

Are you saved? What must I do to be saved? God saved me. These are staple evangelical slogans. But we rarely ask the all-important question “Saved from what?” Well, as we’ll see in this series - there are many good biblical answers to that: saved from sin, death, the devil, the world. But most importantly, we are saved from God’s wrath.

Now, Christian teachers often avoid or deny the wrath of God. I mentioned last time several teachers and public figures who mock substitutionary atonement. Just tragic. / We love the hymn “In Christ Alone” written by Keith Getty and Stuart Townend. It is beautiful and theologically rich. Some have even suggested that it is quickly on its way to becoming the next “Amazing Grace.” It is certainly a “100-year hymn.”

When the PCUSA decided to publish a new denominational hymnal back in 2013, the committee wanted to include “In Christ Alone.” But they didn’t like the wrath of God stuff. They wanted to change the line “Till on that cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied” to “till on the cross as Jesus died the love of god was magnified.” That is nicer. Love instead of wrath. One of the committee members, Mary Louise Bringle told *The Christian Century* that the “view that the cross is primarily about God’s need to assuage God’s anger” would have a negative effect on the hymnal’s ability to form the faith of coming generations.¹

When asked about the request to change the lyrics, Keith Getty said this (after expressing gratitude for the desire to include it): “However, we believe altering the lyrics would remove an essential part of the gospel story as explained throughout Scripture. The main thread of what we see revealed throughout the Old and New Testament is the need for man to be made right with God. The provided path toward reconciliation came through Christ’s predetermined and perfect sacrifice on the cross, satisfying God’s wrath once and for all. The two hymnal committees wanted to change the lyrics to focus on how Christ’s death on the cross magnifies God’s love for the world. And indeed, God’s love was magnified on Calvary’s hill. Yet the way this occurred was through Christ doing for us what we could not do for ourselves—shedding his own perfect blood to atone for our sins.” Later he said, “Stuart Townend and I believe the doctrine of propitiation plays a vital role in how we understand Christ’s saving work as explained in Scripture.”² Amen. They probably lost a lot of money with that decision. Robust theology matters more than royalties.

The author of *The Shack*: “Who originated the Cross? . . . If God did, then we worship a cosmic abuser, who in Divine Wisdom created a means to torture human beings in the most painful and abhorrent manner. Frankly, it is often this very cruel and monstrous god that the atheist refuses to acknowledge or grant credibility in any sense. And rightly so. Better no god at all, than this one.”

¹ <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2013-04/debating-hymns>. Accessed 10/13/25.

² <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/keith-getty-on-what-makes-in-christ-alone-beloved-and-contested/>. Accessed 10/13/25.

A very influential Baptist minister in the UK wrote, “The fact is that the cross isn’t a form of cosmic child abuse - a vengeful Father, punishing his Son for an offence he has not even committed. Understandably, both people inside and outside of the Church have found this twisted version of events morally dubious and a huge barrier to faith. Deeper than that, however, is that such a concept stands in total contradiction to the statement: ‘God is love.’ If the cross is a personal act of violence perpetrated by God towards humankind but borne by his Son, then it makes a mockery of Jesus’ own teaching to love your enemies and to refuse to repay evil with evil.”³

Many cannot conceive of a God who is both loving and holy. We have a high view of the self and a low view of God. As one has said, “It is partly because sin does not provoke our own wrath that we do not believe that sin provokes the wrath of God.”⁴

In 1937, a theologian who would be too liberal to join this church, spoke of the creed of liberal Protestant theology: “A God without wrath brought man without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.”⁵ / Ryle warns us: “Beware of manufacturing a God of your own: a God who is all mercy, but not just; a God who is all love, but not holy; a God who has a heaven for every body, but a hell for none; a God who can allow good and bad to be side by side in time, but will make no distinction between good and broad in eternity. Such a God is an idol of your own, as truly an idol as any snake or crocodile in an Egyptian temple. The hands of your own fancy and sentimentality have made him. He is not the God of the Bible, and beside the God of the Bible there is no God at all.”⁶

No no no we must not make a god in our own image who is tame and palatable to postmodern sensibilities. We worship God *as he has revealed* himself in his Word. To remove the wrath of God would be to gut the Bible. It is on every other page. We dishonor God if we distort his character. He is a God of love *and* a God of wrath. Not in the same way, however. Love is an essential attribute. Holiness is an essential attribute. Wrath is not. Wrath is his reaction when holiness meets sin.

The wrath of God is his righteous anger *in response* to sin. It is his revulsion against all that contradicts his holy nature. Packer says it is “his righteousness reacting against unrighteousness; it shows itself in retributive justice. But Jesus Christ has shielded us from the nightmare prospect of retributive justice by becoming our representative substitute, in obedience to his Father’s will, and receiving the wages of our sin in our place.”⁷ So, God’s wrath is his holy

³ Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 182-183.

⁴ R.W. Dale, *The Atonement* (London: Congregational Union of England and Wales, 1894), 228-39.

⁵ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), xv, 193.

⁶ J.C. Ryle, *Practical Religion* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2013), 434.

⁷ Packer, *Knowing God*, 189.

reaction to evil. God's "personal divine revulsion to evil" and his "personal vigorous opposition" to it.⁸

Psalm 5:5: "you hate all evildoers." Psalm 7:11: "God I a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day." Isa 13:13: "I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place, at the wrath of the Lord of hosts in the day of his fierce anger." A cosmic reckoning is required. / God's wrath is often referred to as the cup. Isa 51:17: "Wake yourself, wake yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering." Jer 25:15-16: "Thus the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: 'Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. They shall drink and stagger and be crazed because of the sword that I am sending among them.'"

Not just an OT reality: When Jesus is praying in Gethsemane, "he fell on his face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.'" (Matt 26:39). Eph 5:6: "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." 1 Thess 1:10: Jesus delivers us from the wrath to come. 5:9: God has not destined us for wrath. John 3:36: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." Rev 14:9-10: "And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, 'If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.'"

The wrath of God is the righteous judgment of God against all that opposes his perfection and love. Because of our sin, God's wrath is a reality we must reckon with. How? What is the solution? That's the bad news, give me some good news, some gospel. J.I. Packer asks, "Has the word propitiation any place in your Christianity? In the faith of the New Testament it is central. The love of God, the taking of human form by the Son, the meaning of the cross, Christ's heavenly intercession, the way of salvation - all are to be explained in terms of it, . . . and any explanation from which the thought of propitiation is missing will be incomplete, and indeed actually misleading, by New Testament standards."⁹

Propitiation is the solution. What is that? An atoning sacrifice. Propitiation is a big word, but a word you need to know. One of the many reasons we use the ESV for our translation is because it keeps the word propitiation! If you can order drinks at Starbucks, you can learn new theological vocabulary.

⁸ Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament* (Bletchley, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 1965), 190-91.

⁹ *Knowing God*, 181.

Theologian Wayne Grudem notes that propitiation is “a sacrifice that bears the wrath of God against sin and thereby turns God’s wrath into favor.”¹⁰ Packer defines it as “a sacrifice that averts wrath through expiating sin and canceling guilt.”¹¹ It is averting God’s anger by an offering.¹² Propitiation is a sacrifice that absorbs the wrath of God. “Till on that cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied.” On the cross, Jesus turned away God’s wrath from us and took it on himself.

Flip to 1 John 2:1 [959] Don’t you just love the realism of God’s Word. The goal is not to sin. We are on a path of progressive sanctification. We want to love Jesus more and more and hate sin more and more. *But* if anyone does sin. But when you fall. You have an advocate. A defender who sides with you against your sin not against you because of your sin. One who doesn’t abandon you and leave you on your own but One who comes along side. Jesus. Christ. the righteous.

2:2 He is the propitiation. He sacrifices himself and absorbs and averts God’s wrath. / And not just ours, but the whole world. / **4:7-8:** “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.” Because we have been born again, we love because God is love. We get a new nature and then we become like him. If you don’t love one another, you are not born again. This is why the local church is so important. It is the context in which we obey these sorts of commands. **3:14.**

How does God show his love to us? **9:** “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.” One progressive pastor says, “Good Friday is not about divine wrath; Good Friday is about divine love.”¹³ To quote D.A. Carson: “Damn all false antithesis to hell, for they generate false gods, they perpetuate idols, they twist and distort our souls, they launch the church into violent pendulum swings whose oscillations succeed only in dividing brothers and sisters in Christ.”¹⁴ God shows his love through the cross. He sent his Son that we might have life. In love, God provides what he demands. As John Stott put it, “Divine love triumphed over divine wrath by divine self-sacrifice.”¹⁵

That’s not all though. John, tell me more about this love: **10:** “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” Notice

¹⁰ *Systematic Theology*, 510

¹¹ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1973), 156.

¹² *Knowing God* Ibid., 180.

¹³ Brian Zahnd, *Sinners in the Hands of a Loving God* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2017), 86.

¹⁴ D.A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 234.

¹⁵ John R. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 159.

propitiation is a result of God's initiative and God's love. It wasn't that we loved him first. No no no fam don't get it twisted – God loved us. *Jesus sought me when a stranger*. John 15:16 You did not choose me but I chose you. / The love of God sovereignly sent the son of God to be a sacrifice that satisfies the wrath of God. The Father sent the Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Flip over to **Heb 2:14-17** (9:11-10:18). / **Rom 1:18, 2:5, 2:8, 3:5, 5:9. 3:9-25a** This word “propitiation” here in Romans 3 is the same one used for the mercy seat in the OT. The mercy seat was the cover of the ark of the covenant where blood was poured out (Heb 9:5). Christ is now the place of atonement. By his shed blood (Lev 17:11). The cross provides propitiation. Packer asks, “Do you understand this? If you do, you are now seeing to the very heart of the Christian gospel. No version of that message goes deeper than that which declares man's root problem before God to be his sin, which evokes wrath and God's basic provision for man to be propitiation, which out of wrath brings peace.”¹⁶

25b-26 The cross was to show God's righteousness. Here we learn the inner logic of the cross. Here we learn that Jesus did not only die for us, he died for God. God put his Son forward. It was his initiative. God put Jesus forward as a propitiation by his blood. So that he could remain just. No sin goes unpunished. God is holy and just. All sin will be punished either on the sinner's head or on the Son's head. The choice is yours. Will you trust Christ and stand before a holy God without a mediator or will you stand alone? I plead with you to flee to Christ. There is one mediator between God and men: the man Christ Jesus.

Why does this matter? Well, first, God's Word teaches it and truth matters. But it also affects your view of all of life. This is worldview stuff. If you distort God into a tame sky fairy who winks at sin, it will affect other things. If you have a deficient view of God that will lead to deficient views of man and deficient views of the cross. When you remake a god in your own image who shows no wrath, what does the cross mean? It is reduced to just being a moral example. Be selfless like Jesus was selfless. Be kind. Oh it is so much more.

We want people consumed with Jesus Christ. Worshipping Jesus in all of life. All of life for Christ: **Cross chart.** / What glorious good news! Though we are born sinful. Dead in sin. Blind helpless hopeless. Without God and without hope in the world. But God. Didn't leave us to ourselves. Sent the Son. Son of David and Lord of David, fully man and fully God for us and our salvation. Though tempted, yet without sin. Our Creator has become our Redeemer. God become man for us. Perfect life. Substitutionary death. He bore the wrath that we deserve. Absorbed it. Turned it away. / Are you saved? Saved from what? The late R.C. Sproul: “The glory of the gospel is this: The one from whom we need to be saved is the one who has saved us.”¹⁷

¹⁶ Packer, *Knowing God*, 189.

¹⁷ R.C. Sproul, *Saved From What?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002).

