



## A Biblical View of the Christian Life

*You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*

1 Thessalonians 1:9b-10

### The Nature of Repentance

Paul preached the gospel in the Greco-Roman world. Those who heard his message were devoted to the worship of a variety of gods and goddesses from ancient mythology. Each was represented in a temple by an image made by human hands. All were served by sensuous orgies at their temples.

The apostle's congregation at Thessalonica had *repented*. They had turned away from lifeless forms which did not exist in the realm of reality. As they were averted from the former objects of their religious devotion, their hearts and faces were redirected to '**the living and true God**'. There is only one living God, only one who truly may be called 'God'. He is the Creator of heaven and earth, the God of Abraham, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This religion, which was new to the Gentile nations, required two paths of behaviour from its converts. One was '*to serve the living and true God*' (verse 9). Repentance led to the service of a new way of worship. By the aid of the Holy Spirit each penitent would begin a life of communion with God centering round the Scriptures, prayer, the sacraments, and keeping all of God's commandments. A life of active service to God.

The second pathway of behaviour is expressed in verse 10: '*And to wait for his (the true and living God's) Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*' Paul wrote this letter after Jesus was first sent into our world, after he was crucified, dead and buried; after he had risen from the dead and had ascended into heaven. A major aspect of repentance had been adopting a radical shift in understanding of the outline of world events.

### The Duty of Waiting

In only a few words the entire chronicle of the epic of this earth is told. A shape is given to the total outline of human history! God and his Son dwelt in heaven. The Son was sent to earth to die. He was raised from the dead. There is a wrath of God coming upon this earth. Jesus will come again to deliver all who trust him from the wrath to come. Therefore it is a major aspect of our religion to wait for God's Son. This aspect should consume us as much as all service to God. We turned to God from idols *to serve God and to wait* for his Son from heaven (the Second Coming).

'To wait' is a mindset. It means:

1. Expecting this Son of God to return from heaven to deliver us.
2. Looking for that arrival.
3. Making all proper preparations to receive this Son of God at his return.
4. Placing all hope of escaping the coming wrath on the coming Son of God!

It is not possible to have such an attitude of living, unless we firmly believe catastrophic wrath will fall upon this earth. The true and living God has an unyielding holiness which must visit upon all sinners his vengeance and destruction.

The New Testament has an abundance of passages describing this coming wrath scattered throughout. Peter tells us in 2 Peter 3:10-13:

*The day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are to be dissolved, what people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*

Large passages in Jesus' teachings focus upon a great final judgment of all men when he returns from heaven. In the same way the Book of Revelation describes immense upheavals on the earth and a final judgment at Christ's second coming.

## **Two Critical Moments of Waiting for the Son of God**

In a sense the first coming of God's Son from heaven was much like his second coming will be. When Joseph and Mary took the newborn babe Jesus to the temple in order to keep Mosaic laws of purification they met two extraordinary individuals.

Simeon, an elderly man, '*was righteous and devout, **waiting** for the consolation of Israel*' (Luke 2:25). Anna, an elderly woman, was constantly fasting and praying at the temple and had made acquaintance of '*all who were **waiting** for the redemption of Jerusalem*' (Luke 2:37-38)

These two elderly Jews who joyfully greeted the Christ have a remarkable tale to tell us about 'waiting' in the midst of service to God. For six hundred years the people of God had been oppressed by nations dominated by heathen darkness. That long era of chastisement for their sins against the true and living God had twisted and corrupted the religion of the Jews.

In their day temple religion was dominated by Pharisees whom Jesus was repeatedly to call '*hypocrites*', by Sadducees who, like modern Protestant liberals, had stripped the religion of the Old Testament of all that is supernatural and miraculous, by Herodians devoted to a corrupt government, and by 'Priestly' leaders who were Gentiles who had purchased their offices for earthly gain.

Yet a handful of Jews understood that the Messiah was to come and to redeem Israel. These few but faithful folk *waited* for Messiah and his salvation. They found out one another and kept alive the flame of hopeful waiting, of expecting the Messiah, and of resting all their hope on his appearing.

## **Modern Parallels**

In our age too we see the distortion of true religion by those claiming to embrace the God of Scripture. Roman Catholicism has a message of salvation by works (including idolatrous acts) and administered by 'authorities' who falsely claim religious powers belonging only to the Holy Spirit and to apostles. Another manifestation is found in many, many Protestant Liberals who declare Jesus to be a mere man with better than average insights but no divine commission.

These loud voices claiming to represent 'Christianity' have been joined by 'Evangelicals' determined to be upbeat and optimistic about the present age. With them the message of coming wrath has fallen into silence, and the necessity of the personal return of God's Son has become unnecessary.

A minority of 'Christendom' continues to tremble at the coming wrath as a certainty declared in Scripture. The true believers' own deliverance will be by the return to earth of the same Jesus whom God raised from the dead. As the western world sinks beneath the burden of unending wars with sinister powers, and as it capitulates to philosophies of human self-reliance, conscious trust in a returning Saviour is our only refuge and our only source of joyful hope.

## **Demanding Implications**

When any important guest is expected great preparations must be made. Certainly a room must be cleaned and set in order as the chamber for the coming dignitary. In our case the coming Son of

God from heaven has sent us a request for certain quarters. *'My son, give me your heart'* (Prov. 23:26). He intends to take his lodgings in our inmost beings, in our very souls. When he stands at the door and knocks, it is the entrance to our *hearts* that must open if he will enter and sup with us (Rev. 3:20). As Peter looks ahead to the dissolving of our present world at the coming of Christ he directs us to prepare with lives of holiness and godliness (2 Pet. 3:11). We must thoroughly sweep the chamber chosen by the Lord. With his coming again in view, *'Keep your heart with all vigilance'* (Prov. 4:23).

Identify those who are **'waiting for the consolation of Israel'** and of the church, those **'waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem,'** as did Anna. Speak often with those who *'fear the Lord and esteem his name'* (Mal. 3:16-17). These the Lord will *'spare as a man spares his son who serves him'*. These jewels of God are to be found where true worship is the focus of assembling. *'Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another **and all the more** as you see the Day drawing near'* (Heb. 10:25). Everywhere in the New Testament we find the eschatological element of the coming day of the coming Saviour.

### **The Close Link between Waiting and Serving**

In a sense we have come full circle from serving God to waiting for his Son and back again to serving. Jesus put it this way in his teaching:

*They will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory ... But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake – for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or in the morning – lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.*

Mark 13:26-37

Unfortunately, many studies of eschatology have been filled with speculation as to the timing of Jesus' return from heaven. Repeatedly Jesus insisted that it would be in an hour when we think not. Clearly we are told, *'No one knows'*, and *'You do not know when the master of the house will come.'* There is no point to speculation about the timing of this great cosmic event. Because of this mistaken speculation, too many have set aside all consideration of the fact that the Son of Man will surely come again.

This setting aside of the expectation of and hope in the Saviour's Second Coming is a serious flaw. *'From thence (heaven) he shall come to judge the quick (living) and the dead.'* So says the Apostles' Creed. In addition to the frequent exhortations from Jesus' lips to watch, to wait, and to stay awake, there is the serious matter of our calling.

If we are Christians, whether noted elders or recently-born-again babes in Christ, we have been employed as the servants of the Lord of Glory. No post is insignificant, but each is dignified by the One we serve. There must be no slouching in our lofty service. We must be alert and aware of the certainty that the great Lord from heaven will come to our stations! What he asks is that we watch for his arrival, and that we be found doing what he appointed for us. No task that he assigns is trivial.

Our service, while Christ is away from his earthly home where his servants have been left in charge, is a very personal favour in Jesus' estimation. In the final judgment he will say to those who serve well, *'As you did it ... you did it to me'* (Matt. 25:40). The risen Jesus is watching our service that is motivated by devotion to him and by a heart waiting for his return. *'You turned to God from idols to serve ... and to wait for his Son from heaven'* (1 Thess. 1:9-10).

Walter J Chantry