2 Thessalonians - Commentaries by Alexander Hume Rule

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Christ: A Propitiation, and the Bearer Away of our Sins

The terrible effect of sin is to shut the sinner out from the presence of God. He is the Holy One. What is unholy can have no place in His presence. Without holiness no man shall see the Lord. Not only is there no place in His presence for what is sinful, but He can only deal with it in unsparing judgment. Thus has He dealt with sin at the cross, and so will He deal with the rejecters of His grace by-and-by. He will judge the world by that Man whom He has appointed. “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.” (2 Thess. 1:7-9.) Solemn testimony as to judgment! Wrath alone is the response of His nature to sin. Man is a sinner, and therefore unfit for God’s presence, and not only unfit for His presence, but under His wrath. From this the believer has redemption. But “he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.” Awful state! Unconverted reader, it is your state. What do you think of it? How will you meet that Savior whom you have long slighted and rejected, when He comes “in flaming fire, taking vengeance?” A slighted and rejected Savior taking vengeance! Terrible thought! Oh, how will you meet Him before the great white throne, when heaven and earth have fled, and there is neither rock nor mountain to hide you from the fire of His wrath? Dear reader, your sins must be blotted out by the blood of the Lamb now, while God reveals Himself in grace, or else inevitable, unsparing, eternal judgment must be your portion—the lake of fire! the undying worm! the smoke whose torment ascends forever and ever! no rest day nor night! Oh, the anguish, the indescribable anguish, of a lost soul! Perhaps, reader, you have experienced the sufferings of a burning fever, with its restless tossings, for a few days and nights. How at night you longed for the morning, and when morning came there was still no rest, and you thought the weary hours would never pass! But what is this in comparison? Only a moment; no, not even that, for time is not even a drop in the shoreless ocean of eternity. When countless ages have come and gone, hell is but begun; the weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth find no answer; the tossings of the lost on the fiery billows approach no nearer an end; it is eternal! Such is the doom of those who reject Gods gracious remedy for sin, and whom sin shuts out from His presence. Oh! unsaved soul, how awful must he your state if you can pursue your path unconcerned to such a doom! May God in mercy arouse your conscience, and arrest you in your fatal course.

But do you say, I know I am a poor wicked sinner, and the judgment of God is only what I deserve; but how can such a sinner escape that judgment, and get clear of all his sins? Let us look then for an answer to this question in God’s blessed word. You have sinned against God, and you need forgiveness and justification. But these you cannot expect at the expense of God’s character—His justice and holiness. You have dishonored God, and ruined yourself; and you can neither undo the dishonor, nor repair the ruin. Here then are two things to be provided for, the dishonor done to God, and your need as a guilty ruined sinner. God in his free and boundless mercy has provided for both. If the sinner’s resources were at an end, this only became the occasion for the rich display of inexhaustible resources in God Himself. His eternal fullness has been displayed in Christ, His Son, the gift of His love to a lost world. Most blessed God! most precious Gift!

The sacrifice of Christ answers every question that can be raised, whether as to the character of God, or the sinner’s need. He has more than blotted out the dishonor done to God by sin, and He has more than answered for the sins of those who believe on His name. “Whom God hath set forth a propitiation [or propitiatory] through faith in his blood “ declares the one; “Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification” declares the other. One of these texts declares that God is satisfied as to the whole question of sin; the other declares that our need is met—met fully and forever. Happy those who have received into their hearts these two blessed truths.

Dear reader, let me call your attention to a blessed and beautiful picture of these two things. You will find it in Lev. 16. It is the great day of atonement. The sins of a whole year have been accumulating against the children of Israel. The day has come when Jehovah makes provision for the people in a way suitable to Himself. Two goats were chosen—one for Jehovah, and one for the people. These were both types of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first goat was killed, and the blood was carried by the high priest within the veil of the tabernacle into the most holy place, and sprinkled on the mercy seat, between the cherubim and before the mercy seat. Then the blood was applied to the holy place, and to the tabernacle of the congregation, and to the altar. Almost all things were purged by blood. When this part of the work was done, the high priest came out again to the people, and taking the other goat alive, confessed on its head all the sins of the people, and sent it away, by a fit man, into a land not inhabited.

The holy of holies behind the veil, was the presence chamber of the divine Majesty. The mercy seat was His throne, Jehovah said, “I will appear in the cloud on the mercy-seat.” His dwelling-place was between the cherubim; and the Shekinah, or glory-cloud, was the symbol of His presence, Here the high priest approached on behalf of a sinful people. How could he stand in the presence of that glory as the representative of a sinful people? Israel had sinned, and the high priest, being one of themselves, was also a sinner. How then could he enter the presence of that glorious and holy Majesty? There was a prescribed way. He came with blood in his hand, and with sweet incense on his censer, burning with coals from the altar—the holy fire. And while the perfume of that burning incense (the sweet savor ascending out of the death of Christ, under the testing of divine judgment, of which the holy fire was the type) ascended between him and that cloud of glory, he sprinkled the blood on the mercy seat and before it. The inflexible justice and holy majesty of the throne were thus vindicated. The blood had made propitiation; Jehovah was satisfied; and He could now send out blessing to the people. Peace having been made by the blood, the high priest retraces his steps outward toward the people, reconciling the holy place, the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar—everything defiled by a sinful people. The waiting people see their high priest coming out again. How do they know that his work has availed for them? Because he has been in the presence of Jehovah on their behalf, and has come forth again without being consumed. The blood which he

carried within, has settled all; and not only this, but the high priest comes forth, and, in the name of Jehovah, sends away the sins of the people on the head of the live goat, to be remembered no more. Thus Jehovah is satisfied, the sins of the people are gone, and their relationships with Jehovah are maintained in righteousness.

Now, dear reader, all this is a blessed picture of what the Lord Jesus has done for those who believe on His name. Through the eternal Spirit, He has offered Himself without spot to God. “Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption.” (Heb. 9.) By His blood, the truth and righteousness, holiness and majesty of God’s throne have been established forever. As a sacrifice for sin, He bowed His head on the cross under the wrath of God. There He drained the cup of divine judgment, and there He cried; “It is finished.” God’s immediate answer was the rending of the veil of the temple from the top to the bottom. God has set forth Christ a mercy seat, or way of approach into His presence. It is “through faith in his blood.” God’s righteousness in remitting sins is declared through the blood of Christ. God is now just in justifying the sinner who believes in Christ. God has been so perfectly glorified about sin, that now, in virtue of the blood of Jesus, from a throne of mercy He extends the arms of mercy, and invites the sinner to come. To every sinner in the wide, wide world, God’s gracious call is, “Come.”

But this is not all. To every sinner who does come—to everyone who believes His gracious message—He says: “Your sins and iniquities I will remember no more.” He, of whom the scapegoat was the type, has borne them all away into the land not inhabited, where they are eternally forgotten.

Dear reader, do you believe in the sacrifice of Christ? Do you believe that sacrifice has gone up as a sweet savor to God? Do you believe the blood of Jesus has met every claim of God’s throne? Do you believe God is now saying, “Come?” Does your heart utter its “Amen “ in response to all this? Then your sins are gone—gone forever—gone never to be remembered more.

You say, “Well, I do believe in Christ, and I do believe God has found satisfaction in his sacrifice, and that He is inviting sinners to come, but I do not quite see how it applies to me and that my sins are gone.” Come, then, and let me point out to you another side of this truth as to the blessed work of Christ. You will find it in the end of Rom. 4.

We have been looking at the work of Christ. His sacrifice has glorified God. It has met every claim of His holy nature. In this sacrifice the veil was rent. The veil was Christ’s flesh. (Heb. 10:20.) Through this rent-veil God has been revealed—revealed in Christ providing a sacrifice for the guilty. You look through the rent-veil, and you see Him sitting on a throne of mercy, sitting between the cherubim, as it were, over the mercy-seat, and addressing Himself to the world as a Savior-God, and saying to sinners: ‘I have provided a sacrifice for your need, my own holy Lamb; in the presence of your sin I have been glorified by the shedding of His blood; I am satisfied; come to me, and be ye saved.’ Thus, God addresses Himself to a world of sinners. You say, you believe it. This then is the God you have found through what Christ has done. Yes, I say this is the God you have found, for you have been looking at the work of Christ, and it has rent the veil, opened the way right through to the mercy-seat, and brought you face to face with God, the Savior-God, and you hear Him saying, “Come.” But now, this God in whose presence you stand, and whom you hear beseeching you to come—has He done nothing? Has He had nothing to do in the wondrous transaction of the cross? Ah! yes, reader, this is the God who gave His only begotten Son for you, and who did not spare, but delivered Him up to the death for you. He delivered Him up for your offenses, and raised Him again for your justification. Fix your eyes for a moment upon this blessed God of all grace. See Him bring forth His own holy Lamb! See Him lay your sins on the spotless Victim. He made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin. The cross is the scene of action, where Christ, the Son of God, is nailed to the tree, numbered with the transgressors. There He “bare our sins in his own body.” There He suffered, the Just for the unjust. There, reader, the Holy One of God “was delivered for our offenses.” He died, and was buried. Was that the end? No, thank God, that was not the end. Had that been the end, hope would have found its grave in the sepulcher of Christ. “If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.” “But now is Christ risen from the dead.” (1 Cor. 15) Yes, reader, the same God who delivered Him for your offenses, also raised Him again for your justification.

But you were looking at God as the One who brought forth His holy Lamb, and laid your sins upon Him, and delivered Him up to death because of them. Did God raise Him up again with your sins upon Him? Impossible! If God could do that, He never would have delivered Him to death. It was for your sins He died; and by His death He paid the penalty. It was because He was under the judgment of God for your sins, that He cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” If He had not gone to the end of that judgment—exhausted it—God could not have turned His face toward Him again. But the Son. of God could not fail, blessed be His name! He took from the hand of God the cup that was yours, and drank it, until not a drop was left for you to drink. God poured out His judgment on Him till not a drop of judgment remained for you. Then the darkness was past the heavens were clear again; and God raised Him up from the dead. Thank God, your sins are gone! Him who bore them God has raised from the dead—raised Him for your justification. It is God’s own word. The offenses are gone, and justification takes their place. As surely as He was delivered for your offenses, so surely is your justification a consequence of His death and resurrection. It was God who delivered Him; it was God who raised Him again and “it is God who justifies.” And this is our God, the God we have found, and to whom we have access by Jesus Christ. It is the God who has taken our sins, and buried them in everlasting forgetfulness in the grave of Jesus, and who has brought us face to face with Himself with purged consciences, washed in the blood of Jesus, and made whiter than snow. God Himself has settled the question of our guilt—settled it with Christ, on whom He laid our sins. The question is settled, never to be re-opened. The resurrection of Christ proves it, and has secured our justification. All is bright now in the presence of God. All is peace. All is love. Reader, is it all bright with you?

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