The Manifestation of the Wrath Of God in Jesus Christ

Enough has already been said in this study to indicate that the view advocated so persistently and so thoroughly by Marcion in the second century, and consciously or unconsciously echoed in much so-called 'Christian' teaching in recent years, that the Old Testament reveals solely a God of wrath and the New Testament solely a God of love, is completely erroneous. It can easily be disproved by anyone who is prepared to give more than superficial attention to the text of the Bible, unless resort is made to the use of the critical knife in order to eradicate evidence which conflicts with the presuppositions of the critic. As a matter of observed fact, we do not find any gradual declension in the degree of emphasis which is placed on the wrath of God during the period of revelation with which the Old Testament is concerned; nor do we find that the revelation of God as a loving Father is confined to the New Testament, though it is in the Person and work of Jesus the Christ that that revelation is uniquely and supremely made. There are few more beautiful expressions of the love of God than that contained in Psalm 103, especially in verse 8, where we read: 'The Lord is full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always be chiding; neither will he keep his anger for ever.' Yet within the same Psalm we also read 'God is a righteous Judge, yea, a God that hath indignation every day' (Ps. 7:11). It is moreover a New Testament writer who, when he speaks of God as Father, emphasises in the same breath his work as Judge before whom men must live in fear (1 Pet. 1:17); and it is another New Testament author who, echoing the words of Deuteronomy 4:24, says 'Our God', i.e. the God whom we Christians worship, 'is a consuming fire' (Heb. 12:29).

Nor is it only in the Old Testament that we read stories about sudden destruction overtaking as a divine punishment those who thwart the purposes of God or flout his mercy — stories such as that of the mauling by bears of the forty-two young hooligans at Bethel, who taunted Elisha with the words 'Go up, thou bald head' (2 Kgs. 12:22-24). In the New Testament Herod Agrippa, the murderer of the apostle James and the persecutor of the apostle Peter, who so gloried in the outward apparel of his royalty and was so corrupted by human pride that he gladly received the idolatrous flattery of his subjects, when they declared that he spake not as a man but as a God, was struck suddenly by a devastating mortal
parable of the Wedding Feast in Matthew 22, Professor Dodd writes: ‘To find the character of God exhibited in the King who destroys his enemies is as illegitimate as to find it in the character of the Unjust Judge.‘ It should be pointed out, however, that at the conclusion of the parable of the Unjust Judge our Lord makes it perfectly clear that the judge is not to be interpreted allegorically, but that the argument implied is a fortiori. We may paraphrase Luke 18:6, 7 as follows: The Lord said, Hear what the unrighteous judge [who in this isolated instance has some “regard for man”] said. And shall not God [whose character is so wholly different from that of this unrighteous judge] avenge his elect, which cry to him day and night? In the parable of the Wedding Feast in Matthew 22 on the other hand no such explanation is given; and the hearers would naturally suppose that in verse seven Jesus was making a prophecy of the destruction which awaited the holy city as a sign of God’s anger. ‘But the king was wroth; and he sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.’ In the parallel parable of the Great Supper in Luke the host is similarly described as ‘being angry’ with the guests who refused the invitation to the banquet (Luke 14:21). In the other parable, in which definite reference is made to the anger of the chief character in the story, the parable of the Unforgiving Servant, our Lord definitely asserts that God will deal with those unwilling to forgive in the same way as the king in the story dealt with the unforgiving slave. He himself allegorises the story. ‘And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due. So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not every one his brother from your hearts’ (Matt. 18:34, 35).

Secondly, Jesus reveals the wrath of God in the undisguised expressions of his anger, to which the evangelists draw attention on specific occasions in his prophetic ministry. The only certain passage in the Gospels where Jesus is explicitly stated to have been angry is the Marcan account of the healing of the man with the withered hand in the synagogue on the Sabbath, where we read: ‘And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved at the hardening of their heart, he saith to the man, Stretch forth thy hand’ (3:5). Matthew has no parallel to the first part of this sentence; while Luke, who seems to be following Mark closely, says, ‘And he looked round about on them all, and said unto him, Stretch forth thy hand’ (Matt. 12:13; Luke 6:10).

It is Mark who, as so often in his Gospel, draws attention to the human emotions of Jesus, though they are never merely human emotions. For in him is revealed the divine reaction to men’s words and deeds. Commentators have given attention to the fact that the participle expressing the angry look of Christ in this incident is in the aorist tense (περιθελπασμένος), while the participle expressing

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9 The Authority of the Old Testament, 252.
10 The Epistle to the Romans, 23.
disease (Acts 12:22-23). Similarly Ananias and Sapphira are punished by sudden death for ‘tempting the spirit of the Lord’, even as the Israelites tempted God in the wilderness and were destroyed by serpents (Acts 5:9; 1 Cor. 10:9). Each of the two Testaments contains revelations of both ‘the goodness and the severity of God’, for these two attributes of the divine nature cannot in fact be separated. As A.G. Hebert has recently written, ‘The love of God demands as its correlative the wrath of God, just because God does care and because he is man’s true God, and he has called man to fellowship with himself, and man’s rejection of that fellowship is his ruin and perdition. Because the New Testament emphasises the love of God it also emphasises his wrath, and the evangelists repeatedly show our Lord as righteously angry.’ This last sentence would appear to be a truer evaluation of the evidence of the Gospels than that made by Professor C.H. Dodd when he writes: ‘The concept of the wrath of God does not appear in the teaching of Jesus unless we press certain features of the parables in an illegitimate manner.’

When we consider carefully the evidence of the Gospels it is clear that the revelation of the wrath of God in Jesus Christ is in fact to be found as part both of his prophetic and his priestly ministry. As the prosecutor of ‘the words of eternal life’ he reveals the divine wrath first by calling upon men, as John the Baptist had done before him, to repent in view of the inevitable ‘wrath to come’ which would fall upon the unrepentant. That Jesus taught no doctrine of universal salvation, but that he rather bade men fear the final day of God’s wrath is clear from such sayings as: ‘Be not afraid of them which kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom ye shall fear: fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him’ (Luke 12:4, 5). And ‘those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and killed them, think ye that they were offenders above all the men that dwell in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay; but, except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish’ (Luke 13:4, 5). What Jesus saw to be awaiting the generation which he was addressing was for the most part not salvation but condemnation. It would be better, he said, for Tyre and Sidon, heathen cities, in the day of judgement than for the cities wherein his mighty works had been done (Luke 10:14). It is noticeable that Luke the evangelist, whom Dante called ‘scriba mansuetudinis Christi’ does not hesitate to record all these sayings; and he also alone notes that Jesus spoke of the disaster which would descend upon God’s people in the destruction of Jerusalem specifically as a manifestation of his wrath (Luke 21:23).

A similar revelation of the divine wrath is made in some of the parables of Jesus, especially those which are concerned with God’s judgement. It is true that the details of these parables cannot always be pressed allegorically; but some scholars are perhaps guilty of unduly abandoning the allegorical element, which would seem clearly to be present in some of them. Thus, in speaking of the parable of the Wedding Feast in Matthew 22, Professor Dodd writes: ‘To find the character of God exhibited in the King who destroys his enemies is as illegitimate as to find it in the character of the Unjust Judge. It should be pointed out, however, that at the conclusion of the parable of the Unjust Judge our Lord makes it perfectly clear that the judge is not to be interpreted allegorically, but that the argument implied is a fortiori. We may paraphrase Luke 18:6, 7 as follows: The Lord said, Hear what the unrighteous judge [who in this isolated instance has shown some “regard for man”] said. And shall not God [whose character is so wholly different from that of the unrighteous judge] avenge his elect, which cry to him day and night? In the parable of the Wedding Feast in Matthew 22 on the other hand no such explanation is given; and the hearers would naturally suppose that in verse seven Jesus was making a prophecy of the destruction which awaited the holy city as a sign of God’s anger. But the king was wroth; and he sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.’ In the parallel parable of the Great Supper in Luke the host is similarly described as ‘being angry’ with the guests who refused the invitation to the banquet (Luke 14:21). In the other parable, in which definite reference is made to the anger of the chief character in the story, the parable of the Unforgiving Servant, our Lord definitely asserts that God will deal with those unwilling to forgive in the same way as the king in the story dealt with the unforgiving slave. He himself allegorises the story. ‘And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due. So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not every one his brother from your hearts’ (Matt. 18:34, 35).

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3 The Authority of the Old Testament, 252.
4 The Epistle to the Romans, 23.
5 Many modern critical commentators regard this passage as a vatitcinum post eventum: but, even if this subjective criticism is accepted, it remains noticeable that the evangelist, who makes this 'insertion', seems not to have felt that there was anything incongruous in the identification of the angry King of the parable with God himself.
the sorrow of Christ is in the present tense (συνήπειμένος), the deduction being that the anger was expressed in one passing indignant glance, while the sorrow was persistent. Even so, the fact of the anger of Jesus on this occasion remains. It would seem to have been roused not merely by the desire of those present to find reasons for accusing him, but also by their failure to face up to the fact that mere abstention from wrong-doing (in the legal sense) was no adequate interpretation of the divine command to do no work on the Sabbath. They remained silent. When Jesus asked them the pertinent question, ‘Is it lawful on the Sabbath-day to do good or to do harm? to save a life or to kill?’ They failed to understand that there were occasions when not to act was in fact to do evil; and when to refrain from healing was in effect to commit murder. And how could an interpretation of the duty of Sabbath observance be justified which led to a violation of the sixth commandment? It is true that the Rabbis permitted acts of healing to take place on the Sabbath if it was believed that life was in immediate danger; and the Pharisees may well have thought that in this case the life of the man with the withered hand was not immediately in danger. Our Lord however seems to be angry that they should claim to be able to decide whether or not a human life was in danger. This was part of the arrogance due to sin, which blinds men to the realisation that they stand in jeopardy every hour, and have no life at all apart from him who is the Lord and giver of life. And it was this blindess (the true meaning of πορισίς in Mark 3:5) which angered and grieved the Christ.

If in Mark 1:41 the reading ὄργισθης 'being angry' (found in the Codex Bezae, three old Latin MSS, and in Ephraem's commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron) is original, we should have in this evangelist's account of the cleansing of the leper a second specific reference in the Gospels to an actual display of anger by Jesus. This reading, on the grounds of internal evidence, has some claim to be considered original for, as C.H. Turner remarked, 'it is inconceivable that any scribe should have substituted anger for compassion [the alternative reading being σπανχρισθής], while the converse is intelligible'. The anger of Jesus might indeed have been aroused by the uncertainty expressed in the leper's words, as to Christ's willingness to heal. For, as Turner added, 'to acknowledge his power but to doubt his good-will was to display the same temper as that of the scribes from Jerusalem who admitted his power but denied that it came from God.' [See Mark 3:22ff.] Ephraem's comment is worth recalling. 'Quia dixit 'Si tis' tratus est: quia eddit 'potes' eum: sanavit.' But in the absence of stronger external attestation the reading ὄργισθης cannot be considered certain.

In Mark 10:14 we read that Jesus was 'moved with indignation' (ἐγανακτησεν) with his disciples for rebuking those who brought little children for him to 'touch'; or, as Matthew says, 'that he should lay his hands upon them and pray (Matt. 19:13). The indignation of Jesus on this occasion was called forth, it would seem, not merely by humanitarian motives. Jesus was indignant, I would suggest, because the thought that lay behind the disciples' words probably was 'What have these children done to merit a blessing at the Master's hands? Later on, when they have some good deeds to their credit, they may come and justly claim a blessing but not now.' It was just this way of regarding the relationship between God and man which evoked the indignation of Jesus with his disciples. They were showing themselves to be Pharisees at heart. How could he refrain from bestowing his blessing upon little children, when, as he at once proceeds in effect to point out, they were living parables of the essential truth that he had come to proclaim, the truth that just because sin renders man so proud and self-sufficient, a new birth brought about by the creative activity of God himself, is necessary before the human heart can receive the reign of God within it? Man has to receive salvation, which he can never merit however long he may live, and receive it as willingly as a little child receives the gifts that are offered him.

Just as the evangelists, in the incident of the children brought to Jesus, draw attention to this indignation with his disciples for their failure to understand the truth stated in Romans 3:28, 'by works of the law shall no flesh be justified in God's sight'; so too do they show him displaying righteous wrath in cleansing the temple. The cause of his wrath on this occasion was the blind trust that the Pharisees had come to put in the temple sacrifices as the means by which the covenant-relationship with God could be maintained and they themselves delivered from the wrath to come. They failed to see the temporary nature of the Levitical system, and knew not the truth stated in the Epistle to the Hebrews that 'it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins' (Heb. 10:4). The temple moreover had failed to be 'a house of prayer for all nations'; but had become increasingly since the exile the outward symbol of the exclusiveness of Israel. It had also been turned into 'a den of robbers' [see Jer. 7:8-11], where men thought they could salve their consciences after fraudulent transactions within the very house of God itself. When Jesus in St. John's Gospel, on the first visit to Jerusalem, recorded that that evangelist, 'made a scourge of cords, and cast all out of the temple, both the sheep and the oxen; and he poured out the changers' money, and overthrew their tables', he was not only, as the disciples came to see, 'eaten up with a zeal for the Lord's house' [see John 2:17]; but was also, though the evangelist does not record this prophecy, fulfilling the words of Malachi 3:1, 2: 'The Lord ... shall suddenly come to his temple ... But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire.' In the Synoptic Gospels the cleansing of the temple is one of the last prophetic acts of Jesus and leads directly to his death and resurrection; or, to state the matter theologically, the destruction and rebuilding of the temple of his body, of which the Johannine account of the incident speaks (John 2:19-22), were the means by which a purer and universal worship would be rendered possible within the shrine of the hearts of the redeemed. In Mark and

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Matthew the incident is also closely connected with the mysterious cursing of the fig-tree. Israel had been meant to be like a tree planted by the water-side which would bring forth fruit in due season. It had however become like the fig-tree which Jesus cursed. For its appearance gave the impression that it was bearing fruit while in reality it was bearing no fruit at all. Instead of bringing forth fruit worthy of repentance, which would enable it to ‘flee from the wrath to come’, by its showy legalism and the false security of its temple worship Israel had rendered itself liable to God’s curse.

The third way in which Jesus manifested the divine wrath in his prophetic ministry was by the severity with which he denounced those whose behaviour and beliefs were contrary to what they knew to be the expressed will of God, or who deliberately rejected the divine grace which was being offered to them in his own person and work.

One of his sternest sayings was directed against those who deliberately placed stumbling-blocks in the way of an immature believer. ‘Whoso shall cause one of these little ones which believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea’ (Matt. 18:6). ‘The sin of sins’, it has been well said, ‘is that of leading others into sin, especially the weak, the untaught, the easily perplexed, the easily misled’. The Pharisees (and later the Judaeans, who tried to rob Paul’s converts of the liberty which they had in Christ Jesus) were especially guilty of this sin. It is not therefore surprising that some of the most angry denunciations of Jesus are levelled against the Pharisees, and the series of woes which occupies Matthew 23 is a most thorough and searching description of the kind of sinful behaviour, of which respectable and ‘religious’ people are capable, when they are still fundamentally unrepentant and therefore blind to the power of sin within them which is vitiating their intentions and their actions. The contents of Matthew 23 apply therefore not only to the Pharisees who first heard them, and who despised all whom they classified as ‘sinners’ because they either could not or would not keep their traditions, but to all whom Jesus satirised as ‘the ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance’. The contents of this chapter have been well summarised by James Denney as follows:

To keep people ignorant of religious truth neither living by it ourselves, nor letting them do so (13); to make piety or the pretence of it a cloak for avarice (14); to raise recruits for our own faction on the pretext of enlisting men for the Kingdom of God (15); to debauch the simple conscience by casuistical sophistries (16–22); to destroy the sense of proportion in morals by making morality a matter of law in which all things stand on the same level (23ff.); to put appearance above reality; and reduce life to a play, at once tragedy and farce (25–28); to revive the spirit and renew the sins of the past while we affect a pious horror of them; to crucify the living prophets while we build monuments to the martyred (29ff.) – these are the things which make a storm of anger sweep over the soul of Jesus and burst in this tremendous denunciation of his enemies.\*

But the ‘woes’ of Jesus, so eloquent of the wrath of God, are pronounced not only upon the Pharisees and all who manifest a Pharisaical spirit, but also upon those who oppress those who are in a grievous state because of their material possessions or their personal achievements; those who are self-satisfied; those who are care-free because they are blind to any need for repentance; and those who imagine that their life must be good because it wins the approval of their fellows. The wrath of God, it is implied in Luke 6:24–26, is upon all who are in this sense ‘rich’ or ‘full’ or who ‘laugh’ or who are ‘well-spoken of by men’.

It was just because this was the condition in which all men lay, though most of them were unaware of it, that Jesus, because he had come to reveal the love as well as the wrath of God, had to do something more than give utterance as a divinely commissioned messenger to the doom which awaited the unrepentant and the unbelieving at the hands of a righteous and angry God. In addition to a prophetic ministry he had a priestly work to perform; a work which involved nothing less than drinking to the dregs the cup of divine wrath, ‘the cup of his fury’, as it is called in Isaiah 51:17. He drank that cup in Gethsemane and on Calvary, when God ‘laid upon him the iniquity of us all’. It was the knowledge of the bitterness of the contents of this cup that led him to pray that ‘if possible the cup might pass from him’ and to utter, or at least to contemplate the utterance of the prayer, ‘Father, save me from this hour’ (Matt. 26:39; John 12:27).

When Paul says that ‘Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us’ (Gal. 3:13) and that ‘him who knew no sin God made to be sin on our behalf’ (2 Cor. 5:21), he is in effect saying that Christ, sinless though he was, experienced the wrath of God towards sinners which rendered them liable to the death which was pronounced by the law to be accursed. We are not of course to suppose that in drinking this cup of wrath Jesus felt that God was angry with himself. How could the Father be angry with ‘the beloved Son in whom he was well pleased’, who arose from his knees in Gethsemane with the words ‘Thy will not mine be done’ on his lips; and who knew that God could only be supremely glorified by the passion of his Son? (John 12:31). But he did experience the misery, the affliction, the punishment and the death which are the lot of all sinners subject, as sinners must be, to the wrath of God who, just because he is all holy and all righteous, must punish sinners. It is therefore very natural that Christians should feel, when they contemplate the passion of Jesus, the relevance to his sufferings of the words put by Jeremiah into the mouth of the stricken city of Jerusalem, when God visited his wrath upon her in the Babylonian invasion: ‘Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by, Behold, and see if

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9 It is uncertain whether these last words should be regarded as a question or a statement, i.e. as a projected prayer or a spoken prayer.
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But the 'woes' of Jesus, so eloquent of the wrath of God, are pronounced not only upon the Pharisees and all who manifest a Pharisaical spirit, but also upon those who exalt themselves above who are their material possessions or their personal achievements; those who are self-satisfied; those who are care-free because they are blind to any need for repentance; and those who imagine that their life must be good because it wins the approval of their fellows. The wrath of God, it is implied in Luke 6:24-26, is upon all who are in this sense 'rich' or 'full' or who 'laugh' or who are 'well-spoken of by men'.

It was just because this was the condition in which all men lay, though most of them were unaware of it, that Jesus, because he had come to reveal the love as well as the wrath of God, had to do something more than give utterance as a divinely commissioned messenger to the doom which awaited the unrepentant and the unbelieving at the hands of a righteous and angry God. In addition to a prophetic ministry he had a priestly work to perform; a work which involved nothing less than drinking to the dregs the cup of divine wrath, 'the cup of his fury', as it is called in Isaiah 51:17. He drank that cup in Gethsemane and on Calvary, when God 'laid upon him the iniquity of us all'. It was the knowledge of the bitterness of the contents of this cup that led him to pray that 'if possible the cup might pass from him' and to utter, or at least to contemplate the utterance of the prayer, 'Father, save me from this hour' (Matt. 26:39; John 12:27).

When Paul says that 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us' (Gal. 3:13) and that 'him who knew no sin God made to be sin on our behalf' (2 Cor. 5:21), he is in effect saying that Christ, sinless though he was, experienced the wrath of God towards sinners which rendered them liable to the death which was pronounced by the law to be accursed. We are not of course to suppose that in drinking this cup of wrath Jesus felt that God was angry with himself. How could the Father be angry with 'the beloved Son in whom he was well pleased'; who arose from his knees in Gethsemane with the words 'Thy will be done' on his lips; and who knew that God could only be supremely glorified by the passion of his Son? (John 12:31). But he did experience the misery, the affliction, the punishment and the death which are the lot of all sinners subject, as sinners must be, to the wrath of God who, just because he is all holy and all righteous, must punish sinners. It is therefore very natural that Christians should feel, when they contemplate the passion of Jesus, the relevance to his sufferings of the words put by Jeremiah into the mouth of the stricken city of Jerusalem, when God visited his wrath upon her in the Babylonian invasion: 'Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if

² It is uncertain whether these last words should be regarded as a question or a statement, i.e. as a projected prayer or a spoken prayer.
there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger' (Lam. 1:12). It was, moreover, out of the horror of experiencing that complete separation from God which is the inevitable and permanent state of the wicked that the cry of the Psalmist was heard once again in the darkness of the first Good Friday as the cup of wrath was being drained to the dregs by the Saviour: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Ps. 22:1; Matt. 27:46).

This drinking of the cup of the divine wrath on behalf of those for whom it was prepared was an essential part of his Father's business' which Jesus had come into the world to perform: and, when Peter sought to dissuade him from fulfilling this vocation, the Lord spoke to him with a vehemence difficult to dissociate from wrath: 'Get thee behind me, Satan'. All who would not accept him as the Lamb of God, by whose sacrifice the guilt of sinners was to be removed, were in effect choosing damnation rather than salvation, darkness rather than light, death rather than life. This is made abundantly clear in many of the sayings of Jesus recorded in St John's Gospel: and in none more explicitly than in John 3:36, 'He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him'. Equally severe is the saying recorded in Matthew 21:44, when Jesus refers to himself as the stone rejected by the builders which had nevertheless become the chief cornerstone in that new temple, where alone men can find security and obtain release from the divine wrath and then adds: 'He that felleth on this stone shall be broken to pieces: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust.' Because the Jews had 'fallen on this stone', Jesus prophesied that the kingdom of God would be taken from them and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof (see Matt. 21:43). To fail to recognise that the mighty deeds of Jesus were in fact a divine assault upon the citadel of evil; and to attribute them to some malignant power, as the scribes who came down from Jerusalem to Galilee did, was to blaspheme against the Holy Spirit; and whosoever shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin (Mark 3:29). Similarly, to refuse to see Jesus for what he was, i.e. the Son of God, sent to proclaim the words of God and to do the works of God, rendered the Jews no longer the children of God but the children of the devil, doomed to 'die in their sins' and to receive the punishment prepared for the devil and his angels (see John 8:44f.).

These are sayings of terrible severity, but they are just as much part of the revelation of God made known in Christ Jesus as those sayings and deeds of the Master which so conspicuously display the divine love and mercy. To thrust these severe sayings on one side and to concentrate attention solely upon passages of the gospels where the divine fatherhood is proclaimed is to preach a debilitated Christianity, which does not and cannot do what Christ came into the world to do, viz. save men from the wrath to come. In this connection we may welcome the words of a recent writer who remarks: 'Those who perceive only the love of God avert their eyes from the uncongenial doctrine of the wrath of God. But in eliminating the wrath or disgrace of God they have also eliminated the grace of God. Where there is no fear there can be no rescue. Where there is no condemnation there can be no acquittal. Love must be based on justice, else it degenerates into mere affection.' Or we may put this vital truth a little differently by saying that by seeking to eliminate Hell we must in effect also eliminate Heaven, which, in the words of the Te Deum, Jesus by his death and resurrection opened up to all believers.

The resurrection is the abiding evidence that the priestly sacrifice of Jesus has been accepted by the just and holy God. The New Testament makes it quite clear that the good news of the first Easter day was not just that a man had been raised from the grave, but that the sacrifice of Christ the true Passover Lamb had received divine approval, and that therefore all who accepted it in faith as the means of salvation were placed in a new status with God, the status not of disgrace but grace, and were no longer of necessity the objects of his wrath, but able to enter into the divine glory as redeemed sons of God. Jesus is consequently proclaimed in the apostolic gospel as he 'that delivers us from the wrath to come' (1 Thess. 1:10). 'Being now justified by his blood', Paul tells the Romans, 'we shall be saved from the wrath of God through him' (Rom. 5:9). The believer can therefore await with confidence and assurance the day on which that wrath will finally and fully be revealed, knowing that God has not appointed him 'unto wrath, but unto the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Thess. 5:9). For, though the wrath of God is always being revealed to a greater or less extent in the judgements of God that find expression in the providential ordering of human history, the history both of nations and of individuals, it remains true that in his mercy he endures 'with much longsuffering vessels of wrath fitted unto destruction' (Rom. 9:22). In consequence there must be, and the Bible again and again affirms that there will be, a final day of judgement which will prove a day of full salvation for the believer, but will be a day of the uttermost wrath for the wicked.

The Manifestation of the Divine Wrath Under the New Covenant

The New Testament makes it abundantly clear that those who responded in faith to the apostolic gospel, and came under the sanctifying influence of the Spirit of Christ, were conscious of a change so great that the only human language adequate to describe it was the language of birth and resurrection. They had been 'born again'; they had 'passed from death to life'. God had delivered them 'out of the power of darkness and translated them into the kingdom of the Son of his love' (see Col. 1:13). An essential element in this conversion experience was the knowledge that they were no longer under wrath but 'under grace'. The New Testament is very far, however, from asserting that the Christian is automatically, as it were, removed from any manifestation of the divine anger. The burden of its message is that the justified sinner must become

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10 F.C. Synge, The Epistle to the Ephesians, 46.
the sanctified sinner. He is called to abide in the divine love. The essential difference between the believer and the unbeliever is that, while the latter, whether he realises it or not, is inevitably subject to God's wrath, the believer, by continual submission to the Holy Spirit, remains under grace, and so escapes that wrath.

Paul was much concerned to warn the Christians of the danger of being deluded by a false sense of security. Because they lived by faith in Christ who had sacrificed himself for them, they were under an obligation, he reminded them, to offer themselves as a sacrifice untainted by any uncleanness or covetousness; for any such moral stains would render them not, as they now had the right and the power to be, 'sons of God', but the 'children of disobedience' subject to the wrath of God (see Eph. 5:1-6). Because after formerly being 'darkness' they were now 'light in the Lord' they must 'walk as children of light' and bring forth that fruit of light which consists of moral goodness (Eph. 5:8, 9). Because they were 'risen with Christ' and were able by virtue of Christ's resurrection to enjoy the benefits of his passion, they must 'seek the things that are above'... and mortify their members upon the earth; and these 'members' are stated to be in particular sensuality, and 'covetousness which is idolatry'... and Paul adds that it is because of these things that 'the wrath of God cometh upon the sons of disobedience' (Col. 3:1-6). Because they were 'not under law but under grace' they must not forget that there is a 'law of Christ' which has to be kept (Gal. 6:2). Because they had 'put off the old man and put on the new' they needed to remember that the new man must be 'renewed unto knowledge after the image of him who created him' (Gal. 3:9-11).

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Many of the Corinthian 'Christians' in particular failed to see that Christianity was very different from the Greek mystery religions. It was not an opus operaturn rendering them permanently secure. Those who were 'in Christ', members of the new Israel, and children of the new covenant, were not free from the obligation of worrying about moral behaviour. If it was true that 'all things were lawful unto them', it was also true that 'all things were not expedient'. Paul in his attempt to disillusion them on this vital matter recalls the fate which overtook the majority of the Israelites during their journey from Egypt to Canaan. In so doing he makes it clear that the God with whom these ancient Israelites had to deal is the same God who has made the Corinthian Christians part of the new Israel, and established with them a new covenant inaugurated by the blood of Jesus. The story of the old Israel has been written down not just as a matter of antiquarian interest, but because it is an inspired record containing a word of God relevant for God's people at all times. These things', Paul asserts, 'happened unto them by way of example, and they were written for our admonition' (1 Cor. 10:11). They were historical incidents of unique significance because in them the living God acted in order to reveal to mankind an essential element in his nature. These Israelites of old, Paul reminds the Corinthians, were a privileged people no less than the Christians. They were 'under the cloud' of divine protection. They too had a saviour and experienced salvation, for they were redeemed from bondage in Egypt and enjoyed the leadership of Moses, a man endowed with supernatural power. They too had their sacraments, for they were fed with bread from heaven and drank of life-giving water from the rock. Nevertheless they were on many occasions subject to remarkable and devastating visitations of the divine wrath. 'With most of them God was not well pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness.'

In the Old Testament accounts of almost all the examples referred to by Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:1-10 explicit mention is made of the wrath of God with Israel. When the Lord had sent quails amongst them when they lusted after flesh, we read that 'while the flesh [of the quails] was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the anger of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord smote the people with a very great plague' (Num. 11:33). When Aaron erected the golden calf and said, 'These be thy gods, O Israel'; and 'the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play', the Lord said unto Moses, 'I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiffnecked people: now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them' (Exod. 32:4, 5, 9, 10).

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those exacted by God from the ancient Israelites are liable to fall upon the Christians if they think that they are inevitably secure. 'Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall' (10:12). The Corinthian Christians, moreover, doubtless prided themselves that they were no longer heathen and profane. But Paul reminds them that the partisan loyalties which exist among them are signs that they are, in fact, sacrilegious. They are desecrating the temple in which God is now pleased to dwell. And he warns them in no uncertain manner that 'if any man destroy the temple of God, him shall God destroy. For the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are' (1 Cor. 3:17).

It is noticeable that the Epistle to the Hebrews also draws attention to the visitation of the divine wrath upon Israel during the period of their wanderings. As a result of persistent disobedience, the author reminds his readers, as he quotes Psalm 95, God 'sware in his wrath' that the people should never enjoy his rest in the land to which they were journeying. And although that rest remains as a hope for the children of the new covenant, nevertheless the opportunity of enjoying it can be lost for ever, if the readers should apostatise as they were in danger of doing (see Heb. 3:7–12 and Heb. 4). The danger of 'falling into the hands of the living God' who is 'a consuming fire' is just as real under the new covenant as under the old (see Heb. 10:31 and 12:29).

When Paul reminds his readers so emphatically of the danger in which they stand, it would appear, not merely proclaiming a truth which is self-evident in the Old Testament, but also speaking from his own experience as a Christian. Because of these persistent warnings which he gives to his fellow Christians, if for no other reason, those interpreters would seem to be right who assume that in the dramatic description of the inner struggle in Romans 7 the apostle is in fact speaking of his own experience since and not before his conversion. In his pre-conversion days Paul, though separated by God from his mother's womb for the great work which awaited him (Gal. 1:15), had been all the time under the divine wrath. But so far from realising this, he had been conscious of being a blameless Pharisee (Phil. 3:6), full of zeal for God. He had kept the strict letter of the law; but that law had never really influenced the inner springs of conduct but had only fed the flames of his pride. Nevertheless he had been happy in his very self-righteousness, for he had fondly supposed that he was doing God's will. When therefore he looked back on this period of his life, which had culminated in the supreme sin of persecuting the church of God (1 Cor. 15:9) under the delusion that he was doing God's work, he could say, 'I was alive apart from the law once' (Rom. 7:9). The essential mark of the unregenerate man lies in that disclosure. He thinks he is wholly alive, when he is in fact spiritually dead. He assumes that he is the object of God's love, when he is in fact the object of his wrath. He has in a word no conception of the extreme gravity of his situation. After his conversion, however, Paul saw clearly that formerly he had been all the time a sinner, estranged from God, and in need of a salvation which he could never achieve for himself. But now that salvation had come to him in the mercy of God, he was conscious of a moral struggle such as he had never known before. Hitherto he had been wholly carnal, uninfluenced by the divine Spirit; and so there had been no struggle of a divided self. As a Christian he is acutely conscious of such a struggle. He knows of two forces at work within him, a 'flesh' which is still very active; and a higher self, an 'I' so influenced by the divine Spirit that his mind is now sensitive to God, hating sin, and delighting in the divine law. Between this 'flesh' and this 'I' there is perpetual conflict; but potential victory now rests with the 'I', because the 'flesh' is no longer just 'I', but, as he puts it in Galatians 2:19, 'not I but Christ who lives in me'. As a result of Paul's conversion, as R. Haldane well stated, 'sin had been displaced from its dominion but not from its indwelling'.

When therefore Paul cries out, 'O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' he can at once assert, 'I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord'. But that the moral struggle goes on even after delivery from the dominion of sin the apostle makes clear by adding after his grateful cry to release the words, 'So then I myself with the mind serve the law of God: but with the flesh the law of sin'. The attempt of some scholars, e.g. Moffatt, to simplify the whole passage by transferring this last sentence of verse 25 to the end of verse 23, so that it may harmonise better with the interpretation which assumes that Paul is describing his pre-conversion struggle, has no MSS evidence in its support; and as in the particular interpretation which it is meant to illuminate is, as we have seen, not the most probable in the light of Paul's teaching elsewhere, it should be rejected as arbitrary and improbable. Karl Barth has well said with reference to Romans 7: 'What Paul is here asserting was well understood by the Reformers; but it is misunderstood by those modern theologians who read him through the spectacles of their own piety ... How vast a gulf separates the nineteenth-century conquering hero attitude to religion from that disgust of men at themselves which is the characteristic of true religion!'

We have seen that under the old covenant those who sought to thwart the purposes of God and to frustrate his plans for the salvation of his elect were subjected to his wrath in the disasters which befall them. Paul is equally certain that the divine wrath will descend upon those who, as he says in 1 Thessalonians 2:15, 'both kill the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drive out us, and please not God, and are contrary to all men; forbidding us to speak to the Gentile that they may be saved'. Such wrath is due to fall upon

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The Final Day of Wrath

The expression 'the day of the Lord' at the time of the rise of the great prophets of Israel denoted an event to which the Israelites were looking forward as the day of Jehovah's final vindication of the righteousness of his people against their enemies. One of the tasks of the prophets was to insist that in fact 'the day of the Lord' would be a day on which God would vindicate 'his own righteousness' not only against the enemies of Israel, but also against Israel itself. This 'day of the Lord' throughout Old Testament prophecy remains a future reality, though there were events within the history covered by the Old Testament story which were indeed days of judgement both upon Israel and upon the surrounding nations which had oppressed her.

The certainty of this final 'day of the Lord', in which through the now unrestrained display of his wrath his absolute justice will be completely vindicated, passes over into the New Testament; and this is one of the many factors which gives unity to biblical theology. There is still a 'wrath to come', when John the Baptist begins his mission, which inaugurates the age of fulfilment to which the Old Testament is pointing. It is a fulfilment which is not finally achieved however till the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ; for there is still a 'wrath to come' when the New Testament closes with the words, 'Even so come, Lord Jesus'.

The main purpose of John's mission was to enable his contemporaries to escape from that final wrath by pointing them to Jesus as the Lamb of God, through whose atoning sacrifice the sins of the world would be taken away (see Matt. 3:7; John 1:29). But this Lamb of God was also destined to be, as is stated in John 5:22, the divinely appointed agent of God's final judgement upon men. 'All judgement has been given by the Father to the Son.' For this reason that 'day of the Lord', which is still awaited at the close of the Old Testament, the day of wrath and righteous judgement of God, as Paul designates it in Romans 2:5, is in the New Testament synonymous with the return of Jesus the divine Son of Man in glory. And an essential element in the salvation experienced by those under the New Covenant is the eager and fearless expectation by the believer of this final appearing of the Saviour: The Thessalonians, Paul assures them, if they remain faithful, will find on that day complete deliverance from the wrath to come (see 1 Thess. 1:10), God who had called them had not appointed them unto wrath but unto the obtaining of final salvation through their Lord Jesus Christ (see 1 Thess. 5:9). Those who at the moment were persecuted but were faithful under persecution would find 'rest at the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven with the angels of his power (2 Thess. 1:7). But, on the other hand, to those who knew not God and obeyed not the gospel of the Lord Jesus that day would be a day of wrath, in which they would suffer 'the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might' (2 Thess. 1:9, RSV).

In the New Testament, therefore, the final day of judgement can be called not only 'the day of the Lord' but, as it is called in Revelation 6:17, 'the day of their wrath', i.e. the wrath of God and of the Lamb; or, as some MSS read in this verse 'the day of his wrath'. In the Apocalypse of John the point is stressed that, because Christ himself has drunk the cup of divine wrath against sinners in his atoning passion, he has been entrusted with the task of being the agent through whom the divine wrath will be finally expressed. This would seem to be the main reason why believers are warned in the New Testament not to attempt to avenge themselves. By so doing they would be usurping the function which belongs to God and his Christ. In so far, however, as those who legitimately exercise authority in secular affairs are restraining evil by the punishment of transgressors, they can be said to be performing a ministry of God, which, in the case of those who do evil, is a ministry in which the divine wrath is at least partially manifested (see Rom. 8:4).

But when Paul bids the Romans in Romans 12:9 to 'avenge not themselves but give place unto wrath' it is almost certain that the reference is to the manifestation of the divine wrath in the fullest sense on the final day of wrath. The presence of the definite article in this verse suggests the 'wrath' and the 'day of wrath', the former being in juxtaposition with the quotation from Deuteronomy 32:35, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord', would seem to place this interpretation beyond dispute.

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15 See Mal. 4:1: For, behold, the day cometh, it burneth as a furnace; and all the proud, and all that work wickedness, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.
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The final divine ‘repayment’ comes when, as the seer of Revelation is privileged to witness, the risen and ascended Lord opens the seals of the divine book of destiny, in which the last judgements of almighty God stand written. The risen Christ alone is worthy to open this book, because he is at one and the same time the Lamb that has been slain, and the all-powerful Lion of the tribe of Judah, who has purchased unto God with his blood men of every tribe and tongue and people and nation (see Rev. 5:9). The fact that the Lamb is also the Lion adds to the terribleness of his wrath, when he opens the seals of the book and releases the final woes and plagues which are to usher in the end. From this wrath of the Lamb all those who have had special responsibility for the conduct of human affairs, but have acted in a manner contrary to God’s purposes, are pictured as hiding themselves in caves and in the rocks of the hills. For, as Swete well commented on Revelation 6:16, ‘What sinners dread is not death but the revealed presence of God’. ‘There is’, he adds, ‘deep psychology in the remark of Genesis 3:8, “And Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden” ... The Apocalypticist foresees the same shrinking from the sight of God in the last generation of mankind which Genesis attributes to the parents of the race. But there will then be a further source of terror: the end brings with the revelation of God “the wrath of the Lamb”’.18

He it is, the holy Lamb of God, who through his ministering angels is pictured as gathering the vintage of the earth (so-called because it is the fruit of a vine in direct contrast to the True Vine whose branches bear fruit unto God), and casting it into the winepress, the great winepress of the wrath of God (see Rev. 14:9). He it is, the Word of God, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who ‘reads the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of God’ (see Rev. 19:13, 15, 16). And he it is who gives the nations to drink of the wine that this winepress produces, the deadly wine of the fierceness of God’s wrath. All who have worshipped the Beast, or some substitute for the true God, and all who have persecuted God’s people, will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is prepared unmixed [i.e. in full strength] in the cup of his anger’ (Rev. 14:10). At 15:7 a somewhat different metaphor is used. The seven angels are given seven incense bowls laden with the wrath of God, and are bidden to pour out their contents upon the earth. Thus in an unmistakable manner is the final and complete effusion of God’s anger symbolised.

The twenty-four elders, representing the true Church of God, are pictured as giving praise to God that this supreme vindication of divine justice has come: that the divine wrath has proved stronger than the futile raging of the nations; and that God’s servants, and prophets and saints, both great and small, have received their due reward (see Rev.11:18). For whatever disasters may fall upon the earth, as the death-bringing contents of the vials of wrath are poured out, they cannot touch God’s servants whose foreheads are sealed with the blessed name of their Redeemer, and whose names

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