"The Goodness And Severity Of God"

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Paul wanted Christians to fully understand the nature of the God we serve. He reminded his Gentile audience of the severity of God's judgment upon the Hebrew people for their idolatrous practices thus urging the Gentiles who had been made acceptable in Christ to consider very seriously their responsibility to remain faithful to God. He wrote, "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off" (Rom. 11:22).

Sunday afternoon at Getwell in studying the symbols in the book of Revelation we came upon "the winepress of the wrath of God" in chapter 14. The source of the trouble addressed in Revelation is Babylon, which clearly is an apocalyptic reference to Rome. The certainty of the coming demise of Rome is underscored by the use of the prophetic present tense where that which is to come is presented as having already happened. John wrote, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication" (v. 8). Some commentators refer to this chapter in Revelation as "The Great Harvest" due to the reaping of the earth discussed in the chapter. But, the reaping is not of the righteous but of the wicked whose punishment for their sins is described as their being thrust into "the great winepress of the wrath of God" (v. 19).

In Revelation, John quotes more from the Old Testament than any other New Testament writer. For example, out of the 404 verses in the book 348 references to the Old Testament may be identified. However, there are not direct quotations or citations in the usual form as may be seen elsewhere in the New Testament but rather allusions drawn into the Apocalypse to convey the message unique to John's readers in the late first century A.D. (Rev. 1:1). Peering back into the Old Testament, a possible source from which John is bringing this imagery is Isaiah 63:1-3. Isaiah expressed God's judgment on Israel for their idolatry in these words, "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, traveling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment." The picture is that of a mighty person wearing deeply dyed clothing as if purchased in an expensive place, but upon closer examination the clothing is deeply stained with the blood of the wicked upon whom God has exacted his righteous vengeance.

Like the stomping of grapes in a winepress yielding a crimson flow of juice, the wrath of God is depicted as the wicked having the blood stomped out of them. John wrote, "And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs" (Rev. 14:20). The depth of the blood is staggering; the distance of the flow is literally the length of Palestine but as Swete suggested is likely symbolic of the entire earth.

We do not hear much on the subject of the severity of God, so comments concerning the wrath of God may be needed. Space will afford discussion of three observations on the wrath of God.

The Wrath of God Shows
The Severity of Sin

One development likely resulting from the inspired affirmation that "all have sinned

and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23) is that people have great difficulty understanding the seriousness with which sin is viewed by an infinitely holy God (Hab. 1:13). The mercy of God toward man is highlighted in the realization that God did not immediately condemn mankind when sin entered the world like he did the angels who sinned in eternity past. Peter wrote, "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment" (II Pet. 2:4). Nowhere can sins repulsion to God be seen clearer than that which was required to remedy its consequences, that is, the death of the Son of God (Isa. 53:11; Jn. 3:16; Heb. 9:22; Jn. 19:33-35).

The Wrath of God Shows
The Severity of Rejecting the Mercy of God

One of the greatest responsibilities God ever gave man was the ability to choose between right and wrong—between serving God or the Devil (Josh. 24:15; Mt. 7:13-14). The mercy of God is the pity of God toward man for his utter inability to save himself (Jer. 10:23). Long, long ago the prophet Micah wrote, "Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Mic. 6:7-8).

The Wrath of God Shows
The Severity of Indifference

Always, God has required man to seek him, and he always has drawn man to him through his goodness to mankind (Isa. 55:6; Mt. 6:33). Romans 2:4, "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" Above even the drawing power of the magnificence of the universe he created and the existence and sustenance with which he provides mankind stands the surpassing love of God through his Son, Jesus Christ. "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (Jn. 12:31-32). Friends, "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God."