

HANDED OVER

www.thebiblejesus.org

In my Senior year at High School, I was a jury member in the musical *Trial By Jury*.¹ I certainly did not consider myself a good public singer, but as one of the panel of jurors, I felt safety in numbers. The production took months to prepare, was performed before the entire school including parents and friends over several nights, was a lot of fun, and a reasonable success.

Little did I think that these decades later, I would be in a real-life trial by jury. Along with my fellow jurors, I was empanelled to condemn or acquit the accused. There, in the dock, under police guard, was a man charged with four very serious counts of indecent handling and rape of a minor. I tried to imagine, as I looked at the accused, how it must feel to be handed over to judgment.

I felt the full gravity of the occasion. I also felt rather encouraged that all members of the jury took their civil responsibility with equal care. As it turned out, we were able to reach our verdict quickly and unanimously. How blessed to live in a country where the rule of law is honoured, and where everybody gets a fair go.

I would not be the first to leave a court thinking about bigger implications: Our judicial system is a microcosmic portrayal of the trial that the Bible predicts is going to happen on a future Great Day, when the books are opened for judgment;

And I saw a Great White Throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them [to evade]. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God and the books were opened; and another book was opened which is the Book of Life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works (Rev. 20: 11-12).

DENIAL OF JUDGMENT

Of course, in our secular world, talk of a Judgment Day is ridiculed. By and large, even “the Church” has gone awfully silent on this subject. Gone are the days when preachers would thunder from their pulpits that our lives on this earth carry eternal implications and that we are morally answerable to our Creator. In the Church and in society, God --- if He is believed to exist at all --- is viewed as though He were a stuffed, soft, cuddly, cosmic teddy bear. And even if there is to be a day of reckoning, God could not possibly condemn anybody. He will surely just benignly wink and nod at our wicked record, and give everybody a big warm welcome hug.

There are those who go further, and allege that belief in “the wrath of God” is positively harmful to society. They say it’s psychologically harmful to teach about God’s judgment. And, they allege, it’s especially harmful for children to hear such things. We are told religion that teaches such horrific things, should be outlawed. It’s time to grow up, and throw off the vestiges of these past superstitions and fear-mongering!

Now, I am not going to devote time in this article to defending why belief in a final judgment is reasonable.² Sufficient to say a strong case can be made, that if people don’t believe there is a God who will eventually put all things right, then they will take matters into their own vengeful hands, and society turns out worse.

Or, to put that the other way round, if we are sure there is a God who will ultimately put all things right, and that justice must prevail --- that we live in a moral universe --- then we actually have the choice to refrain from taking vengeance into our own hands.

¹ An operetta by Gilbert & Sullivan.

² I have done that elsewhere. For example, see my article, [Is The Bible Bad For Morality?](#) at this website.

OUR DEEDS LIVE ON

Belief in nothingness after death gives the false solace of thinking that our ill-treatment of others, our greed and selfishness, our unfaithfulness and betrayals, will all perish with us in the grave. But the doctrine of the judgment of God affirms that our deeds and behaviours are *imperishable*!

Remember how Potiphar's wife pressed **Joseph** daily, "Come, lie with me! Make love to me!" Day after day this went on. But one day the temptation took on a particularly urgent note. This was the day nobody else was in the house. Nobody would ever know, right"? "Come lie with me!"

So how does a virile young man with his master's entire estate at his disposal --- with everything lying at his feet so to speak! --- stay clean? If Joseph had been to Sunday School (I know that is completely anachronistic, so please don't write me about it, OK!), then this song must have been running through his head:

Oh, be careful little eyes what you see, for the Father up above is looking down in love, oh, be careful little eyes what you see.

Oh, be careful little hands what you do, for the Father up above is looking down in love ...

Oh, be careful little feet where go, for the Father up above is looking down in love ...

Oh, be careful little tongue what you say, for the Father up above is looking down in love, oh be careful ...

Joseph understood the principle, for he answered his temptress, "**How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God**" (Gen. 39:9)? Unlike the common view that what happens between the sheets in the bedroom is a private affair (!) the Bible teaches there is no such thing as actions without public consequences.

SCANDALOUS

I was having a lunch break, turned on the Fox News Channel, and per-chanced upon a mini-series called *Scandalous*. This is a seven-part documentary investigating the numerous intrigues that beset President Bill Clinton and First Lady Hillary during their years in the White House. These allegations were multifaceted, ranging everywhere from murder, bribery, adultery, blackmail, and so forth.

A thought struck me powerfully. What a difference it would have made if every single player in this real-life drama had had one overriding conviction: I am going to stand before the Almighty and give an account for the deeds done in my lifetime. I live my life under the eye of my Creator to whom I must give an account. ³

THE WRATH OF GOD

Unpopular and as repugnant as the teaching on the wrath of God currently is, any fair minded reading of the Bible will agree that it is a persistent and ubiquitous subject from Genesis through to Revelation; God will not tolerate evil. If nothing else, it proves the consistency of the Bible's claim that God does not change ... notwithstanding those who allege the God of the NT is different to the God of the OT.

The Bible teaches God is implacably opposed to anything and everything that degrades humanity and defaces His image in people. In fact, His judgment will even come upon those who destroy the environment, for wilful lack of care for His earth amounts to defacing His property (e.g. Rev. 11:18). In a society of law, any citizen found defacing government property commits a crime against the State, and in God's world this principle holds good too.

Any decent and loving parent hates that which would jeopardy their child's well-being and happiness. And surely God's settled opposition to all evil that would mar His beautiful creation is proof of His good and righteous

³ For my Australian readers, the name of our Deputy Prime Minister, Barnaby Joyce is right on topic!

character? God is not less decent or moral than we are! Jesus warned that if anybody hurts the smallest member of society --- **one of these little ones** --- then it would **be better for him that a millstone were hung round his neck and that he were cast into the sea (Matt. 18: 6).**

In fact, it is the wrath of God expressed in His judgment upon sin, that is a cause for great rejoicing in Heaven and amongst the righteous on earth. The prospect of a coming judgment when God puts wrongs to right is cause for great joy, even hand clapping and singing amongst the people of the Most High (e.g. Ps. 47). Eternal justice will prevail, and everything is going to be put right. And *that* is cause for celebration!

The fact that His judgment is so long in coming is a cause of deep angst for His people. They cry out for justice. All the saints who have suffered unfairly at the hands of the wicked are seen in vision to cry; **How long O LORD, holy and true till You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth? (Rev. 6:9).**

A DISCLAIMER

Lest this be taken the wrong way, I hasten to add that judgment is God's **strange work**, and He would much rather people turn from their wicked ways, and know His mercy and life (Is. 28:21).

Nor does anybody who has experienced God's grace wish ill upon anybody else, even an enemy. If our enemy is hungry, we are to feed him; if he is thirsty, we are to give him a drink (Rom. 12: 20). We are to **love our enemies, pray for and do good to those who persecute us (Matt. 5:44).** Let me give an example of the attitude Christians are to display.

Richard Dawkins is a name most are familiar with. Here is a man who has turned multitudes away from faith in the Lord and who is what I call an evangelical atheist. Some Christians have railed against Dawkins, thrown bile at him, spat upon him, cursed him, calling down heaven's wrath upon him. This should make anybody who knows anything at all of God's character recoil with disgust. Contrast that with this man who has debated Dawkins;

I would not absolutely believe that people like Dawkins are in some way to be 'eternally punished' for what seems to me a bout of intellectual myopia. I do think, however, that he is missing something very important about the nature of reality, and that at some point and in some way he, and others like him, will need a widening of vision that will disclose the reality of God to him. How this will come it is not for me to say. But as a Christian I feel compelled to say that God will meet him with unlimited love and the offer of unconditional forgiveness. ⁴

That, I suggest, is the attitude of one who represents the Spirit of Christ: Always hoping and praying that those who oppose God's work will come to repentance. We are to **overcome evil with good**, leaving all vengeance to God, and by our good-will **heap burning coals of fire** on those who snub God's goodness (Rom. 12: 20-21).

Yes, of course there is a tension here. God is wonderfully good and holy so He cannot tolerate sin (Numbers 14:18). Therefore, He must deal with sin in one of two ways — either grace or wrath.

GOD HANDS OVER TO JUDGMENT

It is instructive to see how the Scriptures describe the judgment(s) of God. A frequent expression is that God **hands over, delivers up, or gives up** to judgment. ⁵

The classic passage would be **Romans chapter 1** where *three times* God is said to **hand over/give up** those who abandon His truth to His wrath. We read that, **The wrath of God is being revealed** ⁶ **from heaven against all**

⁴ Keith Ward, *Why There Almost Certainly Is a God: Doubling Dawkins*, Lion, Oxford, England. 2008, p. 143

⁵ *Paradidomi* is a word with a rich degree of meaning and depending on context can mean to give over to, to hand down, to pass on, to transmit, to deliver up, to betray.

⁶ *Apokaluptetai* is a present passive indicative.

ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). Their punishment is that God hands them over to the consequences of their degrading actions.

Abandoning themselves to puny idols, God abandons them to disgraceful passions and to depraved minds (Rom. 1: 24, 26, 28). In the OT God warned the Israelites that if they abandoned Him and became disobedient, then He would deliver them up --- **hand them over** --- into the hands of foreign peoples who would plunder them (e.g. Judges 2:14; 6:13; Jer. 32:4, etc.).

If there is one thing the Hebrew Bible illustrates, it's how God's righteous acts are intertwined with human greed, pride, arrogance, disobedience. The wars and treachery that litter human history are the results of turning away from God and from devotion to His will.

We call this **Consequential Wrath** — it is the wrath we bring upon ourselves when we reap what we sow through sinful living. It's the inevitable liver and pancreatic disease following years of alcoholic abuse. It's the breakdown of the family unit following unfaithfulness and neglect. It's the economic ruin that follows problem gambling. It's the fallout of friends following hurtful gossip. It's the crumbling and rotting of the house following years of laziness. And so forth. This is sowing and reaping wrath. It tells in no uncertain terms that **God is not mocked. We reap what we sow** (Gal. 6:7).

Consequential wrath however, also includes the further element of **Abandonment Wrath** — when God turns His back on a person or a society, allowing self-destruction. **The wages of sin is death** ... the death of goodness, the death of happiness and fulfilment, the death of the 'soul'. The judgments of God are the way in which our own egoism leads to self-destruction, a state of **abandonment wrath**.

When an individual or a society will not listen to God's loving warnings, they will suffer increasingly severe judgments. We may call this development **Cataclysmic Wrath** — as evidenced in man-made disasters of war and hostile invasion, or in natural calamities. God allows these as a way of calling people and nations to repentance. ⁷

An OT example of God handing over to **cataclysmic wrath** is **Psalm 106**; (It's worth reading carefully!) The people of Israel disobeyed God's command to **destroy the peoples** [those practising abominations such as witchcraft and child sacrifices],

But they mingled with the nations, and learned their practices, and served their idols, which became a snare to them. They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons, and shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and their daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; And the land was polluted with the blood ... Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against His people ... so He **gave them into the hand of the nations; and those who hated them ruled over them. Their enemies oppressed them, and they were subdued under their power. Many times He would deliver them; They, however, were rebellious in their counsel, and so sank down in their iniquity (Ps. 106: 34-41).**

Does this make God a "monster"? Not at all! It rather proves His goodness, for how could a good God ignore the evil of sin and allow it to go unpunished? His wrath against evil demonstrates His righteousness. In fact, God wishes all to be saved, and His judgments even in this life are meant to show that he does everything possible to bring sinners to repentance (1 Tim. 2: 3-4).

God sent prophet after prophet to call the nations of Israel and Judah to repentance; **The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place; but they continually mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, until there was no remedy** (2 Chronicles 36:15-16).

⁷ Jonathan Cahn has written on this theme insightfully in his novel *The Harbinger: The Ancient Mystery That Holds the Secret of America's Future*. He compares the 9/11 New York disaster to God's dealings with Israel in Isaiah 11. Highly recommended!

He tried to warn the antediluvians through the preaching of Noah for 120 years. He tried to warn Sodom and Gomorrah through Abraham and even the compromised Lot . He tried to warn the pagan city of Nineveh by sending the prophets Nahum and Jonah. He tried to warn Israel over her adultery against the LORD and the social evils that followed. God's wrath is never unannounced, out of the blue, and without calls to repentance and offers of forgiveness.

Nor is God's wrath ever motivated primarily by a delight to punish. Rather, it is designed to bring people to repentance so that they might be saved. Even in His wrath, God remembers mercy. But persistent refusal to obey inevitably and always leads to God having to **hand over** to correctional judgment.

This is true of another category of God's outpoured wrath --- **Eschatological Wrath** --- the wrath God will unleash on all the disobedient world during the Great Tribulation. Rather than simply pouring out His wrath on the rebellious nations of the world without warning and judging them in one instant of overwhelming catastrophe, He is going to send upon the world a series of increasingly dire judgments designed to help men S-T-O-P, think, and turn from their wicked ways.

However, because **men love darkness rather than light (John 3: 19)**, because **men refuse to obey the Gospel of His Son (2 Thess. 1:8)**, and because **men will not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved (2 Thess. 2: 10)** God will send upon them a strong delusion that ... all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in **unrighteousness (2 Thess. 2: 11-12)**. By and large it appears this world abandons the truth of God and receives the Great Tribulation judgments of God's end times, (or **eschatological wrath**), which Jesus said would be a time of Big Trouble like no other period before in mankind's history (**Matt. 24: 21**).

Although most do not repent during the Great Tribulation, but are hardened in their evil course (**Revelation 9:20-21; 16:9,11**), there is **a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues** who do repent and respond to the word of Jesus in faith (**Revelation 7:9**).

The prediction is that this **eschatological wrath** of God will have the desired effect and melt some hearts in repentance, but it causes hardening of the hearts of many others.

Such failure to be corrected is inevitably followed by **Eternal Wrath** --- the ultimate punishment God will mete out upon the finally impenitent. This is the judgment Jesus warned about when he said;

I will plainly show you whom you should fear: Fear Him Who after He has killed has authority to throw into Gehenna; yes, I say to you, fear this One (Luke 12: 5).

The context of this warning is that we are not to be frightened of those who threaten to kill us for our faith, for **after that they have no more that they can do (Lk.12: 4)**. Jesus warns of the God who can judge by annihilating the entire person in the Lake of Fire, which is the Second Death (**Rev. 20: 14-15**).

GOD HANDS JESUS OVER FOR OUR SALVATION!

Now there is a most informative connection in the Scriptures, between the teaching that God **hands over** to judgment, and the teaching that He **handed over** His own Son for our salvation. We read in **Romans 8: 32**;

He who spared not His own Son, but delivered him up for us all ... how will He also not freely give us all things ?

Delivered up is exactly the same word we have been considering for **hand over!** Preaching to his own countrymen, the apostle Peter announced that, **This man Jesus was delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, and you nailed him to a cross by the hands of godless men and put him to death (Acts 2: 22-23)**. When the

Jewish authorities **handed over** Jesus to Pilate, they were unaware they were fulfilling the ancient prophecy of Isaiah, that God Himself would **hand over** His Suffering Servant **for our sins (Is. 53:6)**.⁸

God's Sovereign Hand was working His own purposes through their wicked hands. They meant it for evil, but God meant it for good! The Scriptures therefore teach us that on the cross of Calvary, God **handed over** His own Son Jesus for judgment --- **condemning sin in the flesh (Rom. 8: 3)** --- so that we might never be **handed over** to the wrath of God.

There is therefore no reason for any child of God to fear the wrath of God. Since **we have been justified by the blood of Christ, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him (Romans 5:9)**. Jesus will deliver the Redeemed **from the wrath to come** at his Second Coming (**1 Thessalonians 1:10**). The reason is that **God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:9)**.

Thus, on the one hand (speaking anthropomorphically of course!) God hands over men to either His **consequential wrath, abandonment wrath, cataclysmic wrath, eschatological wrath** or ultimately His **eternal wrath** after they have persistently been rejecting His love, or on the other hand (anthropomorphism again!), we may know His eternal salvation through Jesus who was handed over as our representative at Calvary.

One thing is for sure. Either way God cannot overlook sin. It will be dealt with --- either through ourselves bearing it or the Lamb of God bearing it. Thus, God holds out something different in each hand (again speaking in human terms!). Which hand do we choose? Grace or wrath? To use OT language, it's up to us whether we receive blessing or curse, life or death;

Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; a blessing if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God ... and a curse, if you will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way ... (Deut. 11: 26 f).

HANDING DOWN THE VERDICT

Summing up the case, what do we learn?

We live in a moral universe. There are consequences for our actions. Each one of us sits accused in the dock. The charges are serious, very serious ... rebellion against a good Creator ... treason against the Throne of Heaven. There is none of us righteous, not one. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We are charged with a capital offence.

Handcuffed by the Law, the wages of sin is death --- God must judge (even though His kind heart is heavy). The Law must be satisfied, otherwise cosmic anarchy will ultimately prevail. The gavel is poised. His holy wrath surely comes. God has given the world the guarantee of this, **because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising him from the dead (Acts 17: 31)**.

Yes, there is good news to all who will listen and turn from their sin. The Judge Himself is rich in mercy. He **delivered up** His own Son on our behalf. **He made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in him (2 Cor. 5: 21)**! The wrath of God was fully satisfied at Calvary. Jesus cried from the cross, **Tetelestai ... It is finished, done, completed, fully paid!**

Thus, Jesus Christ has completely satisfied all that the Law of God demands. When he was nailed to the cross **the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, and which was hostile to us, he has taken out of the way, having nailed it to the cross (Col. 2: 14)**.

⁸ *Paradidomai* in the LXX of **Isaiah 53:6** is the exact same word as found in **Rom. 1: 24, 26, 28** where God hands over sinners to their fate, and the very same word of **Romans 8: 32** where God delivers Christ up for us all!

All who now place their lives in the hands of Jesus Christ are justified and set free to enjoy the peace of God for time and for eternity ... citizens of the Kingdom of God. We walk free.

There is only one question to answer: Which hand from God will we choose? Blessing or curse? Life or death? Condemnation or justification?

For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He who believes on him is not condemned; but who believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God ...

The Father loves the Son and has given (!) all things into his hand. He who believes on the Son has eternal life; and he who believes not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God remains on him. (John 3: 17-19, 35-36).

Our name is either in the Book of Life --- listed with those acquitted by the blood of the Lamb of God --- or still awaiting arraignment when the books will be opened for final hearing.

The question therefore is, do you want to handle your case yourself, or will you hand it over to the one who has already handled it fully?