

# God's Wrath Postponed

## PART ONE:

### "GOD'S WRATH POSTPONED" AN ANSWER TO BIBLICAL UNIVERSALISM

#### CHAPTER 1: REASONS FOR "GOD'S WRATH POSTPONED"

##### I. Introduction: The need for God's Wrath Postponed

For whom did Christ die? Did he die to save all humanity or the elect only? If He died to save all, then why are not all saved? If He died only for the elect (John 5:21; 6:37; 13:18; 15:19; Acts 13:48; Rom. 8:28-30; 9:11-15; Eph. 1:4; Col. 3:12; II Thess. 2:13) why does the Scriptures say He died for all (Isa 53:4-6, 10; I Tim. 4:9,10; I John 2:2; Romans 5:18; II Cor. 5:18,19, etc.)?

The tension between Biblical passages on election and those that imply a universal atonement has resulted in disagreement between Christians for centuries. Theological systems have been formulated in an attempt to resolve these tension. These systems have caused believers, not just to respond to the gospel but to form an allegiance with one of the several theological camps.<sup>1</sup> Instead of resolving the Biblical issues, the systems have tended to polarize Christians on the issues.<sup>2</sup> How the tensions are resolved by the systems have enormous implications to our entire understanding of God's character, His revelation, Christ's mission and message, the presentation of His message, and man's relationship and responsibility to God and man.

When speaking about what Christ accomplished on the cross we generally employ the use of the word Atonement. It is a theological term that has come to encompass all that Christ accomplished at Calvary<sup>3</sup>: reconciliation, redemption, propitiation, deliverance, salvation, justification and forgiveness. In Theology the word is sometimes defined as At-One-Ment; the idea that man and God are restored back to an original relationship of oneness that was lost when Adam sinned. Some have attempted to use the term metaphysically to say that man becomes at one with God, or that man is absorbed into God. This view is pantheistic<sup>4</sup> and never aligns with the Biblical theism<sup>5</sup> of the Holiness or separate nature of God. Lewis Sperry Chafer says of the term:

Whether it be accurately or inaccurately employed, the student will become aware of the fact that the word *atonement* is the term upon which men have seized to express the entire work of Christ upon the cross. That such a word is sorely needed cannot be doubted. The almost universal use of *atonement* for this purpose may go far to give it authoritative

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<sup>1</sup> The four primary systems are Strict Calvinism, Moderate Calvinism, Arminianism, and Universalism.

<sup>2</sup> In recent years there has been an attempt by many Christian teachers to convince their followers that they are not committed to a particular theological persuasion (usually referred to as doctrine), but that they simply teach the Bible. Upon examination of their teachings however, every teacher belongs to some theological system of thought.

<sup>3</sup> Some theologians would also include what He accomplished by His life.

<sup>4</sup> Pantheism means All is God. God and the universe are indistinguishable, that is God is the universe and the universe is God. God is impersonal in pantheism. Because God is indistinguishable from the universe and man is in the universe, man is God and God is man. There are many different forms of pantheism (Hinduism, Buddhism, New Age teachings, etc.) and some of these have made inroads in Christian theology in recent years.

<sup>5</sup> Theism teaches that God created the universe, is distinguishable from it, and yet actively participates in it. It is foundational to Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

acceptance regardless of its inaptitude for the immense service thus thrust upon it. Objection to the use of the term as employed generally, arises from the fact that the word is not a New Testament term, and when used in the Old Testament some seventy-seven times it is a translator's attempt at interpretation and poorly represents the meaning of *kaphar*, which it purports to translate, which word originally meant *to cover*. Though etymologically the *atonement* suggests *at-one-ment*, it feebly relates itself to the New Testament truth which presents Christ as the Lamb of God *taking away* the sin of the world.<sup>6</sup>

We will continue to use the word atonement as a theological term to represent the broad spectrum of Christ's accomplishments on the Cross. Our focus however, will not be to explore all the accomplishments of Christ's work at Calvary, but to determine the reach, scope, or extent of which these accomplishments have been applied to the world, and the implications to the world. Did Christ die to save the "World" or only the "Elect" (those he choose beforehand to be saved)? We are not seeking compromise between Universalism and Election. We are attempting to find an explanation that allows for a literal interpretation of both and thus defending the literal reliability of Scripture.

## II. Purpose Statement

My purpose is to introduce a Theological System that resolves the tensions between the passages on election and passages teaching a universal<sup>7</sup> salvation. The focus will be on the Universal passages. It is the author's contention that the phrases "all are saved" and "only believers are saved" are both legitimate statements. There are neither contradictions nor tensions between the statements. In addition salvation for both "all" and "the elect" is "actual" and not merely "potential"<sup>8</sup>. The system is simple rather than complex. Once the foundational proposition has been understood there will be very little need of elaboration on exceptions and/or complex reasoning<sup>9</sup> to explain Biblical passages as they relate to the system.

## III. Method

My method will be to propose the foundational components of the system, identify key biblical terms and their relationship to the system; and identify significant passages, explain their influence on the system and the systems influence on the passages.

This is an introduction to the system and is not meant to be an elaboration of the system. After being introduced to the system readers will, as they study other passages, recognize other evidences for the system. Interaction with other systems will be restricted to the degree that they help explain the present system and the advantages of this system.

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<sup>6</sup> Chafer, Lewis Sperry, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. III Soteriology, p. 127, Dallas Theological Seminary, Copyright 1948, 14th Printing, Aug. 1980.

<sup>7</sup> I restrict universal, in the immediate context, to this world rather than to the universe at large.

<sup>8</sup> The distinction between "actual" and "potential" when become clearer as we progress ahead in reviewing the different systems.

<sup>9</sup> The attempt will be to interpret Scripture with Scripture and avoid philosophical systems and other outside sources in our attempt to interpret Scripture.

#### IV. Foundational Proposition

The entire physical world was saved from the immediate wrath of God at the time of Christ's death. Christ's atonement postponed God's judgment of the physical cosmos. The result is that Christ saved the creation (which means all humanity) from Father's immediate wrath.