

# Thessalonians

A Careful Study Of Thessalonians

September 26, 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. We've spent the last two Sundays looking at **vs 5** in order to gain an understanding of what it means and how we ought to apply it to our lives. Today we are going to focus on **vs 6-7**, and look at what God is doing and how we ought to respond.
- C. Pray

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

- A. As I said two Sundays ago, the Greek wording of **vs 5** is not as clear as we might like it to be, which makes it difficult for translating it into English so we can easily understand it. The same is true for **vs 6**. And though the NAS is my Bible of choice, there are a few places where I don't agree with its translation from the Greek into English – and **vs 6** is one of them.
  - 1. In my opinion, the ESV provides a better translation of **vs 6** than the NAS, and so I am going to read **vs 5-7** from the ESV.
  - 2. **2 Thessalonians 1:5-7** (ESV), "This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, [so] that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— [6] **since** indeed

God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, [7] and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels.”

- a. The word “**since**” at the beginning of the ESV’s **vs 6** can also be translated as “*in as much as, or because.*” Understood this way, it shows us that God, in His righteous judgment and fairness, judges His own people first so that when He judges those that persecute and afflict His people, they will have no basis for complaining that He is not a just judge, but rather has a double standard – one for His people and one for everyone else.
- b. Peter affirms this view of God’s righteous judgment in **1 Peter 4:17**, “For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?”
3. To further clarify this truth, I am going to give you an amplified paraphrase of **1 Thessalonian 1:5-6**.
  - a. “The persecution and afflictions forced upon believers by unbelievers or unconverted Jews or those who call themselves Christians but aren’t, is a plain indication of God’s righteous judgment – a judgment used by God to purify His children and separate the insincere from the sincere so that those who remain will be reckoned worthy of the kingdom of God. And God begins His judgment with His own people so that there will be no legitimate reason to say His justice is partial and therefore unfair when He repays with affliction those who have persecuted and afflicted His children.”
  - b. In other words, because God’s righteous judgment is completely impartial and perfectly fair, He begins with His own children because they – or should I say we – know better and are therefore held to a higher standard of accountability.
4. You may find it challenging to believe God is a righteous judge when you are the one being persecuted or cruelly afflicted for being a Christian, and it seems God is doing nothing to stop it.
  - a. However, God’s ways are not the world’s ways. Nor are they your ways – when your ways are self-centered or relief from the suffering is your highest priority.
  - b. **One** of our problems in valuing God for who He is and His justice for what it is, is our propensity to like God’s justice when it serves our purposes and protects our interests, but dislike God’s justice when it makes our lives more difficult or painful

or lonely – such as when God uses persecution and affliction to purify His people.

- (1) Though Job wasn't being persecuted, he faced a similar challenge in relation to trusting in God's goodness. And as if Job's suffering wasn't enough, in the midst of his trials, his wife expressed both a mindset and attitude that we are prone to have when life seems unfair, or when difficult and painful things keep happening to us. She told Job, "Curse God and die!"
  - (2) In today's language she might have said, "Why don't you just tell God to go to hell, because He's letting horrible, awful, and terrible things happen to you."
  - (3) Job's response to his wife's suggestion displays the kind of mindset and attitude we ought to have when facing hard times – and especially when facing persecution and affliction for being a Christian.
  - (4) Job said, "Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" (**Job 2:10**) In other words, "Is God only good when good things are happening to us? Is He not just as good when bad things are happening to us?"
  - (5) If God causes all things to work together for good for those who love Him and are living according to His will, will He not also work everything out for good when you are being persecuted and afflicted for being a Christian?
  - (6) And the answer to that question is a resounding "yes," regardless of what life feels like at the moment.
- c. A **second** problem we face in valuing God for who He is and His justice for what it is, is our propensity to be like Esau who sold what was highly valuable in the long run (*his birthright*) for a bowl of soup because he was in a hurry to gain relief from his more immediate need of hunger.
- (1) It is way to common to be like Esau in valuing immediate relief from pain and suffering more than we value the benefits that come from enduring suffering with godly patience, a good attitude, and trust in God's goodness.
  - (2) A classic example of this among believers is how many either don't understand, or ignore, or dislike **James 1:2-4** rather than taking it to heart and gaining stronger faith, greater perseverance, and the spiritual perfections that comes from facing trials and tribulation with a grateful

attitude, godly patience, godly behavior, and confident trust in God that He will bring great good from the bad.

- d. The point is, if you want to have a sane and sensible mindset for seeing persecution and affliction for what they are (*and you ought to want this*), and if you want to see God's righteous judgement as impartial and fair to all, and if you want what is best for all – not just yourself, then believe that God is using the persecution and affliction of believers to do what is good, and right, and just for the whole community – including those being persecuted and afflicted.
- 5. Therefore, I want to remind you once again that how you trust God today, how safe you feel in His hands today – regardless of the circumstances, and how you handle adversity today will either help prepare you or leave you less prepared for being persecuted and afflicted by unbelievers if and when the time comes.
  - a. The truth that how you live now will powerfully influence how you live later is stated by Jesus in **Luke 16:10**, “He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much.”
  - b. Therefore, now is the time to build your faith, strengthen your resolve to remain faithful in any and every situation, nurture the conviction that you are always safe in God's hands, and learn what is truly valuable so that when life gets exceedingly hard you value what truly matters.
  - c. Now is the time to learn to walk and talk with God in the way that convinces you He will never leave you nor forsake you. Now is the time to learn to pray wisely, to live sensibly, and to rely on God's wisdom, love, goodness, empowerment, protection, and provision to see you through the toughest and worst of times.
  - d. Therefore, if you want to remain faithful to God when being persecuted and afflicted for being a Christian, prepare now.
- 6. Moving on to **vs 6**, Paul begins to address God's judgment of those who persecute and afflict believers – a judgment that will punish the evil doers and do good to those who have suffered unjustly.
- B. **[6]** For after all it is only just (fair/right)) for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you . . .
  - 1. When we are mistreated, unloved, disrespected, emotionally hurt, or treated unjustly, we are prone to respond with what is called in today's jargon, “fight or flight.”

- a. In either case, we justify ungodly anger and raise self-protection above trusting God to take care of us, and above godly humility, and above loving our neighbor as ourselves, and above seeking peace when possible.
  - b. Such responses result in the kind of behavior that further damages or ends relationships, feeds resentment or bitterness in us, and makes true reconciliation nearly impossible.
  - c. Obviously, flight brings relief by putting distance between us and the one mistreating us, while fighting back makes us feel less vulnerable and sometimes forces the one mistreating us to stop their hurtful ways.
  - d. However, when we make self-protection more important than faith in God's protection, God's honor, and our own godliness, we weaken our faith and damage God's reputation and the reputation of Christianity. Plus, we degrade the quality of our character, our spirituality, and our love.
2. Therefore, God says we are to leave it up to Him to repay those who harm and unjustly afflict us. This is an important truth, and it is found in God's word more than once.
- a. **Deuteronomy 32:35-36a**, "Vengeance is Mine, and retribution (*repayment*). In due time their foot will slip; for the day of their calamity is near, and the impending things are hastening upon them. [36] For the LORD will vindicate His people (*avenge and restore their rightful position and possessions*), and will have compassion on His servants...."
  - b. **Romans 12:19**, "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord."
  - c. **Matthew 5:43-48**, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' [44] But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, [45] so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. [46] For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? [47] If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? [48] Therefore you are to be perfect (*in showing love and show mercy*), as your heavenly Father is perfect."

3. It may seem that dealing God's way with those who mistreat, persecute, and afflict you leaves you vulnerable – and from a worldly perspective it does. But from the perspective of God, faith in God, Christ-likeness, and eternity, the vulnerable ones are those who are self-centered and trusting in themselves for their provision and protection.
4. As the scripture says, those who dwell in the shelter of the Most High are the ones who live in the shadow of the Almighty. It is those who confidently trust God to be their refuge and fortress who are truly safe. “For it is [God] who delivers you from the snare of the trapper and from the deadly pestilence. [4] He will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness will be a shield and bulwark when you have made the LORD, even the Most High, your secure dwelling place (**Psalms 91:1-4,9**).
5. The truth is, based on what really matters and what is eternally valuable you are never vulnerable – any more than Jesus was vulnerable when taken by the Jews, beaten by the soldiers, condemned to death by Pilate, and nailed to a cross.
  - a. Why? Because God was with Jesus working out His purposes for a good far greater than the immediate relief of Jesus' suffering. In the same way, God is with you and is bringing about a far greater good than the relief of your suffering.
  - b. The reality is, true safety and security comes from God.
6. It is probable the Christians in Peter's day wondered why they had to patiently wait until Christ's return to see justice in regard to those who were unjustly mistreating them. And so Peter wrote in **2 Peter 3:7-9**, “By His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. [8] But do not let this **one fact** escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. [9] The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, **not wishing** for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”

### III. Conclusion

- A. Remember, God's justice is justice for all – for those who mistreat you and for you who are mistreated. Therefore, Paul says in **vs 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.”