***Lightning and Thunder

RV74-02***

We are studying the throne room of God in Revelation 4:1-5. This is segment number 7.

**God's Throne Room**

As we have seen, the apostle John has been honored by Jesus Christ with a vision of God's heavenly throne room. He has been invited into the throne room itself. There he sees one sitting upon a throne, surrounded by 24 other thrones. On each of these 24 thrones, there is a rational creature called an elder. Each of them is seated there in white garments, signifying ultimate sanctification, and they are wearing the reward of crowns for their divine good works. We have indicated that the 24 elders on these thrones are a biblical symbol of a group of individuals representing a larger body. The 24 elders here represent the church as the body of Christ – that unique segment of saints from Pentecost to the rapture of the church.

The elders seated on the throne are a fitting symbol, because they, of course, speak to us of the elder-bishop-pastor-teacher in each local church organization. This symbol of the elders in heaven representing the body of Christ indicates again to us that the church does not go through the tribulation judgments. The church is removed and it is in heaven. That actually is what we have in Revelation chapters 4 and 5 – the situation in heaven with the church there. Then, in chapter 6, John begins to see the future of mankind unfolding as it will be experienced during the seven years of divine tribulation.

**The Pastor-Elder-Teacher**

It is important that we understand, at this point, the subject of the pastor-elder-teacher in the local church ministry. So, we have been reviewing what the Bible has to say about this issue. This is important because, if this is wrong in a local church, then everything else down the line is out of order. By and large, this is wrong in the local churches. It is wrong in its concept of authority in administration, and it is wrong in this concept of what the pastor-teacher-elder is supposed to be doing; what he is called to do; and, what his primary responsibility is. There are so few Christians who understand this truth, and who can look at these elders seated around Jesus Christ, and understand what they really represented in the local church organization. So, the poor Christian who has to go out and look for a local church doesn't know what on earth to look for. The first clue to whether you're in the right place is the person who is in the pulpit.

So, we continue now with a little further examination of the elder-bishop-pastor as the local church administrator. Again, I want to remind you of a very important point. It will save you a lot of trouble if you get this clear in your mind. That is that the word "elder;" the word "bishop;" and, the word "pastor" all apply to one and the same individual. ... There are not, in the local church, some people who are elders; some people who are bishops; and, some people who are pastors. That is impossible on the basis of the Word of God. It is one person. He is the elder-bishop-pastor, and you may add here the teacher fact, because in order to be a pastor, he must be a teacher. So the complete title is the elder-bishop-pastor-teacher. These do not refer to separate offices.

Let's go back to Acts 20:28, where we have this fact established. We have the historical record of the apostle Paul asking the pastors from the city of Ephesus to meet with him at Miletus, as he was preparing to depart for Jerusalem: "Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves (speaking to these pastors), and to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers." The word "overseers" is the word "bishop:" "To feed the church of God." "To feed" means "to pasture," and that's associated with the word "pastor" here: "Which He has purchased with His own blood." If you compare this verse to Acts 20:17, you'll see that these same men, that he has already called bishops (overseers), and he has indicated that their duty is that of pastoring, in verse 17, he calls them elders: "And from Miletus, he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church." So, this chapter establishes for us that all three of these titles belong to one person, not to different people within the congregation.

**Elder**

Let's look at it once more. The word "elder" looks like this in the Greek: "presbuteros." This is an adjective. This is referring to the rank and the authority of the executive head of the local church. When he is called an elder, that word really means "the old man." It is old man, not in chronological age so much, as in the fact that he carries the authority of age. He is the old man in terms of rank and authority as the executive head of the local church.

**Bishop**

When he is called a bishop, that is another word. That is the word "episkopos." "Episkopos" is a noun which refers to the ministry of the local church executive head as overseer or manager of the church work. When we call him an elder, we are referring to his authority of leadership. When we call him a bishop, we are referring to his responsibility for managing the local church work.

**Pastor**

Then when we call him a pastor, which is the Greek word "poimen," this noun refers to the responsibility of the executive head of the local church in caring for the spiritual well-being of the members.

So, each of these indicates something about that one person who is the executive head of that local church, and there is only one of these in every local church. If he's referred to as an elder, it is recognizing his spiritual authority in that church. If he is called a bishop, it is recognizing his responsibility to oversee or to manage the business of that local assembly. If he is called a pastor, it is recognizing his duty of caring for the spiritual well-being of the church members. The word "poimen" main actually means shepherd." If you are going to really translate this word, it means the shepherd.

In Acts 20:28, therefore, that we have just read, you see that the apostle Paul says, "Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock." Immediately, we see that he's using the analogy of a shepherd and his sheep: "Over all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (bishops) to feed the church of God." The responsibility of the elder-bishop-pastor in the local church, then, is to feed the church of God. The word "to feed" is "poimaino." "Poimaino" (to feed) means "to shepherd" or "to tend the flock." The idea here is to govern. Feeding the congregation refers to nurturing the believers on the spiritual food of Bible doctrine truth. Therefore, in Matthew 4:4, we read, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

In the Old Testament, the book of Job refers to the same concepts of doctrinal truth as spiritual food. Job 23:12 says, "Neither have I gone back from the commandment of His lips." These are God's lips. God's commandments are His doctrinal truths: "Neither have I gone back from the commandment of His lips. I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food." So, here again, we have the same concept expressed in Job that Jesus expressed in Matthew 4:4 – that physical food is critical, but no human being lives on the basis of physical food alone. He cannot make it that way.

That's the trouble with our society today. We've got a society filled with people, and particularly in our country, who have ample physical food, with all the comforts and luxuries that attend that, but they do not have the spiritual food that enables them to make it as human beings. So, all of our social institutions are coming apart. It is shocking to realize that out of every two marriages, one is going to end up in divorce. It is shocking to realize that the Dallas Fort Worth area is the leader in the United States of the number of divorces. It's even worse. There's a reason for that. When human beings marry, and the sustenance of their existence is physical food, their marriage is threatened from the very first day. It is almost certain to come apart. It takes the spiritual food to cement it together, because without spiritual orientation and stability, you cannot make it in marriage.

The problem goes into education. We have a total disorientation to education. Not so long ago, we had, under the Carter administration, one of the leaders in the Department of Education had declared that we must get over the immorality of biblical morality in our society. That's an interesting, twisted kind of logic – that biblical morality is immoral, because it imposes upon people that which is bad for them. I think it was the lady who is the head of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare who said that for America to be Christianized would be a great tragedy. What is she saying? She's saying, in effect, that spiritual food is not important. The food of the Word of God is not important to human beings. Physical things are what is important. Of course, that's the Marxist viewpoint that permeates even American society today.

The Word of God says that God has provided an organizational structure within a local church where there is a person who holds the role of elder-bishop-pastor who is responsible for shepherding the flock, which consists of being fed the Word of Truth. This word "poimaino," which means "to shepherd" or "to tend" is in the aorist tense, which tells us that this is the primary duty of the elder-bishop-pastor as a whole. Whatever else he does, this is his primary responsibility. Furthermore, it is in the active voice, which tells us that the elder-pastor-teacher must do the feeding of the sheep himself. This cannot be sloughed off to someone else, because the primary place that the sheep are fed spiritually, and where they're going to make it, is right here within these organized regular services of the local church, where he is, as Ephesians 4:11 says, going to face them with the Greek preposition "pros" which means face-to-face. As he faces them, and they face him, they receive the instruction that the Spirit of God provides in its primary instructional context. There are other areas that instruct, but the primary one is that executed by the pastor-teacher.

This happens to be in the infinitive mood, which tells us that this is God's purpose for the elder-pastor-teacher in the local church organization. That's a very important thing – that this is infinitive in mood. Almighty God the Holy Spirit is telling us, "This is what I intend to happen in the local church – that the people of God shall be fed by the Word of God, and thus they are to be shepherded."

**The Spiritual Gift of Pastor-Teacher**

The shepherd, who feeds the flock divine viewpoint truth, does require the gift of pastor-teacher which is listed in Ephesians 4:11. The pastor-teacher gift means that the person has the spiritual gift of teaching. I want to stress to you again that it does not mean that the pastor-teacher must be a teachable person. It goes without saying that he must indeed be that. But 1 Timothy 3:2 says, "He must be apt to teach." The translation there is: "He must be skillful in teaching." And if he is not skillful in teaching, then he cannot be feeding the sheep. This is not something that you develop. This is a spiritual gift. He is skillful in teaching spiritual truth. Therefore, not everyone can be an elder-pastor-teacher – only those who have, by God's choice, been given the gift. Why one person has a gift and another person doesn't have it, I don't know, and it's irrelevant. The point is that when it exists, that person is responsible for exercising it accordingly.

The elder-bishop-pastor-teacher in charge of a local church ministry is actually serving as the under shepherd of Jesus Christ through the exercise of his pastor-teacher gift. That's why Paul says that the elder-pastor-teacher is to take care of the local church under his authority. In 1 Timothy 3:5, we read, "For if a man doesn't know how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" This is part of the qualifications for an elder-pastor-teacher. This is part of the guidelines that congregations must use to select men for that responsibility. That verse tells us that part of his responsibility is to take care of the local church. And what that means is to exercise spiritual authority in that local church. Of course, the concept here is that if this man has children, and his children cannot be restrained with obedience to his authority as they grow up, that certainly he cannot expect to be able to exercise obedience within the congregation. He will have a bunch of maverick, rebellious sheep who will be taking charge of things there as well.

The idea of taking care here is another word. We ought to look at that. In 1 Timothy 3:5, the word for care is "epimelomai." "Epimelomai" connotes "forethought and provision for another." To take care of" means "forethought and provision for another." So, the elder-pastor-teacher must give some thought for how the sheep are going to be cared for, and he must make provision for their care. This is in the future tense. It connotes any time in the future that a member of the flock needs spiritual help. It's active. The pastor-teacher-elder does the caring. It's indicative – a statement of fact.

To give you an idea of specifically what is involved in this caring, this is the same word which is used in Luke 10:34-35 in the story of the Good Samaritan: "And went to him (to the man that he saw wounded by the side of the road), and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him ('epimelomai')." Verse 35: "On the next day when he departed, he took out two denari and gave them to the host, and said to him, 'Epimelomai' him (take care of him), and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you." There you have specifically what the elder-pastor-bishop is all about in that capacity. This is the wounded sheep; the sheep who is negative; the sheep who is thrashing around against the will of God; the sheep who is thrashing around against doctrinal truth in some respect; and, who is thrashing around against the arrogance of the sin nature that the Spirit of God is trying to bring into subjection. And in the process, he is doing a great deal of self-injury.

Wounded church members can only be cared for in one way. It is very dangerous to miss this. The poor man on the road, that the Good Samaritan found, could only be helped in his wounds with proper application of medicinal help and nutritious care. And that's exactly what the Good Samaritan provided. For the wounded church member, there is only one medicine, and that is the medicine of doctrinal truth – being brought to understand that here is the problem. This is the disease; this is what you're fighting against; and, this is what God has to say. When you subject yourself to God's viewpoint, your spiritual healing will follow immediately. You must understand that, because we're given the idea that all a person has to do is have a lot of counseling; have a lot of sympathy; and, have a lot of chicken soup that you bring over, and other kindnesses, and that then they will straighten out. They will not. If they will not straighten out with the Word of God being brought to their attention, they will not straighten out.

The result of that will be that the sheep are going to ignore the medicine, or they may be negative to it. They will not apply the medicine. They will stay sick, and then they will stray from green pastures. That, I guarantee you, is inevitable. When they reject the medicine for their wound, they will stray from green pastures, and they will go out and start feeding on husks like the prodigal son. It's a very dangerous thing to pretend that the elder-bishop-pastor-teacher, who exercises spiritual authority in the local church, is some nincompoop that can be pushed around and ignored before the Lord. That is a dangerous game. You better be sure that he is really wrong. You better be sure he is really on the wrong track, because if he's right, you are on a self-destructive course. What God will do is that He will grab you up by your hair roots, and he will jerk you out of green pastures, and He'll throw you into a burned-out field and say, "Now there. Scrounge around on that." He did it to the prodigal son until the prodigal son was out there eating with the pigs. If you want to eat in the pig sty, you just pretend that you do not have to be responsive to the authority of the Word of God as it is delivered to you faithfully by the pastoral authority in a local church.

This is serious business. God has put it together because the Lord knew that Satan was going to destroy every Christian he could. In the age of the angelic conflict, this is the only defense. If that fellow in the local church does his job, the believers are going to have a chance to survive. They are going to have a chance to be victorious over all the satanic things that come into their lives. If he does not do his job, they are doomed.

One of our men came to me this week and said, "You know, I went back and I read through and studied through on the tapes of that Ephesians 4:11 passage." He said, "I am astounded. That is a thrilling passage. But it is also scary because it is a chain reaction." And it all starts with that face-to-face meeting in the local congregational meetings, and if that is not done right, or the sheep ignore it and don't show up for that instruction, then they are not fed, and then they cannot be strengthened, and they cannot be equipped for the combat. Then they themselves cannot grow to spiritual maturity. Then the Lord's work cannot be accomplished, and the body of Christ cannot be brought to completion in maturity.

That is frightening. The Bible could not be clearer about it. So, "epimelomai" means to care for the wounded ones. But when have to care for a wounded sheep, and all of you will, remember: Don't try to substitute; don't try to psych them; and, don't try to encourage them into some delusion that all is well with them. If they are spiritual rats, help them to realize that they're spiritual rats, and that until they turn around and change course, they're going to still be spiritual rats, and they're going to run around like rats. When the barn door is open, and the light of God's sunshine comes in, they're going to hide, while those of you who are oriented spiritually are the birds who are going to start singing.

So, you go ahead and kill yourself, and wound yourself, and strike out, and express the arrogance of the sin nature if you want to. Justify it any way you want to. But don't you forget that there's a report card time coming at the Judgment Seat of Christ, and the kind of eternity you're going to enjoy is going to depend upon the kind of life you lived here, and mostly on the kind of positive volition you exercised toward the teaching authority in that local church in which God has placed you.

There is only one elder-bishop-pastor in each local church. The office is entered by divine appointment. That was another thing that Paul reminded these Ephesian pastors about in Acts 20:28. He told them to: "Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers" – "over which the Holy Spirit has made you bishops:" "Has made" is the Greek word "tithemi." "Tithemi" means "to be placed in this position." It is aorist tense, indicating the point in time when the Holy Spirit leads the congregation to recognize a man as the elder-pastor-teacher for their particular church. It is middle, which stresses that the Holy Spirit is the agent of this appointment. The middle voice indicates that it's the Holy Spirit who is the agent who clarifies to a church and says, "Not Sam; not Joe; and, not Jake, but James is the pastor for your church. He's the one you select." And God the Holy Spirit thereby places him. It's indicative mood. It's a statement of fact.

So, the Holy Spirit guides a positive congregation to recognize a specific man, first, as possessing the pastor-teacher gift. He sure should do that. In heaven's name, don't appoint an evangelist to your pulpit. Get a man with the pastor-teacher gift, and then recognize him as being God's choice to lead that particular local church. Acts 20:28: "Over which the Holy Spirit has made you bishops."

**Pastors are Men**

The congregation has some guidance in recognition of a qualified candidate for the elder-pastor-teacher-bishop role (office) by the guidelines in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and in Titus 1:5-9. As somebody pointed out and observed to me last week, one of those requirements is that if he is married, he is to be the husband of one wife. That really is a tough qualification for the Pentecostal women preachers to fulfill. They have a very difficult problem being the husband of one wife. I'm not really sure how they work that one out, but they are working on it, and maybe they have worked it out in a way that they don't want to talk about. But in any case, obviously, just that requirement alone indicates that we're talking about males as being pastor-elder-bishops.

**Apostolic Succession**

The obedience of the congregation and the obedience of the man with the pastor-teacher gift results in combining the right elder-pastor-teacher with the right church. And elder-pastor-teachers do not appoint other elder pastor-teachers to the churches. That would be apostolic succession. That would be claiming to have the authority of an apostle. Only apostles could appoint elders. Now, only congregations, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit can appoint elder-bishops.

His job, as was the job of these 24 elders sitting on these thrones around the throne of God, was to make final decisions concerning the local church business. He is where the buck stops. His decisions are subject to review and change by the congregation at any time. The pastor makes decisions, and should make them with maximum objectivity. Their decisions are based on facts, and not some surge of emotion – his or others. That's often a problem in local churches. If the pastor-teacher is doing his job, he will make decisions with objectivity, and will give advice and guidance accordingly in the direction of the church. He is faced with people who are acting with emotion, or people who are not in the position of having his insights. So, he's in a very great advantaged position because he's there all the time and he knows what's going on. If he's been in the ministry, he's got a lot of experience to bring. So, he has some judgments to exercise which are often resisted just because people haven't caught up with him.

It's like the man in the little country church who was strongly opposed to the fact that the pastor wanted, and was recommending to the congregation, that they buy a chandelier. He was just adamant about being opposed to spending money for a chandelier. Finally, the pastor says, "Why are you so opposed to our getting a chandelier?" He says, "Well, for the first thing, nobody knows how to spell the word. So, how are we going to even order the thing? And secondly, if we do get it, nobody knows how to play it. So, what good is it? And the third thing is that what we need is to get more light in this church." I've had that experience many times. I've had my chandeliers left and right. And I've had to nod my head and look to heaven, and say, "Oh, Lord, don't tell me I've got another one like that who doesn't know the score, but is very opinionated on how to handle the situation."

He has to make his decisions with maximum objectivity, and not be bowled over by the emotions and the shortcomings of the judgments of other people. He has to be concerned that what he does is OK with the Lord. It's not that it's OK with his friends; it's not that it's OK with his family; and, it's not that it's OK with his big financial backers in the ministry, but that it's okay with the Lord. He has the maximum insight opportunity from the Word; from operational information; and, from his experience. The members are free to express their views; their concerns; and, their recommendations, and they surely should, and they better do that. But he has to be the quarterback who finally takes the responsibility for calling the plays. Differences of opinion in the congregation, as they always do exist among members, require an umpire, and it has to be an umpire who is willing to make the decisions.

I was watching a Japanese wrestling match for a little bit last night, and they were describing it in Japanese. You could see all that was going on, and I fully understood the language because I could see what these guys were doing. Finally the bout was over, and one guy wanted to keep fighting. The referee got under there and grabbed him by the hair and put his fist under his jaw and started counting. I guess they can count to a certain number and you'd better let go. And, boy, that guy jumped off and let go. And I thought, "Now, there's a pastor-teacher doing his work in the wrestling ring – grabbing them by the hair and jerking them back, saying, 'Now, I'm going to count to five, and you better let go.'"

That's what you're faced with when you get strong-willed pushy members who are trying to create dissension and trying to get other Christians to assume their problem. There are always enough dumb Christians who are going along wonderfully, enjoying the relationship with the Lord and with the believers. Then some character comes along and gets them caught up in their problem and their dissension and their malcontent situation, and they become part of the problem, and they lose their grace orientation and their happiness.

If you think your course is right, you should pray that the pastor in time will be led by the Lord to realize that your direction is the direction to go. And if your pastor is wrong, I guarantee you that the Lord will not let him continue in it. The greatest misery comes to the pastor-teacher-elder-bishop who is wrong. He is neither perfect nor even as perfect as some of his board members sometimes. But he's not perfect, and the Lord straighten him out. If he is responsive to the Lord, then he will be the first to change. If your viewpoint is not accepted, you may assume that maybe it is because that isn't the Lord's plan. That's an insult to the Lord's ability and to the Lord's faithfulness in caring for His local congregations. And don't forget that it is Jesus Christ who is the head of the local church. It is an insult to Him for you to pretend that some pastor-teacher who is off-base cannot be straightened out by the Lord. They can. The pious moaners in the congregation are just people whose own sin nature power lusts have been frustrated by that pastor-teacher-elder-bishop. Very often they will just move on and find some little group that they can dominate.

**Lording it Over**

There is one problem. We should mention 1 Peter 5:3 in terms of such authority in the local church. It tells the elder-pastor-teacher: "Neither as being Lords over God's heritage, but examples to the flock." This forbids a pastor-teacher from lording it over his congregation. If he disobeys this directive, then he will come under discipline. If he continues, he faces potential removal from his office and his ministry by the Lord. This verse tells us that, in the long run, no elder-bishop-pastor-teacher can get away with lording it over the congregation that is following the interests of his sin nature rather than the guidance of the Spirit of God. He will not get away with being a dictator, and he will be brought down because God is sovereign; God is omnipotent; and, God is truth to His Word. You may count on that.

It is blasphemy even to suggest that God's system of local church organization vested in a single elder-bishop-pastor-teacher can result in the congregation being victimized. That is not true. The greatest victimizing of groups historically, if you are a student of history, has always been by committees. The people of the Roman Empire knew their greatest victimizing when the Roman triumvirates (the committees) ruled, because committees are powerful groups that can override opposition, whereas a single individual cannot. That's why God did not put committees in charge of local churches, because they can victimize the congregations, and they usually do. But the single individual cannot get away with that.

So, with this site of John seeing these elders, he immediately recognizes, no doubt in his own mind, that here is the church in heaven. He knows that he himself was an elder. He understands the spiritual responsibility. He himself had stopped using the word "apostle" in his writings, and he wrote near the end of the New Testament church era. He was shifting to the word "elder" all the time, because he knew the apostles were going off the scene, and the authority in the local congregation had to go to the elder-bishop-pastor. So, John recognizes that the church is here.

Then immediately, his attention in Revelation 4:5 is drawn to something else. He immediately sees the signs of great divine wrath: "And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderclaps and voices." The word "out of" is important. It's this great preposition "ek" which means "out from within." So, from within the throne of God now, John sees something happening. The throne is that same throne that we have already seen – that "thronos" that refers to God's throne. It is His seat of sovereign authority in heaven. John sees something proceeding "out from the throne." The word "proceeded" is "ekporeumai." "Ekporeumai" means "to go forth." John saw and heard something coming out from within God's throne. His attention is immediately riveted upon that. This word is in the present tense, so that John constantly saw this. It repeated and repeated. It's active in meaning. It actually was taking place.

**Lightning**

What he saw, first of all, was lightnings. This word is "astrape." "Astrape" is the word that means lightning, just as we use the word "lightning." So, from within the throne of God, John sees these bolts of lightning crashing out. That, I'm sure was an awesome sight. These bolts of lightning were exploding right before his eyes. John, who was a good student of the Old Testament, immediately, no doubt, thought of the incident recorded in Exodus 19:16 when the Mosaic law was given on Mount Sinai: "And it came to pass on the third day in the morning that there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud upon the mount, and a voice of the trumpet exceedingly loud, so that all the people that were in the camp trembled." For the people there, it was a frightening experience.

This concept (this vision) of lightning appears again in Revelation 8:5; Revelation 11:19; and, Revelation 16:18. On each of those occasions, it has to do with divine judgments. It has to do with lightning at the moment that God is going to bring punishment. Lightning symbolizes the divine wrath of God against evil. God's throne of grace before the rapture has now, as John looks at it, become the throne of wrath and divine judgment.

**Thunderclaps**

John is aware of the fact of seeing these bolts of lightning coming out of the throne of God. Then, very understandably, he also can hear something, and that is thunderclaps ("bronte"). John hears loud peals of thunder coming from God's throne. Again, as we saw in Exodus 19:16 on Mount Sinai, the thunder is associated with the presence of God. Thunder symbolizes divine power which will be exercised against all unbelievers. There is something about thunderclaps that certainly speaks of power. You are aware that you are in the presence of some kind of tremendous power when you hear those thunderclaps pealing forth like that.

The thing that John realizes is that God the Father is a powerful being, and the thunderclaps make that very clear to him. It's good for us to remember that God the Father is going to overcome all the smug, arrogant, liberal mentality of our world. The Bible tells us again and again something about these people who arrogantly reject the Word of God. Remember that that is what is happening in our society. They are going to face the almighty power of God at some point, and the result for them is going to be the frustration of the gnashing of teeth.

In Matthew 13:40-42 we read, "And therefore, the tears are gathered and burned in the fire. So it shall be at the end of this age. The Son of Man shall send forth His angels. They shall gather out of His kingdom all the things that offend, and them who do iniquity (all the arrogant, liberal, smug mentalities), and shall cast them into a furnace of fire. There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." There will be gnashing of teeth, in part, because of pain; and, gnashing of teeth, in part, because they cannot control God.

Matthew 22:11: "When the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man who did not have a wedding garment on. He said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here not having a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast them into utter darkness. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

In Matthew 24:42, again, we have that terrible picture: "Watch, therefore, for you don't know what hour the Lord comes, but know this: that if the householder had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore, also be ready, for in such an hour as you think not, the Son of Man comes. Who then is a faithful and wise servant whom his lord has made ruler over his household to give them food in due season? Blessed is the servant whom his lord, when he comes, shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you that he shall make him ruler over all his goods, but if that evil servant shall say in his heart, 'My lord delays his coming,' and shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the lord of that servant shall come in the day when he doesn't look for him, and in that hour that he is not aware of, and he shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

You may add to that Luke 13:22-30, which also convey that idea that when God the Father exercises His power, there is going to be a bunch of gnashing of teeth.

I call this to your attention because we fundamentalists are today despised and ridiculed by our society. But we, in that contempt, remember that we are in the honored company of people like the apostle Paul, who describes his own treatment at the hands of his intellectual world, and of the other believers. In 1 Corinthians 4:9, for example, Paul says, "For I think that God has set forth us the apostles last, as it were, appointed to death. For we are made a spectacle into the world, into angels, and into men. We are fools, for Christ's sake. But you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are honorable, but we are despised."

Right there, that's sarcasm in verse 10, because this church was an awfully snotty church. This was a church that was very arrogant and very carnal, as you know. This was a church that had given a great deal of misery to the apostle Paul, and had said contemptible things about him. For example, they said, "Oh, yeah, Paul was great when he could write a letter, but in his words (in his presence), he's very weak." Paul is using sarcasm here about the great spiritual progress they've made. As you go down through this chapter, he reminds them where all of their instruction began. If it wasn't for him, they would have known zero to begin with in spiritual things, and now they know so much. But he does describe what his real condition is as a servant of the Lord.

Verse 11: "Even unto this present hour, we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place, and labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless. Being persecuted, we endure. Being defamed, we entreat. We are made as the filth of the world (and, boy, he means filth there), are the off-scouring (the dirty garbage) of all things unto this day." That's how it is for those of us who are in the fundamentalist camp. Don't forget that that's how we are treated. When the world knows what our position is, and knows our loyalty to the Lord, and knows our rejection of the evil of our society and its moral system, they're going to look upon us as garbage.

Let me add to that Acts 17:22. Here is Paul with the intellectual men of our day. Those are the people that are going to bowl you over. These are the characters with the big high IQs; all the college degrees; and, who can speak with a mellifluous voice. Here is the apostle Paul in Athens, the center of intellectualism of the time: Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' Hill (the Areopagus) and said, "You men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious." Then he goes on and tells them about their altar to the unknown god. He wants to tell them about the real God, and how this was a living God who is a God who created us all, and that we should seek after him. He tells them how He has revealed Himself and He has made Himself known, and that this God cannot be represented by idols that they have carved out of their hands, because He is a living God, and that He is an essence that is far beyond any idol object. He's not just a dead god.

In verse 30, Paul says, "And the times of this ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent." There was a time when God was waiting to bring His Son, but now the time has come for repentance: "Because He has appointed a day in which He would judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom he has ordained (the Lord Jesus Christ), concerning which He has given assurances to all men, in that He has raised Him from the dead."

To fully appreciate that statement, you must remember that there was something that was commonly accepted. If there was anything accepted in the intellectual circles of the ancient world, it was that when a human body dies, it's like a dog or a horse or anything else. It's dead and gone. It rots away, never to be seen again. If the ancient philosophers came to any conclusion uniformly, it was that there was no life after human death. The apostle Paul is standing up with the greatest intellectuals of the day, and he's talking about this living God who cannot be represented with idols, who has raised from the dead His Savior Son. Notice their smug response:

Verse 32: "And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, and others said, 'We will hear you again of this matter.' So, Paul departed from among them." Isn't that interesting? Paul didn't say, "Well, let's sing another verse of a hymn, and see if I can get you to change your mind. Paul didn't flee. Paul said, "I've given you the information. Now you are responsible. And you can mock me, and you can shove off (which they did). You could not come back again to my services. That doesn't makes any difference to me. But, boy, it's going to make a big difference to you, buddy." Paul departed from among them. These men are now burning in the raging flames of Hades. I guarantee you they are thinking again and again of that moment on Mars' Hill when it was within their grasp, and Paul even uses that expression: "He is there for you to reach out and take hold of." Within their grasp was eternal life. Within that moment was their opportunity that the Spirit of God gave to escape the eternal torments of the flames of hell. They let it slip through their fingers.

But not everyone did so. There were a few who became biblical Christians. Verse 34 says, "Nevertheless, certain men joined them and believed, among them who were Dionysius, the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them." Isn't that amazing? Here was this guy, Dionysius. He was a nobody who had probably been shoved off. Here was this poor girl named Damaris. Here, she is immortalized in the pages of Scripture because, while the intellectual men turned their noses up at the truth of the Word of God given by one who had the teaching authority of the living God, this woman believed. She will escape the thunderclaps of God's power. The others will experience it.

So John sees the bolts of lightning. It's hard to picture this. I almost wish you could put this in a movie form: the bolts of lightning coming out of that throne; and, these thunderclaps, one after another. He becomes aware of another thing: a rumbling noise. Our translation says, "Voices." But it's more than voices. We'll go into that next time.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1982

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