

UNDILUTED WRATH AND UNDILUTED GRACE

By Cornelius R. Stam

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Undiluted Wrath And Undiluted Grace



In the new evangelicalism that has become so popular in Christendom, two vital elements are lacking:

1. A consistent emphasis on God’s wrath against sin.
2. The conviction of sin that follows such an emphasis.

This is important, since it is doubtful that anyone was ever saved who was not first convicted of his sin and his need of a Savior.

JUDGMENT TO COME

“And as he [Paul] reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled...” (Acts 24:25).

Judgment to come is declared in Scripture to be one of the “first principles” of its doctrine (Heb. 6:1, 2). In our day, however, this fact is held in general disregard and often made light of. Worldly performers sing and joke about “the Judgment Day.” Many humorous motion pictures and plays have been written about it. Few men tremble as Felix did, at the thought of judgment to come, probably because few men preach it as Paul did.

Too many Christians even, failing to understand Paul’s great message of grace, think of God only as a Being of infinite love, who gave His Son to die for man, forgetting that it was His infinite *justice* that demanded so terrible a price for sin, and that the lake of fire is but the expression of God’s hatred of sin, and His righteous indignation at man’s rejection of His love and grace. Christians are also prone to put the mildest possible construction upon those passages which deal with the coming judgment of the believer’s conduct and service, as though this were nothing more than a joyous handing out of rewards at the close of life’s race.

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But this is all wishful thinking. The Governor Felix was at least most realistic in his thinking—as Paul was in his preaching. Acts 24 tells how Felix called Paul before him and “heard him concerning the faith in Christ.” Had Paul been one of our modern neo-evangelicals he would have told Felix how wonderful Jesus is, how willing to solve our problems, how ready to forgive our sins, if only we are willing to “make our commitment” to Him! But Paul told the governor nothing of the kind. Rather, as we have seen above, “*he reasoned of righteousness, temperance [self-control] and judgment to come,*” and “*Felix trembled.*” Felix’ sudden adjournment of the hearing does not alter the fact that Paul’s approach was the right, the Scriptural approach in this instance.

This writer had a similar experience some years ago in the city of Milwaukee. As I sat in a barber’s chair, the barber used such foul language and used the Lord’s name so profanely, that I finally stopped him in the midst of his work and asked: “Aren’t you *afraid* to be talking like this? Don’t you know that God’s Word says: ‘*The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain*?’” At this he cursed and said: “I’m my own God.”

I replied: “Some God! If you don’t die suddenly or soon through some accident or disease, one thing is certain: You *will* get old, and shrivel up, and die. Then they will dig a hole in the ground and bury your body in it. God’s Word says that ‘it is *appointed* unto men once to die,’ and you *know* that this much of the Bible is true. But do you know what the rest of that verse says?” “What?” he snapped. “Well, it’s found in Heb. 9:27, and this is how it reads: ‘It is appointed unto men once to die, *but after this the judgment.*’ You may *hope* that this is not true, but you can’t be sure, can you? All you can do, if you let yourself think about it, is to wonder and worry. And you *should* worry, for the Bible is full of this. It says again and again that ‘*every one of us shall give account of himself to God.*’”

Strangely and suddenly this man’s bravado was all gone. His chin began to quiver. His voice faltered. And then, of course, I had the great pleasure of breathing into his ears the wonderful gospel of the wonderful grace of God.

GOD’S WRATH REVEALED

Before men can truly appreciate the *grace* of God they must recognize the *wrath* of God.

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold [Lit., restrain, or suppress] the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:18).

Just a casual look at the facts will confirm to us this declaration from God’s Word. His wrath against ungodliness (spiritual wrong) and unrighteousness (moral wrong) is revealed in many ways. Not only does God’s Word *say* that His anger is kindled against sin, but He visits it, even here and now, with trouble and misery, sorrow and death. Moreover the conscience, when awakened, can so trouble the sinner as to make him completely miserable though no one but he and God know about his sins. So unbearably wretched have some men become about their hidden sins that they have been driven to confess them even though faced with long imprisonment or death.

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But God's wrath against sin is most clearly and solemnly revealed at Calvary's cross and in the "lake of fire."

At Calvary a just and holy God unsheathed His sword and smote even His own beloved Son, as He took our sins upon Himself. The Cross was at the same time, however, the crowning demonstration of God's mercy and love to sinners, and those who reject or ignore this love will suffer the sorrows of "the second death," the "lake of fire."

Regarding the essential nature of the lake of fire, Dr. Joseph A. Seiss has said: "What that 'lake of fire' is, I cannot tell, I do not know, and I pray I may never find out." One thing, however, is clear. It is an expression of divine anger over love spurned. Here those who have rejected God's gracious payment for sin will have to pay the price themselves—and take an eternity to do it.

GOD'S WRATH INFINITE

We are aware of the fact that many people, even many religious leaders, reject the Bible doctrine of everlasting punishment, but their arguments are not valid.

First they fail to recognize the infinite character of *sin*. If I smite a *stranger* unprovoked I have committed a grave sin. If I smite a *friend*, my sin is much more grievous. If I smite my *brother*, still more so; if my *mother*, it is multiplied again; if the *ruler* of my nation, it is multiplied still further and I stand guilty of unspeakable wrong-doing. Yet the stranger, my friend, my brother, my mother, and the ruler of my country are all themselves poor, finite, sinful, dying creatures. It immediately becomes evident, then, that sin against a holy and infinite *God* takes on infinite proportions, and warrants an infinite penalty.

But second, those who deny eternal punishment fail to recognize the infinite character of *God*. Strangely, unbelievers are glad to acknowledge that God is infinite in everything *except in His wrath against sin*. They *know* He must be infinite in wisdom and power. All one needs is a microscope and a telescope to see that! Generally they also readily agree that He is infinite in love and mercy. But if this is so, must we not conclude that *He* is infinite and that therefore He must be infinite in *every* respect and in *all* His attributes: in wisdom and power, in love and mercy and grace—and in *His wrath against sin*?

If God's grace is beyond our finite comprehension, does it not logically follow that this must be equally so with respect to His wrath? Is it not altogether fitting that as we stand amazed at God's grace, so we should stand aghast at His wrath? Should we revel in His infinite mercy and love, but tone down His wrath to fit our finite notions?¹ Should we rejoice that "*God is love*," but ignore the fact that "*our God is a consuming fire*"? (See I John 4:16; Heb. 12:29).

Does some reader object that in writing thus we are departing from our God-given calling to preach grace? We reply that it is impossible to truly proclaim the grace of God apart from the wrath of God. It is Paul, the apostle of grace who, commenting on a list of sins, warns:

¹ This whole subject is discussed at length in the author's book, *Man, His Nature and Destiny*, See pp. 318, 319.

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“LET NO MAN DECEIVE YOU WITH VAIN WORDS, FOR BECAUSE OF THESE THINGS COMETH THE WRATH OF GOD UPON THE CHILDREN OF DISOBEDIENCE” (Eph. 5:6).

This he repeats in Col. 3:6 and elsewhere, while in Rom. 2:5 he declares that those who are hard and impenitent as to sin “*treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath.*”

GOD’S WRATH UNDILUTED

But not only is God’s wrath against sin revealed every day, and at the cross and in the lake of fire. It will also be revealed *historically* in His dealings with men here on earth. The prophetic Scriptures have much to say about this, as do the Psalms; notably Psalm 2:

“Why do the nation’s rage, and the people² imagine a vain thing?

“The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His Anointed, saying,

“Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us” (Vers. 1-3).

How true is this declaration from the Word of God! The rulers of the nations, even of the so-called “Christian” nations, keep forever talking of ways and means to bring “lasting peace” to this troubled world, ignoring God’s repeated declarations that *there will be no lasting peace until the Prince of Peace occupies the throne.* Surely they “*imagine a vain thing.*”

How will God finally respond to man’s rejection of the One He has anointed to reign? Read on:

“He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: The Lord shall have them in derision.

“Then shall He speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure” (Vers. 4, 5).

This coming time of God’s wrath will mark the end of “the day of man,” described in Dan. 2:31-43, and the beginning of “the day of the Lord,” so often referred to in prophecy, and will follow soon after the close of the present “dispensation of the grace of God.”

First God will allow man, with his “cleaver solutions,” to bring his own troubles to a head, as it were. Man will have his Antichrist (see John 5:43; II Thes. 2:3-12) and seemingly all will go well, until it becomes evident what he has done to them. Then God will begin to intervene directly. Both the Prophet Daniel and our Lord describe this period of time as one of unprecedented trouble.

“...and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time...” (Dan. 12:1).

² I.e., the people of Israel (See Acts 4:25-27).

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“For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Matt. 24:21).

These are only two of many Scripture passages on this subject which indicate that the coming “great tribulation” will mark the total collapse of civilization. As we consider the present world-wide “spirit of lawlessness” and rebellion, and the unbelievably fast pace at which great nations are falling before the forces of evil—as we consider all this, does it not appear that the world is even now racing recklessly toward this time when God, in His wrath, will finally intervene?³

It is the Book of the Revelation, principally, that *describes*, often by signs and symbols, this dreadful day of God’s wrath. If anything is clear, as we study this book, it is the fact that God does not take sin lightly, especially *presumptuous* sin. He does not give sin a pat on the wrist, so to speak. Rather, those who have lived on in sin, resisting God’s love and grace, will then have to suffer his *undiluted* wrath *here on earth*, long before they are called to appear at the “great white throne.”

“Because they received not the *love* of the *truth*, that they might be saved,” says II Thes. 2:10, they will be given over to Antichrist, who will deceive them with “*power and signs and lying wonders*,” and they will “*believe a lie*,”

“That they all might be damned [Lit., judged] who believed not the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (II Thes. 2:12).

Let us see what we find as to this when we turn to the Book of the Revelation.

In Rev. 6:15-17, which describes the conditions existing more than one thousand years *before* the judgment of the “great white throne” (See Rev. 20:6, 12), we read these terrible words:

“And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every freeman, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;

“And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and HIDE US FROM THE FACE OF HIM THAT SITTETH ON THE THRONE, AND FROM THE WRATH OF THE LAMB:

“FOR THE GREAT DAY OF HIS WRATH IS COME, AND WHO SHALL BE ABLE TO STAND?”

This phrase, “the wrath of the Lamb,” is most significant. Our Lord died as a lamb for our sins, but He arose again and, “rejected of men,” ascended to the Father’s right hand, where the Father welcomed Him with these words:

³ The Scriptures clearly teach that the members of Christ’s Body will by this time have been caught away to be with Christ. Before God declares war on this Christ-rejecting world He will first recall His ambassadors (II Cor. 5:20, and I Thes. 4:16-5:10). See the author’s booklet, *That Blessed Hope*.

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“Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool” (Psa. 110:1).

For more than 1900 years now the Son has remained a voluntary Exile, sending His ambassadors forth in grace to offer reconciliation to His enemies.⁴ But this will not go on forever. One day, who knows how soon, our Lord will recall His ambassadors and the day of grace will be brought to a close. Then, not many years after, He will be *“revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (II Thes. 1:8).

It is solemnly significant in Rev. 6:15-17 that even as men see this event *approaching* they will cry to the rocks and mountains to *“fall on them”* and hide them from *“the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.”*

Fearful as all this is to contemplate, it is but a foretaste of the sufferings that the worshippers of Antichrist will have to endure. In Rev. 14:10 we read of every such worshipper:

“The same shall drink of the wine of THE WRATH OF GOD, which is Poured out WITHOUT MIXTURE into the cup of His indignation....”

In that day it will be clear to all that it is *not* enough merely to be religious, or to “have faith in something or someone,” as we are so often told. Indeed, in Revelation, Chapters 16-18 we find God dealing with Babylon, the headquarters of the great ecumenical Church that will emerge after the true Church has been taken to glory. This Church will be composed largely of professed, but apostate “Christians,” who never knew Christ and will then be red-ripe for the worship of Antichrist. Our Lord calls this Church, not “the Bride,” but *“the harlot”* and *“the mother of harlots,”* and in Rev. 16:19 we read:

“...and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her THE CUP OF THE WINE OF THE FIERCENESS OF HIS WRATH.”

It makes one shudder to read the full account of the fall of Babylon, and to see how God will force the leaders and constituents of this false Church of the future to drink the cup of His wrath.

Let us not suppose, then, that it is enough to belong to some church. The true Church, which will be caught away before this awful time of wrath, is made up solely of those who have been reconciled to God through faith in Christ as their personal Savior from sin.

Finally, in Rev. 19:11-15, we have the actual return of Christ to earth. The symbolism is most expressive.

⁴ The Apostle Paul, “in all his epistles,” writes of “these things” (II Pet. 3:15, 16).

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This time He does not come “meek and lowly,” and “sitting on an ass’s colt.” Rather He appears on “a white horse,” to “judge and make war”⁵ (Ver. 11), and the armies of heaven follow Him (Ver. 14). This time He does not go submissively to Calvary. Rather He *returns from* Calvary with “a vesture dipped [drenched] in blood” (Ver. 13). This time He does not go about in compassion, preaching good news and healing the sick and afflicted. Rather His eyes are “as a flame of fire,” and on His head are “many crowns.” (Ver. 12).

“And out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations; and He shall rule them with a rod of iron: and HE TREADETH THE WINEPRESS OF THE FIERCENESS AND WRATH OF ALMIGHTY GOD” (Ver. 15).

Thus, as the *Mosaic* dispensation demonstrated *historically* the total depravity of man and his utter inability to obey God’s law, and as the *Pauline* dispensation demonstrated *historically* the infinite grace of God to sinners, so the day of God’s wrath, coming before the kingdom reign of Christ, will demonstrate *historically* that God *does not tolerate sin*. His wrath against sin is not diluted by leniency, tolerance or indulgence. Men are either “justified freely by His grace, *through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*” (Rom. 3:24) or they must suffer the just consequences of their sins.

WHAT THE GOSPEL IS

The foregoing should help us to understand more fully what the gospel of the grace of God is. It is not a promise that God will be lenient with our sins, or that He will forgive if we are deeply sorry for our sins, or if we repent, or pray, or pay, or say, or do anything whatsoever to make amends for our wrongdoing. It is rather the good news that the infinite penalty for our sins has been *paid* by Christ at Calvary. In Rom. 1:16 the Apostle Paul declares:

“I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION to everyone that believeth...”

We believers have experienced the blessed truth of this statement, but *why* is the gospel “the power of God unto salvation”? *Wherein* lies its mighty power to save? The answer to this question is found in the next verse:

“FOR THEREIN IS THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD REVEALED...” (Ver. 17).

You say: “I thought that the *love* of God was revealed in the gospel,” and you are right. For this the apostle expresses his gratitude again and again. But what made him so *proud* of the gospel is the fact that it tells how Christ *died to pay the just penalty* for our sins, and therein is the *righteousness* of God revealed. He could now, “at this time,” declare “His *righteousness*,” as well as His love, in dealing with sin, “*that He might be just, and the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus*” (Rom. 3:26). And to these words he appropriately adds: “*Where is boasting then? It is excluded*” (Ver. 27).

⁵ *Judgment and war* are the exact opposite of “*grace and peace*,” the benediction with which the Apostle Paul opens all the epistles signed by his name.

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This is why the apostle was so careful “lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect” by “wisdom of words” or by the addition of a religious work once required for salvation (See I Cor. 1:17).

“For THE PREACHING OF THE CROSS is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is THE POWER OF GOD” (Ver. 18).

It is because the cross demonstrates the righteousness of God in dealing with sin, that the apostle declares:

“God forbid that I should glory [boast], SAVE IN THE CROSS OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST...” (Gal. 6:14).

Paul had nothing to boast of⁶—except what our blessed Lord had accomplished at the cross in dealing justly and completely with the sin question. This is why he calls his message “*the preaching of the cross*” (I Cor. 1:18, 23).

As we follow Paul in this, thank God, we too can tell the vilest sinner with profound pride: “The sin question has been justly and fully dealt with by the death of Christ at Calvary. All that remains for you to do is to acknowledge Him as your Lord and Savior, accepting eternal life as ‘the free gift of God.’”

GOD’S GRACE INFINITE

We have already seen that God is infinite in *all* His attributes, simply because *He* is infinite. Thus His grace too is infinite in character, scope and extent. This is why Paul’s epistles have so much to say about God’s lavish dealings with believers, whether from among the chosen race or from among the Gentiles whom, previously, He had “given up” (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28).

“For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is RICH UNTO ALL THAT CALL UPON HIM.

“FOR WHOSOEVER SHALL CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD SHALL BE SAVED” (Rom. 10:12, 13).

This we read in Eph. 1:7 that even *now*, in this present life, we may rejoice that,

“We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE.”

⁶ Indeed, he repeatedly mentions those sins of which he is ashamed, freely acknowledging his own unworthiness.

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And in Eph. 2:7 the apostle looks forward into the distant future and declares that it is God's purpose:

“That in the ages to come He might show THE EXCEEDING RICHES OF HIS GRACE in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.”

It must always be remembered that this present “dispensation of the grace of God” is not mentioned in the prophetic Scriptures. In Eph. 3 the apostle distinctly states that it was a “*mystery*” (Ver. 2, 3), “*in other ages not made known*” (Ver. 5) and that it was first revealed to him, the chief of sinners saved by grace.

This is why he exults in Ver. 8 of the same chapter:

“Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST.”

This too, is why he refers in Col. 1:26, 27 to “*the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints:*” and declares that,

“...God would make known [to his saints, Ver. 26] WHAT IS THE RICHES OF THE GLORY OF THIS MYSTERY AMONG THE GENTILES; which is Christ in you [Gentiles] the hope of glory.”

How unspeakably sad that so few of God's people have any real conception of this “mystery” and its “riches of glory,” when God emphatically declares that He would have us understand it!⁷

GOD'S GRACE UNDILUTED

But as God's grace in dealing with sin is infinite in scope and extent, it is also *undiluted* and must, in the nature of the case, remain so. It cannot be mixed or watered down with religion or works. Acknowledging our utter depravity and unworthiness, we must accept salvation as the gift of God's grace *alone*, and not try to pay Him for it. The apostle is very emphatic about this in Rom. 4:5, where he does not merely say that justification is *not* to him that worketh, but that it is “to him *that worketh not*.”

“To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”

This means that to be saved we must *stop trying*. We must come to the end of ourselves and trust in Him alone to take care of the whole matter for us. This is brought out again and again in the Epistles of Paul.

⁷ See the writer's booklet titled, *The Knowledge of the Mystery*.

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As God still lingers in mercy, we pray that He will convict His saints of the importance of proclaiming the pure, powerful “gospel of the grace of God,” as it is found in His Word, rightly divided. Also, we urge those who have not yet accepted salvation by grace, through faith in Christ, to do so without delay. We close this article with a few passages from the Word itself, praying that the Spirit will apply them to each heart. Note as you read, that God’s grace is never mixed with human merit or religion or works. It is always presented to us *pure* and *undiluted*.

“If by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work” (Rom. 11:6).

“I do not frustrate the grace of God, for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead [has died] in vain” (Gal. 2:21).

“Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, NOT ACCORDING TO OUR WORKS, BUT ACCORDING TO HIS OWN PURPOSE AND [HIS OWN] GRACE, WHICH WAS GIVEN US IN CHRIST JESUS BEFORE THE WORLD BEGAN” (II Tim. 1:9).

Finally, in Ephesians 2 the apostle, by the Spirit, sums it all up beautifully. Making it clear that we were the “full grown sons” [Gr., *huios*] of disobedience,⁸ and therefore “the children [Gr., *teknon*, born ones] of wrath, even as others” (Vers. 2, 3), He goes on to say:

“BUT GOD, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us,

“Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved),

“And hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:

“That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

“For by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

“Not of works, lest any man should boast.

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:4-10).

⁸ I.e., we did not act innocently. We sinned knowingly, willfully.