The Wrath of God upon the Cross of Christ

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 bloodshed 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 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; 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. 4,9,10). 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.

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