6-16-19

Ephesians 5:1-7

Last week we looked into Paul’s emphasis on avoiding all forms of sexual immorality and greed. We are warned that anyone who lives their life in this kind of sin has no inheritance in the Kingdom of God and Christ. We are reminded of this so that we are not tempted back into a pagan lifestyle. It is also a call to each of us who claim Christianity to check our own lives. Do we live like this and somehow justify it by saying that we are forgiven in Christ so it doesn’t matter what we do? If so, then we do not have good evidence of our salvation. A Christian cannot live like this; we are to be imitators of God.

Following these things comes verse 6. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Anytime we see the phrase “wrath of God”, we need to take notice and pay attention. This is a weakness in the Christian world today; we tend to ignore the wrath of God. When we think about it, the wrath of an almighty God who answers to no one is not something to be treated lightly. The wrath of God is real, it exists; we must face this fact if we are to escape it.

First off, let’s consider what the wrath of God means. It is God’s just attitude and response to sin. It is His righteous and holy anger against sin. Those words: just, righteous, and holy are important; God’s anger is not like ours. Man’s wrath is uncontrolled; it controls him. It lashes out at what ever point the man can’t hold it back anymore. It is sinful. God’s wrath is fully under control; He unleashes it only at the proper time. His wrath is for the punishment of sin.

Once God’s wrath has been raised, it must be satisfied, sin must be punished; if He chooses to hold back His anger for a time, it does not diminish or fade away. God’s nature and His very being are holy, to turn His back on sin would be to deny His very self. We know our God is always faithful and unchanging; He will not deny Himself.

This is actually good. We don’t want to serve an all-powerful God who is wishy-washy; who might change His mind depending on His mood. This describes the gods served by all the nations that surrounded Israel; they were constantly trying to find ways to appease their gods; to keep them happy. Of course, they were serving satan and his demons; their task was hopeless. Our task of avoiding God’s wrath is also hopeless without a full dependence on Jesus Christ.

We must pay attention to the things that incur the wrath of God. Paul has just mentioned all forms of sexual impurity and greed as being very serious acts of rebellion against God; God’s wrath will be upon individuals that live these things. But we must also consider the things mentioned in chapter 4: Bitterness, anger, clamor, slander, and malice; he mentions falsehood, theft, all forms of unhealthy and consuming desires; also sins of omission such as not being kind or tender-hearted or forgiving. This extensive, yet incomplete, list of unholy actions and attitudes arouse God’s wrath. Anyone who lives in these things will remain outside the Kingdom of God and Christ.

We certainly realize that we are all sinners. We who are Christians understand that Jesus took the wrath in place of those, and only those, who will accept the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Any who refuse God’s gracious offer of salvation through Christ, will suffer wrath eternally themselves; be it in hell, or the lake of burning Sulphur, or eternal darkness, or some combination of these. It has to be through Jesus because forgiveness comes only through the appeasement of God wrath, not in laying it aside.

It is important for us to consider the timing of God’s wrath; when does God pour out His wrath? Looking at verse 6, we are told that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. This wording is interesting because it covers two possibilities. It can be future: the wrath will come at some later date; or, it can be present: the wrath is now coming upon these people. As we read the Bible, it is clear that both of these are applicable. At some point in the future, God will have a final judgement and all those who have rejected Christ will have to face His wrath for eternity. But we also see where God pours out His wrath in some present time in response to sin. One example is the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah; another is His instructions to Israel to destroy all the people in the land of Canaan; He even let judgement upon His own people, Israel, due to their idolatry.

We are familiar with the wrath that comes at the end of time; so let’s look at what takes place here on earth in the present. First off, I assure you that God’s wrath and judgement are upon the earth now. Romans 1:18-32 explain exactly why the world is as it is now.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

24Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. 25For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

26For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

28And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, 29being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* gossips, 30slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; 32and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

Here we see the explanation for all the swift turning to evil that is taking place in this country and in all the other developed nations of the world. Rebellion increased against God so His wrath is released. The people are under judgement as we are told in verse 28 “God gave them over to a depraved mind”.

But what about wrath and the Christian; aren’t we saved from God’s wrath? A couple of verses:

1 Thessalonians 1:10

and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

Jesus rescues us from the wrath to come; from that final judgement of hell. We are saved fully and eternally from that future outpouring of God’s wrath.

1 Thessalonians 5:9

For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Wrath is not our destiny; it is not our future. What about present wrath? The Bible lets us know that the Lord will discipline us when we stray; we come under judgement which is from His wrath for sin. This is shown very clearly when Paul talks about the Lord’s supper to the church in Corinth.

1 Corinthians 11:29-32

For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.

In this case, true Christian people were partaking of the Lord’s supper, without checking out their lives to recognize sin. They had taken the work of Jesus for granted. They were no longer concerned about sin or the wrath of God. Look at what happened: Some of them had become sick and some had actually died; these were Christian people. They did not lose their salvation, but they experienced some of God’s wrath. Notice that we as Christians are disciplined by the Lord; this takes place during our life on earth. We will suffer the consequences of our sin.

Nobody wants to undergo this discipline; but at least for us it is for our good. It is meant to bring us close to God; back into line with His will. Still, we don’t want to experience God’s wrath in any measure. Even more importantly, we don’t want to be the cause of God’s wrath because it hurts Him. We do not want to grieve the Holy Spirit. Our love for Him and our recognition of the high price that Jesus paid for us ought to keep us watchful that we are only pleasing to Him.

The other reason Paul brings these things up is because it is common to have people who regularly attend church, but are not Christians. They have not truly accepted Christ as Lord and Saviour. We must confess Him as our only means of salvation and He must be in first place in our lives. There can be nothing or no one ahead of Him; it there is, then we are idolatress.

These words are a wake-up call. If we believe we are Christian, but look at our lives and see that we are consistently living any of these behaviors, we have a problem. The evidence of our salvation is missing. A person in this condition may be saved and have backslidden, or they are not truly saved. Either way, the situation needs to be fixed by repentance and praying for salvation.

The first part of verse 6 says “let no one deceive you with empty words”. People who will not accept Christ, or who think they have under false pretenses, have been deceived. People who are Christian, but believe that they can get by with unholy behavior are also deceived.

The world is deceived by satan. He tells them that there is no God or that they are good enough to get into heaven without Him. These are the ones who live in sin and in rebellion against God. They face God’s wrath both now and at the final judgement. Oddly enough, they may live a wonderful life, never lacking any material thing they desire. But this is a judgement; if they think everything is good, they will have no incentive to seek Jesus. Sometimes a hard life is a blessing; we recognize our need for a Saviour.

As Jesus warned us, there are many false prophets and teachers in the world. Some teach against the Bible directly; some pretend to teach from the Bible but twist its words to mislead the people. These false teachers fill the internet, TV, and radio; and people flock to them. These false teachers will face the wrath of God; but so will their followers, because they did not check things for themselves in the Bible. They did not follow Paul’s advice to “let no one deceive you”.

We are to watch for “empty words”. Empty words are any speaking or writing that goes against Scripture; Scripture is the word of God.

Proverbs 21:30

There is no wisdom and no understanding  
And no counsel against the Lord.

Anything that contradicts Scripture or modifies it are empty words. Do not be deceived by them.

Paul makes reference to “the sons of disobedience”. These are, of course, any people who do not follow God through Jesus Christ; They will not obey God. Paul tells us in verse 7 that we are not to be partakers with them. We need to study this carefully. There are some Christian groups who will do everything they can to isolate themselves from the world. This is not Biblical; this is not what verse 7 means. The Bible is very clear that we are to live in the world, that we are to have contact with non-believers. This is the only way we can spread the Gospel; if we avoid others, we cannot fulfil the great commission of Matthew 28.

To not be partakers is to not live like them. Our lives are different, holy; our lives ought to be a testimony to them. If we live like them, then we will become partakers in the wrath that they are facing.

Wrath is real and horrible. We don’t want to have to face it. But ultimately, when we look upon Christ, who gave Himself up for us as an offering and a sacrifice; when we consider God, who gave His Son as that sacrifice, our main desire is to be pleasing to Him and not grieve Him to bring about His wrath in the first place.

Prayer

Dear God, Your wrath is a terrifying thing. We confess that we tend to ignore it, because of the perfect work of Your Son. We focus on Your great love and mercy; and we forget that You are also just and that You hate sin. We are guilty of presumption; of taking Christ’s propitiation for granted.

We repent of this attitude, LORD; we ask Your forgiveness through Jesus Christ. May Your Holy Spirit work in our lives to give us a better understanding of Your justice and of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. May this understanding better transform us into the likeness of our Saviour.

Now we praise You and worship You Lord God; You are awesome and terrible; You are holy. By Your grace, and in Your mercy and love, we will one day be in Your presence to adore You.

These things we pray in Jesus’ name

Amen