

## 2 Thessalonians

A Careful Study Of Thessalonians

September 19, 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. Last Sunday we talked about God bringing or allowing persecution and afflictions to come upon His people for the purpose of purifying them and separating the sincere from the insincere. Today, we are going to return to **vs 5** and look at what it means to be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, and why it matters.
- C. Pray

### II. God's righteous judgment in relation to persecution

- A. [5] This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will **be considered (or counted) worthy of the kingdom of God**, for which indeed you are suffering.
  - 1. There are two significant difficulties in coming to a clear and biblically sound understanding of what God means when He says through the apostle Paul that in His righteous judgment He either brings or allows the persecution and affliction of Christians in order to purify them and separate the sincere from the insincere so that those who remain will be counted worthy to be a member of His kingdom.

2. The **first** difficulty takes us back to Martin Luther and his effort to call the Catholic church back to a biblically based understanding of salvation. Since then, there has been a growing and developing theology of grace – which has been good on the one hand and not so good on the other.
  - a. The good side is its clarification that salvation cannot be earned or given in exchange for any deeds of righteousness we may do in this life – though we ought to live righteously, for that is how we fulfill the two great commandments.
    - (1) The reason salvation cannot be earned or purchased by deeds of righteousness which we may do in this life is because we owe a debt for sins committed. And that sin debt can either be paid by us – which requires spending eternity apart from God in hell, or it can be paid by someone on our behalf – which requires a sinless person to step forward and willingly take our place in paying the debt we owe.
    - (2) According to God’s word, Jesus is the sinless person who took our place and paid our sin debt. However, to be included with those to whom God graciously applies Christ’s payment, we must believe that God exists, that we are sinners doomed to eternal destruction because we owe a debt we cannot pay, and that Jesus Christ paid our sin debt for us. Then, to make our faith real, that is, to make it more than an intellectual agreement with certain biblical truths, we must repent and proceed to live a life in keeping with our faith and repentance.
  - b. The not so good outcome of Luther’s grace theology is the popular belief that you can have **salvation** without repentance, **baptism** without a serious pursuit of holiness, **communion** without self-examination and the confession of unconfessed sins, **worship** without doing your part to restore a damaged or broken relationship, **a church** without godly leadership, **church** membership without church discipline, **a Christian life** without discipleship, and **a God-pleasing life** without humility, dying to self, loving your neighbor as yourself, and making an honest effort to become holy in all your behavior.
    - (1) More recently, another misrepresentation of God’s grace has crept into the American church. It is called the Free Grace Movement, or Free Grace Theology, and its purpose is to emphasize that we are saved by grace through faith – alone.

- (2) I know that sounds good, but according to this theology, the alone part means that how you live after being “born again” has no effect on your eternal salvation. In effect, the Free Grace Theology reduces saving faith to an intellectual act that is separate from your behavior.
  - (3) My point is that this misuse or misrepresentation of God’s grace makes it difficult to understand the importance of being “counted worthy for God’s kingdom,” and especially when such teachings promote the belief that even the hint of a condition or requirement beyond intellectual faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ makes salvation works based rather than an undeserved gift.
3. The **second** difficulty in understanding what God means in **vs 5** is the lack of a clear biblical explanation of **what** being considered worthy of the kingdom of God means, and **why** it is important.
- a. From Genesis to Revelation, the word “worthy” appears only 51 times.
    - (1) 26 times worthy is used in reference to our behavior.
      - (a) **Ephesians 4:1-3**, “Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk (*live/ behave*) in a manner **worthy** of the calling with which you have been called, [2] with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, [3] being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”
    - (2) 8 times it is used as a comparison of people’s positions.
      - (a) **Matthew 8:8**, But the centurion said, “Lord, I am not **worthy** for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed.”
    - (3) 7 times worthy refers to the value of something or someone.
      - (a) **1 Timothy 5:17**, “The elders who rule well are to be considered **worthy** of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.”
    - (4) 6 times it is used to point out God’s worthiness to receive something – such as praise or power.
      - (a) **Revelation 5:12**, “**Worthy** is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.”
    - (5) 3 times it refers to being worthy of some form of compensation.

- (a) **1 Timothy 5:18**, For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and "The laborer is **worthy** of his wages."
    - b. It seems obvious that the word worthy in **2 Thessalonians 5** does not refer to compensation deserved, or what God is worthy of, or the comparison of two positions. It could fit the Bible's use of the word "worthy" in reference to someone's value, but it seems best to understand it as referring to our behavior.
- B. Therefore, to **be considered worthy of the kingdom of God** is to behave in ways (*believe, think, speak, attitudes, and act in ways*) that make you an honorable and reputable member of the kingdom of God.
  - 1. Two examples of behaving in ways that make you worthy of the kingdom of God are found in the first and last beatitude.
    - a. Blessed are the poor in spirit (*humble*), for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
    - b. Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
  - 2. Once again I want to affirm that living or behaving in a way that makes you worthy of the kingdom of God does not in any way pay the sin debt you owe or earn you salvation. But it does make you the kind of person to whom God graciously gives the gift of eternal life.
  - 3. Though you may think that God always gives His gift of eternal life to those who, in faith, simply ask for it, let me remind you of Jesus' parable of the four soils, and let me give you several other scriptures that make certain kinds of behavior a requirement or condition for being given the gift of eternal life and being counted worthy of God's kingdom.
    - a. John the Baptist put it this way in **John 3:36**, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."
    - b. Jesus said it this way in **Matthew 7:21-23**, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. [22] Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' [23] And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'"

- c. Jesus also said, **John 8:51**, “Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps (*lives according to*) My word he will never see death.”
  - d. Speaking directly about times of persecution and afflictions, Jesus said in **Matthew 24:9-13**, “Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. [10] At that time many (*Christians*) will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. [11] Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. [12] Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. [13] But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.”
  - e. Paul said this about the gospel he preached, **Acts 26:19-20**, “So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, [20] but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.”
  - f. Paul also said, **Romans 2:12-13**, “For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; [13] for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.”
  - g. James said it this way in **James 1:21-22**, “Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. [22] But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.”
  - h. And finally, we read in **Titus 2:11-14**, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, [12] instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, [13] looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, [14] who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.”
- C. My goal today is to present you with a reasonable understanding of the importance of being considered worthy of the kingdom of God. I trust that you can see from a more comprehensive study of God's word that He does not give the gift of eternal life simply because you have made

an intellectual expression of faith, prayed the sinner's prayer to receive Christ as savior, and started reading your Bible and going to church.

1. God gives the gift of eternal life to those who, according to their ability, **live lives that are in agreement with** the faith they have expressed, the sinner's prayer they prayed, their repentance, the forgiveness they have received, their baptism, the bread and the cup they partake of, the scriptures they read, the Holy Spirit's leading, enlightening, and conviction, and **live lives that are in agreement** the way they judge others.
2. Though our faith is often tried and tested in various ways, it seems the hardest testing comes when facing persecution and afflictions for living a godly, righteous life.
3. Therefore, we ought to sincerely work at showing ourselves worthy of the kingdom of God in the daily testings and hardships of life so that we will be prepared and strengthened for enduring to the end when facing persecution and afflictions for being a Christian.
4. And if you remain faithful when facing persecution and afflictions for righteousness sake, God's righteous judgment will have brought about its intended results in you – which is to be counted worthy of the kingdom of God.

### III. Conclusion

- A. Once again, I want to affirm that being counted worthy in no way means you have earned or worked for God's gift of eternal life. Eternal life has been and will always be an undeserved gift from God that He graciously and mercifully gives to those who trust in Him, repent, and sincerely pursue a godliness that is worthy of His grace, mercy, and gift of life.
- B. Therefore, in the simplest terms, to be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, you must intentionally and sincerely seek to live a godly life – in times of plenty and in times of want; when life seems happy and good, and when facing trials, tribulation, sickness, or suffering; when your rights as a Christian are protected by law, and when Christians are persecuted and afflicted for being godly – in spite of any failures along the way.
- C. Therefore, my advice to you as well as to myself – make it your aim to put forth a commendable effort at living a worthy life now so that when persecution and afflictions come upon you for being a Christian, you will be prepared, strengthened, and ready to persevere to the end.