

CHAPTER 4: "GOD'S WRATH POSTPONED"

I. An Explanation of "God's Wrath Postponed"

Christ death saved the entire physical world from the immediate wrath of God. Thus, the entire cosmos (world) has been literally saved. Passages that speak of the universal salvation of humanity are viewed within the context of a physical salvation. This does not imply that all people have been or will be saved spiritually, or that all people will be spared from God's future wrath.

Salvation¹⁸ in the New Testament has traditionally been viewed from a spiritual perspective. Propitiation, reconciliation and redemption have been restricted to a spiritual plane and have not taken into consideration the possibility of the atonement having major physical implications. Yet, the effects of the atonement includes more than just the spiritual salvation of the believing members of humanity. Christ's atonement also spared the entire physical world.

It is suggested here that the atonement of Christ be viewed as impacting two¹⁹ spheres. The first is spiritual and includes the basic orthodox understanding of salvation from a Calvinistic framework. The second is physical or cosmological²⁰ in scope and recognizes an actual salvation of the physical cosmos in time and space. It is in the latter context that we shall understand New Testament Universalism.

In order to understand what is meant by physical (cosmological) salvation the circumstances surrounding the Cross of Christ as it relates to the total picture of special revelation must be constructed. In Genesis 15:16, God promised Abraham that the land owned by the Ammonites would one day be in the possession of Abraham's descendants. God would give this land to his descendants once the sins of the Ammonites had reached their full measure. The reception of the land was dependent upon the sinful condition of the previous owners. Israel is to be viewed as God's tool of judgment on the wicked nation. This principle is repeated in Deut. 9:4-6. Moses warns the Israelites not to think that God had brought them into the land because of their own righteousness. Rather, it is because of the wickedness of the other nations that God was giving them the land. Israel is presented in these passages an instrument of God's divine wrath upon the wicked nations.

The Jews understood this concept to be a literal element in the establishment of the Kingdom. Messiah's entrance and establishment of His Kingdom would necessitate the overthrow and submission of the nations (Psalm 2; Isaiah 49:22-26; 63:1-6; Ezekeal 36:1-34; Joel 3:1-16; Micah 7:8-13).

Upon this essential component we must view the entrance of the Messiah into the world. For Him to enter the world and offer the Kingdom to the nation of Israel (Matthew 1-12) the

¹⁸ The system within Systematic Theology explaining Salvation is referred to by theologians as Soteriology.

¹⁹ There are actually three realms of salvation. There is 1) a salvation of the entire universe. Christ is proclaimed the creator of the universe (Col. 1:16) and not just this world or man. His actions on the cross was so applied in some since to the heavenly beings. There is 2) a salvation of this world we call earth and all its inhabitants and 3) there is a salvation of the faithful in Christ.

²⁰ I've adopted the term cosmological (from the Greek kosmos) to mean the earth. I've avoided the term cosmic because its English usage has come to mean universe. I'm restricting our usage here to salvation of this world, not the universe at large.

nations of the world had to have reached a level of corruption that initiated God to bring His judgment upon them.

When the nation of Israel rejected the Messiah and the establishment of His Kingdom they canceled themselves out of the immediate blessing and entered into condemnation with the other nations, thus stepping into God's divine judgment. As a result, **the entire world stood in a state of condemnation.** The divine wrath of God was ready to be poured out on the whole world.

The Cross, at this point, becomes the greatest paradox of history. Instead of this murder sealing the verdict, the murdered Son, by substitution, judiciously received the wrath of God prepared for the world upon Himself, thus becoming the propitiation for sin (1 John 2:2) and reconciling the world to the Father (2 Corinthians 5:15). By world, I mean the literal, physical cosmos. Christ saved the physical world from the wrath of God. He purchased²¹ it from the Father for Himself. If Christ had not interceded-- the earth would have been destroyed along with all life on it.

This view does not teach that the whole world will be saved from God's future wrath or that all humanity has been saved spiritually. It introduces an overlooked aspect into doctrine of salvation. The physical world has been spared in time and space from God's wrath at the crucifixion. This could be understood in the context of God's willingness to physically spare mankind for the sake of preserving and gathering up His future elect, just as He told Abraham He would spare Sodom and Gomorra for the sake of a handful of the righteous people living among them.

An understanding of the Soteriological plan for the elect is not changed by this view. What is changed is our understanding of the universal passages in the New Testament. The world has not been "potentially" or even "provisionally"²² saved, neither is it promised that "all" will be saved, but it has been "actually" saved from God's immediate wrath at the time of the Cross.

II. Proposition Summarized

Christ died for the whole world by taking God's immediate wrath upon Himself, thus postponing the destruction of the cosmos until a later time. Even as the righteousness of Noah spared the world and future generations of mankind, so also did the atonement of Christ, for all have been saved. But election still stands. God will gather the elect unto himself. All have been saved physically, but only the elect are saved spiritually and eschatologically.

²¹ Redemption, reconciliation and propitiation are viewed as universal in scope in conformity with the three primary passages of Moderate Calvinism. The difference is that all three are actual rather than potential.

²² A common statement of Moderate Calvinism is Christ's atonement makes "salvation provisional for all, but it is efficacious for the elect."