

Bible Study

God's Wrath Upon Sinners

**How Christ's Blood Sacrifice
Turns Back God's Wrath**

By Craig M White

Version 1.2





The Wrath of God Upon Sinners
How Christ's Blood Sacrifice Turns Back God's Wrath

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NB: All Scriptures used in this Bible Study are taken from the ESV unless otherwise
stated.

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The purpose and desire is to foster Biblical, historical and related studies that strengthen the Church of God's beliefs and message.

Associated Bible studies

- *Do Sacrifices Provide Forgiveness?*
- *God's Law and Way of Life Before Moses.*
- *Protect Your Heart! Nurture a Pure Heart!*
- *The Lake of Fire in History and Prophecy.*
- *Understanding the Burnt Offering.*
- *What does "having a relationship" with God and Jesus mean?*
- *Will the Temple, Sacrifices & Tribal Allotments be restored during the Millennium?*

Executive Summary

This Bible study examines the Biblical doctrine of God's wrath against sin and sinners and explains how the Old Testament sacrificial system foreshadows and illuminates the atoning work of Jesus Christ. The central thesis is that all humanity stands under God's wrath because of sin, and that only the sacrificial death and ongoing priestly intercession of Christ can remove condemnation and reconcile repentant human beings to God the Father. The wrath of God results in punishment, curse and death.

The study begins by emphasising that God's wrath is a consistent theme throughout both Testaments. Passages from across the Word of God are used to demonstrate that God's holiness necessarily opposes evil and unrighteousness. According to the author, Divine wrath is not arbitrary anger, but the just response of a holy God toward sin, impurity, rebellion, and covenant unfaithfulness.

A major focus of the paper is the sacrificial system outlined in Leviticus. The author argues that modern Christians often overlook the importance of Old Testament sacrifices, even though the New Testament consistently interprets Christ's death through the sacrifices as presented in Leviticus. Citing scholars such as Gordon Wenham, Jacob Milgrom, Leon Morris, Douglas Moo, and others, the study contends that concepts such as propitiation, expiation, purification and covenant restoration are essential for understanding Christ's sacrifice.

The study explains the various offerings in the Mosaic system - burnt offerings, sin offerings, guilt offerings, peace offerings, and the Day of Atonement rituals - and how each symbolically points to aspects of Christ's redemptive work. Sacrifice in the Old Testament is presented as God's ordained means for dealing with sin, averting wrath, cleansing impurity, restoring fellowship, and preserving covenant relationship. Blood plays a central role because "the life of the flesh is in the blood" (Leviticus 17:11), and therefore sacrificial death serves as a substitute for the sinner.

The author highlights four major theological functions of sacrifice in the Old Testament and Christ's:

- **Propitiation** — turning away God's wrath.
- **Expiation** — removing guilt and sin.
- **Purification** — cleansing impurity and defilement.
- **Covenantal Restoration** — restoring fellowship between God and humanity.

These categories are then applied directly to Christ's death. The study argues that Jesus fulfilled the sacrificial system completely and permanently through His shed blood. Christ's death satisfied Divine justice while simultaneously expressing God's mercy and love. His sacrifice not only forgives sin but also removes condemnation for believers, reconciles them to God, and protects them from His wrath.

Several New Testament passages are emphasised to support this conclusion, including Romans 8:1 (“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”), John 3:18 and 3:36, Acts 4:12, and Galatians 3:22. Believers are said to be freed from wrath through faith in Christ, though Christians will still face judgment regarding rewards and faithfulness.

In addition, the study also argues strongly against the idea that human works, law-keeping, prayer, fasting, or religious observance can save anyone independently of Christ. Salvation is presented as entirely dependent upon God’s grace through Christ’s atoning sacrifice and priestly intercession. Nevertheless, obedience, holiness, and commandment-keeping remain absolutely essential as the proper response to God’s grace; as part of our relationship with Him; and as part of developing righteous character.

In its concluding sections, the study connects God’s wrath with the doctrine of final judgment and the “Lake of Fire.” Referencing the author’s earlier work on the subject, it supports the doctrine of conditional immortality or annihilationism - the belief that the wicked will ultimately be destroyed rather than be eternally tormented. The Lake of Fire is portrayed as the final expression of Divine justice that permanently removes evil, sin, and rebellion from creation.

“God is a righteous judge, and **a God who feels indignation every day** [toward the wicked/sinners]” (Psalm 7:11, ESV)

"For **the wrath of God** is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth." (Romans 1:18, ESV)

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but **the wrath of God** remains on him.” (John 3:36, ESV)

“Without the categories of sacrifice, priesthood, and cleansing supplied by Leviticus, the meaning of Christ’s death would be largely unintelligible.” (Derek Tidball, *The Message of Leviticus*, p. 21).

Introductory Comments

In my Bible study *Do Sacrifices Provide Forgiveness*, I wrote:

“So, to be cleansed or purged, a variety of different sacrifices were performed to enable cleansing and covering, thus removing His wrath from them [Israel], enabling their freedom from the penalty of law breaking.

Thus, blood sacrifices were part and parcel of one’s relationship with God and took on several motivations:

- Forgiveness of various types of sins
- For ceremonial cleanness after child birth or a skin disease
- Making a vow in God’s presence
- For commitment and worship

Then they could be regarded as washed clean and able to approach God with a clear conscience (1Cor 1:27; 13:5-10; Eph 3:12; Phil 2:12; Heb 4:16; 10:22). This means of honouring Him allayed His wrath and assisted in their relationship with Him.” (pp. 10-11)

After all, God’s wrath is upon sinners, whether called to salvation at this time or not in both Old and New Testaments:

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.” (Roman 1:18. See Exodus 34:7)

This Bible study posits that in fact, His righteous wrath is over anyone and everyone who is not covered by Christ’s sacrificial blood – whether He has called them or opened their eyes to His way or not. His wrath is against gentile sinning nations (Isaiah 34:2; Nahum 1:2) and Israel when it sinned (Numbers 25:3).

Anyone and everyone are under condemnation unless the blood covers them and turns back His wrath (and its consequences) against them.

Understanding the sacrifices and their roles (and thus Christ’s sacrificial role) helps us to understand the wrath of God upon all and how and why He diverts it. And how that impacts oneself.

Further, we shall see that the sacrifices contained within Leviticus, helps us understand Christ's sacrifice. Why He had to die; how He had to die; and what that death achieved. And where God's wrath comes into it.

Several scholars have written of the need to comprehend Leviticus in this context:

““In one sense then the whole ceremonial law in Leviticus is obsolete for the Christian. We are interested in the sacrifice of Christ, not in animal sacrifice. But in another sense the Levitical rituals are still of immense relevance. **It was in terms of these sacrifices that Jesus himself and the early church understood his atoning death.** Leviticus provided the theological models for their understanding. If we wish to walk in our Lord's steps and think his thoughts after him, we must attempt to understand the sacrificial system of Leviticus”

... the Levitical rituals are still of immense relevance. It was in terms of these sacrifices that Jesus himself and the early church understood his atoning death. Leviticus provided the theological models for their understanding. **If we wish to walk in our Lord's steps and think his thought after him, we must attempt to understand the sacrificial system of Leviticus.** It was established by the same God who sent his Son to die for us; and in rediscovering the principles of OT worship written there, we may learn something of the way we should approach a holy God” (Gordon Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus. New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, p. 37).

In another work Wenham states:

“The rituals of Leviticus provided Israel with symbolic models of access to God, models ultimately fulfilled and transformed in Jesus Christ.” (Gordon Wenham, *Exploring the Old Testament: The Pentateuch*, p. 92).

This very important insight is supported by other scholars:

“The New Testament writers consistently interpret the death of Christ in terms drawn from the sacrificial system of the Old Testament.” (Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, p. 108).

“Leviticus is not an obsolete manual of ancient rituals but a theological foundation for understanding holiness, atonement, and communion with God.” (Allen Ross, *Holiness to the Lord: A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus*, p. 49).

“The sacrificial system was a divinely ordained pedagogy pointing beyond itself to the final and effective sacrifice of Christ.” (David Wright, *Inventing God's Law: How the Covenant Code of the Bible Used and Revised the Laws of Hammurabi*, p. 287).

“Hebrews assumes that the reader understands the logic of Levitical sacrifice; otherwise its presentation of Christ’s priestly work loses much of its force.” (Richard Averbeck, *The Old Testament Law for the Life of the Church*, p. 134).

“Christ’s atoning work cannot be fully appreciated apart from the sacrificial theology developed throughout Leviticus.” (Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, p. 52).

“But he [the Israelite] was well aware that the only reason God had given for 'setting His love upon' His people was, simply, 'because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers'. The Christian could wish for no clearer statement, *mutatis mutandis*, of his own acceptance ...

“So it was with the sacrifices in general. The very means of making atonement was His gift to man: ‘the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls’. **The theology of this is essentially that of grace:** its crowning statement is that 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son'.” (Frank Kidner, *Sacrifice in the Old Testament*, page 23-24) [emphasis mine]
[emphasis to all of the above, mine]

From this we can see how very important it is to have at least a rudimentary understanding of the sacrificial system and the book of Leviticus – apparently the least read book in the Bible!¹ Yet one of the most interesting and revealing.

Let us now explore the sacrifices and its relationship to His anger toward sin and the sinner – whether individuals or entire nations. And how His wrath toward us is turned back. A select list of verses on His wrath is found in the **Appendix. God’s Wrath in Both Old and New Testaments.**

NB: this is a Bible study, not an article or technical paper.

Lessons from the Old Testament

One key Scripture is found in Numbers 25:1-13 where Israel committed a serious transgression by indulging in sexual immorality and idolatry with the Moabites and Midianites, specifically by worshiping Baal of Peor.

“The Lord’s anger burned against Israel... A plague broke out among them.” (vv. 3-9). As the people mourned in repentance at the tabernacle, one Israelite brought a Midianite woman into his tent. Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron the priest, acted: he pierced both the man

¹ Refer to Joseph Hartropp, “The Five Least Favourite Books of the Bible,” *Christianity Today* online, 27 January 2017.

and the woman with a spear, thereby halting the plague that had already claimed the lives of 24,000. God subsequently proclaimed:

“Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, **has turned back my wrath** from the people of Israel, in that he was jealous with my jealousy among them, so that I did not consume the people of Israel in my jealousy. Therefore... Behold, I give to him my covenant of peace... because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the people of Israel.” (Numbers 25:11-13) [emphasis mine]

God’s wrath upon sinners is explicitly depicted above as igniting with a lethal plague serving as judgment for sin. This is connected to atonement - Phinehas’ decisive action (executing judgment on the public sinners) is referred to as “making atonement” (Hebrew *kipper*), **which diverts God’s wrath**. Throughout the Old Testament, atonement is most frequently accomplished through blood sacrifice (refer to Leviticus 1-7, 16-17), where the death of a substitute (animal) covers sin and restores the relationship with God. This incident illustrates the principle: sin incites God’s holy wrath, yet atonement (through sacrifice or a substitute bearing the cost) mitigates it or allays it. This is how He operates because He detests sin so much as should we.

Leviticus 17:11 is crucial in understanding all of this - it is a fundamental principle of the sacrificial system: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life." Sacrifices address sin to enable a holy God to coexist with sinful humanity upon repentance. It is His way of doing so.

Similarly, the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16) involves annual sacrifices and the scapegoat ritual aimed at purifying the people and the sanctuary from all sins, ensuring that God’s presence (and wrath) does not lead to their destruction.

In 2 Samuel 24:25, following David’s sin which resulted in a plague (wrath), he presented burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, "and the Lord answered his prayer for the land, and the plague on Israel was halted."

The entire sacrificial system of the Old Testament (including burnt offerings, sin offerings, etc) serves as His ordained method for sinners to obtain forgiveness and avert wrath through the means of substitutionary blood atonement.

In other words, the atonement rituals protect Israel from the dangerous consequences of sin and impurity before a holy God. And that is true of Christians as well for we are protected by Divine wrath and eternal death due to Christ’s immeasurable sacrifice.

Research which explains this well include:

- Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16* (1998); *17-22* (2000); *23-27* (2001): *A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (3 vols). Milgrom is probably the most frequently referenced contemporary scholar on Leviticus. He argues that sacrificial blood

eliminates the pollution of the sanctuary resulting from Israel's transgressions. Should impurity build up, God's presence withdraws, leading to judgment.

- Robert Jamieson, "Hebrews 9.23: Cult Inauguration, Yom Kippur and the Cleansing of the Heavenly Tabernacle," *New Testament Studies*, Vol. 62, No. 4 (2016), pp. 569–87. Jamieson contends that sacrificial blood purifies the defilement associated with sin. While the focus is on Hebrews, the article relies on Levitical theology and the Day of Atonement rituals.
- Christian Eberhart, "A Neglected Feature of Sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible: Remarks on the Burning Rite on the Altar," *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 97, No. 4 (2004), pp. 485–93. Eberhart explores the significance of burning sacrificial offerings and the role this ritual plays in Israel's Divine acceptance.

Concerning turning back God's wrath, scholars debate concerning this critical element of God's nature and His Plan, which include the following views of what the sacrifices function as or what they are for:

- **Propitiation** - turns away or removes God's wrath.
- **Expiation** - removes sin/impurity.
- **Purification/Cleansing** - cleanses sanctuary and also the covenant community.
- **Covenantal Restoration and Fellowship** - Mending the communion between God and us.

Many modern scholars argue that all operate simultaneously, rather than separately.

The following passages are central in the scholarly discussion on all of this, but I shall not discuss all of these in this short Bible study as one can read them oneself:

- Leviticus 16 (Day of Atonement).
- Leviticus 17:11 - "the life of the flesh is in the blood."
- Numbers 16:46-48 - Aaron's incense "stopped the plague."
- Exodus 32.
- Psalm 106.
- Isaiah 53.
- Hebrews 9-10.

These texts are often interpreted as showing sacrifice averting judgment, plague, curse or wrath, impurity, and should be studied in this light and not overlooked by Christians. Why? Because the same principle applies in the New Testament – God's wrath is upon all of us unless Christ's shed blood both covers us and washes us clean on an ongoing basis. And He appearing before the Father on our behalf, asking for His forgiveness and mercy (John 17:9; Romans 8:26-27, 34; Hebrews 7:24-25; 9:11-15, 24; 1 John 2:1).²

² For additional research, refer to:

• Roy Gane (2022), "Sacrifice and the Old Testament". In: B. N. Wolfe et al., eds. *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*.

Background to the Sacrifices

In the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, primarily outlined in Leviticus (chapters 1–7), the responsibilities for slaughtering animals were allocated as follows:

Who Slaughtered the Animal?

The offeror (the individual presenting the sacrifice) was responsible for slaughtering the animal. This is outlined in several passages, such as Leviticus 1:5 regarding the burnt offering: the **offeror slaughters** the bull before the Lord, while the priests (the sons of Aaron) manage the blood by splashing or sprinkling it on the altar.

Similar rules are found for other offerings (Leviticus 3:2 for peace offerings, and Leviticus 4:4 for sin offerings where the offeror slaughters the animal). The offeror also frequently skinned the animal and divided it into pieces (Leviticus 1:6).

The priests (from the tribe of Levi, specifically the descendants of Aaron) did not carry out the initial slaughter for individual offerings. They undertook their roles after the killing: receiving the blood, dashing it on the altar, burning portions on the altar, and executing other ritual procedures. The Levites assisted with temple responsibilities, but the **primary act of slaughter was the offeror's duty** as outlined in Leviticus. In certain exceptional circumstances (such as offerings made by the high priest or on behalf of the congregation), elders or others might lay hands on the animal specifically in the case of a sin offering for the whole congregation of Israel (see Leviticus 4:13-15).³

Which Sacrifices Were Consumed and Which Were Not

The five primary animal-based offerings (along with the grain offering) had distinct regulations regarding their consumption:

- **Burnt Offering** (Leviticus 1): The entire animal (excluding the hide, which was given to the officiating priest) was completely incinerated on the altar as a total dedication to God. No part was consumed by individuals (priests or offeror). It was entirely consumed by fire, symbolising complete surrender.

• Dwight Willett (1923), *The Development of the Idea of Sacrifice and Atonement in the Old Testament*. Th. D. Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

• John Hayes (1998), "Atonement in the Book of Leviticus," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, Vol. 52, Issue 1, pp. 5-15.

• Glenn Pemberton (1995), *The Theology of Atonement Sacrifice in Leviticus 1, 4:1-6:7, and 16*. Digital Commons @ ACU, *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 571.

³ In the article *Will the Temple, Sacrifices & Tribal Allotments be restored during the Millennium?* I explained that the sacrificial system will continue, though be modified. As will the Temple furnishings. "[In the Messianic Age] the Levites shall slaughter (*šāhat*) the sacrificial animals of the burnt offerings (*ôlâ*) and regular (peace) offerings (*zebah*) for the people (*lâ'âm*). This authorization actually represents a promotion over the Mosaic legislation, according to which the worshiper would kill the victim himself" (Daniel Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48, New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, p. 630). In other words, during the Millennium, the priests will slaughter the sacrificial animal, not the offeror.

- **Grain Offering** (Leviticus 2): This offering was non-animal (comprising flour, oil, etc.). A portion was burned on the altar; the remainder was consumed by the priests (but not by the offeror).
- **Peace Offering** (Leviticus 3, 7:11–34): Specific parts (fat, kidneys, liver lobe) were burned on the altar for God. The breast and right thigh were allocated to the priests (wave/heave offerings). The rest was consumed by the offeror and their family/friends during a communal meal of fellowship and gratitude. It had to be consumed within 1–2 days, with any leftovers incinerated.
- **Sin Offering** (Leviticus 4–5): Certain parts (fat) were burned on the altar. The remainder of the animal was either:
 - Consumed by the priests (if it was for an individual's unintentional sin).
 - Completely burned outside the camp (if it was for the high priest or the entire congregation, to prevent defiling the camp).
- **Guilt/Trespass/Reparation Offering** (Leviticus 5:14–6:7, 7:1–10): This was similar to the sin offering where the fat was burned on the altar; the remainder was consumed by the priests. It frequently involved restitution in addition to the sacrifice.

In summary, those sacrifices which are

- Not consumed (fully/wholly burned or disposed of outside): burnt offering (entirely); certain sin offerings (for leaders/congregation).
- Consumed by priests: portions of grain offerings; the majority of sin and guilt offerings; specific parts of peace offerings.
- Consumed by the offeror/family: primarily the peace offering (as a shared meal symbolising fellowship with God).

Its is this consumption of the animal's flesh that symbolises fellowship with God and thus His acceptance. An ongoing relationship is the ongoing blessing.

What do the Sacrifices (as a type of Christ's) Accomplish?

The sacrificial categories exhibit significant overlap, and various scholars would argue that a single sacrifice can fulfill multiple roles simultaneously. However, in general terms, the sacrificial system in the Old Testament is frequently represented in the following manner.

1. **Propitiation** (Turning away Divine wrath or judgment) - Focuses on sacrifices that explicitly stop wrath, plague, judgment, curse, or death. Eg:
 - **Day of Atonement** (Leviticus 16) - High priest makes atonement for sanctuary, priests, and people to prevent God abandoning the sanctuary and judging Israel.
 - **Numbers 16** plague - Aaron's incense offering stops the plague (clearest Old Testament example of averting Divine wrath).
 - **Burnt offering** (*'olah*) - Often linked to surrender, homage, and appeasement (e.g., Job 1:5); associated with "pleasing aroma" language.
2. **Expiation** (Removal of sin/guilt) - Emphasises forgiveness, removal of guilt, substitution, and covering sin. The key sacrifices for this are:

- **Sin offering** (ḥaṭṭā't) (Leviticus 4-5) - “and he shall be forgiven.”
- **Guilt offering** (ʿāšām) - Deals with desecration, restitution, and objective guilt (includes compensation + sacrifice).
- **Scapegoat** (Lev 16:22) - “The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area.”

3. Purification (Cleansing pollution from sanctuary/land/community) - sacrifices primarily cleanse sacred space contaminated by sin. The main elements of these are:

- **Sin offering** (ḥaṭṭā't) - Often better translated “purification offering.” Blood applied to altar, veil, and sanctuary furnishings.
- **Day of Atonement** (Leviticus 16) - Central purification rite; repeatedly uses “cleanse,” “purify,” “make atonement” for the sanctuary.
- **Red heifer** (Numbers 19) - Pure example of removing corpse impurity to protect the sanctuary.

Uncleaned pollution leads to God’s departure and judgment. Today, sacred space is the Christian him/herself (1 Corinthians 6:19) and the Church of God.

4. Covenantal Restoration / Fellowship - Repairing communion between God and Israel or oneself. Emphasises communion, peace, covenant loyalty, shared meals, and restored relationship. Key sacrifices:

- **Peace offering** (šĕlāmîm) - Most relational; includes communal meal before God (thanksgiving, fellowship, covenant joy).
- **Passover** - Protection from judgment, covenant identity, and communal meal.
- **Covenant ratification** (Exodus 24) - Blood sprinkled on altar and people.⁴

Summary:

Sacrifice	Dominant modern scholarly interpretation
Burnt offering	Propitiation and dedication
Sin offering	Purification and expiation
Guilt offering	Expiation and restitution
Day of Atonement	Purification with propitiatory implications
Peace offering	Covenant fellowship
Passover	Covenant protection and identity with God

What Christ’s Immense Sacrifice does for us!

Because of Christ’s shed blood, we Christians are no longer under the Father’s wrath.

Notice relevant New Testament verses:

⁴ **NB:** Most modern scholars reject that the above categories are exclusive. A single sacrifice (e.g., Day of Atonement or sin offering) can simultaneously function as propitiation (wrath prevented); expiation (sins removed); purification (sanctuary cleansed); covenant renewal (relationship preserved). As do Christ’s sacrifices.

“But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another - if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home - so that when you come together **it will not be for judgment**. About the other things I will give directions when I come.” (1 Corinthians 11:32-34)

“There is therefore **now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**.

For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.”

“Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised - who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.” (Romans 8:1-2, 33-34)

“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” (John 3:18)

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. **He does not come into judgment**, but has passed from death to life.” (John 5:24)⁵

“So speak and so act **as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy**. Mercy triumphs over judgment.” (James 2:12-13)

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

Although Christians have passed from death to life, continuing in this state is not guaranteed. Putting all the Scriptures together, we can still lose our salvation due to unfaithfulness.

Christians will still be assessed or judged at the resurrection for what they have done in this life which determines their reward in the Kingdom (2 Corinthians 5:10; 3:10-15; Romans 14:10; Luke 6:23; 14:14; Revelation 22:12; Matthew 16:27; I Corinthians 4:5; 2 Timothy 4:8).

Insights from Commentaries

Various scholars who have delved very deeply into the sacrifice of Christ and all He has done for us, have written some very insightful commentaries which we can learn from:

⁵ There is, of course, also God’s loving discipline as a Father to a child for growth, training and holiness and must not be confused with wrath upon a sinner: Hebrews 12:5-7; Revelation 3:19.

“Everything that is not holy is common. Common things divide into two groups, the clean and the unclean. Clean things become holy, when they are sanctified. But unclean objects cannot be sanctified. **Clean things can be made unclean, if they are polluted.** Finally, holy items may be defiled and become common, even polluted, and therefore unclean. . . . cleanness is a state intermediate between holiness and uncleanness. Cleanness is the normal condition of most things and persons. Sanctification can elevate the clean into the holy, while pollution degrades the clean into the unclean. The unclean and the holy are two states which must never come in contact with each other” (Gordon Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus. New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, pp. 19-20).

“Only the death of Jesus makes possible the forgiveness of sinners without compromising the very character of God” (Everett Harrison and Donald Hagner, *Romans. Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol.11, p. 74).

“God could not simply wipe the slate clean by pardoning sins. That would be condoning sins. Christ’s death on the cross shows how seriously God in his righteousness takes sin, how costly forgiveness is, and how much love underlies God’s grace...

“Humans cannot make atonement through their ritual acts. All they can do is respond to God’s action in Christ with a confession of faith, as did the Gentile centurion who, facing Jesus on the cross, witnessed how he died and declared, ‘Truly this man was God’s Son! (Mark 15:37-39). Those who make this confession no longer stand against God but can stand under God’s grace”...

“Atonement and escape from God’s wrath come only through Christ’s death. It is ‘effective once for all time and procures for those who believe the forgiveness of their sins...” (David Garland, *Romans. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, pp. 147, 149).

“While, then, the basic notion of *hilastērion* points to the removal of God’s wrath, this removal of wrath implies, or lead to, the forgiveness of sins: so “expiation” might also be part of the meaning here...

“God’s wrath is the inevitable and necessary reaction of absolute holiness to sin...”

““In his blood” singles out Christ’s blood as the means by which God’s wrath is propitiated... “Paul’s point is that God can maintain his righteous character (“his righteousness” in vv. 21 and 22) because Christ, in his propitiatory sacrifice, provides full satisfaction of the demand of God’s impartial, invariable justice” (Douglas Moo, *The Letter to the Romans, New International Commentary on the New Testament*, pp. 147, 149, 256, 262-63).

“The death of Christ, then is the means by which God does away with his people’s sin...” sin has been removed not only from the believer’s conscious, on which it lay as an intolerable burden, but also from the presence of God...

“The *hilastērion* which God has provided in Christ not only removes the ungodliness and wickedness, but as the same time averts the retribution which is the inevitable sequel to such attitudes in a moral universe...

“The phrase *by his blood* refers to the sacrificial death of Christ as the means by which the one effective atonement for sin has been made (cf. 5:8-9), ‘while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God’)...

“This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. That is, ‘to demonstrate that God was not unrighteous when he passed over sins committed in earlier days, in the period of his forbearance’. **The redemption accomplished by Christ has retrospective and well as prospective efficacy.** His atonement avails for the whole human family; he is the expiation for our sins’, as a later New Testament writer puts it ... ‘and not for ours only but also for the ... whole world’ (1 John 2:2)... “Although the problem in theodicy may not be as obvious to the modern mind as it was to Paul, yet to pass over wrong is as much an act of injustice on the part of a judge as to condemn the innocent...”

“That he himself is righteousness and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus. In the self-offering of Christ, God’s righteousness is vindicated and the believing sinner justified. For Christ occupies a unique position as God’s representative with man and man’s representative with God. **As the representative man he absorbs the judgment incurred by human sin;** as the representative of God he bestows God’s pardoning grace on men and women. The words recall Isaiah 45:21 (‘a righteous God and Saviour) and Zechariah 9:9, LXX (‘righteous and saving’)” (Frederick Bruce, *Romans. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, pp. 111, 112, 113, 114). [emphasis mine]

NB: the word *Hilastērion* (ἱλαστήριον) is a term in the New Testament, appearing in Romans 3:25 and in Hebrews 9:5. It means to “to appease,” “to propitiate,” or “to make favourable.” In other words it refers to the means of atonement where sins are dealt with so that God and humanity can be reconciled. In this way, God’s wrath upon ourselves has been lifted.⁶

From the above we can understand that the sacrifice of Christ stands at the centre of God’s solution to the problem of human sin while perfectly upholding His holiness and righteousness without compromise. In the Old Testament (as explained by Gordon Wenham), there is a distinction between the **holy**, the **clean**, and the **unclean**. The holy and the unclean must never meet. Sin pollutes and separates humanity from God’s holy presence.

Christ’s death on the stake resolves this, as the above scholars (and many more) reveal that:

- **Christ’s death propitiates (satisfies) God’s wrath against sin.** God’s wrath is response of holiness to evil. On the stake, Jesus bore the full penalty of sin in His blood, turning aside wrath and making forgiveness possible.
- **It demonstrates and vindicates God’s righteousness.** Rather than overlooking past sins in unrighteousness, God publicly displayed His justice by punishing sin in Christ. At the same time, He reveals His incredible love and grace, as the innocent substitute dies for the guilty! This is truly marvelous and far beyond human comprehension.
- **It provides complete atonement once for all.** Sin is not only forgiven but removed from the believer and from God’s presence. The stake has both retrospective power (covering sins before Christ) and prospective power (for all

⁶ For insights, refer to Stephen Hultgren, “*Hilastērion* (Rom. 3:25) and the Union of Divine Justice And Mercy. Part II: Atonement in the Old Testament and in Romans 1–5,” *The Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. 70, Issue 2, October, pp. 546–599.

who believe). It covers all sin from Adam into infinity for all those who repent and accept Christ as Saviour.

- **The only fitting human response is faith.** Acknowledging Christ as the Son of God and accepting the grace purchased at such great cost. The response must be obedience to the Father which includes His commandments as part of the ongoing relationship with Him.

In summary, through Christ's sacrificial death, sinners can be reconciled to a holy God, not by their own efforts, but by trusting in the One who is both the representative of humanity and the representative of God and then living the life He wants them to live to enable the development of holy, righteous character.

The Greatest and Most Terrible Wrath

The article [*The Lake of Fire in History and Prophecy*](#) demonstrates that one aspect of God's Love is to put those who are belligerent and will not change out of their misery and to keep the universe clean of all filth and sin and unrighteousness into eternity.

The above Bible study explores the Biblical concept of the "Lake of Fire," examining it historically, prophetically, and spiritually. The argument is against the traditional doctrine of eternal conscious torment and instead supports the idea of *conditional immortality* or *annihilationism* - the belief that the wicked are ultimately destroyed permanently rather than tortured forever.

Numerous Biblical passages are cited to show that fear of God and awareness of judgment are intended to lead people away from evil and toward salvation. The "Lake of Fire" is presented not merely as symbolic, but as a future judgment resulting in the "second death" described in Revelation.

A major theme is that fire throughout Scripture symbolises both God's presence and His judgment. Examples are drawn from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, prophetic judgments in Isaiah and Ezekiel, and New Testament references to Gehenna and eternal fire. It is noted that the Valley of Hinnom (Gehenna), south of Jerusalem, became associated with Divine punishment because it was a site of child sacrifice and later a place of refuse and burning corpses.

The study attempts to identify the physical location of the future Lake of Fire. Further, it is suggested that the Dead Sea region, with its volcanic history, sulfur deposits, and association with Sodom and Gomorrah, may become the literal site of the final judgment. Drawing on Biblical prophecies and geological observations, the study proposes that volcanic activity near the Dead Sea could explain references to burning sulfur, smoke, and unquenchable fire in passages such as Isaiah 34 and Revelation 19–20.

In addition, the study further speculates that the Lake of Fire may continue burning throughout Christ's millennial reign as a warning to rebellious nations. Satan, the Beast, the False Prophet, demons, and ultimately all unrepentant sinners are said to be cast into this fire after judgment.

Throughout the study, fire is consistently portrayed as both purifying and destructive - a symbol of God's holiness, wrath, and authority. The conclusion urges believers to fear God, obey His commandments, and seek eternal life through repentance and faith. Ultimately, the paper presents the Lake of Fire as the final and irreversible removal of evil from creation, resulting in eternal separation from God and complete annihilation of the wicked.

Conclusions

The Bible reveals that we are granted:

“the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” Romans 3:22–23 (ESV)

“But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.” (Galatians 3:22)

“For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.” (Hebrews 6:4-6)

And crucially:

“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

Only His sacrifice and ongoing priestly service interceding on our behalf with the Father can turn back His wrath.

The bottom line is this: Commandment observing, prayer, fasting, good works et al cannot save you. It is only God Who can save you from your sins and impurities. It is only He Who can resurrect you from the dead. Nothing else can. But only if you respond to His grace and commence a relationship that He determines which includes keeping His commandments.

Christ's precious and immeasurable sacrifice and shed blood is explained in the book of Leviticus and the sacrifices in typological fashion:

- **Propitiation** - Averting His anger or judgment.
- **Expiation** - Eradication of sin/guilt itself, highlighting forgiveness, the elimination of guilt, substitution, and the covering of sin.
- **Purification** - Cleansing from contamination.

- **Covenantal Restoration and Fellowship** - Mending the communion between God and us, stressing peace, covenant fidelity, shared meals, and the restoration of relationships.

The shedding of His blood covers each of these and not just a vague ‘forgiveness of sin.’ In this Bible study, the first one (propitiation) is emphasised because it is rarely raised or referred to within the Churches of God.

A good book on the subject is *Where Wrath and Mercy Meet. Proclaiming the Atonement Today*

“In 4:10 we learn again that Christ takes sin away by being ‘the atoning sacrifice for our sins’. It is the ultimate manifestation of the love of God that he provides his only Son as the means of atonement, so that we might ‘live through him’ (4:9). John says little about the judgement of God against sin (cf. 2:17—18, 28; 4:17), but Christ’s incarnation and atoning death are clearly necessary to enable us to pass from death to life (3:14; 5:6-12). The penal and substitutionary dimension to Christ’s death is essentially conveyed in 1 John by the use of atonement language (2:2; 4:10). But there is also an exemplary and a re-creational dimension to Christ’s death. Loving one another as God has loved us is a sign of the new life in Christ already at work in those who believe (3:11-17; 4:7-12).” (p. 64)

Having faith in Christ and His shed blood together with His ongoing intercession as High Priest and His mercy can save us from sins and God’s wrath. We must then respond to His grace and kindness by performing the Father’s Will – keeping His commandments and Way of Life to develop holy, righteous character.

This is the same in both Old and New Testaments – the Commandments are not less important than faith or grace – they are all part of the same means to enter into a relationship with God Himself.

Once we accept Christ as personal Saviour having fulfilled all four aspects of the sacrifices for us (including turning back God’s wrath), we must walk with God in the Way He has established which includes keeping His commandments.

Only then, can we undeserving mortals inherit life eternal. For it is impossible to inherit eternity without Christ’s shed blood and our faith in what it does for us.

Appendix. God's Wrath in Both Old and New Testaments

Old Testament Verses

Here are several verses from the Old Testament that address God's wrath upon sinners or the wicked:

1. **Psalm 2:4-5, 12** – “He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury... Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.”
2. **Psalm 7:11-13** – “God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day. If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword; he has bent and readied his bow; he has prepared for him his deadly weapons, making his arrows fiery shafts.”
3. **Psalm 11:5-6** – “The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. Let him rain coals on the wicked; fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup.”
4. **Psalm 75:8** - "In the hand of the LORD is a cup full of foaming wine mixed with spices; he pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs"
5. **Exodus 32:10-12** - “Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them... But Moses implored the LORD his God and said, “O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people... Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people.”
6. **Deuteronomy 32:21-22** – “They have made me jealous with what is no god; they have provoked me to anger with their idols... For a fire is kindled by my anger, and it burns to the depths of Sheol, devours the earth and its increase, and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains.”
7. **Isaiah 5:24-25** – “Therefore, as the tongue of fire devours the stubble, and as dry grass sinks down in the flame, so their root will be as rottenness, and their blossom go up like dust; for they have rejected the law of the LORD of hosts... Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against his people, and he stretched out his hand against them and struck them.”
8. **Jeremiah 7:20** – “Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: behold, my anger and my wrath will be poured out on this place, upon man and beast, upon the trees of the field and the fruit of the ground; it will burn and not be quenched.”
9. **Ezekiel 7:8-9** – “Now I will soon pour out my wrath upon you, and spend my anger against you, and judge you according to your ways, and I will bring upon you all your abominations... And my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity. I will punish you according to your ways, while your abominations are in your midst. Then you will know that I am the LORD, who strikes.”
10. **Nahum 1:2-3, 6** – “The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies. The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty... Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure

the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken into pieces by him.”

11. **Zephaniah 1:14-15, 18** – “The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there. A day of wrath is that day... Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them on the day of the wrath of the LORD.”

New Testament Verses

From the New Testament (ESV) I have selected 10 verses which emphasise wrath upon sinners/unrighteous:

1. **Matthew 3:7** - “But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?””
2. **John 3:36** - “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”
3. **Romans 1:18-20** - “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”
4. **Romans 2:5-6** - “But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works.”
5. **Romans 9:22** - “What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction...”
6. **Ephesians 2:3** - “among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”
7. **Ephesians 5:5-6** - “For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.”
8. **Colossians 3:5-6** - “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming.”
9. **1 Thessalonians 1:9-10** - “...how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”
10. **Hebrews 10:30-31** - “For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

11. **Revelation 6:16-17** - “calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?””

These passages highlight God's holy opposition to sin and unrighteousness.

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