

## AIDS as Divine Judgment: PART I

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Most evangelical Christians would not hesitate to affirm that homosexual behavior is contrary to biblical norms.' However, fewer would say that God judges homosexual behavior. Even fewer see in the AIDS epidemic evidence of divine judgment on homosexual behavior (and on other ungodly behaviors like fornication, adultery, prostitution and the addictive behavior of IV drug abusers with its biblical parallel in the drunkard.) From the outset it must be affirmed that the responsibility and guilt for the homosexual person's distorted sexual identity is often shared by others. These include:

- (1) parents who may have failed in their role-modeling and other parental responsibilities,
- (2) peers who may have ostracized someone because of his differences before as well as after his homosexual behavior became manifest,
- (3) people who may have exploited his weakness or assaulted his developing sexuality at a time in his life when he was highly vulnerable (for example through homosexual pornography or the attack of a pederast),
- (4) this society which has not only been permissive but actually encourages homosexuality and,
- (5) the church which has been too silent on the issue of homosexuality and uncaring toward those persons wrestling with their sexual identity and struggling against the temptation to homosexual sin.

This author, however, has chosen primarily to address God's judgment on homosexual behavior because of the modern day insistence on gay rights and privileges. Since the gay movement has demanded its rights and

privileges it must be willing to bear its share of the responsibility and guilt for the consequences which its homosexual behavior has incurred.

A number of evangelicals have challenged the suggestion that AIDS is divine judgment. While remaining open to the possibility that God may judge homosexual behavior in this present age, James E. Fletcher rejects the suggestion that the AIDS epidemic is a manifestation of God's judgment. Fletcher says that "what we see in certain high-risk groups is that God is not mocked; whatever an individual sows, he reaps. Scripture, describing homosexuals, declares that they receive in their own persons the due penalty of their error. God so ordered His universe that we may choose to sin if we wish; however, such choices are inevitably followed by consequences. Thus we currently observe in AIDS not judgment so much as wages."<sup>3</sup> Thus Fletcher assumes that "inevitable" consequences of sin and judgment on sin cannot exist simultaneously. Ronald Sider, similarly argues that "violating God's law in this area (homosexuality) will have negative consequences . . . Ignoring God's law structured into nature has consequences." <sup>4</sup> It is less clear whether Sider completely rejects the suggestion that AIDS is a manifestation of divine judgment but such is implied when he asks the rhetorical question, "If AIDS is divine judgment, why don't gay women get it?"<sup>5</sup> Sider does explicitly reject AIDS as a "special" punishment for the sin of homosexual practice.<sup>6</sup> But the real issue is not whether AIDS is a "special" judgment of God but whether it is a manifestation of divine judgment at all. Ben Patterson prefers to regard the judgment "theory" with "a benign agnosticism." He acknowledges that "God might be judging sexual sin with AIDS" but suggests that "the judgment theory raises more

questions than it answers", e.g., the affliction of only male homosexuals and the infection of some innocent wives, infants and hemophiliacs. Thus Patterson, like Sider, is concerned with the fact that the theoretical AIDS judgment doesn't affect all of those who presumably deserve it. He is further disturbed by the fact that it even affects innocent people. Harold O.J. Brown does go so far as to say that "God can be said to be judging society" but then goes on to say that "we must be careful not to say God is punishing individuals for their individual conduct."<sup>8</sup> In this Brown discounts the possibility of divine judgment on the individual in the AIDS epidemic. Fletcher further suggests that a calamity must be "ubiquitous" and of a "staggering proportion" to be considered divine judgement.<sup>9</sup> Finally, Billy Graham says, "It [AIDS] may be a judgment of God upon us. I can't say for certain, because only God would know that. But something is happening to us, paying us back for our promiscuity and our free way of life, in which God has certain rules and regulations outlined in the Scriptures."<sup>10</sup> Thus Graham is hesitant ("It may be" and "I can't say for certain") to acknowledge that God's disposition of judgment can be reliably discerned in AIDS.

The unbiased reader of these citations might be tempted to say, "The lady cloth protest too much, methinks."<sup>11</sup> But each of these authors' objections and concerns along with others not yet raised will be addressed in what follows. The approach will be to:

- (1) theologically address the issue of discerning God's judgment in historical events,
- (2) present a biblical theological understanding of divine judgment paying particular attention to aspects of God's judgment which bear on the theoretical AIDS judgment, e.g., consequences of sin and judgment, corporate and individual judgment and the unpunished guilty and the innocent sufferer,
- (3) examine the biblical material to determine God's disposition toward homosexuality,
- (4) point to some of the relevant medical data regarding AIDS especially in relation to homosexuality,

(5) offer my conclusions regarding AIDS as divine judgment,

(6) make some suggestions as to the role of the church in the AIDS epidemic.

### **Interpreting History Meaningfully**

Though God's providential rule in history is affirmed by virtually all evangelicals, there is debate regarding the validity of seeking to discover God's disposition in particular historical events. The major differences do not arise in interpreting a specific historical event when God's attitude of grace or judgment toward that event has been revealed in Scripture. Rather, there is disagreement over the legitimacy of attempting to interpret historical events when God's disposition toward the event in question has not been revealed in Scripture.

Berkouwer, for example, says, "no event speaks so clearly that we may conclude from it a certain disposition of God - as long as God Himself does not reveal that His disposition comes to expression in the given event."<sup>12</sup> Berkouwer's, however, has little support for his conclusions. Indeed, his analysis of the problem of discerning God's disposition in particular historical events is mainly a polemic against past abuses. Berkouwer rightly says that the Scriptures "earnestly warn against premature and rash conclusions from facts" and appropriately points to Luke 13:1-5 and John 9:1-3." He also points, as a recent abuse, to the "German Christians" who interpreted Hitler's rise to power as evidence of God's special favor.<sup>14</sup> The major problem with Berhouwer's assessment is that if God's disposition is not discernable in specific historical events, then history, even each individual's personal history, has very little discernable meaning. Yes, we can still say that all events fall within the circle of God's mysterious rule. But we can say little more than this.<sup>15</sup>

Others believe that history can be meaningfully interpreted. Thus Kuyper says, that God's "holy footsteps can be heard upon the entire path of history."<sup>11-16</sup> Van Til agrees when he says that "The general development of history ... comes about through

God's presentation of Himself as He is, in varying degrees of self-revelation, to man, plus man's reaction to this presentation . . . His attributes face man as man faces God . . . The greatest obscuration the sin of man can cast over the fact of nature and his own consciousness, cannot destroy the validity of revelation."<sup>17</sup> Van Til goes on to say that "facts may not be separated from faith, neither may faith be separated from facts. Every created fact must therefore be held to express, to some degree, the attitude of God to man."<sup>18</sup>

If God's attitude toward man as revealed in history is generally discernable, it is certainly true of the revelation of His disposition in judgment. For Dabney points out that to deny that "calamities are penal or have any moral significance of God's displeasure with men's sin . . . utterly obliterates all evidence from natural theology whether God . . . possesses any moral attribute or exercises any moral regimen over his rational creatures."<sup>19</sup> And Harold O.J. Brown, rephrasing Fredreich Schelling's famous quote, says, "The history of the world is God's judgment. That is, we see in what goes on in the world day by day God's verdict at least to some extent on the way the world has been conducting its lives [sic]."<sup>20</sup>

Dooyeweerd approaches the problem of interpreting history by suggesting that history, like nature, does not operate without basic laws and that God's leading in history is revealed in connection with the norms which He has set down.<sup>21</sup> Of course God reveals the norms by which He judges sin in Scripture. But while the law of God is most clearly, fully and authoritatively revealed in Scripture, Stob says that Christians who proclaim that law "are not to think of themselves as proclaiming something 'special' or 'private', but rather as proclaiming something that is suited to all men and women everywhere because it holds for the race." Further Stob says, "That there is natural and universal awareness of this law is beyond doubt" and substantiates this assertion by pointing to Romans 1 and 2 where Paul declares that "the conscience of those outside Christ 'bears witness' to a moral norm recognizably applicable to themselves (2:15), and that such individuals are without excuse (1:19), being, when unrepentant, justly condemned (1:18, 2:15,16) for

acting contrary to the light available to them."<sup>22</sup> However since humankind apart from Christ has suppressed the truth (1:18) and become vain in their reasoning and undiscerning in their hearts (1:21), they can hardly be counted upon to give a reliable testimony to the law whose requirements are written on their very own hearts (2:15). Thus we must first turn to God's law as revealed in Scripture to determine God's norms for our behavior. It is there that we most clearly see God's standard of righteousness. And it is that standard which the Christian must proclaim as God's standard for the world.

### A Biblical Definition of God's Judgement

Justice (*mishpat*) in the OT is not limited to modern conceptions of juridical function which is chiefly concerned with equity in decision-making and sentencing. Rather it includes the idea of authority and rule and finds expression in specific statutes of the law. Thus the OT concept of justice includes functions which Western society would consider executive or legislative functions. In the OT justice is first and foremost an attribute of God who is the Sovereign judge (*shopet*) who rules and judges (*shapat*) the world. And His ordinances (*mishpat*) represent God's just claims on all those who live under His authority, i.e., all of humanity. Because God is the Ruler as well as judge, He not only decides and sentences but actively vindicates by saving the righteous and actively condemns by punishing the wicked. Thus God's judgment (*shepet/shepot*) can have positive or negative consequences." Baird notes that all the cases (200) where justice (*mishpat*) and judging (*shapat*) is used of God's judgment in the OT, 112 times judgment expresses "God's equity", 33 times "God's love, His salvation" and 55 times "God's wrath, His condemnation and punishment."<sup>24</sup>

The NT equivalent of (*shapat*) and (*mishpat*) are (*krinein*), (*krisis*) and (*krima*). These terms embrace the full OT meaning of (*shapat*) and (*mishpat*), but now with more emphasis on God's wrath as expressed in condemnation and punishment. Again Baird notes that of the 112 of (*krinein*), (*krisis*) and (*krima*) in the NT where God is the subject, 51 times judgment expresses God's equity, 8 times judgment expresses

God's love, His salvation and 63 times God's wrath, His condemnation and punishment."

### God's Judgement in the Old Testament

**Anyone** who has even briefly glanced at the OT knows that God's judgment is a common theme. Travis says, "It is axiomatic for Old Testament writers, despite their varied theologies, that Yahweh brings judgment on both individuals and nations."<sup>26</sup>

However, there has recently been debate on the nature and purpose of God's judgment. Until 1955 when Klaus Koch published his article, "Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?"<sup>27</sup> divine retribution at least as a prominent aspect of God's judgment was not seriously questioned. Divine retribution is here understood as a punishment directly or indirectly inflicted by God on a sinner [offender] because it is deserved. A penalty is paid because it is owed to the One who has been sinned against [offended], and there is an equivalence between the sin [offence] and the punishment.<sup>28</sup>

Koch, in an attempt to repudiate the accepted dogma that there is a doctrine of retribution in the OT, pointed to the built-in connection between an action and its consequences.<sup>29</sup> He said "an action is the seed" and "a corresponding harvest comes out of what is planted."<sup>30</sup> For example in Proverbs 11:18b wisdom teaches that "he who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward." And in Hosea 10:12 the prophet exhorts Israel to "sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love", while in vs. 13 he denounces her saying "you have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil." Thus Koch said, "a wicked action - just like the laws of nature which operate so that an action inevitably is followed by a reaction - inevitably results in disastrous consequences."<sup>31</sup> This is most clearly seen, says Koch, in Proverbs 29:6a where we read that "an evil man is ensnared by his own sin." Even in passages where God is involved in effecting the judgment, Koch says He simply sets in motion, hurries along and brings to completion the "Sin-Disaster-Connection."<sup>32</sup> This would be God's role, for example, in Psalm 9:16 where

the psalmist sings, "The Lord is known by his justice; the wicked are ensnared by the works of their hands" or in Hosea 12:2 where we read that "the Lord . . . will punish Jacob according to his ways and repay him according to his deeds."

Many, however, reject Koch's view that the doctrine of divine retribution is not found in the OT. For example Eichrodt says that "the evidence adduced . . . is not sufficient to cast doubt on the existence of belief in a retributive intervention of God"<sup>33</sup> and Travis says that "there is a large body of evidence pointing to a belief in the retributive judgment of God."<sup>34</sup> There is, of course, another way to interpret the evidence raised by Koch which better interprets Koch's own evidence (e.g., Psalm 9:16 and Hosea 12:2 noted above) and fits in much better with the testimony of the rest of the OT. Namely, God devises a punishment that is appropriate to the sin<sup>35</sup> and often the sinner is punished by God in the very thing by which he sinned.<sup>36</sup> In this way the sinner clearly understands why he is being punished and realizes that even in judgment God is equitable. Thus Isaiah declares that "according to what they have done, so he will repay wrath to his enemies and retribution to his foes; he will repay the islands their due (Isaiah 59:18). Of course, divine judgment may be indirectly dispensed through the moral order of the universe which God has ordained, for there are spiritual laws at work in this physical world.<sup>37</sup> But indirect divine judgment is no less God's judgment than direct. To reject this assertion is as Ed Payne says to believe in the "mechanistic, Deistic concept that God wound up the universe (like a clock) and let it go, only to function according to His predetermined natural and spiritual laws."<sup>38</sup> Further, it is no less retributive when it is indirect though some have argued so. Travis, for example, argues that punishment must be inflicted from the outside in order to be truly retributive.<sup>39</sup> However, elsewhere he acknowledges that "in a divinely controlled universe, if men's sin leads to evil consequences, that can only be because God has willed it so."<sup>40</sup>

Examples of divine retribution are numerous but examples of two types are of particular interest for our discussion. The first is where the instrument of sin

becomes the instrument of punishment. Thus David is told by the prophet Nathan that the sword by which he sinned against Uriah will never depart from his house (2 Samuel 12:9,10). The second is when the judgment consists in giving people over to a fuller expression of the sin for which they are being judged. Thus we read of the hardening (Exodus 4:21, 7:3, 10:20,27 and 14:4) of Pharaoh's already hard heart (Exodus 1:8,22 and 3:7-10). In Isaiah the previously wayward and hard-hearted Israel (Isaiah 42:18-25, esp. vss. 24,25, 48:1-13, esp. vss 4,8 and 59:12,13) now penitently pleads for the tenderness and compassion of their Redeemer asking, "Why, O Lord, do you make us wander from your ways and harden our hearts so we do not revere you?" (63:17). Both of these examples bring to the fore God's equity in dispensing judgment since there is a close correspondence between the sin which is being judged and the nature of judgment. Divine retribution, then, is not capricious,<sup>41</sup> rather God judges both men and nations according to recognizable principles of justice.<sup>42</sup> This retributive justice, however, is only partially manifest within history even when a judgment results in physical death. Divine retribution will be fully expressed at the last judgment (e.g., Isaiah 66:24 and Daniel 12:2).<sup>43</sup>

Though one of God's purposes in judgment is retribution, divine judgment may have simultaneously revelatory, purificatory and/or disciplinary = corrective functions.<sup>44</sup> Revelatory judgment is that judgment by which the existence and character of God is revealed. Thus through revelatory judgment the Egyptians in Exodus 7:17 and the Israelites in Ezekiel 6:13 "will know that I am the Lord." In purificatory judgment the wicked are destroyed leaving a remnant who themselves are cleansed in the judgment. For example, Israel is purified in the refining fire of judgment in Zechariah 13:8b,9a where we read, "two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them" (see also Isaiah 4:3,4).

However, disciplinary judgment, along with retributive judgment, appears to be the most common purpose of judgment in the OT. In Jeremiah 2:30 the Lord actually

declared that His punishment was in vain when it did not have the corrective effect that He intended it to have on His people, namely repentance (see 5:3 and 31:18,9). Indeed repentance, individual or national (covenant or not), in response to warnings of judgment will often avert God's judgment (Ezekiel 33:14,15 and Jeremiah 18:7,8). For the Sovereign Lord declares, "As surely as I live, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live" (Ezekiel 33:11). Thus Eichrodt says that punishment, as a general rule, "occurs in the service of . . . the saving will of God" for "it has an inherent tendency to convict the sinner inwardly of his sins."<sup>45</sup> This does not mean that corrective judgments are without retributive aspects. Indeed, every judgment includes a well-deserved penalty. But most of God's judgments have a corrective, and/or revelatory and purificatory, function as well.

Since the primal sin of Adam divine judgment has often been expressed through the continuum of suffering (Genesis 3:16), disease (3:15), and death (3:19). Individuals have suffered from disease as the result of divine judgment, like Miriam against whom "the anger of the Lord burned" (Numbers 12:9,10). Here, Miriam's judgment of "leprosy" where she became white "like snow" was the suitable judgment for her racist attitude towards Moses' darker skinned Cushite wife (Numbers 12:1). Not just individuals, but large numbers of people, e.g., inhabitants of cities, even whole nations, have been punished with disease often in the form of plague. Thus we read of the plague of boils on the Egyptians for their enslavement and oppression of the Israelites in Exodus 9 and the plague of "wasting disease" when in the "wasteland" Israel put God to the test for "the anger of the Lord burned against the people" (Psalm 106:14,15; Numbers 11:33). There was also the plague, probably bubonic plague, which the "hand of the Lord" brought against the non-covenanted Philistines for their irreverent capture of the Ark of the covenant as well as against some of the inhabitants of the Israelite village of Beth Shemesh for their irreverent treatment of it (1 Samuel 5-7).

Frequently in the OT divine judgment is attributed to an outpouring of God's wrath. This wrath is not an

impersonal force, rather it is the expression of a Personal Being passionately reacting with displeasure toward another personal being(s).<sup>46</sup> But this wrath is not arbitrary as some have suggested, rather it is the response of a holy God to sin - the absolutely good God to evil. Thus John Murray says, "God cannot be indifferent to or complacent toward that which is the contradiction of himself. His very perfection requires the recoil of righteous indignation. And that is God's wrath."<sup>47</sup> And in the revelation of His wrath all can see how truly impotent sin is in its rebellion against God.<sup>48</sup>

God's wrath is often experienced as abandonment. However, God does not really abandon us, rather He turns His gracious face away from us so that we experience only His wrathful presence. The Lord through the prophet Shemaiah says to the king and the leaders of Judah assembled in Jerusalem in 2 Chronicles 12:5, "You have abandoned me; therefore, I now abandon you to Shishak" and in vs. 7 says, "My wrath will be poured out on Jerusalem through Shishak." Jeremiah prophetically declares of exilic Israel in Jeremiah 7:29, "the Lord has rejected and abandoned this generation that is under his wrath" (see also Numbers 32:13 - 15, Hosea 1:9, cf. 1:4,6, and Zechariah 7:12 - 14). All have by common grace experienced God's gracious presence through His restraining influence on sin and through the blessings He bestows on both the righteous and the wicked. Thus when God's wrath is expressed by removing His restraining influence on sin and by judging directly or indirectly (through the God-ordained consequences of sin), His wrath is experienced as abandonment from the God whose gracious presence we have come to rely upon.

Thankfully God is slow to anger and will turn aside from His wrath when there is repentance. For in that most wonderful revelation to Moses of His name/glory = His essential being/nature/character/activity (Exodus 33:18,19 and 34:5), God revealed himself in a verbal theophany<sup>49</sup> as "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and merciful God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their

children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation" (Exodus 34:6,7). Were there no sin we never would have experienced God's wrath, but only his love and faithfulness. Sadly, this has not been the case since the Fall. However, in the wake of God's wrath, even while we still feel the heat of His anger, we can experience the depths of His love and faithfulness. For He will not always hide His face from us if we turn from our sin. Rather, He will forgive us and we will experience the wonders of His mercy and compassion. For God the Redeemer says to His people, "For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you" (Isaiah 54:7,8). We may pay dearly, even with the penalty of death, because of our sin, for His is a severe mercy. But there is no greater joy (Isaiah 54:1) than to experience the eternal presence of God revealed in His everlasting kindness.

Although God's wrath is primarily poured out on disobedient people, one of the most troubling aspects of divine wrath is the way in which the innocent people are affected. This is not to say that any are truly guiltless, for all human beings have been polluted by original if not actual sin, but some are innocent of the sin which caused the divine wrath to be poured out. Thus the prophet speaks in Jeremiah 49:12 of "those who do not deserve to drink the cup" ("the cup of God's wrath", see 25:15) and yet "must drink it." Invariably, however, the innocent are corporately related to the objects of God's wrath, e.g., by familial or national ties, and thus bear a corporate guilt. One of the benefits of a sense of corporate liability is the sense of mutual responsibility and accountability it fosters. The potential offender may be deterred by it and those corporately related to each other have a greater incentive to watch over each other more carefully. Eichrodt goes on to point out that "modern individualism, which is for the most part the sole assumption behind condemnations of collective liability . . . means a loosening of moral obligations that bind men to each other and a dissolution of powerful moral motives."<sup>50</sup> This, of course, doesn't solve all the problems of theodicy raised by corporate liability. However, it cannot be denied that in Scripture corporate judgment is a frequent result of the

outpouring of divine wrath.

### God's Judgment in the New Testament

The wrath of God is "the most inclusive and most radical idea" in NT understanding of God's judgments' It is most fully and clearly developed in Paul's writing, thus we will concentrate on his understanding of divine wrath.

Some have suggested that certain features of God's wrath in the OT are no longer present in Pauline theology. Thus it is said that in Paul's writings God's wrath (orge) is not personal but rather is the impersonal "inevitable process of cause and effect in a moral universe."<sup>52</sup> However, God's wrath is for Paul personal. It is, first of all, the personal rejection of God's revealed truth (Romans 1:18-20,25) and personal failure to glorify Him as Creator and instead to worship and serve the creature (Romans 1:21-23,25) which incites His wrath (Romans 1:18). Secondly, God's wrath is an expression of His righteousness as in Romans 2:5 where "God's wrath" is the revelation of His "righteous judgment." It is true that, unlike righteousness, wrath is not an essential attribute of God. For God's wrath is the response of God to sin and evil, and the former would never have been expressed in the absence of the latter. But though wrath is not essential to the nature of God, it is no less personal than His righteousness (Romans 1:17,18) or mercy (Romans 9:22,23).

Some concede that God's wrath is personal but suggest that it is devoid of divine emotion. However, in Romans 2:8 divine wrath is coordinated with divine anger which not only refers to an intense emotion but to the venting of that emotion as well. Thus Stahlin says that divine wrath includes "God's displeasure at evil" and "His passionate resistance to every will which is set against Him."<sup>53</sup> But though God's wrath is personal and passionate it is not capricious, for, as noted above, it is an expression of His righteousness. Further it is selectively expressed against those who despise Him and disdain His will. For it is only expressed against those who show contempt for the revelation of His being (Romans 1:18ff) and those who have transgressed the laws of General (Romans 1:18ff and

2:12, 14-16) and Special revelation (Romans 2:1-13, 16 and 3:15).<sup>54</sup> Thus those who are "dead in [their] transgressions and sins" = those "gratifying the cravings of [the] sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts" are "by nature objects of wrath" (Ephesians 2:1-3) for "God's wrath comes on the disobedient" (Ephesians 5:6, see also Colossians 3:6). It is the enemies of God who experience His wrath (Romans 5:9,10) for they even "show contempt for the riches of His kindness (Romans 2:4,5).

In Pauline theology wrath may refer to God's present or future judgment. For example, in Romans 1:18ff where "the wrath of God is being revealed" and in 1 Thessalonians 2:16 where "the wrath of God has come", wrath is realized. And it is directed against "all the godlessness and wickedness of men" (Romans 1:18) and against those who "heap up their sins" (1 Thessalonians 2:16). In Romans 1 divine wrath is experienced as abandonment as evidenced by the threefold "God gave them up" (Romans 1:24, 26, 28). And this manifestation of divine wrath is active, if indirect, judgment. For the active force of the verb in the threefold phrase "God gave them over" has a judicial sense. Further, this divine wrath is an expression of divine retribution (as it also is in Romans 13:4 where the state is "an agent of divine wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer"). For in Romans 1:27 we read of the "penalty" which was "received as due" punishment. Here both the noun and verb have retributive connotations. And in 1:32 we read of those who "deserve death" which expresses the retributive idea of deserving.<sup>56</sup> Thus in Romans 1:24-32 God's wrath is expressed in active judicial abandonment of men and women to the cultivation their own sinful desires, shameful lusts and depraved thoughts. The result is that they experience even greater retributive judgement whose ultimate penalty is death.<sup>57</sup> On the one hand, death is the result (Romans 6:21) and fully developed fruit of sin in that "a man reaps what he sows" and "the one who sows to please his sinful nature will reap destruction."<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, death is the retributive judgement of God "for the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23); and "condemnation" leading to "death" was the result of "trespass" (Romans 5:17,18). Here, as in the OT, God punishes by means of the

consequences which He builds into sin.

But God's wrath is more fully revealed in the future. For example, in Romans 2:5 where we read of "the day of God's wrath" and probably in Ephesians 5:6 and Colossians 3:6 where we read of "the coming wrath of God," wrath is eschatological. Those stubborn and unrepentant people who deserve judgement but as yet go unpunished are "storing up wrath" against themselves for "the day of God's wrath" (Romans 2:5). However, because the full expression of God's wrath lies in the future there exists the possibility of averting it now. Indeed the delay of the full manifestation of God's wrath is an expression of His kindness whose purpose is to lead the repentance (Romans 2:4). Stahlin says, "This explains why there is often no execution of wrath even when one might expect it."<sup>59</sup> On the other hand, temporal judgements typologically point to the consummate expression of God's wrath when all men and women will stand before the judge without excuse (Romans 1:18 - 2:16, exp. 1:20, 2:1-3,6).

Believers are saved from this eschatological wrath. For though "by nature" they were once "objects of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3), Jesus "rescues [them] from the coming wrath" (1 Thessalonians 1:10; see also 5:9). For "God, who is rich in mercy" has "great love for [them]" (Ephesians 2:4).

Thus God's wrath in Pauline theology has many features in common with OT theology. It is personal and passionate but not capricious, for God's wrath is His response to sin. It has a present and future expression. It can be expressed as divine retribution even in this life, a retribution whose ultimate penalty is death. But in the delay of the full revelation of God's wrath, God's kindness is manifest. And by God's mercy, which is an expression of God's love to sinners, God's wrath can be averted when there is repentance.

Of course the new feature present in Pauline theology is the fullness in which God demonstrates His loving mercy to sinners while at the same time revealing the depths of His wrath toward sin, for His own Son died to save sinners. "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us," and "through him" "we will be saved from God's

wrath" (Romans 5:8,9). "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" who "died for us" (1 Thessalonians 5:9). Though in these verses Paul does not explicitly say it, he clearly implies that Christ bore God's wrath for repentant sinners. For Paul knew that Jesus had to drink from the cup of God's wrath (Mark 14:36) and that Jesus cried out in forsaken terror on the cross when his Father abandoned Him to His wrath (Mark 15:34). Thus Stahlin says, "In Christ alone has eternal wrath been breeched . . . To reject Him is to abide under wrath."<sup>60</sup> Thankfully those who have "gained access by faith into [God's] grace" (Romans 5:2) "have now been justified by his blood" (Romans 5:9) for God "made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in transgressions" (Ephesians 2:5). We are no longer what we once were for "[we] were washed, [we] were sanctified, [we] were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 6:11). Thus Paul exhorts us not to live "the life [we] once lived" but to "put on the new self which is being renewed in the image of its Creator" (Colossians 3:5-10; see also Ephesians 5).

### Homosexuality and God's Judgment

In the second creation account in Genesis 2 several universal truths emerge. First, the need for human companionship emerged (vs. 18). Secondly, the divine provision to meet this need, at the most intimate level, in the form of a sexually distinct fellow human being is seen (vss. 19-23). And finally is shown the divine plan that the most intimate union between fellow human beings, i.e., sexual intercourse, be experienced in the context of monogamous heterosexual marriage (vss. 24,25).<sup>61</sup> This is not, of course, to deny that God calls some to celibacy, but in that situation God meets this basic human need through non-sexual human companionship and intimacy.

Those who fail to heed God's word in regards to sexuality are expressing a profound lack of trust in God to meet one of their most basic needs in His way for their good. This lack of faith is a rejection of God's sovereignty (i.e., that He is able to meet our needs) and goodness (i.e., that He is willing to meet our needs in a way that is for our good). In rejecting God's way, men

and women turn to themselves instead of God to meet their needs. This is self-idolatry, for it makes the autonomous self sovereign and the source of goodness. "I will do it my way," says the self-idolator, "because I know what's good for me."

Scripture not only affirms heterosexual intercourse in the context of monogamous marriage, it also implicitly and explicitly prohibits homosexual behavior. John Stott divides all of the biblical references to homosexuality into four groups.<sup>62</sup> Interestingly, all either directly or indirectly refer to God's judgment.

The first group is the stories of Sodom and Gibeah. In the story of Sodom (Gen. 19:1-29) Scripture records the attempted homosexual rape of Lot's two angelic visitors by the men of the city. Therefore the angels warned Lot that "we are going to destroy this place" for "the outcry to the Lord against them is so great that he has sent us to destroy it" (19:13). In 19:14 the angels again warn Lot that "the Lord is about to destroy the city" and in 19:15 speak of the punishment of the city. Later we read that God did in fact judge Sodom for "the Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah" (19:24) and "God destroyed the cities of the plain" (19:29). In one New Testament commentary on this event, Peter says that God made Sodom and Gomorrah "an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly" (2 Peter 2:6; see also Jude 7) and then goes on to say that "the Lord knows how . . . to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment while continuing their punishment . . . especially . . . those who follow the corrupt desire of their sinful natures" (vss. 9 and 10). Thus according to Peter the judgment of the unrighteous, with an allusion to the homosexual behavior of the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah, is currently taking place. But as Edwin Blum notes, "Immediate judgment of sinners is only the beginning. Temporal judgments . . . do not exhaust the divine wrath."<sup>64</sup> In the story of Gibeah after the attempted homosexual rape of the Levite and the actual brutal rape/ homicide of his concubine by the Gibeonites (Judges 19), we read of the Lord's approval of the war of the eleven tribes of Israel against the Gibeonites and the Benjamites who supported them in 20:18, 23,25. In 20:25 the Lord declares to the eleven tribes that "I will give them into your hands" and in 20:35 we read that "the Lord

defeated Benjamin before Israel."

The second group of passages are the texts in Leviticus. In 18:22 the "detestable" practice of homosexuality is forbidden and in 18:24-28 the Israelites are admonished regarding this and other ungodly practices: "Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you must keep my decrees and my laws. The native-born and the aliens living among you must not do any of these detestable things, for all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled. And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations before you" (see also 20:22-24). Of particular note in this passage is that the Lord not only warned native-born Israelites, i.e., members of the covenant community, of divine judgment for sins like homosexuality but also the aliens living among them. He also foretold through Moses of impending judgment on the pagan nations of Canaan for such sins. In 20:13 homosexuality is declared to be a capital offence in the Israelite theocracy. In the covenant nation of Israel where God is King with a geo-political realm as well as spiritual reign severe sentences reflect God's extreme displeasure with ungodly behavior. Here the covenant community itself acts as God's instrument of judgment.

The third passage is Romans 1 where Paul uses homosexuality (1:24-32) as an example of the present revelation of God's wrath (orge). Homosexual behavior itself is a manifestation of divine judgment, for God's wrath (1:18) is manifest in His judicial abandonment to the cultivation of their "shameful lusts" (1:26), those who despise Him and disdain His will - those who fail to glorify the Creator, worshipping and serving the creature instead (1:21-23,25), and reject His revealed truth (1:18-20,25). In this judicial abandonment, practicing homosexuals "receive in themselves the due penalty for their perversion" (1:27). If they continue in sin they will experience even greater retributive judgment whose ultimate penalty is death (1:28-32).

The final group of passages are two other Pauline texts. In 1 Corinthians 6 Paul warns us that unrepentant (vs.

11) homosexual offenders (as well as fornicators, adulterers, prostitutes and drunkards among others) will not inherit the kingdom of God (vss. 9,10), and this is clearly the most terrifying of all divine judgments. For not inheriting the kingdom of God is equivalent to the coming of God's wrath (orge) at the last judgment (Ephesians 5:5,6; see also Colossians 3:5,6). Of course any delay of that judgment is the result of God's kindness during which time people can avert experiencing the full expression of God's wrath by repentance. In I Timothy 1:8-12, while there is no clear reference to divine judgment, Paul does tell us that the law is made for, among others, homosexual offenders (pederasts). In this passage Paul refers to the Mosaic law and the value of that law in its external function of restraining evil-doers.<sup>65</sup> Since it is the function of civil government to punish the "lawless " and "disobedient" by means of human law patterned after Mosaic law (taking into account, of course, the uniqueness of the Israelite theocracy), and since divine judgment is to some degree expressed through civil governments (see Romans 13:1-5, especially vss. 2 and 4), there is in this passage an indirect reference to God's judgment.

## PART II OF "AIDS AS DIVINE JUDGEMENT"

- including -

- Medical Aspects of AIDS
- AIDS as God's Judgment
- A Word of Caution
- The Role of the Church

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