

I. GAINING CLARITY ON THE WORK AND HEART OF THE CROSS

- A. The clearest demonstration of God's heart for the World is seen in the Father crushing the Son in our place, so that we can be saved from the punishment due us and brought into intimate relationship with Him.
- B. I want to bring clarity to the situation we were in and the amazing demonstration of love that God showed us in His solution so that these truths can fill our mind and heart.
- i. It is only as these truths fill our mind and become part of our dialogue with the Lord that they change us. It is only as our view of God changes that we are transformed (2 Corinthians 3:18). Analogy: a menu.

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things. (Philippians 4:8)

II. THE SITUATION – THE JUST WRATH OF GOD WAS ABIDING ON US

- A. Each of us had sinned greatly. Because of our wickedness, we deserved punishment. The measure of punishment due each of us was exactly what we deserved. In other words, God is a perfectly just judge not punishing one bit too much or too little. (Ex 21:24)

The spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh...and were by nature children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3)

As it is written: “ There is none righteous, no, not one; 11 There is none who understands There is none who seeks after God. 12 They have all turned aside; (Romans 3:9-20)

- B. As we see how truly evil and destructive sin is, we begin to understand a bit more of the anger, fury, and wrath that God has toward sin. There are over 150 references to God's anger in the Bible. (Isaiah 13:6-16; Zephaniah 1:14-18)

When you beget children and grandchildren and have grown old in the land, and act corruptly and make a crave image in the form of anything, and do evil I the sight of the LORD you God to provoke Him to anger (Deuteronomy 4:25)

A people who provoke Me to anger continually to My face; Who sacrifice in gardens, And burn incense on altars of brick (Isaiah 65:3)

- C. There is an important distinction to be made here. God is not filled with anger toward sin because He is an angry person – as though we must tip-toe around Him and always be on edge lest we set Him off. In Exodus 34 God reveals that He is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in unfailing love. The source of God's anger is not that He is easily offended, but that humans have committed great wickedness.

And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in unfailing love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin (Ex 34:6-7)

D. I think it is essential that we also have a correct paradigm of the glad heart of God. In studying His anger and wrath at sin, we must remember that God has a happy heart. His default is happy. He must be provoked to anger. Seeing the joy in His heart also helps us understand the depths of love shown at the cross. It is hard to imagine a mostly mad God showing the kind of extravagant love seen at the cross.

Honor and majesty are before Him; Strength and gladness are in His place. (1 Chronicles 16:27)

You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Psalm 16:11)

Luke 15

E. Why is God angry at sin and why must He punish it?

i. Sin causes pain

Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Rom 13:10)

ii. God as the King of all creation will punish sin to maintain the integrity and goodwill of His government. If the US government never punished crime, it would grow rampant, become the accepted norm, and destroy the integrity of the nation.

iii. Punishment restores justice. If a young child is brutally murdered and it is brushed off as though nothing happened, something is left feeling 'not right.' We have this desire for justice because God does.

F. Disclaimer: rebellion is not the same as weakness (Psalm 147:11)

G. In summary, the world had committed great wickedness and rebellion and deserved severe punishment. Not only this, but they refused to repent and remained His enemies. They had no fear of God (Romans 3:18).

III. THE SITUATION – GOD LOVED THE SINFUL WORLD

A. God also, at the very same time, had a deep love and desire burning in His heart for us. He desired that we would not bear the wrath due us.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. (John 3:16-17)

For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. (Matthew 18:11)

For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." (Luke 9:56)

And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. (John 12:47)

Who is a God like You, Pardoning iniquity And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in mercy. (Micah 7:18)

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) (Ephesians 2:4)

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

- B. We didn't earn this. We *did* earn the wrath of God. That was what we had earned. But we had nothing to do with earning the love and mercy of God. It was completely and will always be completely based in the character and nature of God – that He loves and desires sinners.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

- C. We must have the full picture – God was filled with both wrath and love.
- i. If we have only one of these in our picture, it will not be balanced. If we have a God that only felt love for people and never felt anger at sin, we would not have a picture of God at all. Many in these days would seek to separate God from wrath. The solution is to not paint a picture of God based on our own thoughts and reasonings but based on what He has revealed of Himself in the scripture. Truly God does not change.
 - ii. The other ditch is to have a picture of God that only includes justice. If God were not a God of love, we would be completely without hope and headed for the lake of fire. God is love (1 John 4:8). He made us to need His love and acceptance. To know the love of God and love Him back is the highest calling we have (Matt 22:37).
- D. In summary, God had deep love for the undeserving world.

IV. THE PROBLEM

- A. God in His love for His creation as a whole and in His deep hatred of wickedness must punish the individual sinner, yet in His deep love and desire for that person as an individual, He desires to forgive them.

V. THE SOLUTION – AN ATONING SACRIFICE

- A. The astonishing solution provided by the Godhead was that God Himself would come to earth and bear His own wrath. The Son would take on human flesh and bear the punishment that was due us. The Father would crush His dearly beloved son-the object of all His affection! Even more astonishing is that He did it while we were still His enemies. We did not convince Him. It was His heart and His heart alone that brought Him to that cross. It is this truth that sets our hearts on fire to love God. What is the depth of this love!?! That He would take our punishment?! That the Father would crush the Son and the Son would willingly endure it for us! All this when we were yet His enemies!

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!(John 1:29)

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:10) Propitiation: a sacrifice which takes away wrath and brings us into a propitious (or favorable) stance before God

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins (1John 2:2)

Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood (Revelation 1:5)

But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:5)

- B. This plan of salvation was established before the world was ever created. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were in unity in their desire for fellowship with their creation.

All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. (Revelation 13:8)

- C. In the atonement God did not simply erase the charges against us. He fully punished them in Christ Jesus.
- D. In this substitutionary sacrifice, the Father administered the punishment and the Son bore it. Jesus willingly laid down His life for us.

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep...No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. (John 10:11-18)

VI. THE RESULT

- A. All that stood between us and God has been poured out on Jesus. Nothing is left. We have been completely reconciled to God. A way has been made so that we can be washed white as snow – to the point that it is as if we never sinned.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:1)

"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool. (Isaiah 1:18)

As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. (Psalms 103:12)

- B. In this reconciliation, God didn't just remove the wrath and punishment that was due us. He actually brought us into intimate fellowship. Even to the point of making us His sons and daughters.

And further yet, making us the bride of His Son. What kind of love is this that Jesus would take those who were His enemies, give His life for them, and then make them His bride!?

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her (Ephesians 5:25)

VII. CONCLUSION

A. There is no greater love. Jesus taking our place on the cross will, for all time, be the greatest proof of His love and desire for us – even while we were His enemies.

Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants...but I have called you friends. (John 15:13-15)

B. What then should be our response?

i. How should we feel about Jesus' great sacrifice and the punishment He bore for us? Joy? Remorse? Sadness? Somberness? As the end of the day we want to feel how Jesus felt about it.

...let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2)

ii. If Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before Him, then we should join with Him and rejoice and be grateful for such a wonderful Savior and salvation. Joy and thankfulness should be our response. He desires these rather than remorse. (Philippians 3:1,3; Gal 5:22)

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! (Philippians 4:4)

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

iii. We meditate on it and ask the Holy Spirit to give us more understanding so that we are set on fire to love the Lord. When we see the depths of love, tenderness, and passion shown at the cross, our hearts are set on fire to love Him. It is the understanding that He loved me completely of His own accord. I had nothing to do with motivating Him. He freely paid a price I will never know. All for love of me when I hated Him. The security we feel when we see the pursuit of God when we were at our worst. The understanding of His great sacrifice inspires in us a passionate desire to give everything we have to live only for Him – every breath. Not to earn His love, but because we have been freely given such love.

...and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. (2 Corinthians 5:15)