

Wonderful Words of Eternal Life

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May you allow God to guide you in your study of His Holy Word, the Bible.

Propitiation

In the study on Atonement we find that Sin creates a debt between a human, the sinner, and the Almighty God who is sinless. The debt must be paid. The sinner has nothing to offer as payment. Sin doesn't just create a debt between humanity and Deity; it also elicits the wrath of God. God is Holy and Righteous, therefore, sin is absolutely foreign to His nature. He detests sin and when sin comes near to God, it is something that angers him. Look at Adam. He sinned by doing what he desired rather than what God commanded. Consequently, Adam was driven out from the presence of God and from Eden, the place where God originally placed him. By inspiration Paul tells us "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23) and "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." (Romans 1:18) A little bit later Paul states "because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God "will give to each person according to what he has done." (Romans 2:5-6) Consequently "because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." (Ephesians 5:6; also reiterated in Colossians 3:6)

What are some of the things God classifies as sin or disobedience? "But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." (Ephesians 5:3-5) "But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds." (Colossians 3:8-9)

The wrath of God is against sin (disobedience). That wrath will occasionally be manifested in our current times as God puts His foot down and draws the line and says I will allow sin to go no further and what it's doing to siege the earth. But more than that, the wrath of God will be revealed most fully when Jesus comes again and there will be the final judgment. The Bible says that those who were faithful to the Lord will go to live with Him and yet at the same time it says that those not faithful will be cast into a place that the Bible calls Gehenna in the original language. Gehenna was a garbage dump outside the walls of Jerusalem that was open and burning almost continuously. In that kind of context, you have eternal punishment compared. The Bible uses weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth over and over again in describing the eternal punishment situation.

Many people detest the notion of our God demonstrating wrath. These people believe there's a God, they believe God is love, they believe God is merciful, and they believe in the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. But frankly, they think the doctrine of the wrath of God is beneath them or they have come to accept the lie that wrath is unworthy of God.

Others think of rage when wrath is mentioned, somebody seeing red and just absolutely going berserk. They say surely God wouldn't do that. Jonathan Edwards in the 17th Century saw God toying with humanity, holding humanity out over an open fire. But these are not biblical depictions of God's wrath. To the contrary, in the Bible it says God's wrath is never out of control, nor is his wrath cruel.

When God comes His wrath can be characterized as:

1. Judicial. It is the wrath of the all-perfect judge administering perfect judgment. "But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." (Romans 2:5) You see that God's judgment and His wrath are going to be righteous. God's wrath will be no more raging, or no more cruel, than a prudent, honest judge pronouncing sentence against someone who deserves that sentence. It's not out of control. It's judicial.
2. Chosen. "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." (Ephesians 5:6) God's wrath comes to the disobedient. They chose their desires rather than obedience "the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." (Galatians 5:19-21) Colossians 3:5-8 adds the following to the above list: passion, evil desire, covetousness, anger, malice, blasphemy, and filthy language out of your mouth. So, when someone chooses to do these things they choose disobedience, sin.

God made us human. We are frail, we are vulnerable, and every one of us matures to the point that when we distinguish right from wrong, we generally will choose to sin. In fact, Romans 3:23 says, "all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory." So, can one really be responsible for choices that, in their weakness, God knows they are going to make. How

could He really send them to Hell (Gehenna) for their sin when all of us sin? What kind of choice is that? That's where our word propitiation comes in.

God does not want to see a single one of us suffer from His wrath and knowing that He still made us all vulnerable giving us the ability to choose. We have a choice for "Whoever believes in the Son (Jesus) has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." (John 3:36) "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him." (Romans 5:8-9) You see the Bible makes it clear. When one chooses to believe in Jesus, obeys the gospel, comes up from the waters of baptism as a Christian, and continues to obey the teachings of Christ, they are saved from God's wrath. But how does Jesus make the difference? Where does Christ come in? He propitiates for us.

The word propitiation means deflect wrath or let it bounce off. In another form the word was used to define a shield that a warrior would take into battle. What would you do with a shield? When the enemy would rare back the bowstring and let an arrow fly, the shield would go up to deflect it to keep you from harm. When a sword would come crashing down the shield would go up so that it would hit the air and it would mar the shield, but you would be saved. Now do you begin to see the relationship with Jesus?

Jesus deflected our wrath. "He is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." (1 John 2:2) Isn't that something? He is the shield; he is the deflector of wrath for our sins, for the sins of the whole world. "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed" (Romans 3:24). "Herein is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation (atoning sacrifice in the NIV) for our sins." 1 John 4:10) Isn't that great? Jesus not only paid my debt to God, [atoned the debt caused by my sin], He shields [propitiates] the wrath God is aiming at us caused by our sin.

Now let's piece it all together. When Jesus was dying as he hung on the cross He said, "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?* My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" At that moment for the only time in eternity, God the Father had forsaken the Son. He had turned his back on him. Jesus, who as God and before the world was created, had always had perfect communion with God, could no longer sense his presence. Why not? Because he was being our propitiation. He was taking the wrath of God in that separation and burying our sin so that when we come to that cross obedient to the gospel by dying to sin, being buried with him in baptism to rise a new creature and claim his righteousness, would be freed from sin. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ." (2 Corinthians 5:17-18)

How can this be? By propitiation. "For God made him who had no sin to be sin for our sakes, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21) The one who had no sin became sin and in doing so deflected God's wrath away so that we could live.

What does all this mean to me?

1. I am a sinner.
2. The wages of sin is death.
3. I have nothing to remove my sin.
4. Unless something can be done, I will perish.
5. Jesus was God and in Him everything was made.
6. Jesus became flesh and lived among mankind.
7. Jesus was without sin.
8. Jesus' purpose in coming to earth was to become an atoning sacrifice and a propitiation for our sins.
9. Jesus accomplished his mission when He willingly gave himself to be crucified.
10. Through Him and in Him; that is, in Christ, I can be free of sin and God's wrath.
11. I must be obedient to his Gospel and live according to his teaching.