

**Justice Will Prevail
2 Thessalonians 1:5-10
Part Three**

In the June 16, 1997 issue of U.S. News and World Report, the cover of the magazine had written across it these words, *"The Place For Vengeance."* It showed a picture of the Death Chamber in Huntsville, Texas where eleven inmates were executed in the month of June. Under the main title were these words, "Families of murder victims often hope that executing the killer will bring them peace." Is that the right reason for the death penalty?

If families of murder victims believe that the execution will bring them peace, they will be sadly disappointed. The only thing that will bring peace to the families is not the execution of the murderer but rather forgiveness. But a family exercising personal forgiveness should not suspend the working out of justice. This is the reason for the death penalty. This is the biblical standard of justice. In **Genesis 9:6** it says, **"Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed."**

A woman named Vicki Haack seemed to capture the correct balance between what the Scriptures teach in respect to an individual's personal responsibilities versus the state's responsibility. When the murderer of her sister was executed two months ago in Huntsville, Texas she said after the execution, "We have no hate or bitterness in our hearts, but that doesn't mean he should not pay for his crime."

For Vicki Haack, she saw justice done according to the laws of the state of Texas. Certainly this is not always the case. But there is a day coming, not in the courts of man but in the courts of heaven, perfect justice will be executed. We read about such a time in **2 Thessalonians 1:5-10**, **"This is the plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. (6) For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, (7) and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, (8) dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (9) And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, (10) when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed - for our testimony to you was believed."** This future day when justice will prevail is described by theologians as the Second Advent. It is not the rapture when the church is caught up to be with Christ which could happen at any moment. Rather it is when Jesus will be "revealed" or "uncovered" for the whole world to see when He comes to set up His earthly kingdom. This uncovering is described in **V. 7** where we see Jesus coming **"from heaven," "with his mighty angels," "in flaming fire."** He will, in other words, be uncovered or revealed as God.

We have now moved from considering the description of this uncovering, which unveils Jesus as God, to considering the results of this uncovering. I shared with you last week that it has two results. The first of those results that we considered was retribution. We saw this in **VV. 6,8,9**.

After establishing this as one of the primary results of Christ's uncovering, we have begun to answer three basic questions. The first question we answered was, WHY? And the answer to that question was quite simple and it is given to us in **V. 6. "For it is only just."**

This morning I want to go on and answer a second basic question concerning this retribution. And that question is, "Who will suffer retribution at the unveiling or uncovering of Jesus at His Second Advent?"

WHO?

HE WILL AFFLICT THOSE WHO AFFLICT US? - Let us look again at **V. 6, "For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you."** Who does this verse tell us God will afflict? He will afflict those who afflict Christians.

Anyone who inflicts any unnecessary pain on a believer in any shape or form will be afflicted by the Lord. Anyone who attacks Christians will be vulnerable. What did Jesus say in **Matthew 18? "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depths of the sea."** May God have mercy on those who mess with Christians!

Those who afflict us are facing certain judgment. Why? Because it is just. What does **V. 6** say? **"For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you."** It is a serious thing when people in this world afflict Christians. They don't understand what they are doing. The world did not understand what they were doing when they crucified Jesus, and the world still does not understand what they are doing when they persecute Christians. The world did not know Him and the world does not know us.

In light of this, how should we pray for those who afflict or persecute us? We need to remember the words of Jesus, **"Father forgive them for they know not what they do."** One might think He would have prayed, "Father consume them." But he didn't. By this expression Jesus made it very clear to those who crucified Him as well as to us that even the sin of crucifying the Lord of Lords, King of kings, and almighty God, could be forgiven if they would only repent and by faith accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. But what would happen if those who crucified Jesus didn't repent? What would happen if they failed to believe in the person and work of Jesus as revealed in the Scriptures? The Lord would, in the day of judgment, afflict them. This is only just, because their unforgiven sins demand it. And the same thing would be true of those who afflict the church.

This is not the only group that will be afflicted by the Lord when He is unveiled. Actually, this a subset of a larger group.

HE WILL AFFLICT THOSE WHO DO NOT KNOW GOD - Let us look at **V. 8, "dealing out retribution to those who do not know God."** In this world there are two groups of people: those who know God and those who do not know God. When the Scriptures speak about knowing God, it does not mean that we know about Him. It means that we know Him in the

sense of having a personal relationship with Him. In **John 17:3** it says, **“This is eternal life that we know God.”** If we do not know Him, rather than experiencing life and life eternal, we will experience what? Retribution. What does **V. 8** say? **“Dealing out retribution to those who do not know God.”** Yes, God will afflict those who afflict us, but we need to understand that God will, in addition to this, afflict anyone who does not know Him. And he will deal out retribution upon them whether they persecute us or not.

Someone might say this is unfair. How can people be judged on this basis? They will say that there are people in this world who never had the opportunity to make an informed choice concerning the Lord. But this just isn't so. Everyone in this world has had the opportunity to make an informed choice.

What does **Romans 1:18** tell us? **“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”** Those who do not know God have suppressed His truth. How could they suppress the truth if they did not know the truth? But let us go on in this passage, **“(19) because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.”** Paul is saying in this passage that all people have a certain knowledge about God within them because the Lord Himself has planted it in them. Your next door neighbor has that knowledge, your boss at work has that knowledge. The person on the other side of our planet has this knowledge. No one is without this knowledge.

God has been speaking to men since the beginning. He has been speaking to them through creation. **Romans 1:20** says, **“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made.”** What is He saying? He is saying, “I am here and I don't want to be ignored.” But mankind as a whole has ignored Him.

They have ignored Him by ignoring His laws. For the Jews, they ignored the laws written on tablets of stone. For the Gentiles, they ignored the laws written on the tablet of their own heart. In **Romans 2:11-15** it says, **“For there is no partiality with God. (12) For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law; and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law; (13) for not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified. (14) For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law are a law to themselves, (15) in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them.”** God has been speaking through creation and He is saying there is a God and He wants to be honored. But men have not honored Him by virtue of the fact they ignore His laws. That is a very serious thing. And because of this any individual, whether they are your next door neighbor or an individual on the other side of this world, can be righteously judged.

Suppressing the truth is not an easy thing to do. In an attempt to make this suppression of the truth easier, they will reinvent God and go through the motions of knowing Him. Isn't this what we read in **Romans 1**? What does it say? **“(21) For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their**

foolish heart was darkened. (22) Professing to be wise, they became fools, (23) and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.” Nothing has really changed since Paul wrote these words. People today are still pretending to know God by using the trappings of religion. People today, rather than making an idol out of stone or wood, might build a building that is beautiful and ornate with stained glass windows and beautiful stone spires reaching up high into the sky. They may put on beautiful robes and move through elaborate ceremonies, but none of it means anything unless they truly know God. None of these things in and of themselves communicate that they truly know Him.

Religious people need to be very careful that they are not self deceived. This includes us. In **Matthew 7:21** it says, **“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. (22) Many will say to me on that, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ (23) And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’”**

Hell will be populated with people who were religious. This is the damning illusion of religion. And that is, I am sure, why Satan spends most of his time in religious circles. Why? Because he can give people who have suppressed the truth in unrighteousness a false sense of security.

Hopefully for most of us this morning, or perhaps all of us, we have been, in a figurative sense, listening to the voice of God in our lives saying, “I am here and I don't want to be ignored.” And hopefully because we have listened to His voice or have recently begun listening to His voice, He led us down the path of salvation. What is that path? The path is Jesus. This leads us to the third group that Paul says will suffer retribution.

HE WILL AFFLICT THOSE WHO DO NOT OBEY THE GOSPEL OF OUR LORD JESUS. Look at **V. 8** again, **“Dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.”**

The world truly deserves judgment. The Scriptures tell us that **“All have sinned and have fallen short of God’s glory.”** The Scriptures tell us, **“There is none righteous no not one.”** The Scriptures tell us that **“All we like sheep have gone astray.”** All these things testify to the fact that the world does not know God, no matter how religious they might appear on the surface. But the Scriptures also tell us that **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have ever lasting life.”** I deserve God’s judgment, I deserve His retribution to be poured out on me. But God so loved me He sent His son to die on the cross of Calvary to suffer my punishment and take my judgment upon Himself. So that through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, He could offer me the gift of salvation. This is the gospel. This is the good news. There is no other gospel but this one. The only way for us to have a personal relationship with God is through Jesus: receiving Him by faith as our Savior and our Lord.

Even if we have in our past suppressed the truth about God in unrighteousness, walked our own way, committed sins of various kinds, perhaps even the sin of persecuting believers, we can be delivered from all that through obeying the gospel of Jesus. If you are here this morning and believe that you do not enjoy a relationship with God, I am exhorting you to listen to the voice of God and come to Jesus. Placing your trust in Him as your Savior and placing your trust in Him as your Lord. But if we disobey the gospel then we have no hope.

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