

2 Thessalonians

A Careful Study Of Thessalonians

September 12, 2021

I. Introduction

- A. **2 Thessalonians 1:3-10** . . . We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater; [4] therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. [5] This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. [6] For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, [7] and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, [8] dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. [9] These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, [10] when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed.
- B. So far in our study of **2 Thessalonians**, we have looked at **vs 1-4** of chapter 1. Today, we are going to focus on **vs 5**.
- C. Pray

II. God's righteous judgment in relation to persecution

- A. **[5a] This is a plain indication of God's righteous (*just*) judgment** so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering.
 - 1. Based on the sentence structure of **vs 4-5**, it is not completely clear what the word **"This"** at the beginning of **vs 5** refers to.
 - a. It is possible that it refers to the Thessalonians' perseverance and faith, but it is also possible it refers to the Thessalonians' persecution and afflictions.
 - b. When we take into account the context of **vs 4-8** along with other scriptures with a similar message, it makes the most sense to tie the word **"This"** to the persecution and afflictions the Thessalonian believers were experiencing.

2. Let me explain this connection by starting with a little Jewish and Christian history. Historical Judaism taught that if you were experiencing a peaceful, prosperous, secure life, then God was with you and blessing you.
 - a. However, if you were experiencing such things as trials and tribulation, afflictions, persecution, or national defeat and domination from outside nations (*such as the Philistines, Babylonians, Persians, Rome*), then it meant God had turned His back on you or had abandoned you altogether. And the reason for God turning against you or the nation was your own or the nation's sinfulness.
 - b. The Jewish theologians used the first five books of the OT to support this view, and especially the section dealing with the blessings and curses found in **Deuteronomy 27-28**.
3. The weakness of their view is that it only applied to the nation of Israel with its one God, one religion, common beliefs, shared values, and standardized religious practices. In other words, Israel was a closed community with a safe environment for the practice of Judaism. Therefore, if they suffered, they suffered according to the blessings and curses.
4. In contrast, though the Body of Christ is in some ways a closed community, Christians live as individual or in small groups scattered around the world – a world that is ruled by Satan, is often governed by corrupt leaders, is overrun by sinners, and is increasingly opposed or even hostile to Christianity.
 - a. In a world like this, the beliefs, values, and ways of godliness are a threat to evil governments. They are too restrictive for those who want to enjoy the pleasures, benefits, and profits of sin. And they openly condemn self-centeredness, self-rule, and the selfish use of riches.
 - b. Therefore, one of the ways the unbelieving world tries to gain legitimacy for their selfish and sinful life-styles is by thwarting the growth of godliness, extinguishing the voice of truth, and persecuting those who condemn their sinfulness and threaten their selfish life-style.
 - c. And they do this by using various forms of discrimination, making false claims about Christianity, shaming Christians publicly, promoting ill-will and hostility toward Christians, denying Christians access to employment, and imprisoning, torturing, and killing Christians.

5. The point is, the Israelites were able to enjoy peace, prosperity, and the safe practice of their religion within the confines of their nation as long as they lived according to God's word and will. Therefore, though their theology of suffering was narrow, it fit their circumstances.
6. However, Christ's life on earth, His teachings, and the teachings of the Apostles showed the incompleteness of the Jewish theology of suffering. For example –
 - a. Jesus was sent from God, spoke and did only as God directed Him, and lived a sinless life – **yet** He was poor, mistreated and rejected by His own people, falsely accused, unjustly condemned, horribly beaten, violently abused, and painfully put to death – all things that according to Jewish theology indicate God had turned His back on Jesus due to Jesus' sinfulness.
 - b. About 700 years earlier, Isaiah prophesied that the Jews would think and say such things about Jesus. **Isaiah 53:3-4**, "He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. [4] Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted."
 - c. However, we know God did not look on Jesus as deserving the ill-will and mistreatment He endured. And we know this because even though God allowed Jesus to suffer unjustly, God raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His own right hand.
 - d. And we know from scripture that Jesus did not believe He had been abandoned by God during those days and hours of affliction and unjust suffering.
 - (1) Peter made this clear when he said that Jesus – in the midst of His suffering – kept entrusting Himself to God who judges righteously (**1 Peter 2:23**).
 - (2) Then in **1 Peter 4:19**, Peter applies this truth to us when he says, "Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God (*as did Jesus*) shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right."
 - e. Therefore, though the Jewish theology of suffering is true in part, it is too narrow for universal application. The reality is, godly Christians can unjustly suffer ill-treatment and

persecution simply for living a godly life among unbelievers – just like Jesus.

7. There are other NT scriptures that support this expanded theology of suffering. For example –
 - a. **2 Timothy 3:12**, “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”
 - b. **Matthew 5:10-12**, “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. [11] Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. [12] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”
 - c. **John 15:18-20**, “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. [19] If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. [20] Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.”
 - d. **1 Peter 2:18-21**, “Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. [19] For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. [20] For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. [21] For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,
8. These scriptures do not do away with the truth contained in the Blessings and Curses. God still blesses righteousness and disciplines or punishes willful, unrepentant sinners.
 - a. However, there is a significant difference between OT Israelites living a protected life in the Promised Land, and NT Christians scattered all over the world. True, some Christians live in safe societies, but many do not, and their suffering is not a result of their own sinfulness, but the sinfulness of those around them.
 - b. And yet, the next part of **vs 5** indicates that God’s involvement in this kind of suffering has a specific purpose.

- B. [5ab] This (*the persecution and afflictions forced upon Christians by the world or by alternative religions (i.e., Islam) or by forms of Christianity threatened by godliness*) is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God.
1. How are the persecution of Christians, God's righteous judgement, and being considered worthy of the kingdom of God tied together?
 2. In my opinion, they are tied together in two ways, and to explain myself I will begin with **1 Peter 4:15-17**, and then provide an example from everyday life.
 - a. **1 Peter 4:15-17**, "Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; [16] but if anyone suffers as a Christian (*for righteousness sake*), he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name (*the name Christian*). [17] For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God (*God's cleansing, purifying judgement*); and if it begins with us first (*and is severe enough to include persecution and afflictions*), what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?"
 - b. If we apply the principles found in **1 Peter 4** to the context of **2 Thessalonians 1**, and specifically **vs 5**, we can see that in righteously judging His children God either wills or allows them to endure persecution and afflictions in order to purify them so that they will live faithful and worthy lives – certainly for the sake of His own glory and honor in the world, but also to make them prepared for the return of Christ.
 3. The example from everyday life has to do with tests that are administered to determine if someone is fit or worthy to enter a PhD. program, or fly commercial jets, or get a doctor's license.
 - a. In this kind of testing, God wills or allows those who identify as Christian to experience persecution and afflictions for the purpose of separating true believers (*those who endure to the end in spite of the cost*) from those who live lives that are unworthy of the kingdom of God and therefore unworthy to be given the gift of eternal life.
 - b. Peter affirms God's use of this kind of testing with believers in **1 Peter 4:12-13**, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; [13] but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may

rejoice with exultation (*rejoicing that you lived a godly life and endured to the end even though it was costly at the time*)."

4. When we tie these two forms of God's righteous judgment together, we see that God either brings or allows His people to experience persecution and afflictions in order to cleanse and purify them (*in preparation for the return of Christ*), **and** to separate sincere believers from the insincere, true believers from those who want the blessings of Christianity without the cost and hard work, and those who are committed to endure to the end from those who give up when the demands of the Christian life become more than they want to bear.

III. Conclusion

- A. You may be thinking that a good, loving God would never bring such hard times upon His children (*i.e., Christians in Afghanistan*) – especially those who are sincere and making an honest effort to live according to His will and word.
 1. And yet, God did this to the church in its earliest days, and He has continued to do this to His people in various places and at various times.
 2. **Proverbs 17:3**, "The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests hearts." (*To see how godly you want to be and purify those who choose God to the end.*)
- B. Peter, James, and Paul address the attitude we are to have toward God's righteous judgments, persecution, and afflictions.
 1. **James 1:2-4**, "**Consider it all joy**, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, [3] knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. [4] And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."
 2. **1 Peter 1:6-7**, "**In this you greatly rejoice**, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, [7] so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."
 3. **Romans 12:14**, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse."
- C. Finally, remaining faithful to God and godly living in the face of persecution and afflictions is a confirmation of your salvation and worthiness to be in the kingdom of God. **But it is also** a confirmation

that God's righteous judgment will punish and destroy those who refuse to repent of having persecuted and afflicted you.

1. Just as Jesus trusted God to bring justice to an exceedingly unjust situation – in God's own way and in God's own time – so I encourage you to trust God in the same way.
2. You may not see justice in this life, but be assured, justice will come, and when it does you will be eternally grateful you left it up to God while remaining faithful to God and godliness to your dying day.