

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

Certainly, the wicked who persecute the godly do not always receive their just payment in this life. In fact, the apparent prosperity of the wicked and difficulty of the godly have posed a problem for many of God's people (see **Psalm 73; Jeremiah 12:1; Habakkuk 1**). Why live a godly life if your only experience is that of suffering?

As Christians, we must live for eternity and not just for the present. In fact, living "with eternity's values in view" is what makes our Christian life meaningful today. We walk by faith, and not by sight.

This brings to mind the story of two farmers, one a believer and the other an atheist. When harvest season came, the atheist taunted his believing neighbor because apparently God had not blessed him much. The atheist's family had not been sick, his fields were rich with harvest, and he was sure to make a lot of money. "I thought you said it paid to believe in God and be a Christian," said the atheist. "It does pay," replied the Christian. "But God doesn't always pay His people in September."

The Thessalonians needed to be reminded of these very things. They were being afflicted and persecuted while their tormentors prospered. But though this was true for them when Paul was writing to them, it would not always be that way. Paul reminds them of a coming day of judgment when justice would prevail.

Let us read **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." Not to the church only, but to the whole world when He comes to establish His millennial kingdom. When He comes, **V. 7** tells us that He will come "**from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire.**" The first time Jesus came, the world saw Him in His humiliation. Next time He comes, which will be after the rapture, just before He establishes His earthly kingdom, the world will see Him as the Lord of Hosts.

When He comes, there will be two significant results according to this passage. The first result that we are considering is “retribution.” Why will He do this? Why will He pour out retribution? **V. 6** tells us, “**For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you.**” He will pour out affliction or retribution because it is just. Who will he afflict? Paul begins by telling us that Christ will afflict those who afflict Christians. Isn’t this what **V. 6** told us? “**For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you.**” In addition to this group, there is a larger group that will be afflicted. He will afflict those “**who do not know God.**” Look at **V.8** “**dealing out retribution to those who do not know God.**” There are only two groups of people in this world: those who know God and those who don’t. Some of those who do not know God certainly have and will continue to persecute Christians. And others of this very large group of people who do not know God have been guilty of a further crime against the Lord. Look again at **V. 8**, “**dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.**” There are those who do not know God who demonstrate this lack of relationship by afflicting Christians. There are also those who do not know God, who demonstrate this lack of relationship by not obeying the gospel of Christ. Rather than trusting in Jesus alone for their salvation, embracing Him as their Lord and Savior after hearing the gospel, they will continue to lean on their own human reasoning or the teachings of a particular church and therefore put their trust in themselves and their own good works rather than in Christ who loved them and gave Himself for them.

This morning we are going to consider a third question related to retribution. How is this retribution meted out? It will be meted out in pain. Look again at **V. 6**, “**For after all it is only just to repay with affliction those who afflict you.**” The synonym for the word “**affliction**” (THLIBOUSIN) is “pain.” Some people have the idea that people who have violated God’s laws will, at the judgment, be annihilated, ceasing to exist, and therefore be spared from experiencing affliction or pain. This is not what the Scriptures teach.

How long will this affliction last? The pain is eternal. Let us look at **V. 9**, “**And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction.**” This “misery,” this “affliction,” this “destruction” is forever. The word translated “forever” which is also translated “eternal,” is the word “AION” and is translated either by the word “eternal” or “forever” 72 times. The pain or the affliction will last how long? Forever.

If there is any doubt of this, look at **Matthew 24-25** which is describing the second advent and the retribution that will accompany His coming. First of all, a parable in **Matthew 24:44-51**, “**(44) For this reason you be ready too; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think he will. (45) Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? (46) Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. (47) Truly I say to you, that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. (48) But if that evil slave says in his heart, ‘My master is not coming for a long time,’ (49) and shall begin to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards; (50) the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, (51) and shall cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; weeping shall be there and the gnashing of teeth.**” This parable of course is being used by Jesus to speak of the punishment that will be meted out

to those who are unprepared for His return. And what is very clear is the fact that this punishment that is meted out will involve pain just like we saw in **2 Thessalonians 1:6**. It is also clear in this passage that the pain involved will be forever.

Look at the words of Christ in **Matthew 25**. Let us look first at **V. 31-32**, **“But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. (32) And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”** Those on his right, the sheep, are those who knew Him and faithfully served Him. The ones on his left, the goats, are those who did not know Him and who did not faithfully serve Him. In **V. 41** we see him say to them, **“Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.”** Then in **V. 46** the Bible tells us, **“And these will go away into eternal punishment.”** And what will this eternal punishment be characterized by according to **Matthew 24**? **“The weeping and gnashing of teeth.”**

What was causing these individuals, who had been forced to go away into eternity, to weep and gnash their teeth? You might say that it is because of the eternal fire that they had to endure. I believe the Scriptures teach that hell will be a place of fiery torment, but this is not the only source of weeping and gnashing of teeth. It may not even be the primary source.

Let us go back to **2 Thessalonians 1:9**, **“And these (those who do not know God or who do not obey the gospel of Christ) will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.”** Paul is not so much concerned in this passage about what they will experience in respect to the fire of hell, he is more concerned about what they will not experience.

They will not experience the **“presence of the Lord.”** The phrase **“presence of the Lord”** is literally the face of Lord. Isn't this only justice? They have rejected him in their life and as a result of their rejection, He will, in this time of judgment, reject them. The significance of this rejection should not be overlooked. Who is the source of all good things? **James 1:17** tells us that God is the source of all good things. If he rejects us and condemns to an eternal separation from Himself, what has He done? The result of this banishment will be “the absence of any positive content in life a negative vacuum.” There will be nothing good. There will be nothing meaningful, nothing beautiful, nothing valuable, no joy, no peace, no love, no pleasure, nothing but the presence of physical, psychological, and spiritual pain forever. Heaven is primarily the presence of God. Hell is the loss of that presence.

Is there no hope for one who has been committed to that place? And the answer is no. Why? Because the power that has committed them to this awful place has been withdrawn is not available to them. Look at the next phrase, **“and from the glory of His power.”** They had seen the glory of His power when He came from heaven, with His mighty angels in flaming fire. They experienced that power when they were the recipients of His judgment. But as soon as they were turned away from His presence the lights went out, literally. And though they are tormented in a flame there is no light at all but only total pitched black darkness. This is how hell is described in **Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30**. And doesn't this make sense? What does **1 John 1:5** tell us? **“And**

**this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.”** Once God’s judgment is executed and those who have rejected Him are rejected, they will be removed from His presence and from the light and the glory of His presence. And the darkness they dwell in will forever testify to them of their totally helpless estate. Those committed to this place of eternal punishment will forever be held in its grip.

## CONCLUSION

What is the first major result of Christ’s return that we have considered? Retribution. Why will it come? Because it is just. Upon who will this retribution be poured out? It will be poured out on those who afflict the righteous, upon those who do not know God, upon those who do not obey the gospel of Christ. How will it be meted out? This retribution will be meted out with eternal pain. Those who rejected the Lord will be rejected by the Lord. They will be driven away from his presence and experience physical, psychological, and spiritual affliction forever.

There is coming a day of perfect justice when everything will be set right. Are you prepared for that day? You might say, “How can we prepare ourselves?” It is really very simple. Because God is not only a God of justice but also of love, He sent His only begotten son Jesus into this world to die for our sins. To do for us what we could not do for ourselves. Through his death he opened a door to heaven. He is now asking you to come through that door. Better said, he is commanding you to come through that door, which is Christ.

You come through that door by faith. What do the Scriptures teach? **“For by grace you are saved by faith and that not of yourselves it is a gift of God not of works lest any man should boast.”** We enter through the door that Christ opened by faith, embracing Him as our Savior and our Lord. We do this by transferring our trust from ourselves and our good works to Jesus Christ alone for our salvation. We do this acknowledging Him as Lord and committing ourselves to serve Him in all areas of our lives as He would minister to us grace.