

The Legal Limit On Sin

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The Legal Limit On Sin

"And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. For you brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your countrymen, even as they did from the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out; they are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost. First Thessalonians 2:13-16

The Doctrine

God has allotted to every single entity a measure of sin. When that measure of sin is full, that entity is under the wrath of God to the utmost.

The doctrine of the legal limit on sin is one of the most neglected doctrines of the day. Are you acquainted with it? You certainly need to be! This is the very doctrine that is set before us in the words of the text.

Some suppose that biblical matters are only important if they are often repeated in Scripture. If this is an accurate appraisal, then the doctrine that I set in front of you might be one you could safely disregard because there are not vast portions of Scripture that focus on it. It has, however, long been the conviction of genuine believers, that if God even mentions a matter, that it is sufficient to establish it forever unless He Himself sets it aside.

Every single entity urgently needs to face the truth that God Himself, the Lord God omnipotent, the Creator, the Sustainer of all, has allotted to every single entity a measure of sin. When that measure of sin is full, that entity is under His wrath to the utmost.

The Larger Setting of the Text

Consider this doctrine in its setting. In I Thessalonians 2:1-12, the Apostle Paul justifies his personal labors among the Thessalonians, making it clear that he was sent to them by God Himself and conducted himself among them as a man of God ought. He practiced no deceit, used no flattery, wanted no pecuniary gain, sought no glory from

men, proved himself as gentle among them as a nursing mother, all the while laboring night and day to support himself so as to be a financial burden to no man. His intent and purpose on their behalf was that they might learn to walk in a manner worthy of the very God who called them into His kingdom.

In verses seventeen to twenty, Paul speaks of his repeated yearnings to again visit the Thessalonian believers and of the hindrances with which Satan thwarted him. He likewise rejoices that because of their ready response to his witness at the time of his original visit, they became his glory and joy.

The Immediate Setting of the Text

The passage upon which we are focusing begins at verse thirteen with a deep and heartfelt commendation and expression of profound thanksgiving: “And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the Word of God’s message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the Word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.”

Tragically, we live at a time when the majority of people have no conviction that God still has His spokesmen. The average pastor is preaching to a congregation that listens to him merely as a man. Their comments as they leave the church building reveal this thinking: “Oh, Pastor, that was interesting! I never heard it before. I’m going to think about it.” If a preacher speaks to you merely as a man, it may be appropriate to respond to him that way, but if he speaks the very Word of God from the inspired Scriptures, it is utterly inappropriate to plan to merely think about it. Others indicate even less receptivity to the preacher when they say: “Who do you think you are to speak to us like that? We have our rights!” When God has spoken, what rights do listeners have? The right to question the authority of God’s spokesman? The right to reject what God has said through him?

If you are a pastor and your congregation is not heeding your words, it may be because of the hardness of their hearts, but you would do well to be sure that you are truly speaking as God’s man before you fault them for hearing you that way. If you preach as a man, without authority from God, you have no grounds to blame your congregation for hearing you carelessly. You are the one that must first repent. But there are congregations who seem to pay so little attention to what they hear preached that you can even envision them listening to the Apostle Paul and not being moved. It is tragically possible that this deadness of spirit in such congregations is immediately linked to the doctrine before us. In truth, they may have already reached their legal limit on sin.

Look again at the text: Paul gives a wonderful compliment to the Thessalonian believers. He speaks of the delight and blessings they are to his own heart because they have heard him as if he were truly speaking for God. He adds confirmation to his commendation, declaring that the Word of God is performing its work in those that believe (Verse 13). This is a very critical matter. We have only heard the Word of God aright when it has performed the work that God intended in us. Are you regularly being transformed by the Word of God which you are hearing?

In verse fourteen Paul says: “For you, brethren became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea...” When they heard the Word of God and the Word of God impacted them, it performed its work within them who were believing. They immediately set out to behave themselves as those who truly hear, conforming their conduct to the conduct of other believers who had heard the Word of God earlier, thus acting out the Word of God in a truly appropriate fashion.

It is a splendid thing to be commended along these lines, especially by a man who speaks truthfully. Paul asserts that he did not come to the Thessalonians with flattering speech or pretext for greed (verse 5). While, as an Apostle, he might have asserted his authority (verse 6), he instead proved to be as gentle among them as a nursing mother tenderly caring for her own children (verse 7). Having such fond affection for them and being concerned to impart to them both the Gospel of God and his own life, he commends these people because they heard him as if God himself were speaking to them and proved it by imitating other true believers.

Paul adds this dimension in verse fourteen, “For you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews.” In the Book of Acts we learn that the early Christians fell under tremendous persecution and suffering for their faith. Are you free from suffering? If you say yes, your answer could provide all the evidence that you need to convince you that you are not yet hearing the Word of God as you ought. We are living in a pagan society—one of the darkest ages of human history. There is a hatred of God and of His truth in the hearts of many around us. If we are what He has called us to be, how can we be getting by so easily? How is it that when we line ourselves up with this passage, we don’t make a very good match? When we hear the Word of God as we ought to hear it, we will find that it will cost us something it hasn’t cost us yet, for the world hates what we love. Believers are but very small minority in a world that is given over to great evil, and if our lives rebuke that evil, we will suffer for it.

The description in verses fifteen and sixteen of the action of certain religious leaders needs to be carefully noted:

1. They “killed the Lord Jesus.” He came to His own people and yet they did not receive Him. He was the very Messiah they sought, yet in their spiritual blindness they took His physical life. He was the Lord of Glory, but they treated Him as a common criminal. He came to them with the message of hope, but they chose their darkness rather than His light.
2. They “killed the prophets.” The record of this began in the Old Testament and continues to the present day. Because all such men love darkness rather than light, their deeds continue to be evil.
3. They “drove us out.” The Book of Acts includes details of the ways in which the leaders drove believers out of the synagogue and away from the city of Jerusalem. While Paul was against Christ, they were for Paul, but when Paul was converted to Christ, they drove him out also.
4. “They are not pleasing to God.” They governed themselves by the strictest of laws and sought to earn favor with God by their religious fervor, and yet they could not please Him in what they were.
5. They are “hostile to all men.” Enemies of God are soon enemies of one another.

6. They hinder “us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved.” Unsaved religious leaders hinder and oppose the salvation of those they pretend to lead.

In the several acts of wickedness that Paul describes and in innumerable other ways as well, these religious leaders persisted in their evil deeds “with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.”

The Doctrine In the Text

Now consider the doctrine before us in the light of this text: **God has allotted to every single entity a measure of sin. When that measure is full, the wrath of God is upon that entity to the utmost.**

I can almost hear someone asking, “entity, entity, what do you mean by entity?” That is simply explained. You are an individual and as such you are an entity. But you may be more than an individual. You may be married, and thus as a couple you form another entity. And again, you may be more than a couple; you may have children and thus you are part of a family. Each family is an entity. Each church is an entity. Each denomination is an entity. Each neighborhood is an entity. Each village, town, or city is an entity. Each state is an entity. Each nation is an entity. Each school, each office, each factory, each business is an entity. God has allotted a measure of sin to every entity, and when that measure is full, that entity is under the wrath of God to the utmost.

Let me set this doctrine of the legal limit on sin in front of you in a series of propositions.

Proposition Number One: Every Individual and Every Entity Sins.

What is sin? Is it something I do that harms others? Is it something I do that harms myself? Is right or wrong a matter of opinion? Can I safely do anything my conscience does not condemn me for? Can a thing be wrong in one century and right in the next?

What is sin? Do we really need to ask that? We are all so well acquainted with sin that it would hardly seem necessary to define it. And yet if you talk with two unmarried young people who are fornicating together, they may tell you that every time before they have sex they have a prayer asking God to bless their “love-making.” “And He does,” they tell you. “It is so wonderful,” they say, “God has given us this lovely relationship.” If you say to them, “It is a sin. God could not possibly bless it. He prohibits it!” They are apt to respond, “What do you mean it is a sin? It is just doing what God made us to do.”

What is a sin? It is an awful mistake to suppose that this generation knows the definition. Vast numbers don’t have the faintest idea of what is right and what is wrong. Multitudes do not know that what they are doing is grievously offensive to their Creator. At the same time they have no notion that what they regularly leave undone are things He absolutely requires them to do.

Sin has been described as falling short of the mark God Himself has set for us to hit.

Sin can be demonstrated to be the overshooting of the limits that God Himself has imposed upon our conduct.

A person has sinned if they fall when God has ordered them to stand. Sin occurs when one is disobedient to the voice of God. This occurs both when we fail to listen and when we refuse to heed.

Even the diminishing of that which should have been rendered in full is sin. Ignorance being no excuse of the law, a person can sin without even knowing it.

A distinction must be made between sins of omission and sins of commission, for it is not only wicked to do evil, but it is equally wicked to fail to do good.

Not only do individuals sin personally, but corporate bodies sin collectively.

When you begin to concern yourself with repentance from sin you must also learn the difference between those evils which are fruit sins and that which is at its root.

All sinners need to be aware of the danger of the aggravation of sin by sins against knowledge. The Bible clearly says: ‘...To one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin’ (James 4:17). There is a sense in which a sin committed in ignorance is a lesser sin than a sin that is aggravated by knowledge, but both are dangerous sins that require immediate repentance.

Sin can even go beyond acts of commission or omission. Even things that have been looked upon as mere personality characteristics, like stubbornness, rebellion, and anger, can be and often are sins. In that the very essence of sin is self—me or us versus God—all acts of pride and willfulness are sin.

But it is not my intention to dwell upon the question “What is sin?” as important as that may be for someone who has never adequately considered that issue. This first proposition merely insists that every individual and entity sins. This is a proposition too well established biblically and in the personal and corporate life of all honest people, to require further development here.

Proposition Number Two: God Has Set a Limit on Each Entity’s Sin.

Have you ever thought seriously of the fact that God has allotted you personally a limit on sin? Do you realize that he has allotted your church a limit on sin? Every entity that I have mentioned and every other entity of which you can conceive has been allotted a limit on sin by the Lord God Almighty.

In the light of this, is it reasonable to ask, “What is that limit and when do I reach it?” That is something God does not reveal. You have no way to know what your limit is or when you are nearing it, but you can and must know that there is a limit that God Himself has fixed.

Think of this legal limit in terms of a measure. This is the language of the passage before us: “With the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins.” What if we were to conceive of the measure as a bushel basket? Ah, but it doesn’t work that way. If you knew that your measure of sin was a bushel basket, you could get quite serious about repentance every once and a while and keep that basket always just under the brim. But there is no way to know what the legal limit is in your case.

We have no reason to suppose that the measure of sin allotted each entity is identical. It is not inconceivable that God allows a greater limit of sin for one entity than He does another. Certainly that is His prerogative. To put it very practically, you dare not look at another person that seems to have gotten away with a great deal of evil and suppose that your own measure, which in your judgment contains far fewer sins than his, is not yet precariously close to full. There is no way for any entity to know what the measure is that is allotted to them or to gauge which will be the final sin that will complete their measure. Every individual should write on their hearts in graven letters, "God has allotted me a measure of sin. I dare not add a single sin to it!" Everyone reading these lines should think in terms of the entities in which they have any responsibility and say to their heart, "God has allotted a measure of sin to every entity in which I have an interest. I must do everything in my power to see that the measure is never filled!"

The doctrine of which I am speaking is illustrated biblically in a great variety of ways.

Have you read recently that small Epistle Jude? There we read about angels who sinned by abandoning both their domicile and their dominion. In consequence of this, they were cast out of God's presence and permanently chained in the realm of darkness (verse 6). It is crystal clear that those angels had reached their legal limit on sin.

Think in terms of the ancient world prior to Noah. Is it not abundantly clear that the world in Noah's day had reached its legal limit on sin? "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on earth, and He was grieved in His heart. And the Lord said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them'" (genesis 6:5-7). God then sent upon that whole world a flood and spared but those few in the ark.

Or think of Sodom and Gomorrah. Is it not more than plain that Sodom and Gomorrah exceeded the legal limit by one sin, and God destroyed them in a moment of time? (Genesis 19). Was their limit larger than ours? Was it smaller than ours? This we do not know. But we do know that the very evil God considered such an abomination in Lot's day is a prevalent evil in the land today.

The Israelites, who God so graciously brought out of Egypt, reached their limit of sin in the wilderness, and therefore, virtually none of them who escaped that terrible slavery in Egypt were allowed to enter the land of promise. God declares that they could not enter Canaan because of their sin. It is also plain that the sin which filled their measure was unbelief (Jude 5).

Do you remember the tragic story of that priest who, when a woman came into the temple in tears and in great sorrow of heart, treated her as a drunken woman? I am speaking of that priest who sat on the stool at the doorway of the temple. He sat on the stool because he had become grossly overweight. I speak of the priest whose sons were stealing the sacrifices and fornicating with women in the temple. This is the priest who rebuked his sons and yet grew grossly fat on the food which they stole. Clearly that priest, Eli by name, had reached his legal limit on sin when he fell backward off his stool and broke his neck (I Samuel 1-5).

Even in the New Testament episode of Ananias and Sapphira, a strangely gripping account, there is no opportunity offered them for repentance and no exhortations given them to change their ways. They reached their legal limit of sin, and God poured out His wrath upon them to the utmost (Acts 5:1-11).

Countless individuals, churches, and nations in the past have reached their legal limit of sin and are even now enduring the wrath of God. Every one of us is in grave danger of reaching, even this very day, our own limit. "Well," you say, "I don't think that is possible at this time. I am greatly increased in religious things and am even now reading this important booklet?" Let me tell you what your danger is: God may even now stir your heart afresh and call you to a depth of repentance you have never known, and you may resist Him and remain unchanged. What could be more dangerous to your soul than to fail to heed the Word of God that the Holy Spirit speaks to your heart?

Proposition Number Three: Every Single Sin Committed but Not Repented of Adds to This Measure.

Have you noted these words in Genesis 15:16: "For the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete." Consider what Jesus said to Pharisees and hypocrites: "Fill up then the measure of the guilt of your fathers. You serpents, you brood vipers, how shall you escape the sentence of hell? (Matthew 23:32-33). This is the very doctrine I set in front of you. In letting people live, God gives them opportunity to fill their legal limit of sin. Every sin committed, if not put away, adds to this measure.

It is a sobering thing to realize that each of us began sinning when we were very young children. It never ceases to astonish and distress me as I watch the little ones, to see a child obviously sinning, knowing the child was never taught that particular sin by his parents. Later on he will engage in many sins he has learned from his parents and others, but long before his parents have even conceived of the possibility of that child sinning, the child manages to do so. How old are you now? Do you realize that from the youngest days of your existence you have been sinning, and every single sin added to your measure is still there unless that measure has been emptied through true repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Consider also this significant fact: you may be a largely repentant person and yet have some realms in your life where you are unrepentant. You may have been harboring the opinion that it is critical to be generally right with God but not mandatory to be right in every matter. I beg you to face the fact that since you were a tiny child you have been sinning and sinning and sinning, and every one of those sins that has not been completely turned from has been added to your measure. Any unrepentant spirit that you now harbor as you read these words and as you sense the convicting power of the Spirit of God upon your life, should you fail to respond to Him, could provoke that final sin that fills your measure. What a dangerous thing it is not to heed the Word of God.

You may have altered your course of life, even turning over a new leaf, and still gone right on adding to your measure of sin. You may have experienced something of a religious awakening, even going so far as your measure of sin. The critical question is whether or not Christ has accepted you and is satisfied with your repentance.

The increase of God's grace in you life, if left inadequately heeded, adds to the measure of your sin. "And from everyone who has been given much shall much be

required..." (Luke 12:48). If you are aware of the grace of God as shown to you and yet are not walking in it, you need to be reminded that grace in the life adds to every sin that is committed because it is made an aggravated sin. A person who doesn't know the Lord, knows little or nothing personally of divine grace. While his sins are no less distinctly sins, they cannot be compared with the sins of a person who has experienced the grace of God and sins against that grace.

You are aware, I hope, that much of what is done spiritually and religiously, including many of the functions of the church and tasks that people take on within the supposed realm of kingdom work, must be regarded as nothing other than dead works. A dead work is any work in which you engage as a professed Christian that either cannot be or is not quickened and made alive by the Spirit of God. A deacon may add to his measure of sins every time he seeks to fill his office. Choir directors may add to the measure of their sin every time they lead the choir. Musicians of all sorts run that risk. Both sermons and Sunday school lessons can be dead works. Even prayer and Bible readings are dead works when the heart is far from God. Dead works are very dangerous. They require complete repentance. The Book of Hebrews makes this clear. When the author rebuked the people in the fifth chapter, he upbraided them because they ought to have been teaching others yet still required teaching as babes; they ought to have been capable of the nourishment of strong meat, and yet they were still on milk as babes. "I am not going to go back," says the writer, "to lay again the elementary teaching about Christ," but he does pause to mention what these elementary teachings are. The first he names is "repentance from dead works" (6:10). Some foolish people think he made a mistake and really meant to say "repentance from sin." There is a phenomenal difference between repentance of sin and repentance of dead works. Both are mandatory. The person who engages in dead works is a person who adds consistently to his measure of sin.

Proposition Number Four: In the Case of Every Unrepentant Entity, the Time Will Come When the Measure of Sin Is Full.

Here is a sobering thought: your measure of sin may be already full. "Oh, no!" you say, "It can't be. The wrath of God hasn't fallen on me to the utmost." How do you know that?

Think of the city of Jerusalem and the grievous condition it was in at the time of the end of Christ's earthly ministry. Consider His words: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!" (Matthew 23:37, 38). Clearly, the measure of their sin was then full.

We must not suppose that the measure of sin is full for a given entity only when the wrath of God takes on the form of abandonment, it doesn't matter what happens after that, for nothing is worth anything when God has left it.

What a sober warning it is to be informed that in the case of every unrepentant entity, the time comes when the measure of sin is full. Every aged person ought to be aware of the fact that they live in grievous danger. Your measure of sin may already be full. It could be filled to the limit by the very next sin that is committed. Every young

person should be in great concern. Your allotment of sin may be very small. It could be close to full already. Every middle aged person should be alarmed. In your pursuit of security and pleasure, you may have hastened dangerously close to a full measure of sin.

Every day a person continues in an unrepentant state they are filling up the measure of their sins. Have you noticed these words: "Do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Romans 2;4, 5). We must never suppose that because we have not yet been punished we never will be punished. Is it possible that you have added considerably to the measure of your sins just in the last few days and that you are in extreme danger right at this moment?

Have you ever thought in terms of sin and a balance scale? Let us suppose that when one is born they are born with the balance even. Then that first sin is committed. It is added to the negative balance but the scale doesn't tilt. A second sin is added and then a third and still the scale has not tilted. Day after day new sins are added to that negative balance. How many sins must occur before the balance tilts? We have no way to know because we don't know what measure God has granted a given entity. Now when one truly turns to Jesus Christ and embraces Him in true repentance and faith and He becomes Lord and Master, a perfectly wonderful thing occurs. Whatever sins have accumulated in that measure are removed forever. Isn't that glorious? Gone! Gone! Gone! Forever! But God didn't do that so that you could have a fresh start and fill the measure a second time. It's God's intention that no sin should ever again be added to that measure. That is not to say that no sin will ever again be committed but that sin is only added to the measure when it remains an unrepentant sin. Oh, I pause again and ask if there is any danger that there are sins in your life of which you have not repented?

I remind you again that it is not just individuals that are in danger but every single entity. How about the entities for which you are responsible? What about your church? Are there sins in that measure allotted your church that haven't been dealt with? You need to see the severity of the danger. Suppose you've been saying to yourself, "I suppose the time may come when some kind of corporate repentance is called for." Do you know how large a measure God has granted your church? If you don't, YOU DARE NOT say that the time may come... It is possible that the measure of sin allotted your church is right up there to the brim already and one more sin could be the last that God would allow. Your church could have happen to it what happened to the city of Jerusalem. The wrath of God could come upon your church in the way it came upon Jerusalem, and your church could be left standing, left appealing to the public, left reaching out and embracing multitudes and making them think they are all right, just like you think you are all right, and yet the wrath of God could be as much upon your church as it was upon the city of Jerusalem. You might have thirty-six years of human prosperity in your church, all the while having your church "left unto you desolate." None of us knows this for sure, but in looking around us, we get the conviction that this has happened already in many cases.

And what about the nation? HOW LONG DO WE DARE approach this matter of the rescue of our nation with such a degree of carelessness as now marks us? Everywhere I go I see that people are getting more and more agitated. They are being

stirred up. There is greater and greater interest in these matters. More and more are saying, "Oh, we must repent." But we haven't repented! How many more sins do you think America can add to its measure and still be spared? I certainly don't know, but I don't want to risk it. I don't want to risk it for a day. I am convinced that we need to get more earnest, more serious about this than we ever have in all our lives. It is conceivable that the day of grace has already passed. And yet I think not! I don't want to be a false prophet, but I see God raising up voices in this wilderness who are crying out, "Repent! REPENT! **REPENT!**" There are more crying it today than at any time in my lifetime, and somehow I have the conviction that a merciful God is saying, "There is yet room! The measure is not yet full." But it might be full tomorrow. If we go on as we have been going, as carelessly and as casually as we've been acting, the wrath of God may come upon us to the utmost and we won't even know it. Our day of opportunity could slip through our fingers and we might be totally unaware.

Proposition Number Five: When that Legal Limit Is Reached, God's Wrath Will be Poured Out.

Have you weighed what has already been said about Jerusalem and Christ's words concerning it? Remember that early in His ministry He cleansed the temple, rebuking the moneychangers and driving them out (John 2:13-22), but they came back quickly. Later He drove them out a second time with no more lasting effect. Afterward, He went out on the hill, and looking over the city, wept and said "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it!" Then He spoke these most awful words, "Behold, your house is left to you desolate!" (Luke 13:34, 35). Tragically, the temple had reached its legal limit on sin.

Just think of the significance of these words? Has it occurred to you that an entity can still exist for a long time after its measure of sins is full and the wrath of God is upon it to the utmost? The Lord declared that day that the temple was no longer God's house but their house, and yet there was a long span of time between the promise of desolation and the ultimate judgment of destruction. Do you know at what time in His ministry Christ spoke these words? Without trying to name a year, I can tell you it was near the end of His earthly ministry, but long before the fulfillment of that terrible judgment He prophesied when, as he approached the city, he wept over it saying "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you when your enemies will throw up a bank before you, and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation" (Luke 19:41-44). If Christ spoke in the year thirty-three and the city was destroyed in the year seventy, you can see that the temple stood long after God had abandoned it. While they were under the judgment of God all those years, they went on holding services there and making sacrifices. Seemingly everything was as usual but nothing was the same, for Christ walked away from the place forever.

Consider still more carefully what has just been said about Jerusalem. The God of glory walked the streets of that city. He worked His mighty miracles in the presence of those Jewish people. He spoke with such great authority and power that they were drawn in vast multitudes to listen to Him. They chased Him about, even going to some difficulty so as to be near Him and to hear His words and, of course, to feast on His free bread. But by and large, they didn't heed His words. Most of them did not repent. In their non-repentance, they added to their measure of sin until it was full. Once that measure of sin was full, the wrath of God was poured out.

As noted, some err in supposing that the pouring out of the wrath of God always means destruction. We have seen that this is not necessarily true. The wrath of God fell on Jerusalem at the time Jesus said "your house is left unto you desolate" and yet this declaration was made long before the city's actual destruction. But can you conceive of any manifestation of the wrath of God more awful than the withdrawal of His manifest presence? What does it matter if the buildings are left standing? What does it matter if men and women live and breathe? If God is gone, what hope is left?

Proposition Number Six: This Pouring Out of Wrath Will Be To the Utmost.

A full measure of sin equals a full measure of wrath. The time will come when the wrath of God will be poured out on every unrepentant entity. When that wrath is poured out, it will be poured out to the utmost.

The word "utmost" is a very affecting word. The term implies unrestrained. Currently God is judging each entity on a day-to-day basis, but until the measure of sins is full and His wrath is poured out to the utmost, His judgments are always restrained, being mingled with grace and mercy. Were you to describe your own personal life, speaking of all the judgments of God that have fallen upon you for your sins, you would have to speak of these judgments as gracious judgments, wonderfully tempered with divine mercy. But when the wrath of God falls to the utmost, it is wrath which does not have any restraints. It is wrath that has no limits. It is wrath that knows no boundaries. It is wrath not surrounded by and saturated in mercy and grace.

The word "utmost" suggests the absolute nature of God's wrath. Wrath is not just a possibility. The wrath of God upon the full measure of sin is not merely something that could happen if that entity is not careful. When the measure of sin is full, the wrath of God is absolutely guaranteed. There is nothing unclear or uncertain about it, for it is as sure as God Himself. Notice the very wording in verse sixteen: "Wrath has come upon them to the utmost." It does not say, "Wrath may," nor "wrath will", but "wrath has"! Oh the tragedy of those upon whom the wrath of God has already settled in full!

The word "utmost" suggests that the wrath of God is a completely purposeful wrath. He is a righteous God. He cannot tolerate unrighteousness in His presence. He is a God of justice and cannot tolerate injustice. In righteousness and in justice, He is bound to punish all reprobate sinners who will not heed His calls to repentance and will not respond in faith to the excellencies of deliverance from damnation which He has provided in His Son. God has purposed in His world to sustain His righteousness, vindicate Himself against all false accusers, and punish appropriately all Christ-rejecting sinners.

The word “utmost” clearly speaks of the eternal nature of God’s wrath. The damned sinner is not quickly consumed in the fire of God’s wrath. Rather, his sufferings are without end. In earthly suffering we may sufferings are without end. In earthly suffering we may entertain the hope, “this too shall pass.” But there is no passing of eternal wrath. It is forever and forever. Neither will there be any abatement nor lessening of the wrath as time wears on. Oh, the horror of a punishment that never ceases and never slackens.

The word “utmost” implies that it is infinite. Sin is an infinite evil. God is an infinite God. Because the great evil of all sin consists in the fact that it is against God, sin is an infinite evil against and infinite God. All sin against God deserves and requires and infinite punishment. When the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross in sinful man’s place, He paid the infinite price of man’s infinite evil. Think of the very worst form that the wrath of God can take and realize that it will be infinitely worse than anything you can imagine. Oh, I plead with you to realize that to reject Christ’s atonement by living in unrepentant sin is the most dangerous mode of conduct possible, for it exposes you to the infinite punishment of wrath to the utmost.

But without any questions, the most fearful aspect of wrath to the “utmost” is the awful fact that it is nothing other than the wrath of God. There are men whose wrath we need not fear. There are men whose wrath is fearful indeed. But the wrath of no man or group of men can be compared with the wrath of God. Who can even dare to describe it. Surely the author of Hebrews has said sufficient: “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31).

Proposition Number Seven: The Case of these Unrepentant Jews Was Hopeless, But Yours Need Not be.

We have noted the sins of which Paul accuses the religious leaders. Clearly, their sins were heinous. It is evident that their judgment was deserved. They not only refused to enter the kingdom of God themselves but were busy “hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved.” It can be no surprise when we read that, as the result of their conduct, “they always fill up the measure of their sins” and “wrath has come upon them to the utmost.” Their case was hopeless indeed!

But what about your personal situation? Is your case hopeless? Is there no room left you for repentance? Can you even know the answer to such repentance? Yes, you can know the answer. Here it is: if you can still sense the danger of unrepentant sin and feel the call of the Spirit of God to immediate repentance, your case is not hopeless. The question that remains is not “Can I repent?” but “Will I repent?” How long can you go on adding to the measure of your sin and do so in safety? You have never had a single day in which to safely sin. Every single sin you have ever committed has been a truly dangerous affront against God. Many others have already experienced wrath to the utmost. Don’t risk another moment. Repent of all sin right now.

If you are yourself a truly repentant person, you must immediately concern yourself with every entity in which you share a part. What a tragedy if you should be saved but your family, church, or nation left to endure God’s wrath to the utmost. Do not let even fifteen minutes go by when sin is left undealt with in the entities for which you are responsible. Obviously, you can do more in your family than in the nation, but

everywhere do everything you can to see that no sin is left uncovered by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ who alone can save us from wrath.

By the grace of God, live with such earnest determination and extraordinary spiritual conviction that day after day you will be as pure and innocent before God as the blood and power of Jesus Christ make possible.