

The way you live today is an investment for your future and God will pay you back on your investment. He will bring vengeance upon the persecutors of His children and all those who rebel against Him, but give relief and a glorious future to all those who have believed and trusted in Jesus Christ. This was the message which Paul wrote to encourage the Thessalonians as they faced persecution. He describes for them God's future payback.

1. God's payback will be "fair" for all (1:6–7).

- a. It will be fair, because it will return to each what they have invested (1:6–7a).
- b. It will be fair, because it will be returned by a righteous judge (1:7b).

The "revelation of Jesus Christ" is both the time and the means by which payback is made. He is the exalted, authorized, almighty, divine Judge who by His angels will gather His children to Himself and cast away the wicked (cf. Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43).

2. God's payback is earned by the wicked (1:8).

- a. The wicked "do not know God" and have earned their payback, because they have no excuse for not knowing God (Romans 1:18–20).
- b. Some have heard but "do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus."
They have even greater guilt because of greater light (Matthew 11:23–24).

Paul, as a former persecutor of the church, "escaped" punishment, only because he turned to Jesus Christ. This is the only "escape" for the wicked. All who turn to Christ can look forward to the "relief" which comes when Jesus returns.

3. God's payback is tragic for the wicked (1:9).

- a. It will be tragic, because the (just) penalty must be paid.
- b. It will be tragic, because the penalty is eternal destruction.
It is forever and ever, as long as eternal life is for the believer (cf. Matthew 25:46).
It is eternal ruin, not annihilation, but separation from the presence of God, as explained in the rest of verse 9.

God will care for vengeance. Rather love your enemies now, before it is too late, that they might turn to Christ. Know that a future apart from Christ is worse than any misery in this life. Pray for compassion for the lost around us.

4. God's payback is glorious for believers (1:10).

- a. Believers will participate in the glory that will be given to Jesus Christ.
Believers have been set apart from sin and the world to God (i.e., they are saints). They will give praise to Jesus Christ and their redemption will display Jesus Christ's glory.
- b. Believers will not be cast from His presence, but will get to marvel at Jesus Christ.
They will be amazed as they see more clearly His Person and majesty, and respond with pure and complete admiration.
The only condition is belief in the gospel message, one met by the Thessalonians, and valid for all who believe.

To come with nothing but our sin and to plead for God's mercy in Jesus Christ, to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, is the only "investment" needed. The "payback" is eternal life in Christ, a gift of God. To live for Christ and entrust our lives to Him daily will bring His praise and glory. A "payback" worth waiting for.

Refusing to come and failing to repent of sin only stores up wrath for the day of God's wrath (Romans 2:5). It is a "fair" but horrible payback.

Two ways lead to only two destinies: eternal ruin or eternity in the glorious presence of Jesus Christ. He is the only way, the narrow way, to eternal life. The broad way, outside of Christ, leads to destruction. Payback is coming. Have you invested trust or rebellion? Will you receive ruin or relief?