

Is God angry with the believer when he sins? A paper presented to the Grace Bible Church Bible Conference by Steve Thomas July 10-12

Introduction

Many believers will be defeated by shame and guilt when they stumble, which is often. At the moment of salvation, the believer is given the means to resist the attacks of his spiritual enemies, but as often happens, he is beset upon by these enemies and gives into temptation. How does God react to these sins? The Old Testament is filled with references to the wrath of God poured out on believer and unbeliever alike. Is God angry with the believer when he falls to temptation? To answer the question posed, time will be spent on the topics of propitiation, the dispensational distinction between Law and Grace, the individuality of the persons of the Trinity, and the believer's positional sanctification.

Propitiation - in the OT

The wrath of God was "kindled" (Hebrew - *charah* meaning "to burn, to be incensed with, to heat oneself in vexation") often against Israel. The book of Numbers records several of these instances.¹ In Numbers 25, there is an interesting statement regarding the zeal of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron. He was zealous for God's sake and it had the effect of turning God's wrath away from the Children of Israel (25:11). This demonstrates the principle of propitiation. The actions of another will cause the wrath of God to be appeased, or turned away, from the original target. The Hebrew word *kaphar* involved the ritualistic covering of sin until it could be dealt with in a more effective fashion by Christ.² Synonyms for the word propitiation in the OT would be *placate* or *conciliate*.

The principle of propitiation is dealt with in 2 Samuel 21:1-14. Saul did not deal justly with the Gibeonites, and God's wrath was leveled against Israel. God sent a three-year famine, and David enquired of God the reason. After finding the source, David made restitution to the people. Offering seven of Saul's descendants for the Gibeonites to execute. Verse 14 states that God was intreated for the land.

The OT sacrifices are propitiatory in nature. Going back to Abel's sacrifice in Gen 4:4, it can be seen that God's favor was on this offering. Noah's sacrifice after the flood gave a smell that was sweet to Jehovah (8:21). This sweet savor was the smell of pacification. This idea is used thirty-nine times in the Old Testament to describe the effect of sacrifices upon the true God. Beginning in the first chapter of Leviticus, with the establishment of the rules of sacrifice, the propitiatory nature of sacrifice is underlined. Verse 9 repeats "the sweet savor unto the Lord" in regard to the burnt offering. Leviticus 4 sets up the sin offering so that the priest "might make atonement for him" and "he shall be forgiven."

¹ Num 11:1, 10,33; 12:9, 25:3, 32:10,13.

² Cf. R. Laird Harris, "kaphar" *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980.), 1, p. 452.

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These phrases establish that the purpose of sacrifice is to receive a placation of the wrath of God. The other sacrifices in which blood was shed likewise assuaged the wrath of God.³ There is much to learn from the OT sacrifices in regard to the conciliatory nature of man to God.

Propitiation - in the NT

A study on the words *wrath* and *anger* in Scripture reveals wrath being something for the New Testament believer to avoid. Rom 12:19, Gal 5:20, Eph 4:26, 6:4, Col 3:8, 1 Tim 2:8, and James 1:19-20 all direct the believer to “put off,” “not give place to,” “be slow to,” and etc. I Thessalonians 1:10 tells the believer that he will be delivered from the wrath which is to come. This wrath is poured out in the book of Revelation. The use of the word *wrath* in the NT from God is directed at the unbeliever. John 3:36 states that the wrath of God abides on the one who does not believe. Romans 1:18 begins Paul’s thesis that each type of man (religious, moral, and heathen man) is without excuse and awaiting the wrath of God.

The believer will be saved from this wrath during the Day of the Lord after the rapture. Scriptures state that Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the believer. Romans 3:25, 1 John 2:2, and I John 4:10 say that the death of Christ was satisfaction for the sins of the believer and even for the whole world. He in essence “bought the rights” to all men, if they will only believe. The word *propitiation* means appeasing. Christ was the satisfaction, appeasing the holy justice of God the Father. Chafer states an interesting caveat here: “It would seem unnecessary to state here the qualifying truth that though the Christian’s sin does not surpass the propitiation which is originated to disannul its power, it does carry with it other penalties, and not the least of these is chastisement by the Father should the sinning Christian continue to sin without repentance and confession (1 Cor 11:31-32).”⁴ Hebrews 12:5-10 displays this teaching on correction, and nowhere in the passage is wrath or anger mentioned. The Love of the Father is emphasized in order to keep the believer from being weary (12:3).

Hodge deals with the issue of Satisfaction: “If such an offender suffers the penalty which the law prescribes as the punishment for the offense he is no longer liable to condemnation. No further punishment can justly be demanded for that offence, This is what is called the perfection of Christ’s satisfaction.”⁵ Hodge goes on to state, “... it [perfect satisfaction] supersedes and renders impossible all other satisfactions for sin.”⁶ Hodge goes on to explain that God’s nature does not change, his sense of justice was satisfied.

³ Judisch, Douglas McC. L. “Propitiation in the Language and Typology of the Old Testament” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* Vol 48, numbers 2 and 3, April - July 1984.

⁴ *Systematic Theology*, Chafer, Lewis Sperry. Vol 3-4, page 320.

⁵ *Systematic Theology*, Hodge, Charles Vol 2, page 482.

⁶ *Ibid.* pg 484.

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Strong's theology adds that "Punishment is the constitutional reaction of God's being against moral evil..."⁷ "Thus the atonement answers the ethical demand of the divine nature that sin be punished if the offender is to go free."⁸ The work of Christ satisfied the holy character of God so that the believer goes free while the wrath of God was poured out on the Son. There is more wrath to come, as scriptures dictate.⁹ The wrath of the Evil One will be delivered during the Tribulation period when Satan realizes his time is short.¹⁰ However, this wrath will be felt by unbelievers and the believers who will be saved during the Tribulation period; the Church will have been delivered.

Dispensational Distinctions between Law and Grace

The distinctions that exist between Law and Grace are many. "A dispensation is a phase in God's plan in which He imposes certain rules to govern the daily lives of a household, composed of some or all of mankind. These rules are imposed through a steward (manager). Dispensations are about mankind."¹¹ The rule of life for the dispensation of Law was for the nation of Israel. It was the means by which they were to approach God to receive the blessings they were promised. The rule of life for the believer under Grace is much different. The believer under grace has position and possessions that were not made available to believers in other dispensations. Grace is the rule of life for the Body of Christ.¹² God, by His grace, trains or raises the believer as a child.¹³ The judgement for the church, who will eventually fail in this rule of life, is actually the rapture. Even this judgement is gracious.¹⁴ Peter wrote in his first epistle that when God comes for the Church, he will bring grace. The coming of Christ to rapture the church should bring comfort to the believer. 1 Thess 4:18 says, "***Wherefore comfort one another with these words.***" Christ will collect the Church to present it blameless to the Father.

The children of Israel failed many times during the dispensation of Law. God's wrath was evident when they failed. Because of the believer's position in Christ, the believer is "blessed with all spiritual blessings."¹⁵ God is eulogizing the believer, saying good things about him, as it were. God has declared the believer to be righteous.¹⁶ God calls the believer holy, blameless, accepted in the beloved, seated in the heavenlies, and etc. This eulogizing does not reflect our current reality here on earth, but instead reflects how the Father has chosen to view the believer. This divine perspective is the essence of the conversation. The believer is a sinner, and God is still holy but God has chosen to place the sins of the believer

⁷ Systematic Theology, Strong, Augustus Hopkins, page 752.

⁸ Ibid. page 753.

⁹ Rev 6:17, 11:18, 14:10, 14:19, 15:1, 15:7, 16:1, 16:19, 18:3, 19:15

¹⁰ Rev 12:12

¹¹ God's House Plans, Holscher, Tim. John 14:20 publishing, Royal City, WA, 2008, Chapter 9, pg. 48.

¹² Eph 3:2.

¹³ Titus 2:11-13

¹⁴ God's House Plans. Chapter 16.

¹⁵ Eph 1:3

¹⁶ Rom 3:24, 3:28, 5:1, 5:9, 8:30, 1 Cor 6:11, Gal 2:16-17, 3:11, 3:24, Titus 3:7

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behind him, and instead views the righteousness of Christ in which God has clothed the believer.¹⁷

The Individuality of the Godhead

The three persons of the trinity have differing offices that work with the believer in different ways. The Father chastens the believer, the Son is the Mediator, acting as the high priest for the believer, and the Spirit is conforming the believer to the image of Christ.

Hebrews 12 states the admonition to “despise not the chastening of the Lord.” Verse 7 directs the believer’s attention to the Father who treats him as a son. There is a distinction between punishment and chastening (see excerpt at end of paper).

The second person of the Trinity has three offices: Prophet, Priest, and King. He is currently in the office of High Priest. Hebrews 4:14-16 explains the benefits of this office to the believer. Hebrews 10:19-21 declares that this work gives the believer the ability to join the author of Hebrews in the exhortations of verses 22-24. The range of these benefits go from confident access to the throne of grace, to the exhortation to incite good works in fellow believers.

When the believer acts in a way that hinders the work of the Spirit, the Spirit of God can be grieved.¹⁸ The word for “grieved” is *lupeo*, meaning “to make sorrowful, to be in heaviness.” The Holy Spirit is conforming the believer to the image of Christ, and when he acts in a carnal way, that work is hindered.¹⁹

The Positional Sanctification of the Believer

The Believer’s positional sanctification keeps God’s wrath from being directed towards the believer when he sins. God’s evaluation of the believer as wrapped in the righteousness of the Son keeps the Father pleased with the believer.²⁰ If the believer understands the way in which the Father views him, it will lead to peace in his life, and power against his spiritual enemies. The Galatians were struggling with this idea. Paul, in his introduction to the churches in Galatia states: “***Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ.***” This is no common greeting. The Galatians were leaving behind the gospel of present tense salvation to pursue a totally different gospel.²¹

Conclusion

Because of the distinction of being under grace, instead of law, the believer will not face the wrath of God. The believer in this dispensation is not viewed as flawed, but holy and blameless. The Spirit of God may be grieved and sorrowful when the believer is carnal, but anger or wrath is not directed at the child of God. It is directed towards the “Children of

¹⁷ Heb 10:17, Micah 7:19, Isaiah 1:18, Psalm 103:12, Rom 8:1

¹⁸ Eph 4:30

¹⁹ 2 Cor 4:10, Rom 8:29

²⁰ Eph 1:3, 1:20. 2:6

²¹ Gal 1:6-7

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disobedience” and it will be poured out on the earth during the tribulation period, but the believer will not be present for that time. The Son of God satisfied the Father with his righteous behavior and his sacrifice on the cross. The once for all sacrifice created an atonement which puts the believer into an elevated state. He is in a place where there is no condemnation. He is loved by the Father, and represented by the Son, so he can expect chastening if he does not stop practicing sin, but he will never feel the wrath of God. What a glorious thought!

Excerpt from paper presented at last year’s conference. This shows the distinction between corrective discipline and punitive action which carries vengeance with it.

Discipline can serve varied purposes. Scripture reveals the mind of God regarding discipline towards His creation. Care must be taken by the believer so as not to overstep the authority given in any situation.

Preventative / Preparative - Teaching to keep the student from straying. Intended to keep the student on the correct path. Imparting some knowledge to the student. Training in some fields of study.

Corrective / Restorative - Needful because the student has strayed and needs to be brought back to a correct path.

Punitive - punishment meant to correct behavior. It contains a vengeance or retribution factor.

The punitive aspect of discipline involves vengeance. The believer should be careful not to usurp the place of God with this aspect. Consider the way God uses vengeance:

Deu_32:35 To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.

Deu_32:43 Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people.

Psa_94:1 O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself.

Isa_34:8 For it is the day of the LORD'S vengeance, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion.

Isa_61:2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn;

Eze_25:14 And I will lay my vengeance upon Edom by the hand of my people Israel: and they shall do in Edom according to mine anger and according to my fury; and they shall know my vengeance, saith the Lord GOD.

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Nah_1:2 God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies.

Rom_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

Heb_10:30 For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people.

God is the only being that is entitled to vengeance. No other being is worthy of vengeance. This is a sobering thought. Often believers succumb to the feeling that they somehow deserve vengeance. Vengeance belongs to God and God alone.