



## *Repayment and Relief when Christ Returns*

**2 Thessalonians 1:6-10 Certainly, it is right for God to repay trouble to those who trouble you, and to give relief to you, who are troubled along with us. When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his powerful angels, he will exercise vengeance in flaming fire on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. Such people will receive a just penalty: eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from his glorious strength, on that day when he comes to be glorified among his saints, and to be marveled at among all those who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.** (from *the Evangelical Heritage Version*)

Sometimes our good intentions can lead us to oversimplify Biblical truths. For example, how many of us parents have told our children, “You should never get angry”? But while we mean well, is that statement actually correct? In the absolute sense it can’t be because the Scripture tells us that our sinless Lord Jesus got angry on several occasions in his ministry: when his disciples shooed the little children away (Mark 10:13ff); when the Pharisees maintained that a crippled man should be denied healing on the Sabbath (Mark 3:2ff); when the sellers of sheep and doves turned the temple courts into a noisy, smelly marketplace (John 2:12ff; Matt. 21:12ff). More properly, then instead of saying, “You should never get angry,” what God wants is for us to be slow to anger (James 1:19), quick to forgive (Luke 13:3,4) and let go of grudges (Eph. 4:26), and to refrain from exacting personal revenge (Rom. 12:19). The Lord would have us entrust justice into his almighty hands and where and when appropriate into the hands of his representatives in the civil authorities (cf. Romans 13:1ff).

Our previous devotion left the Thessalonians bearing up beneath the weight of persecution by the grace of God, but were the Lord to allow them (or any of his beloved children) to suffer perpetually at the hands of the wicked without any promise of retribution or relief, he would cease to be a perfect and just God. In these verses Paul remind us that even in the midst of persecution and pain we can patiently and confidently hold on to the Lord as we await his repayment of his enemies and our relief when he returns.

In the meantime we observe that the wicked rarely receive their just due in this life. More often it appears that it is the evil and the manipulative and the oppressive who enjoy a prosperous and pleasant existence while the righteous suffer (cf. Psalm 73; Job 21). However, our current state of affairs will not continue indefinitely. When life ends and even more emphatically when this age is brought to a close, divine justice and relief will be appropriately served.

Paul vividly describes how on Judgement Day Jesus will be revealed from heaven with all his holy angels. This will be a one-time obvious appearing in the sky, where every eye will see him (cf. Acts 1:11; Rev. 1:7). In contrast to the Flood, when God used water to exercise judgment on an unbelieving and ungodly world, on the Last Day Jesus will use fire to execute vengeance on his foes, whom Paul characterizes as “those who do not know God” (or as the Psalmist says those who have no room in their thoughts for God (10:4)) and who show their lack of knowing God by not obeying the gospel message delivered from heaven by our Lord Jesus. Most often in Scripture “the gospel” refers to the “good news” about Jesus—that he has paid for the sins of all, defeated death, and opened heaven to all who believe. In this case however, this message must be referring to all the things Jesus taught including his pronouncement that all who refuse to believe in him and remain in their sins will be damned (cf. John 3:18-20). At the last they will be granted their wish: those who do not want to know Jesus in this life won’t

have to be anywhere near him for the rest of forever. They will be eternally shut out from his majesty and from his infinite strength.

In contrast, all who believe in Jesus—from the Thessalonians to you and me—will receive an eternity of relief. We will live in the light of God's perfect presence. We will be connected to his perfect life-giving power that imparts healing and peace and glory. With the angels and all the saints we will spend eternity praising and glorifying the Lord with hearts full of endless wonder and amazement. This heavenly rest will be ours, not because of who we are or what good things we have done, but because by faith we believe the testimony about Jesus our Savior.

And so even in the face the most forceful and unjust persecution we with the Thessalonians, with Paul, and the believers of every age are empowered to patiently hold on knowing that repayment and complete relief are on their way when Christ finally returns.

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, when I am persecuted or pressured or mocked for being faithful to your gospel and obeying your commands, banish any thoughts of vengeance from my heart. Fill me with your love and patience and move me to entrust my cause into your almighty hands knowing that you will soon see justice done and give me an eternity of relief with you. Amen.*