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## Vengeance Is Mine! by Bill Lockwood

“Avenge not yourselves beloved, but give place to the ‘wrath of God:’ for it is written, Vengeance belongs to me, I will recompense, saith the Lord” (Romans 12:19). One of the important, but often overlooked concepts in the New Testament is that of **God’s Wrath**. Its significance, however, can be seen as we study through Paul’s book of Romans.

Simply glancing over the epistle of Romans reveals that Paul utilizes the word “wrath” [Greek, *horge*] twelve (12) times. To feel its weight in Romans, consider that in Revelation, with 6 more chapters than Romans, the word appears only six (6) times. The next most frequent usage of the word “wrath” is in the letters of Ephesians (3x), 1 Thessalonians (3x), and Hebrews (3x). The immediate conclusion one would draw from such a word count is that in Romans, frequently thought to be the New Testament’s heart, *the wrath of God* is a doctrine of great moment.

By definition, the WRATH of God means “*that in God which stands opposed to man’s disobedience, obduracy (especially in resisting the gospel) and sin, and manifests itself in punishing the same*” (Thayer’s Lexicon, 452). It is significant to note that “the idea of personal vindictiveness must be eliminated from the word” (Vincent’s Word Studies, III, 162-63). Instead of *personal vindictiveness*, it refers to a “*full meting out of justice to all parties.*” In other words, the wrath of God, as opposed to the mercy of God, is connected to Justice.

Close analysis of Romans reveals that the WRATH of God is no “wrath” or anger in *general*, but as it *now already exists* and will be made known in the future against sin. Consider both of these. *First*, God’s wrath or opposition already exists against sin. In John 3:36 Jesus said that the one who rejects Him, “upon him the wrath of God abides.” This natural law operates without fail. Outside of Christ, in sin, God’s wrath is already working. This is the consequence of sin.

How is this seen? In Romans 1:1 Paul wrote that the *wrath of God is [already] revealed ... against all ungodliness.* This present wrath is seen in the fact that God gives up the Gentiles to the fruits of their own wickedness. Romans 1:24: “God gave them up *unto uncleanness, that their bodies should be dishonored among themselves...*” Later, in 1:26, “Wherefore God gave them up unto vile passions ... *and they receive in themselves the recompense (payment) of their error which was due.*” Regarding this crime of homosexuality and in societies where this sin is tolerated and protected by law, one can almost feel the indignant breathing of God’s holy wrath already working in society as law, order and spiritual health break down. God’s Wrath.

Again, Romans 1:2, “And even as they refused to have God in their knowledge, God *gave them up unto a reprobate mind...*” A “reprobate” mind is one void of discernment. Individuals and societies that refuse to retain God as an object of distinct knowledge (the literal rendering of Paul’s words), marked by a loss of true appreciation of that which is good, is a consequence about which the apostle warns.

*Second*, God’s wrath will be revealed in the future at the day of judgment. Thus, in Romans 2:5, addressing the Jews, Paul warns that the hard of heart “*treasurest up for yourselves wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.*” The apostle is speaking to the Jews and points out that they had “despised” the “riches of God’s goodness and patience.” This goodness embraces all the benefits of Israel in the past, including sending the Messiah. He has in mind, no doubt, the murder of Christ here. God could have, in divine justice, destroyed the nation immediately! Instead, he gives the Jews patience to obey Christ. But if they refuse, they are “storing up for themselves **WRATH**” in the final day!