

1st THESSALONIANS BIBLE STUDY

1 Thessalonians 1:10 (b)

Lesson #2

Introduction

Last week we began our study of 1st Thessalonians, and we covered the first 9 and one-half verses of chapter one. We stopped in the middle of verse 10 because we felt that the last half required an entire lesson all its own. And this is that lesson. So now we'll continue with the last half of verse 10 which we've titled:

Rescued From the Coming Wrath

8 For the Lord's message rang out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place that your faith in God has gone out, so we don't need to say anything. 9 For they themselves report about us what kind of reception we had from you: how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead — Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

1 Thess 1:8-10 (HCSB)

Verse 10b:

Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

I realize that we don't get many messages on the subject of God's wrath. And that's understandable. But when the Scriptures speak of the coming wrath it's incumbent upon us to thoroughly understand what it means. So, in order to do this, I'm going to ask three very basic questions, and then, one by one, we'll examine the answers.

First question - just exactly what wrath is Paul talking about here? Second question - why does God even choose to display any wrath? After all isn't he a God of love? And third question - just what is it that caused this wrath that's coming? All of which then leads us to the statement that we have been rescued **from** this coming wrath.

1st Question:

What wrath is Paul referring to in this specific statement? Is he talking about a singular event that happens all at once, or is it a long series of events? Is he talking specifically about the final outcome of heaven or hell, or is there more involved? The answer is, yes, there is more involved in understanding the term - the coming wrath. Certainly heaven and hell are the final product of God's wrath, but there's much more to understanding God's final wrath than just what happens at the great white throne judgment.

(Eschatologically speaking, we are un-apologetically dispensational literalists)

By far the clearest picture that we have of the coming wrath is portrayed for us in the book of Revelation. Chapters 6 through 19 of the book of Revelation gives us a detailed account of the coming wrath. It stretches out initially over a seven-year period, and seems to escalate exponentially from the beginning to the end. The end of those seven years is that final battle called Armageddon, where the Lord Jesus Christ physically and bodily returns to this very same earth that we live on now to prevent its destruction by nuclear holocaust.

After these events is a specific time period of 1000 years under the direct rulership of Jesus Christ here on earth, where a large segment of humanity eventually bands together in a rebellion against Christ's rulership. This insurrection is immediately dispelled by fire from heaven, and this is the last act that the Bible tells us concerning the wrath of God. There is certainly a great deal more that we could say about these events, but for right now our only purpose is defining what is meant by the wrath to come, which I believe we've done. The answer to this question was relatively easy, but the next questions are going to involve a bit more study, so let's move on to question two.

2nd Question:

Why does God even display any wrath? Actually the answer to this question is extraordinarily simple, the Bible answers it with direct, unambiguous words, that all of us have read many times, assuming we've read our Bibles. The problem isn't in finding the answer, the problem is believing it when we do find it.

I can answer this question by reading just one or two verses of Scripture to you, but the problem is you've been preconditioned by years of either false, or just plain ignorant teachings, that you probably won't be able to accept it when I do read it. When you hear it read you'll grasp your chest and cry, oh no, that's not the God I know. And you'll probably be right, because very few actually know the God that's revealed in the Scriptures. So, before I read the Scriptures and answer this question, I'm going to have to provide some foundational groundwork, and I have never in my life found a more eloquent and accurate groundwork than that which was written by Arthur W. Pink in his book titled "The Attributes of God." So I'm going to read a direct quote from his book. I quote:

Of old, God complained to an apostate Israel, "you thought that I was altogether as you are." (Ps 50:21) Such must now be his indictment against an apostate Christendom. Men imagine that the Most High is moved by sentiment, rather than actuated by principle. They suppose that his omnipotency is such an idle fiction that Satan is thwarting his designs on every side. They think that if he has formed any plan or purpose at all, it must be just like theirs, constantly subject to change. They openly declare that whatever power he possesses must be restricted, lest he invade the citadel of man's "free will" and reduced him to a "machine." They lower the all-efficacious Atonement, which has actually redeemed everyone for whom it was made, to a mere "remedy," which sin-sick souls may use if they feel disposed to; and they enervate the invincible work of the Holy Spirit to an "offer" of the gospel which sinners may accept or reject as they please.

*The "god" of this twentieth century no more resembles the Supreme Sovereign of Holy Writ than does the dim flickering of a candle [resemble] the glory of the midday sun. The "god" who is now talked about in the average pulpit, spoken of in the ordinary Sunday school, mentioned in much of the religious literature of the day, and preached in most of the so-called Bible conferences **is the figment of human imagination, an invention of maudlin sentimentality.***

The heathen outside of the pale of Christendom form "gods" out of wood and stone, while the millions of heathen inside Christendom manufacture a "god" out of their own carnal mind. In reality, they are but atheists, for there is no possible alternative between an absolutely supreme God, and no God at all.

A "god" whose will is resisted, whose designs are frustrated, whose purpose is checkmated, possesses no title to Deity, and so far from being a fit object of worship, merits naught but contempt. [end of quote]

The Bible says that fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom. It also says that there is no fear of God before man's eyes. Of course not. The god that's taught in the average church, and worshiped by the vast majority of them, is nothing but a straw man, a powerless, impotent, loving idol, created by their own emotional sentiments; not the Supreme Sovereign God of the Bible. And for this, the wrath of God will be coming on the disobedient and unfearing masses, who've all their lives affectionately, but uselessly, worshiped a fictitious god that they've created in their own carnal minds. (I saw on television recently a Woman caught in a deadly raging flood, and she was carrying nothing with her whatsoever but a statue of Mary)

Unless the God that you worship is the God of the Bible, then you're not worshiping God, you're worshiping an idol that you call "God." And the only way we have to know the true and living God is to hear and accept what He's told us in His Holy Scriptures. If we can't, or won't, accept that, then we're left with the only other option, to create our own version to fit the concepts of "what God ought to be" in our own minds. If this is the "god" you want, then you'll find no comfort here, because we have no such "gods" to offer. We have, and we preach, only the God who is revealed in the pages of Holy Writ. So what do you want? Do you want to know the true God, with all the ramifications that brings, or do you want to keep the safe and simple one you've created in your own mind? If we want the true One, then we must hear and accept the descriptions rendered in His Holy Scriptures, with all the humbling, difficulties, and demands that it imposes.

Now, I believe we've laid the necessary foundation to answer the question that we're asking - Why does God even display any wrath? Let the scriptures themselves answer this question. In Romans chapter nine, starting at verse six, and continuing on through verse 24, the scriptures are dealing with the subject of God's sovereign authority over everything that He created, especially concerning the living creatures.

Verses 6 through 8 use the example of the two sons of Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac. How God specifically chose which one would carry on the promised blessings of Abraham. It wasn't a choice made by Abraham and Sarah, or by Ishmael and Isaac themselves, but was determined entirely by God, and before either one was ever even born.

Then in verses 9 through 13 it uses the twins in the womb of Rebekah, Isaac's wife, and says that before they were even born, God chose Jacob to receive His love and carry on the blessings; but that He hated Esau. And again, those babies hadn't even been born yet. Then it says that this was done so that it would be understood that its God's election of specific people for His specific purposes that determines their outcome, not the individuals themselves.

Now this immediately flies in the face of our human pride and our natural concept of autonomy. We strongly desire to believe that we ourselves are the masters of our fate, and the captains of our souls. There's a natural repugnance, born out of the fall of man, to think that maybe we're really just pawns in a much bigger game. And Paul clearly recognizes this, so he goes on to address this reaction.

In verse 14 he asks the question - So then, is there injustice with God? Basically he says what he knows they're thinking, which is "how can this be fair?" His answer is; "absolutely not" and goes on to ask - who are you, as a created object, to question the authority of the One who created you? Doesn't even a potter have the authority over his lump of clay to make any kind of pot that he wants, to suit his own purposes? Does the clay pot hold the potter accountable, and demand an explanation for what he's made? In other words, just as a potter doesn't have to answer to his pots, neither does God have to answer to His creatures for what they are. They are all exactly what He wants them to be to serve His purposes for which he made them. There exists no accountability issue here, only one of authority of a Creator over that which He freely creates to suit His own purposes.

And again, this drives a stake straight into the heart of human pride and self importance. If what Paul's saying is true, then our whole existence isn't about us at all, but about our creator, and His purpose for our creation. Honestly, the natural man cannot and will not accept this. Our pride is too great to ever accept that we're all really just pawns in another Man's game. If we can't be the king, then we refuse to play at all. And such was the sin of Satan as well.

To further drive this home, in verses 15 through 18, Paul quotes from Old Testament scripture where God declared that He would show mercy on whomever He wanted to show mercy, entirely at His own discretion; and, conversely that He would also harden whomever He wanted to harden, entirely at His own discretion. Then God uses the Pharaoh of Egypt as an example, by telling him that He raised him up to that position for the very purpose of knocking him down again, and thus displaying, and proving through that visible demonstration, His sovereign and omnipotent power to do so.

In other words, God says, I made this clay pot called Pharaoh, specifically to throw it down on the ground and shatter it to pieces, so that I could demonstrate to all my clay pots that I have both the authority and the power to do whatever I please, whenever I please, with any of my creations. Like it or not, there's no denying that this is the point being made in these passages. I understand that the majority of humanity will refuse to accept this, and will formulate some way to twist the meaning, or explain it away. But for those who have an ear to hear, let us hear what our sovereign God has to tell us, and learn what we were intended to learn from it. Now, after such a preponderance of words let me read directly from the scripture those verses that answer the question of why God displays his wrath. Romans 9, verses 21-24:

Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? 22 What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? 23 And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, 24 even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.
Romans 9:21-24 (NASB)

Do you see how simple the answer is? God demonstrates His wrath because He chooses to. That's intentionally a part of what He wants to display of Himself, to make His power known. He desires, and specifically intends to demonstrate the extent of His power by visible display of His wrath. And He Himself has specifically readied the objects on which He intends to display it. Now I can almost hear the gasps of those whom Arthur Pink described, who have fashioned a soft, all loving god out of their own carnal minds. They're shouting "no, this isn't fair; this isn't the god I know", and they're right, it isn't. But, this is the God that the Bible reveals, and we either accept Him as He is, sovereign, holy, and omnipotent, or we don't get him at all.

The God of the Bible isn't soft and fluffy, He's sharp and piercing and utterly holy. (Heb 4:12, 10:26-31) But we surely can't stop here. This same verse goes on to say that He also, simultaneously, desires to make known the riches of His glory on **objects of mercy**, which He also has prepared Himself from before creation.

So, our question has been answered irrefutably, without doubt or conjecture, by the very words of Holy Writ. Both wrath and mercy are attributes of God that He specifically and intentionally desires to display, so that the entire creation will come to know the bounds and extents of His manifold glory. He fully intends that we know His mercy, and, He fully intends that we know His wrath; so, He's prepared vessels, clay pots to use the example from the verses, on which to visibly display both of these attributes to all His creation. And He specifically and intentionally planned all of this, and even wrote all the names in a book, before any of us were ever born, or even before time ever began.

Now, to address those who may see this as somehow fatalistic, because our fates are determined by God before we're even born, let me just say briefly that God has done all this in such a way as to exert His sovereignty, and at the same time leave mankind answerable for his actions, because man freely chooses the position that he's afforded. Every human is born with an uncoerced will, with which, to make his own decisions. Because of the disobedience of Adam, and the curse it brought on our species, every human is born with an innate desire to disobey God and seek his own way in life. Left to our own unaided, and uninfluenced choice, we will all, every one, deny God so that we can freely practice our unrighteous and carnal pleasures. For this we are all guilty before God to pay the consequences, because we've been warned that the wages of sin is death, and the soul that sins will die. And yet we go right on and do it anyway, fully knowing the horrific consequences. Now, it seems that we've already somewhat transitioned into question three which is:

3rd Question:

What is the cause of this wrath of God?

The answer is "sin." And what is sin? The answer is "disobedience to God"

4 "Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die.

Ezek 18:4 (NASB)

23 For the wages of sin is death,

Romans 6:23a (NASB)

*5 But because of **your hardness** and **unrepentant heart** you are **storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment is revealed.** 6 He will repay each one according to his works:*

Romans 2:5-6 (HCSB)

First let me say that no vessel is coerced into being something that it doesn't itself want and choose to be. Every vessel of wrath has chosen to be so by their own nature and desires. Scripture tells us that we are born in bondage to sin. By that it means that we are helpless to change our innate love of sin and unrighteousness, and even worse we are unable to even want to break that bondage, because we love it.

Man denies God in the face of irrefutable evidence, not because of ignorance but because of unrighteousness. When men behold the light of God's truth they intentionally suppress it because they love the darkness of sin instead. (Jn 3:19) These vessels of wrath have freely participated, with full awareness, in the cause for their destruction. There's not a single one who wishes they weren't sinners. (Rom 3:10-18) They love their sins, they're repulsed by Godly righteousness, and the only change they'd make, if they could, is not to have to pay the price for it in the end.

On the other side is those vessels of mercy that are prepared for glory. These vessels started out among the first group just mentioned. They're no different whatsoever. They're not one wit more righteous nor do they wish to be, in their natural state. But it's on this group that God's mercy is displayed, in that while they were still sinners, in both their actions and their desires, God granted them a new heart that has been reborn unto a desire for righteousness, and remorse over their sins. With this new heart of faith, regenerated and set apart, these vessels now freely choose of their own uncoerced will, to ask God for forgiveness of their sins and the ability to walk in newness of life. They now freely hunger and thirst for righteousness from the depth of their hearts, and this is that gift of God called saving faith. (Eph 2:8-9)

So we see that both groups, the ones fashioned by God to display His wrath, and, the ones fashioned by God to display his mercy, are each fully responsible, and thoroughly willing participants for the parts they've played in the plan of God, and both get exactly what is fitting and righteous for their choices and actions as the final outcome of their existence. And all of this is exactly as it was meant to be by the Master Potter, when He fashioned all the vessels of creation to play their respective parts in His divine master plan.

Now I suppose we could go on much more extensively with the various details of God's wrath as its been described in various places in the scriptures, but that's not the real point of this particular verse that we're examining. Our verse says that Jesus is the One who rescues us from this coming wrath. So then, lets take a look at that rescue, now that we've seen the wrath that's coming.

Please take note that this verse says that Jesus rescues us "from" this wrath to come. By that I mean the sense of this verse is that the vessels fashioned for mercy aren't meant to be the recipients of any of God's wrath. That's not what they were fashioned for, and even more, that's specifically what this verse says they've been rescued from. If the blood of Jesus Christ was in fact efficacious for the full atonement of sins for all of the vessels of mercy, then it's nearly blasphemous to suggest that any of God's wrath will ever come upon a single one of them. What would this say about the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice? Oh no, we can be certain that none of God's wrath will ever be applied against any of those who've been rescued by the blood of Jesus Christ. Complete and total Atonement and Righteousness are imputed onto these vessels of mercy by the actions of Jesus Christ, our rescuer from the coming wrath.

But, we must immediately make a distinction between wrath and chastisement. Although they seem pretty similar in their effects, they are very different in both their purpose and their intent. The purpose of wrath is to execute justice on unpenitent sinners for their continued disobedience as a function of justice. The purpose of chastisement is to induce, by unpleasant force, a beloved child to reconsider their actions, and repent, for the sake of their own good.

It's true that both are caused by the sin of disobedience, but the goals are quite different. The goal of wrath is to meet sin with overpowering justice and punish it for its crimes. The goal of chastisement is to force the sinner to admit their sin and consciously decide to repent and pursue righteousness. If they do, then forgiveness is available, and wrath isn't necessary; but if they won't, then forgiveness is not available, and wrath is inevitable. The vessels of wrath will never freely admit their sin, they'll always justify it or minimize it, because they love it too much to give it up, regardless of the inevitable consequences. But the vessels of mercy have received the gift of a repentant, regenerated heart, and they will confess their sin, and they will turn away from it willingly; though not without considerable difficulties and setbacks in the process. In extreme cases however, God will even terminate the lives of His elect if they refuse to repent. (1Co 11:30)

Now that we understand what wrath Paul's talking about, we can see that the wrath to come is only intended for those who stubbornly refuse to confess their sins and repent. This verse isn't about chastisement of believers, but about punishment of rejecters. Many professing believers argue that we don't deserve to escape this period of wrath, because we aren't good enough to earn escape. On that point I say Amen, we surely aren't good enough to deserve exclusion from God's wrath. This is the whole point of the substitutionary Atonement isn't it?

To those who make this argument I ask - well then are we worthy enough to escape hell and enter God's kingdom on our own merit? Of course not, like we just said, that's the whole point of the Atonement, and that's the whole point of Christ's perfect life on earth. His atonement paid our sin debt for us, and his righteousness provided our worthiness of both heaven and escape from wrath. To those who argue that we still deserve to suffer at least a little I ask - so that means that Christ's atonement wasn't entirely sufficient, and His righteousness was just a little short of the mark? I don't know any who would say this, but saying that we still deserve any punishment is in effect saying the very same thing.

The amazing thing about salvation by grace through faith is that it takes all, every, total, complete, emphasis off of us and imputes it onto Jesus. We cannot continue to evaluate our eternal status on ourselves, but rather on Christ our advocate and substitute. We have died, and our lives are now incorporated into His. He has paid all, every, totally, our debts of sin, and he has imputed to us all, every, totally His perfect righteousness.

Therefore, He has rescued us from the wrath to come to the uttermost. There is absolutely no wrath of God in the future of any believer. But, conversely, there is absolutely no avoidance of the chastisement of God on every one His children, because this is His means of instruction in righteousness towards his own. (Heb 12:6) Again, They may look a lot alike, but they are very different in their intent and purpose. Chastisement yes, definitely. Wrath, no, absolutely none.

Now some may ask - what about the believers who live during these seven years described in Revelation, aren't they suffering God's wrath? To answer this, first let me say that God's chosen bride, that he's preparing for his Son, will have been snatched away into the clouds to be with Jesus (1 Cor 15:51-54; 1Ths 4:13-18) before this time begins. I know there's some who disagree, but that is the most reasonable, literal, inference that can be drawn from these verses, so that's what we believe, and that's what we teach. Therefore His elect will escape this coming wrath.

However, the scriptures do describe many who come to faith after this snatching away event, and during this time period of wrath, so yes, they are alive and living in the midst of it. This is similar to Jeremiah, or Daniel. Both were described as righteous men, but both lived during God's severe judgement on the Nation of peoples among whom they lived. But no one would suggest that God's wrath was directed towards them personally. In like manner there will be multitudes who come to saving faith after the catching away of the elect bride (the church), but for those who believe before this event happens, none will be left behind to see this wrath, and that's what this epistle is going to tell them in chapters four and five. We'll discuss this in great detail when we get there.

Bottom line, for those who lived and believed before the coming wrath being discussed in verse 10, Jesus has rescued us from that, because we weren't appointed for that wrath, but rather to receive salvation from it, through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Chapter 5, verse 9) And in the end, it's always about God's appointments, not man's doings.

Conclusion:

So what have we learned so far from this lesson? Firstly that God displays His wrath by His own choosing, not because of any external circumstances, or as a concession to something that He didn't originally plan Himself. He is not a victim of Satan's treachery, who has corrupted many of His beloved children who He really wanted desperately to save, but they just wouldn't let Him. Yes, that is the popular god of the evangelical church, but that's absolutely not the living sovereign God of the holy scriptures. Everything that has, and ever will happen, He does intentionally to make His power known, and to demonstrate the consequences of disobedience to his holy commands. God is not a victim, He is an invincible, omnipotent ruler, over everything in creation. Everything!

And then by contrast, to also demonstrate His mercy, on other equally unworthy vessels that He's chosen and predestined unto glory. All of this just as planned and purposed by God from before creation began. Everything that takes place in all of time has been planned and established beforehand as a vital part of the working out and preparation process planned by God in the preparation of a kingdom of worshiping children, who have experienced His mercy firsthand, and have seen with their own eyes the demonstration of His power and glory, and have been carefully and patiently prepared to love, and desire, and appreciate His absolute unquestioned sovereignty, His perfect unwavering righteousness, and His magnificent untainted holiness.

To Him Be The Glory, Forever and Ever. Amen.

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