrath and settled indignation. If Christ had not been treated as the sinner, then how could there have been a valid substitution?

¹Many Bible scholars believe that Ephesians and Colossians were written on the same day due to the many similarities between these two epistles.

Ephesians 5:6 and Colossians 3:6

These two passages are both teaching the same thing:

Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience (Eph. 5:6).

For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience (Col. 3:6).

First, note that the wrath of God does not come upon the children of disobedience merely because of their sin of unbelief but because of the sins mentioned in the immediate context of these two verses: fornication, uncleanness, idolatry, etc. This wrath is punishment for these sins.

Second, there is no indication that the wrath mentioned in these verses is limited to tribulation wrath. Millions of children of disobedience have died during this lengthy church age and they never entered Daniel's 70th week. Is there no wrath for them? The Ephesians passage even makes this clearer because there is a contrast between inheriting the kingdom (v. 5) and suffering God's wrath (v. 6). Since no church age believer enters the kingdom in this life, this refers to the eternal state when we will be in our new bodies. It thus seems reasonable that the suffering of God's wrath will also take place in the eternal state, and not on earth during the tribulation.

Notice the emphasis in these verses upon the future. The wrath of God is not coming on the children of disobedience now, but it "is coming" upon them in the future. It is going to happen in the future but it is already in progress. The judgment is coming and is headed their way! The wrath is on its way!

1 Thessalonians 1:10 - **"even Jesus which delivered us from the wrath to come."**

Which wrath has the Lord Jesus delivered us from? Has He delivered us from tribulation wrath or has He delivered us from eternal wrath (the wrath of God connected with hell)?

Actually both are true. No church age believer will experience tribulation wrath and no church age believer will experience the wrath involved with the second death. Both are horrible and we have been delivered from both.

1 Thessalonians 5:9 - **"For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ."**

This most probably refers to tribulation wrath. Church age believers will not experience this wrath because they will be raptured (final salvation) before the tribulation begins.

Verses on "wrath" in the book of Revelation.

As we would expect, most of these verses are referring to tribulation wrath, the wrath of God which will affect people living in Daniel's 70th week. After two thousand years of mankind living in a day of grace, God's judgment and wrath is finally unleashed upon a Christ-rejecting world in the awful time of tribulation. It is a time characterized by wrath. This sad tragedy also serves as an illustration of what happens to every sinner in this day of grace. The person lives in sin and unbelief and God allows it to be so. The person might live quite comfortably in his riches, and may indulge in the lusts of the flesh for an entire lifetime. An example of this could be Playboy tycoon Hugh Hefner who lived a long and comfortable life indulging in every form of wanton immorality before passing into eternity. And yet we know that for such sins the wrath of God is coming upon all of the children of disobedience and they will not escape the judgment of God (Rom. 2:3). Grace spurned will be followed by God's wrath and judgment.

The Cup That Our Lord Drink (John 18:11)

In the garden of Gethsemane, there were three times when the Lord prayed, "Let this cup pass from me" (Matt. 26:39, 42, 44). He did not want to drink from this cup of suffering. He recoiled from the thought of bearing the sins of mankind. In His sinless humanity, Jesus shrank from the awful prospect of drinking from this cup. And yet He prayed, "If this cup may not pass away from Me, except I drink it, Thy will be done" (Matt. 26:42). Bible students have universally seen the drinking of this cup as referring to our Lord's suffering for man's sins, the Just One for the unjust ones (1 Pet. 3:18). This took place during the three hours of darkness and was distinct from His pre-cross sufferings and abuse by the Romans. It was *on the tree* that He bore our sins in His own body (1 Pet. 2:24). He recoiled from doing this, and yet He was willing to do this: "The cup that the Father hath given [to] Me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11).

Because of our Lord's strong aversion to this cup, it obviously contained something terrible. "Upon the wicked He shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their **cup**" (Psalm 11:6). The wicked deserve severe judgment because of their sins, as described in this verse. This is the portion of their cup. Our Lord was made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21), meaning that He took the place of sinners and bore upon Himself that which was due to the wicked. If horrible judgment was due to the wicked, that's what Christ bore. For what kind of Substitute would He have been if He had not taken upon Himself the full penalty which we deserved?

For in the hand of the LORD **there is a cup**, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and He poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them" (Psalm 75:8). Here again the cup represents the judgment and wrath coming from the hand of the Lord against sinners. This same judgement came upon our Substitute when He was made sin for us.

"Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem, which hast drink at the hand of the LORD **the cup of His fury**" (Isaiah 51:17 and compare verse 22). Again the cup represents the fury and wrath of the Lord against sinners.

“The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into **the cup of His indignation**; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb” (Rev. 14:10).

“The **cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath**” (Rev. 16:19).

If wicked men deserve this cup and if Christ became sin on behalf of wicked men, then we must conclude that He drank this cup on our behalf. And it was not a cup of suffering given to Him by the Romans as they crucified Him. No, Jesus said, it was “the cup which the Father hath given to Me” (John 18:11). It was the LORD who laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isa. 53:6).

Thus we are not surprised to read the general consensus among Bible believing students of the Scripture as to what this cup actually was:

The cup which my Father hath given me: by the cup is meant, the wrath of God, and punishment due to sin, endured by Christ in his sufferings, and is said to be given him by his Father; because he called him to these sufferings, they were appointed and determined by him; yea, he was even ordered, and commanded by his Father, to drink of this cup; justice mixed it up, and put it into his hands; and he took it as coming from his Father, who delighted in seeing him drink it up, as the stately of his people; and a dreadful one it was, a cup of trembling and astonishment, of curse, and not of blessing, of wrath and fury” [*Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*].

The cup which the Father had given Jesus refers to the suffering and death He would experience under God’s wrath against sin. [*Bible Knowledge Commentary* under John 18:11].

I am afraid sometimes we have a very shallow conception of the work of the cross. It was not merely the physical sufferings of Jesus which made atonement for sin. He did suffer in His body more than anyone, for as He hung upon that cross, every nerve, every fiber of His being must have been affected, but it was not that which settled the sin question. It was when Jehovah made His soul an offering for sin; when it pleased God to bruise Him. In other words, it was not what Jesus suffered at the hands of man that made atonement for sin, it was what He suffered at the hands of God. It was God who put to His lips this cup of judgment. He received that cup from the Father’s hands and drained it to the dregs.

Death and the curse were in that cup.
Oh Christ, ‘twas full for Thee;
But Thou has drained the last dark dregs,
‘Tis empty now for me.

And this is what we remember when we gather at the table of the Lord. We drink of Him, our blessed Savior, going to that cross and draining the cup of judgment to the dregs. If that cup had been placed at our lips, it would have taken all eternity to empty it, but He drank it all in those three hours of darkness on the tree, “The cup which my Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?” [Harry Ironside, *John*].

He drank a cup of wrath without mercy, that we might drink a cup of mercy without wrath. The agony [in the garden] was not the fear of death but the deep sense of God's wrath against sin that He was to bear. His pure and holy nature shrank, not from death as death, but from death as a curse for the world's sin [J. Oswald Sanders, *The Incomparable Christ*].

In the Old Testament, the image of the cup can symbolize God's blessing; however, in the majority of instances, the cup represents the Lord's judgment and wrath on wickedness (Ps. 75:8; Isa. 51:22). Here in Mark 10:38, the cup has negative connotations, which means it represents the cup of divine wrath that Jesus would drink on behalf of His people to save them from their sin. [https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/cup-jesus-drinks/]

The "cup" (literally "this cup" in Matthew 26:39, Mark 14:36, and Luke 22:42) is the cup of God's wrath upon man's sin. The cup is used as a symbol of God's wrath several times in the Old Testament (Jeremiah 25:15-16; Isaiah 51:17, 22; Lamentations 4:21; Ezekiel 23:28-34; Habakkuk 2:16). It is likewise used as a symbol for enduring God's wrath in Revelation 14:9-10 and 16:19. Jesus endured the wrath of God (drank the cup of God's wrath) so that our sins could be forgiven and so that we may drink of the cup of salvation. --Bob Deffinbaugh [https://bible.org/seriespage/q-where-and-how-did-jesus-drink-cup-wrath]

Conclusion

It is obvious from the passages discussed that the wrath of God is included in the judgment that will come upon unrepentant men because of their sins and the wrath of God is included in the judgment that came upon Christ our Substitute. Christ was made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21). That is, He was treated as if He were the sinner. He was judged in the sinner's stead. He was the sinner's Substitute, taking the punishment that we deserved as He paid sin's penalty in full. Since part of the judgment of God involves the wrath of God against sin, it is unthinkable that our Substitute did not suffer the full wrath of God which was due us. Otherwise, He did not pay it all. Why would God treat the sinner a certain way and then treat Christ, the sinner's Substitute, differently? God's full judgment upon sin fell upon Christ, so that God's full measure of mercy might fall upon us. He drank a cup of wrath without mercy, that we might drink a cup of mercy without wrath.

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