

*Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day. II Thessalonians 1:6-10*

Context determines the correct interpretation of scripture. There is no way to study the scriptures and learn from God's word what He intended for you to learn without "...rightly dividing the word of truth..." (II Timothy 2:15) Attempts to wrest God's word will lead to frustration and misinterpretation. The same is true for the scriptures quoted above from the Apostle Paul's second letter to the church at Thessalonica. These scriptures must be interpreted in light of the environment of the church at Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9), Paul's first letter to the church at Thessalonica and other places in scripture where the concept of belief and obedience of the gospel are discussed in reference to our eternal life.

Many people seek to extract revenge on their enemies. While the thought of doing just that crosses my mind (and let's be honest, yours too), to do so would be disobedient to the commandments of God and is in opposition to the nature of Jesus Christ. Restraining grace is one of the blessings from God that this sinner needs daily. I am thankful that we serve a God that says "...he giveth more grace." (James 4:6) I need more and more restraining grace so as to treat my enemies the way that Jesus taught. Jesus told his disciples to, "...Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you..." (Matthew 5:44) If you have read the scriptures referenced in the paragraph above from the 17th chapter of the book of Acts, you may be wondering how we are, or the saints at Thessalonica were, supposed to be so kind to those who treat the Lord's disciples hatefully. We can do this because God has told us that He will "...recompense tribulation to them that trouble..." us. He is a faithful and just judge. He knows all and sees all. He is capable of taking care of those that cause us trouble. Paul taught and exercised this same lesson in his dealings with Alexander the coppersmith. "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works:." (II Timothy 4:14) Paul didn't say that he was going to reward Alexander according to his works, he turned the evil that was done to him over to One who was able to reward a just reward according to Alexander's evil work. We should do the same. To believe that we should enact revenge on our enemies is to be of the mindset that we are better executors of judgement than God. God forbid!

How does God describe these ones that trouble the Lord's people? Paul says that they:

1. "...know not God..."-This description allows us to determine (because God said-not because we say!), that these troublemakers are unregenerate people. Because these wicked ones, "...know not God...", they are not born again children of God. Scripture teaches us that all of God's children know him (Hebrews 8:11) and are given this innate knowledge in the new birth.
2. "...obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ..."-Again, this is a description of a wicked person. Wicked, unregenerate people do not obey the gospel (I Corinthians 2:14). They can't, neither will they obey. Does this mean that if someone doesn't obey the gospel, believe my preaching, repent and join the church that they are wicked? No! Certainly doesn't. This means that these people who troubled the church at Thessalonica were wicked men, who "...know not God..." and had no interest in obeying the gospel. It takes the first description, they knew not God, in order for us to determine that these people were wicked, not solely the second. Scripture teaches in many different places that ones who God refers to as His children don't obey him and believe His gospel, but they are still His child (Isaiah 1:2, II Timothy 2:12-13 and others).

It is easy to become frustrated when the wicked survive and thrive even in the midst of what we know is wrong doing on their part. The wicked live their lives carefree and are "...not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men." (Psalms 73:5) But there is coming a day when their fun will end. The Lord is going to execute judgement upon the wicked (Psalms 75:8) and destroy them with

"...everlasting destruction..." in an eternal hell (Revelation 14:10-11) when he descends from heaven on the final judgement day (I Thessalonians 4:16). Although this is a far different view of God than the world has today, our God is a righteous judge who will righteously "...recompense tribulation..." to the wicked.

The best way I've heard the final judgement day (titled "General Judgement" in most Primitive Baptists articles of faith) explained is as a declarative and executive judgement. God will **declare** his elect family innocent because they have been made righteous and will be judged by the work of their Saviour Jesus Christ. God will **execute** judgement upon the wicked because they will be judged by their works (Revelation 20:13) "...with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord..." The punishment for the works(sins) of God's elect was executed on His son at Calvary and therefore no charge will be made to God's elect (Romans 8:33). Praise the Lord for His love for His children!

Not only has the Lord shown us in these comforting passages quoted above that He will judge the wicked, but He has reminded us that the day of destruction of the wicked will be a day of glorification for His saints. The One who we haven't seen, but love; "...in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.." (I Peter 1:8) Do you love and believe in Jesus today? If so, it's evidence that you have been born of Him (John 5:24, I John 5:1) and that you will be blessed to admire His presence and thank Him for His blessings along with all of the elect of God.

Even though all of God's children don't have the privilege to believe in and admire their Saviour today, I am thankful for the opportunity to look forward to "...that day..." that they will. The Lord will receive His recognition "...that day..." Recognition for His successful triumph over death and hell. Recognition for being a holy God. Recognition for being a righteous judge of the wicked. Let us look forward to "...that day..." with patience, hope, trust and faith that the Lord will "...recompense tribulation..." to trouble makers. Heaven will make the wait worth while.

God Bless.

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#### **Announcements:**

1. We look forward to the baptism of Brother Jim and Sister Dawn Doles this coming Sunday. Please be in prayer for a Spirit filled day in the Lord.