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### An Exposé of a Wicked Man, Part 3

Today we live in the immediacy of the present! That is the culture in which we live. *There is no tomorrow! All that matters is today!*

And yet this mindset isn't exclusive to our day. The prophet Jeremiah was called to the prophetic ministry in 626 BC at the age of 17. Immediately he began proclaiming the word of the Lord to Judah on account of its many transgressions. One such exhortation is found in Jeremiah 5 which contains both a brutal description of the sin of the people of God as well as a sober warning.

Jeremiah 5:30-31, "An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the

prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule on their *own* authority; and My people love it so! But what will you do at the end of it?"

*What an ominous question! Today you are indeed enjoying yourself with your many sins and false religion. But what about tomorrow? In the blink of an eye you will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and render account for the deeds you have done in your life. What then will you do?"*

What a sobering message! Yet that was the message Jeremiah gave to His generation! Nearly 650 years later Paul would sound a similar warning to the believers in Christ in Thessalonica. Paul has spent the better part of this epistle describing various aspects of kingdom ministry with the obvious intention that his description would become a prescription for the body of Christ.

Paul has written an exposé of a wicked man. In 1 Thessalonians 2:15 Paul gives us the identity of the wicked man. Though many in the world would be classified as "wicked," we know that the wicked also can be named amongst the people of God! In fact, that is the focus here. Judaism at this time included the Christian. Accordingly when Paul speaks of those who persecuted Jesus, the Old Testament prophets, the brethren in Judah, himself, as well as the Thessalonians, he is NOT speaking of Jews per se, BUT the wicked amidst the people of God!

Paul also described the fruit of the wicked man in 1 Thessalonians 2:15c-16. The result of their wickedness is this:

1. Persecuting the genuine servant of God.
2. Arousing the wrath/anger of God
3. Positively harming all men as they hinder the teaching ministry of God's word!

Now heretofore, we've applied this passage by allowing it to:

1. Challenge us- lest we too be found walking in their path.
2. Comfort us- knowing that no attack against the genuine servant of God will go unpunished! God sees and He will take vengeance!

Paul also described the end of the wicked man, judgment. In 1 Thessalonians 2:16 we notice that his judgment is a present reality.

1 Thessalonians 2:16b, "...with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins..."

This is an interesting expression which was masterfully crafted. First off notice Paul here places the blame for the wicked's undoing at the feet of the wicked even though he is

talking here about God's wrath, "THEY always fill up the measure of THEIR sins." And so as to culpability, the wicked have only one place to look... themselves! Whatever doom they might reap on account of their sin, they have only themselves to blame!

Secondly, speaking of this doom Paul reflects here the reality that his ministry was one and the same as the Old Testament prophets. How many times did an Old Testament prophet receive the accusation that they were traitors to their own countrymen? For example, after Jeremiah spoke the word of God and so issued forth a call for Judah to surrender to the Babylonians, we read this:

Jeremiah 38:4, "Then the officials said to the king, 'Now let this man be put to death, inasmuch as he is discouraging the men of war who are left in this city and all the people, by speaking such words to them; for this man is not seeking the well-being of this people, but rather their harm.'"

That easily could have been the accusation leveled against Paul on account of our text! So much for patriotism or being a team player! Yet you must see that with the prophets of old, Paul clearly had no problem in calling out those even in the body of Christ who needed a rebuke. See, the apostle was NOT on the side of any man, people, or program. He was on the side of God! And so it must be with each of us!

Thirdly, let's look at the statement Paul made here, "they always fill up the measure of their sins." The expression is rather complex; yet talk about economy of language! Using only seven Greek words, Paul conveys a world of information! The expression is eschatological in that it references THE determination that will be rendered against the wicked on the Day of Judgment. Yet, here it is given before the time!

Matthew 12 talks about the "unforgivable sin."

Matthew 12:31-32, "Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. And whoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age, or in the *age* to come."

Many think that the sin in mind here is the sin of unbelief. Yet that's crazy! Recall, the interchange between Christ and the Jewish father who had a demon possessed child.

Mark 9:23-24, "Jesus said unto him, 'If thou canst believe, all things *are* possible to him that believeth.' And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, 'Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.'"

If unbelief were an unforgiveable sin, we'd all go to hell! No one would be saved. We all struggle with a weak faith and at times no faith! Don't we!

Unbelief is NOT the unforgiveable sin. So what is it, then? If you look back to Matthew 12:24, you will read an amazing accusation on the part of some of the Jewish leaders against Jesus after Christ cast a demon out of a man.

Matthew 12:24, "But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, 'This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons.'"

That is the unforgiveable sin! It is gazing upon a work of God and calling it Satanic! And get this: it is unforgiveable NOT because it is so bad; it is unforgiveable RATHER because it reflects a withholding of grace on the part of God that evidences a "judgment before the time."

I trust that you do not have a problem with the doctrine of the Last Judgment. At the end of the world, everyone will stand before the judgment seat of Christ where they will render account for their life. At this time we know the majority of mankind will receive the judgment of "Guilty!" (Matthew 7:13-14) Now let me ask you, "When once the sinner receives the guilty verdict, will it be too late for him to repent?" The answer is yes. Scripture indicates that upon the final judgment, the sinner is cast into the lake of Fire (Revelation 20:11-15); there will be no second chances!

Allow me to further ask, could God make this determination in the case of a select few prior to their death? If God made this determination regarding certain individuals while they were living?

This is what is going on with the unforgiveable sin. Again, it is NOT unforgiveable because it is so bad; RATHER it is unforgiveable because it reflects the reality that God in his grace has given a sinner over to his sin before the Last Judgment! And so, committing the sin is NOT that which damns them; in fact it is just the opposite. It is because they are damned that they commit the sin! In fact, look at the text one more time.

Matthew 12:32, "And whoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age, or in the *age* to come."

Do you see? A determination, a Last Judgment Determination, has been rendered in their case. The preserving grace of God has been lifted which is why they have no problem attributing the power of God to Satanic activity! Truly, if ever you hear someone attribute the work of Christ to Satan you can be sure in their case that judgment has already been rendered.

This concept is what is behind our passage this morning. To "fill up the measure of one's sin" reflects a determination on the part of God to abandon a people to their sin. The

picture here is that of a vessel which holds a person's sin. If the vessel should ever be full, judgment is executed. Now for almost the entire human race, their individual vessel is NOT full at the time of their death; and so they approach the Last Judgment with a unfilled vessel of sin. BUT for some, God's preserving grace is lifted and they "fill up the measure of their sins" *in this life*- while they are still living! When that happens, God issues forth a *judgment before the time* that they are damned. Such is the horrible case when it comes to many a wicked of this earth! For example...

Matthew 23:29a, 30-32, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you... say, 'If we had been *living* in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in *shedding* the blood of the prophets.' Consequently you bear witness against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up then the measure *of the guilt* of your fathers."

We are talking here about the same people as referenced in Matthew 12. Their sinfulness reflects a maturation when it comes to sin. People who do such things evidence a skill at sinning that testifies to a withholding of the preserving grace if God. He's given them over to their sin... with the result that sin takes them over! Daniel describes this too.

Daniel 8:23, "And in the latter period of their rule, when the transgressors have run *their course*, a king will arise insolent and skilled in intrigue."

Once again, the idea here is the completion of sin! "When the sinful heart of this people has matured and blossomed such that they are hideously sinful and so condemned before God, a king will arise..." God also told Abraham this:

Genesis 15:16, "Then in the fourth generation they shall return here [to Palestine from Egypt], for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete."

The idea is that God would allow the rebellion of the Amorite to simmer, mature, and so advance unto boiling. Eventually as a culture they would become wholly accursed of God. When that time arrived, then the Lord would bring His people back to Palestine to issue forth judgment upon the land. And whether you realize it or not, Paul is using the SAME language as Genesis 15:16 here!<sup>1</sup> In other words, what God did with the Amorite (letting them go in their sin), He now has done with some of the wicked amongst His people!

And so when we read in our text of the wicked, "with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins," we understand this to mean that God has withheld his grace from them such that they are unhindered in their sinning! Sin has taken them over such that all they now do is sin! Leon Morris put it this way:

The castigation is unqualified, and the final expression indicating the eschatological wrath leaves no hope for the future. A nation (or a person) can reach a point in

opposition to God where return is impossible. (Morris, 1959, p. 65)

This is the case for the wicked man in 1 Thessalonians. This is their end! And it is pretty brutal! And yet, if there were any question, consider the final statement which reflects the certainty of the reality of their judgment.

1 Thessalonians 2:16c, "...But wrath has come upon them to the utmost."

Paul is NOT talking about the wicked in relation to the end times, BUT that which is part and parcel of their lives today. In fact would you notice that Paul chose to utilize the aorist tense in this passage which technically would speak of something that was completed in the past! We could translate this literally as, "But wrath CAME upon them to the utmost."

However, this is to miss an important grammatical tool of the Greek. In fact, to translate this as a simple aorist is to obscure the point Paul is making here. In the Bible, there are things that are so certain that they are spoken about as if they already have come. For example speaking of our salvation, Paul wrote this:

Romans 8:30, "...whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified."

Each of the graces referenced here are in the past tense, aorist! If you are saved, then you can be sure that you were (1) predestined by God, (2) called by Him, and (3) justified, declared "not guilty of violating any of His law!" Now all of these blessings are rightly placed in the aorist/past tense because they are all "one and done" realities! This is incredible news! That is why your salvation is secure! That is why there is now "no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1)!

Yet of all the glorious truths in this passage, the MOST GLORIOUS is the fact that someday we shall be glorified with Christ! We shall be conformed to His image! Now how certain is this? It is so certain that Paul wrote of this future reality as if it were past! In other words, it is a done deal. Something so certain that we can speak of it as already having come to pass (even though it hasn't)! That is one of the uses of the aorist! We see it in the prophetic writings. Isaiah wrote of an event that would take place 150 years in the future!

Isaiah 22:9-11, "And you saw [past tense] that the breaches in the *wall* of the city of David were many; and you collected [past tense] the waters of the lower pool. Then you counted the houses of Jerusalem, and you tore down houses to fortify the wall. And you made a reservoir between the two walls for the waters of the old pool. But you did not depend on Him who made it, nor did you take into consideration Him who planned it long ago."

Though this referred to something that would NOT occur for 150 years, nevertheless Isaiah

deigned to describe the event in the past tense. Talk about vivid! He expresses the coming judgment of God in such a way that his hearers could see it as already happening! This is known as The Prophetic Perfect in which a future judgment is so certain it is spoken about as if it were already completed.

1 Thessalonians 2 is such a passage! Paul speaks of the wrath of God resting upon the wicked, you must see that it is so certain that Paul speaks of it as if it already had come to pass! That truly is a judgment before the time!

Talk about sobering! Talk about shocking! Do you understand what this means? Most likely you know someone in the body of Christ who we would not call wicked as of yet- in fact, you might even think they are wonderful-, but who is on their way to being so! So, allow this passage challenge you (let it cause you to examine yourself before the Lord lest you be found emulating the wicked). Let it comfort you in knowing that God sees all and so will not leave unpunished any wicked act perpetrated against the body of Christ.

But also allow it to sober you and burden you! What does this mean? I would suggest two things based on the exhortation of Jude whose entire epistle is an Exposé of a Wicked Man! Jude 20, as it relates to ourselves, let us make full use of the means of grace and so diligently/ferverently seek the Lord! Listen to the exhortation:

Jude 20-21, “But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith [that’s involves the word of God]; praying in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.”

This exhortation involves four related yet distinct activities.

1. Being built up on the word of God- which is doing more than just reading it, but laboring to apply it/appropriate it!
2. Spending much time on our knees. Again, this is NOT something that comes naturally to us. For most in the body, you will have to purpose to pray.
3. Cultivating ones love relationship with God. Michael Green wrote:

It was [God’s] love which first drew them to himself (v. 1), but, as the false teachers have shown, it is possible to turn one’s back on the love of God. They must cultivate that love relationship with him. (Green, 2009, p. 213)

The idea here is that we must never forget “our first love” (Revelation 2:4, 5)! Rather, we must ever and always cultivate our love relationship with the Lord.

4. Living in light of the return of Christ at which time the Lord will confer upon us the fulness of our salvation! This truly is what it means to “set your minds on the things above” (Colossians 3:1-2)! In fact, we could summarize Jude’s first point with the

warning of the Hebrew writer:

Hebrews 3:12, "Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God."

As it relates to the wicked in the body of Christ or those who willingly engage in wickedness.

Jude 22-23, "And have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh."

This exhortation involves three activities.

1. Caring for the weak of faith and so struggling in their walks- "And have mercy on some, who are doubting..."! This involves active and intentioned fellowship where we get beyond the superficial and genuinely seek to help and encourage each other.

Hebrews 3:12-13: "Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called 'Today,' lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

2. Not allowing each other to live in or endure sin- "...save others, snatching them out of the fire." How many times has your response to the knowledge of another's sin been that of shock/amazement rather than active concern? For the love of Christ we must be bold believers, willing to risk offending another that they might remain in the love of Christ!
3. Guarding our Hearts lest we too be tempted- "...hating even the garment polluted by the flesh." Ever and always remember the words of Alexander Pope, from his poem "Essay on Man":

Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,  
As, to be hated, needs but to be seen;  
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,  
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

How it behooves us as we endeavor to minister to those struggling in our midst that we guard our own hearts from evil.

4. In closing- and once again- if you are one this day who feels threatened by the passage before you- "*Could I be one of the wicked referenced here?*"- heed the exhortation of Isaiah to the wicked of his day:



Isaiah 55:6-7, "Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."

To seek Him is to turn FROM your love of self and religion and to turn to God, asking Him to forgive you for your sin. Don't wait another moment! Bow your knee before the Lord this day and pray!

### **Bibliography**

- Green, E. M. (2009). *2 Peter and Jude (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries)*. Nottingham: IVP Academic.
- Morris, L. (1959). *1 and 2 Thessalonians (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries)*. Chicago: Intervarsity Academic.

### **End Note(s)**

- <sup>1</sup> Fee, G. D. (2009). *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, NICNT, pp. 100.