

CHAPTER 8

ATONEMENT AND THE WRATH OF GOD

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We must see, feel and appreciate His love to us even in His anger, condemnation and punishment. —Karl Barth (*Church Dogmatics* II/1)



I

The doctrine of atonement, as we understand it, is the affirmation that human beings are reconciled to God through the death of Christ.¹ Nowhere in Scripture is it precisely explained how or why the death of Christ atones for our sins. Accordingly, Christian theologians throughout history have felt free to propose various competing theories of atonement.

Interestingly, there is a related biblical theme that is pervasively affirmed throughout Scripture and yet is, so far as we can tell, almost completely ignored by many contemporary theologians and preachers. This is the notion of the wrath of God. This is unfortunate, since we believe that locating at least some of what occurs in the atonement in this divine attribute will aid us in making some headway toward a more complete and explanatorily adequate account of the atonement.² Although we would

1. We prefer to claim that our salvation is due to the life (including the incarnation, teachings, and deeds), death, and resurrection of Christ, though focusing on Christ's death will not affect our main argument.

2. When divine wrath is mentioned in the context of the atonement, it is often associated with the picture of Christ's death as placating a vindictive God. We seek to disassociate ourselves from such a picture while remaining faithful to the biblical data. Moreover, we do not take the notion of divine wrath to be central or fundamental to atonement; rather, we merely advance the more modest thesis of favoring the inclusion of the notion of divine wrath in an overall theory of atonement.

claim that highlighting the wrath of God as it relates to various issues in Christian theology can bear other interesting results, our focus will be on its relation to the doctrine of atonement.

We begin by addressing and responding to some of the objections or concerns that have been brought up as reasons for rejecting divine wrath altogether.³ In particular, some have argued that wrath or anger is an emotion unfitting for God, either because God experiences no emotions at all or because that emotion is incompatible with an all-good and all-loving being. Others have claimed that wrath is inextricably linked to hatred, which goes against God's loving nature. We will show that these concerns fail to provide a reason to abandon anger or wrath as a divine attribute. We then present our own understanding of divine wrath and offer some reasons for why Christians should regard God as possessing such an attribute. Finally, we explain how such a notion can aid our theorizing about the doctrine of the atonement. To be clear, we are not offering a theory of atonement but instead making some suggestions on how future theological discussions concerning the atonement might be carried out.

II

We define God's wrath as his opposition to sin and evil.⁴ Such opposition, we maintain, involves an emotive state of anger as well as God's actions on the basis of that emotion. As the psalmist says, "We are consumed by your anger; by your wrath we are overwhelmed. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your countenance" (Ps 90:7–8 NRSV). Given the existence of sin and evil, the possession of such an emotion seems necessarily to follow from any being that has a morally perfect nature, for anger would be the appropriate response to the horrendous evils that exist due to human sin.⁵ Furthermore, it is difficult to deny the pervasiveness of divine wrath found in the Bible. As Abraham Heschel notes,

[It is] impossible to close one's eyes to the words of the wrath of God in Scripture. To interpret it on allegorical lines or as a metonymy, and to

3. We do not wish to deny that the wrath of God has been overemphasized at various points in the history of Christian teaching and preaching.

4. Cf. Tony Lane, "The Wrath of God as an Aspect of the Love of God," in *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God*, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2001), 138–67; and Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (London: Tyndale, 1965), 180.

5. Though we maintain that divine wrath is not an essential attribute of God since it is possible for God to exist without evil (such as a world in which God never creates).

regard wrath as a synonym for punishment, is to misread the authentic meaning of the word and to misrepresent biblical thought.⁶

Arthur Baird also states that “wherever in the Old Testament one finds a reference to the love of God, his wrath is always in the background, either explicitly or implicitly, and we neglect this element to the impoverishment of the Hebrew concept of love.”⁷ When Scripture affirms God’s love for us, we take that to be true; similarly, we take the affirmations of God’s anger over evil and its perpetrators also to be true.⁸

Before focusing on the relationship between divine wrath and the atonement, we want to respond to some of the reasons the notion of divine wrath has been rejected by some theologians. Throughout the medieval period, it was common to regard God as being impassible—that he undergoes no suffering or no emotions. We will not here offer a critique of such a position, though we merely point out that such a view is no longer the dominant view of theologians or philosophers of religion. (Of course, there are still those who do espouse a strong version of divine impassibility.)

In a recent work, Anastasia Scrutton argues for a distinction between *passiones* and *affectiones*, where the former involves irrational and involuntary emotive attitudes, whereas the latter involves rational and voluntary ones.⁹ She goes on to show that even within the Christian tradition, it is not obvious that those theologians who are associated with the idea of divine impassibility (such as Augustine and Aquinas) rule out *affectiones* and therefore rule out all emotions. Whatever the case, we are not convinced by the arguments for divine impassibility (in such a strong sense as to rule out even *affectiones* from God) and so will assume that it is coherent to construe God as having some emotions.

Another reason that some theologians deny that God possesses the attribute of divine wrath is that such a characteristic seems too anthropomorphic or anthropopathic—that by ascribing divine wrath to God we are somehow foisting our own limited human features onto God.¹⁰ Rather

6. Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1955), 359.

7. J. Arthur Baird, *The Justice of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (London: S.C.M., 1963), 46.

8. For additional treatment on this subject, see Anastasia Scrutton, *Thinking through Feeling: God, Emotion and Passibility* (New York: Continuum, 2011). Scrutton argues that God’s expression of anger is rehabilitative as opposed to retributive (see ch. 5). A loving father may express anger for his child who has harmed a fellow playmate, and such anger does not have as its end the desire or motive to inflict harm for the sake of inflicting harm but rather to seek the good of the other child, the good for future communities, and especially the good for his own child.

9. *Ibid.*

10. For such a criticism, see Charles Harold Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1959), 47–50.

than attributing the emotion of wrath or anger to God, some theologians have claimed that wrath is better construed as the experience of the consequence of sin—the cause-and-effect sequence from sinful action to the just deserts of harm or discipline.¹¹

Certainly there are aspects of human anger that are not attributable to God, such as irrational or erratic behavior that stems from our emotion of anger.¹² However, God’s wrath is only analogically related to the kind of anger that is experienced by humans. When humans experience anger or wrath, it often involves responsive actions where complete information of the entire situation is lacking. Thus, humans sometimes fly into a rage without knowing the motives of the putative offender or the circumstances involving the event. Accordingly, we are commanded by God to be “slow to anger,” for our lack of omniscience may yield problematic behavior. However, God is never lacking in information and knows precisely how to respond appropriately against the offender.

We might even say that God’s wrath is more akin to “righteous indignation” (stripped of its negative connotations), since that too is an attitude that involves opposition to evil. So when we attribute wrath to God, we are not including the human limitations and imperfections involved in our experience of wrath; we merely claim that God, in light of his full knowledge of the situation, undergoes an emotion of anger that is directed at sin and sinners. It does not fall into anthropopathicism since the errors that are associated with human anger—such as irrationally flying into a rage and responding inappropriately—will never be committed by God.

Finally, the concept of divine wrath has been rejected given that it seems to be linked to hatred, and it cannot be the case that God exhibits such a negative emotion as hatred. God’s love seems to be one of those theological axioms that no Christian, whether conservative or liberal, denies, and it is often relied upon as a central tenet for various theological claims (e.g., consider arguments for universalism that rely on the premise that God loves all human persons). Indeed, Scripture does speak much about the love of God, but it also includes various passages that indicate God’s hatred for certain elements of creation—and quite strikingly, it is aimed at both sin and sinners alike. For example, consider the passages in Malachi 1:2–3, “I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau,” and in Hosea 9:15, “All their evil is at Gilgal; indeed, I came to hate them there! Because of the wickedness of their

11. Anthony Tyrrell Hanson, *The Wrath of the Lamb* (London: SPCK, 1957).

12. For a response to such charges, see Scrutton, *Thinking through Feeling*, ch. 5.

deeds I will drive them out of my house! I will love them no more" (NASB). Of course God also loved Esau and the residents of Gilgal. So we seem to require the claim that God can both love and hate certain individuals.

Following this line of thought, John Calvin approvingly cites Augustine, who made similar remarks about God's attitude of love and hatred toward us, which we quote here at length:

Incomprehensible and immutable is the love of God. For it was not after we were reconciled to him by the blood of his Son that he began to love us, but he loved us before the foundation of the world, that with his only begotten Son we too might be sons of God before we were any thing at all. Our being reconciled by the death of Christ must not be understood as if the Son reconciled us, in order that the Father, then hating, might begin to love us, but that we were reconciled to him already, loving, though at enmity with us because of sin. To the truth of both propositions we have the attestation of the Apostle, "God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us," (Romans 5:8). Therefore he had this love toward us even when, exercising enmity towards him, we were the workers of iniquity. Accordingly in a manner wondrous and divine, he loved even when he hated us. For he hated us when we were such as he had not made us, and yet because our iniquity had not destroyed his work in every respect, he knew in regard to each one of us, both to hate what we had made, and love what he had made.¹³

Calvin himself states that "[a]ll of us, therefore, have that within which deserves the hatred of God . . . in respect, first, of our corrupt nature; and, secondly, of the depraved conduct following upon it."¹⁴ Taking the popular slogan "love the sinner, hate the sin," it would be easy to suppose that God's hatred is directed only at sin and not at the sinner; however, such an emotion is regarded by Augustine and Calvin as being also directed at human sinners. Moreover, the tragedy of sin is that it has the effect of ruining and ultimately destroying one's "self," and hence it is difficult to divorce the sin from the sinner. William Temple points out this close connection: "My sin is the wrong direction of my will; and my will is just myself as far as I am active. If God hates the sin, what He hates is not an accretion attached to my real self; it is myself, as that self now exists."¹⁵ Insofar as we have identified ourselves with our sin, God's wrath and therefore hatred is aimed at us.

13. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 110.6.

14. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2.16.3.

15. William Temple, *Christus Veritas* (London: Macmillan, 1924), 258.

We maintain, therefore, that there is a sense in which God hates certain individuals, but such a statement obviously needs various qualifications. No such view of God should preclude his love for all creatures. There is a plausible sense in which, following Augustine and Calvin, we can assert that God both loves and hates certain individuals. Relying on a Thomistic account of love, Eleonore Stump distinguishes between two senses of hate, one that is opposed to love and one that is not. Under the Thomistic account, love involves willing the good of another and seeking (an appropriate kind of) union with that individual. Thus, hatred would be either to seek the bad for someone or to desire separation. Of course there can be instances of hate in which my desire for harm or aversion precludes my love for that person. However, Stump argues that there are some cases when such desires are compatible with love depending on the motive and circumstances. She goes on to state:

Desiring the bad for someone and desiring not to be united with that person can be the desires of love if the person in question is bad enough that the bad of losing what he wants and having people alienated from him is the best thing for him in the circumstances. The difference between the two varieties of hatred consists primarily in the ultimate desire encompassing the desires for the bad and for alienation.¹⁶

Under this account, it becomes evident that God can both hate and love certain individuals. God may permit certain harms to befall someone or may permit that individual to feel distant from him in order to aid in his or her process of reconciliation and transformation. In fact, such an account of hate seems to provide the basis for a theodicy for both the problem of evil (since divine wrath permits evil or enacts discipline for the ultimate good of his creatures) and the problem of divine hiddenness (since divine wrath may permit the sense of separation that might lead us into recognizing our need for rescue and redemption).¹⁷ The experience of such wrath and hatred, then, just is the experience of God's love by rebellious sinners.¹⁸

Though the notion of God possessing hatred for any individual may seem initially abhorrent, we have shown that such an idea is compatible with God's love. Indeed, the possession of such an emotion seems to elevate

16. Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness* (Oxford: OUP, 2010), ch. 5, endnote 74.

17. See Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), who takes separation from God as a central feature of his response to the problem of evil.

18. Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt* (London & Redhill: Lutterworth, 1939), 187.

our status and our relationship with Him. Scrutton offers several reasons for this. For one, God's hatred demonstrates his regard for us as autonomous agents—God does not have the same attitude for rocks, trees, or puppies.¹⁹

God, then, is a respecter of our dignity by regarding us in the way that autonomous agents should be regarded. Moreover, it also shows that God is seeking a loving union with us, for He is not merely a judge who pronounces his verdict in a detached manner but rather is personally invested in the outcome.²⁰ As Scrutton states, "God's anger, as an aspect of his passionate character as a whole, is indicative of the fact that God is not merely an abstract principle, but a fully relational person; and so God's anger is linked to the possibility of human communion and fellowship with God."²¹ It is apparent that the degree to which one experiences anger is proportional to the relationship and level of personal intimacy between the offender and the offended.²² We conclude, then, that no decisive objection has been offered against ascribing wrath or anger to God.

III

Having dealt with some of the objections, we now turn to our understanding of God's wrath and our reasons for ascribing wrath to God. As we take it, the wrath of God is an expression of God's just and righteous nature, where divine justice provides some measure of moral equilibrium in a broken and morally imperfect world. God's justice is not only eschatological, for we believe that without divine justice, the world would fall into greater moral chaos. The manifestation of divine wrath reminds us of moral standards and the consequences of both right and wrong actions. In a morally relativistic climate, the notion of God's wrath undermines such relativistic thinking and elevates the value of moral actions.²³

To be clear, we are not here endorsing any particular meta-ethical or normative theory, but we do claim that divine wrath precludes any relativistic account that results in no objectively wrong actions. Whether morality

19. Scrutton, *Thinking through Feeling*, 107.

20. *Ibid.*, 109, 120.

21. *Ibid.*, 106.

22. Lane also states that "God's love itself implies his wrath [such that] without his wrath God is simply not loving in the sense that the Bible portrays his love," in Lane, "Wrath of God," 139. See also Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, *The Subtlety of Emotions* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 398, who claims that "the closer the person is to us, the more we care about the person, and the angrier we are when this person hurts us."

23. For more development on this idea, see Stephen T. Davis, "Universalism, Hell, and Fate of Ignorant," *Modern Theology* 6 (1990), 184–85.

is independent of God or is commanded by God or is a part of his divine nature (or whatever other account one may prefer concerning the relationship between God and morality), God's wrath indicates that there are some actions that are truly wrong to perform and that "the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient" (Eph 5:6 NIV). As Paul says elsewhere, "Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, and greed (which is idolatry). On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient" (Col 3:5–6 NRSV). Whether one personally experiences the force of the moral law or not, the experience and recognition of divine wrath serves as a reminder that there nevertheless is a moral law.

The absence of such wrath at the pervasive wickedness in our world would be considered a moral defect.²⁴ But given that God is morally perfect, it follows that he must be angry at evil and its perpetrators, for God loves both the victim and the offender and so must act for the good of both. Consider the following example from Lane:

Suppose a child willfully and maliciously hurts another child. In what way is the disciplining of that child an expression of love? It expresses the parent's love for righteousness and detestation of cruelty. It expresses love for the victim in the form of concern for what has been done. It expresses love for the perpetrator in that it is intended as discipline. Finally, it expresses love for society in the disciplining of the child. Those who let undisciplined children loose on society show not love but lack of concern for their children and even greater lack of concern for their future victims in the rest of society.²⁵

In Stump's treatment of the events in Job concerning the problem of evil, she argues that God truly demonstrates love for everyone, not only to Job but even to his friends as well as Satan.²⁶ What God does or permits, then, is for the benefit of all the parties involved. So out of love for the victims of wrongdoing, God must restrain, discipline, and sometimes severely punish wrongdoers to protect not only the victims but also potential future victims. However, God's actions also seek to benefit the offender, with the hope that seeking the bad or separation from the wrongdoer may eventually lead that individual to restoration and reconciliation with other human beings and ultimately with God.

24. C.E.B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 1:109.

25. Lane, "Wrath of God," 166.

26. Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, ch. 9.

IV

What, then, is the relation of divine wrath and the atonement? It is not uncommon for the notion of God's wrath to be raised in connection with the penal substitutionary theory of atonement, but we want to argue that any theory of the atonement would do well to consider divine wrath as an integral part of an adequate account. We take there to be at least three desiderata that any adequate account of the atonement must satisfy. The first is that any adequate theory must explain how Christ's death deals with our guilt for the sins that we have committed. Regarding guilt, it is not merely felt guilt that is at issue but the objective guilt that we have taken on by our offense. The second desideratum is that any adequate theory must deal with our disposition or propensity to fall into sin.

The rationale for these two desiderata follows from what can be taken as the main problem that the atonement is supposed to solve—viz., our separation from God. This separation is due to the sin we have committed (and perhaps even due to original sin), and such separation becomes wider because of our guilt—for we may try to avoid God's discipline or avoid communion with him because of the guilt and shame that we experience. Moreover, such separation expands given our continuation of sin, which follows from our proneness to do what is wrong.²⁷

We also add a third desideratum: any adequate theory of atonement must explain why Christ's suffering and death was "fitting" (as some medieval theologians put it), or at least, effective.²⁸ God is also loving and merciful and so is willing to forgive sinners. So why doesn't God just forgive them without the ordeal of sending his Son to die on a cross? In fact, some theories of atonement seem not to require Christ to have died at all. It seems that if there was some other means to accomplish the reconciliation between God and human beings besides the suffering and death of Jesus, then such a means is not only preferable but perhaps even obligatory for God to bring about—for God should not bring about gratuitous or meaningless suffering, especially on a completely innocent individual. Thus, if we take seriously the plan that God had carried out in the death

27. These desiderata line up with what Stump calls the "backward-looking desideratum" and the "forward-looking desideratum" in Stump, "The Nature of the Atonement," in *Reason, Metaphysics, and Mind*, eds. Kelly Clark and Michael Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 130–34.

28. We leave open the question of whether Christ's suffering and death was necessary for the atonement to be achieved, though we are inclined to think that it is possible for God to have accomplished atonement and reconciliation by other means—but perhaps the means he actually carried out in Christ's death conformed best to the natural order, including human nature.

of his own Son, then we need to explain why that gruesome feature had to be a part of the plan at all.

Incorporating the notion of the wrath of God provides a way of partially satisfying these desiderata. We are not claiming that the notion of divine wrath sufficiently answers all the questions surrounding the atonement or even completely satisfies these desiderata; we only claim that significant headway can be made when we take seriously the wrath of God (though we only provide a sketch here). Considering the first desideratum, divine wrath is directed at the very elements that cause guilt in human beings. If that element (human sin in 1 Peter 2:24 or "the curse" in Galatians 3:13) was taken up in Christ, then divine wrath is aimed at destroying that element. Insofar as that element resides in us, divine wrath attempts to destroy that in us while preserving us—which fits with the theme of God loving us and hating us.

It may seem that initially such anger and hatred will aggravate our guilt and shame because we will fear discipline and punishment (and so believe God is seeking what we take to be bad for us) as well as rejection and separation. However, understanding that hatred is not opposed to love, we can experience God's anger as a means of removing the source of our guilt and shame, whether that is by means of destroying it in the body of Christ or destroying it in us.²⁹

We can also learn to regard God's anger as an experience of the love that he has for us. That is, we learn to regard such anger not as the fits of rage from a tyrant or the impersonal declaration and enactment of punishment from an impersonal judge but as the personal and parental care and concern that involves both emotional anger and severe discipline. There is a significant difference between the acts of anger from an abusive parent and the acts of anger from a loving parent, and we can, through growing in our knowledge of God, understand and construe his wrath as his love. If so, then we need not fear that God will reject us or desire separation, for his very anger and acts of discipline are signs that he is seeking out a restoration in the relationship. Again, we are leaving open the various ways of pursuing this approach, since we are not here offering a full-blown account of atonement. But part of the problem can be overcome by reference to God's wrath.

Divine wrath can also help make sense of how the atonement deals with our disposition toward sinful behavior. As stated earlier, there is a

29. We recognize that much is left unstated, and perhaps it is ultimately a mystery exactly how our guilt and shame are destroyed in Christ's body at his death.

legitimate sense in which we can say that God both loves and hates us as sinners. But his hatred, which involves both the experience of suffering or discipline and (for those saved) the temporary separation from God, is ultimately aimed at reconciliation between God and human beings. As Lane notes,

God loves sinners, not in the sense that he does not hate them along with their sin, but in the sense that he seeks their salvation in Christ. While his attitude to sinners as sinners is antagonism and wrath, his good will toward them actively seeks their conversion and forgiveness.³⁰

Such experiences of suffering or discipline, being manifestations of divine wrath, seek to transform our minds and wills so that we no longer are prone to sin. We leave it open whether such a transformation can take place here on earth (at least in principle, as some interpreters of Wesley seem to believe) or only after death. But the wrath that involves our experiences of what we take to be bad for us (including the sense of rejection) may in fact be for our benefit. Again, this is quite incomplete; we would also have to add the activity of the Holy Spirit among other things involved in the process of our transformation. Yet by incorporating the notion of divine wrath, it becomes clear that God is engaged in processes that are directed at our salvation, which involves not only the forgiveness of our sins but also the removal of the disposition to sin.

The third desideratum of an adequate theory of atonement requires that the theory provide an explanation as to why Christ had to die. As an example of what we take to be an inadequate theory, consider exemplarist accounts of atonement that place great emphasis on the life and teachings of Christ and on the need for Christians to work for peace and justice. They appear to have no strong notion of human sinfulness and thus no need for any strong notion of atonement. Their view appears to be that God is loving and merciful and will forgive anyone who sincerely confesses and repents. There is no need for anyone to die on the cross.

Divine wrath shows us just how bad it is to engage in immoral or sinful behavior. The gruesomeness of sin corresponds to the gruesomeness of the sacrificial system in the Old Testament. One cannot merely offer junk ("spotted animals"), for God rejects such offerings (Mal 1). Rather, something of great value must be surrendered. Thus, the author of Hebrews can write, "Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin"

30. Lane, "Wrath of God," 155.

(Heb 9:22). As such, we uphold the principle that it is always difficult and costly to rectify a terribly wrong situation.³¹

In ancient Greek and Roman tragedies, the expression *deus ex machina* (i.e., "God out of a machine") referred to any easy solution to the problem or conflict that a play had created. For example, suppose that in the last act Zeus was lowered to the stage by a machine and declared something like, "I do not allow things like this to happen. I now command that x , y , and z occur" (which is an edict that in effect resolves the play's central problem). It was recognized early in Western literature that novels or plays with a *deus ex machina* ending were unrealistic and deficient. The reason they are considered inferior is, we think, the almost universal human recognition that it takes a great cost to rectify a terribly wrong situation.

That great cost was the death of the Son of God. Such a cost must be paid on account of the moral instability brought about by human (and perhaps demonic) sin. Since divine justice is the moral equilibrium of the world, it is appropriate that expressions of divine anger be wrought against all that has been infected by sin. Again, God's wrath does not preclude his love, but it does evince that things are not right and that they must be made right through costly (and sacrificial) means. Once again, we think incorporating divine wrath takes us some steps closer to understanding why such a great cost as Christ's death had to be paid.

V

Again, we are not recommending here any particular theory of atonement. We merely claim that taking seriously the notion of God's wrath goes some way toward developing an adequate and more complete account. In this section we provide a sketch of how this can be accomplished by using as an example two current accounts: the penal substitutionary theory and Swinburne's version of the satisfaction theory.

Considering penal substitution theory, one striking objection involves the worry that to exact reparation from someone for the offense he or she has committed precludes any genuine forgiveness offered by the offended. In response, we note that it is part of scriptural teaching that Christ had taken the sin of the world ("he became a curse"), and hence it is fitting that God's wrath be placed on his own Son. We do not pretend to be able to

31. See Stephen T. Davis, "The Wrath of God and the Blood of Christ" in *Christian Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) for additional defense of this claim.

explain the mechanism by which such a transfer of sin or guilt takes place; we only regard *that* it had happened, not *how* it happened.

As noted earlier, great wrongs demand a great cost. In some cases, forgiveness might involve merely pardoning someone or no longer holding someone to their debt. But God's wrath for us is not the wrath of a banker or an impartial judge; rather, it is the wrath of a loving parent. As such, genuine forgiveness and reconciliation cannot take place without a great cost. Of course this does not explain exactly why or how it is that Christ's taking the penalty of our sins achieves our reconciliation. But including a proper understanding of divine anger in the context of a loving parent evinces the cost that the Son had freely decided to pay, thereby demonstrating the depth and magnitude of God's grace and love for us.³²

Next, consider Swinburne's satisfaction theory. Without assaying the details of his account, Swinburne argues that apology, repentance, reparation, and penance are required for atonement. Though human beings can offer an apology and can repent, we lack the resources to offer the appropriate reparation as well as to undertake the appropriate penance when it comes to our offense against God. However, Christ's sacrifice allows a way for the appropriate reparation and penance to take place. Now Richard Cross has argued that the only reparation that is required for humans to make to God is merely an apology.³³ He distinguishes between two types of deprivation of service, one of which involves an additional deprivation and another which does not. Here is his example to clarify this distinction:

Suppose I have a son, and that I ask him to do the washing up. He fails to do this, and in so doing fails not only in a duty of service, but also brings it about (in a loose sense) that I have to do the washing up. But suppose instead I ask him to tidy his bedroom. He fails to do this, but in so doing fails me in no more than a duty of service. The only other harm he does is to himself, not to me.³⁴

Cross claims that our duty to God is of the latter sort, for nothing that we fail to do can cause God any harm.

That God cannot be harmed in any way whatsoever is a view fitting for those who endorse divine impassibility. But as noted earlier, we reject divine impassibility and believe that there are good reasons to ascribe emo-

32. We are not suggesting that all problems of the penal substitutionary theory are resolved by the notion of wrath; we are only trying to show how these theories can overcome *some problems* and provide deeper and more comprehensive explanations of the process of reconciliation.

33. Richard Cross, "Atonement without Satisfaction," *Religious Studies* 37 (2001), 397–416.

34. *Ibid.*

tions to God, and especially the emotion of divine anger. Given what we have said so far about God's wrath, it should be clear that there is a sense in which God can be harmed—whatever is the analogue to the harm done to a parent who perceives his or her children harming themselves. Though the children may be engaged in some activity that is directly harming themselves—say, they are using harmful narcotics on a frequent basis—there is a sense in which the parent is also being harmed. Certainly the parent is not undergoing neurological damage or experiencing other problematic side effects, but any loving parent will experience not only grief but anger.

So taking seriously the notion of divine wrath permits the proponent of Swinburne's satisfaction theory to deny the claim that God cannot be harmed in any way.³⁵ Furthermore, by including God's wrath in our understanding of atonement, it becomes clear that mere apology is insufficient for full reparation—as we argued that a great wrong requires a great cost. Mere verbal utterances won't be enough. As we stated earlier when discussing penal substitution theory, the requirement for reparation does not preclude forgiveness, for we see that the desire for genuine reconciliation, which is motivated by God's love for us, involves a great reparation that we humans cannot make.

To reiterate, we have only provided a mere sketch of how such theories can utilize the notion of God's wrath as a way of mitigating some of the objections and problems. And though we lack space to say more here, we believe that taking divine wrath seriously can also aid other accounts of atonement. Thus, we believe it has been detrimental to theology to ignore or eschew the idea of divine wrath, and we hope for further exploration into this attribute of God and the ways in which it broadens and deepens our understanding of other theological issues.³⁶

35. A distinction can be made between being *harmed* and being *damaged*. A subject S is *harmed* whenever an occurrence takes place that S would desire not to obtain, whereas a subject S is *damaged* whenever the value, capacities, or essential activities of S are reduced, undermined, or eliminated. Thus, God is not damaged by our sin since nothing we can do would diminish his essence, though we maintain that God can be harmed in our sense above.

36. We would like to thank Eleonore Stump, Oliver Crisp, Joseph Jedwab, and those who attended our presentation at the 2015 Los Angeles Theology Conference for their helpful and insightful comments.