

**2 Thessalonians 1**  
**Week 6: Rethinking God's Judgment**

I. Dr. Kurnia Foe shared from 1 Thessalonians 5 last week and thank you Dr. Kurnia for sharing such a powerful word. Toward the end of 1 Thessalonians a primary emphasis is to prepare the believers for:

**The Day of The Lord**

A. A core doctrine of our Christian faith is that Jesus will return to the earth.

When He returns, He will return for what Paul calls a:

**Royal Visit**

1. Jesus will physically return to earth to enact the full authority that He already rightfully claims. I have an opinion of how the events around Christ's Return will unfold, but I hold them loosely. There is room for discussion as to how the events will unfold; what is not up for discussion is that Christ will physically return to the earth and when He does it will be to fully consummate His earthly kingdom.
2. Paul isn't writing 1st and 2nd Thessalonians as an End Times manual. What he intends to do is provide comfort and hope amid the Thessalonians' current confusion. Jesus is returning! When Christ returns, it will not be like His first coming, but in full authority as Lord and King! He is coming as Judge.

II. Judgment is almost always viewed in a negative sense. But should that be the case? Today Paul's words in 2 Thessalonians 1 should cause us to rethink God's judgment. The primary point of 1st and 2nd Thessalonians is to provide comfort and hope when life is tough and to remind all believers of how Christ's return impacts our daily decisions.

A. The background for 2 Thessalonians is the same as 1 Thessalonians. These letters were written within the same period. The Christians in Thessaloniki had found themselves in opposition to the political and social structures around them and life wasn't easy.

Let's dive in!

**2 Thessalonians 1:1-2 – 1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy: To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

1. We have two letters, again, both written to the Thessalonians within the same period. The traveling companions of Paul, the almost verbatim greeting, and the continuation of themes, indicates that 1st and 2nd Thessalonians are within the same overall conversation.
2. There are two changes between the greetings of 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, but one must pay close attention.
  - a. God "the" Father in the introduction of 1st Thessalonians becomes God "our" Father in 2nd Thessalonians. It's a subtle shift, but Paul begins 2nd Thessalonians in a way that he continues throughout the letter. He's physically removed from the Thessalonians, but his heart is with them. He's bonded with them in Christ. The "our" is also significant because Paul is including this predominantly gentile church to be identified as the children or family of God. We don't think much of that, but it's a big deal.
  - b. The other change is a bit more obvious, but Paul indicates the source of grace and peace: from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. God's unmerited favor and peace that are the reality of our lives, particularly when our circumstances are difficult.
3. Two things we desperately need are two things we often think about the least.
  - a. One, the grace of God which is His unmerited favor in our lives. In Christ, it's unconditional. We can't earn it or lose it!
  - b. The second thing is God's peace. His peace and grace are a packaged deal. It's a gift God gives to us that we come to understand the more we're committed to Him. Nothing happens in our lives that isn't sifted through His hands first and we can trust that He works everything for His (and our) good! Peace comes from God, not from within us. As we draw near to God in Christ, we experience the peace of God in our lives. One simple way to know we're stepping outside of God's will is the absence of His peace.

B. From grace and peace, Paul is going to launch into a discussion on God's:  
**Judgment!**

1. To us, that might feel like Paul just crossed 4 lanes on the interstate to catch an offramp. But it's time we rethink God's judgment. It's not the opposite of God's grace and peace and let's discover how Paul understands God's judgment.
2. But first Paul is going to commend those in Thessaloniki on two aspects of the Christian life they're doing well.

2 Thessalonians 1:3-4 – 3 We ought to thank God always for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, since your faith is flourishing and the love each one of you has for one another is increasing. 4 Therefore, we ourselves boast about you among God's churches- about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and afflictions that you are enduring.

a. One of the best opportunities we have within our church family is to invest our lives in the lives of others. We make church so program centric that if we're not careful, we'll program the relationships right out of it! One way we can all make a huge impact is to take the initiative and invite someone to lunch or coffee. I see some of you young fellows perking up. I'm not talking about the opposite sex on a date. You can do that, but I'm talking about it for the purpose of hearing someone's story and discovering how we might encourage someone else in their faith. There is so much joy that we leave on the table when we do the solo Christian life thing. Paul is bragging about the Thessalonian believers and how ecstatic he is about their faith and love.

3. But something very important is missing. There are two Pauline trios that permeate his letters.

a. One is the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is One in essence and three in Person. I'm skipping ahead just a bit but consider 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14:

13 But we ought to thank God always for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God has chosen you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth. 14 He called you to this through our gospel, so that you might obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

b. The other trio that is typically employed in the Pauline Letters is:

Faith, Hope, and Love

But one out of this trio is strangely missing throughout the Letters to the Thessalonians.

Can you guess which?

Hope

Let's take a moment and unpack these terms because we throw around faith, hope, and love, without clarifying what they mean.

(1) Love - Fighting for the highest good for another.

I stole that definition from Edy Herrera but it's a good one! Love is actionable. It's sacrificial. That's why God is love. That's why we can't say we love God while we disregard reflecting God's love to others.

(2) Faith - Relational trust in the person of Jesus Christ.

Faith is trusting in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the past works of God, and responding in obedience today. Faith and hope intersect but I would distinguish faith and hope because the Bible does.

(3) Hope - Confidence concerning the future promises of God.

There is a big difference between hope and wishful thinking. Hope is a future oriented faith that reflects on the future reward of following Christ as motivation for the here and now. Even Jesus knew something of this:

Hebrews 12:1b-2 - 1b Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, 2 keeping our eyes on Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

(4) Faith manifests in response to what God has done. Hope manifests in anticipation of what God will do. Paul needed to shore up some misconceptions for the Thessalonians that were most evident in their lack of hope. They considered their afflictions as abandonment by God, but Paul is going to clarify this misconception.

2 Thessalonians 1:5-8 – 5 It is clear evidence of God's righteous judgment that you will be counted worthy of God's kingdom, for which you also are suffering, 6 since it is just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you 7

and to give relief to you who are afflicted, along with us. This will take place at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with his powerful angels, 8 when he takes vengeance with flaming fire on those who don't know God and on those who don't obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

4. Paul begins to bolster the hope of those in Thessaloniki by unpacking the righteous judgment of God. We hear the word judgment, and we tend to balk about it, but to people being marginalized and afflicted, I don't think they would have the same response. The judgment of God isn't arbitrary! It is righteous! How can judgment be righteous?

When we think of righteousness we tend to think in terms of morality. But righteous, justice, just, all come from the Greek word:

Dikaiosyne

- a. It does not carry the force of a noun but of a verb! I like Flemming Rutledge's definition of God's righteous judgment, "the action of God in making conditions and relationships right." The omniscient God who knows everything will one day square up the actions of humanity and there are only two payment options.

Jesus or death

(1) The only reason some of us don't get what we deserve is Jesus! No one gets unfair treatment by God, but those in Christ receive His grace. The justice of God repays people what they are due. Jesus willingly took on that debt because that is our only path to a holy and perfect God.

(2) Some think it's fun and games now, but the Day of the Lord is coming and there will be affliction for those who afflict and relief for those who are afflicted. The judgment of God is no light matter and there is no reason it should come as a surprise! God is merciful. He's slow to anger and desires that no person would perish. But His holiness demands His justice. His love demands His justice! For a community of persecuted believers this word from the Lord would have been comforting. God sees and takes note of their pain and will one day demand repayment for the evil that has been done. Do we really want a hippy God, where love is free (and cheap) with no consequences for our decisions? I don't.

- b. Who will God demand a repayment from?

Those who don't know God. Well, most everyone knows about God. That's not the type of knowledge referred to here. This is personal or intimate knowledge of God. How do we know if we have a personal knowledge of God? We have faith in Jesus Christ that expresses itself in obedience. This isn't a religious thing but a relationship thing. Walking with Jesus and being salt and light on the earth!

- c. Paul will end this opening chapter with the most poignant depiction of hell in all the New Testament.

When we think about hell, we probably start thinking about all the awful things that are in hell. May I tell you today the most frightening thing about hell is not what is in hell but what isn't in hell. Frankly, there are a lot of misconceptions about hell, and I promise we'll do a series at some point soon.

Let's read 2 Thessalonians 1:9-10:

9 They will pay the penalty of eternal destruction from the Lord's presence and from his glorious strength 10 on that day when he comes to be glorified by his saints and to be marveled at by all those who have believed, because our testimony among you was believed.

- (1) I don't like to think about hell, and I don't know anyone who does but the Bible speaks so we speak.

Those who reject God and His Son Jesus Christ will not be forced to love God when the judgment comes. God doesn't send anyone to hell. People willingly reject His offer of grace, and they get what they want: the payment of eternal destruction. Think about those two words together. Never ending destruction is a long time.

- (2) Why does that happen?

They have cut themselves off from the Lord's presence and His glorious strength. It isn't what is present in hell that is so troubling, it's what isn't there! What isn't in hell? The presence of God! Everyone on the planet experiences the love and mercy of God even when it's rejected, but there will come a time when God releases a person to their own devices. But for those who have trusted Christ and know Him, we will marvel at the fullness of His glory. Jesus' value and worth will be made evident throughout all of creation!

**C. Paul has given us cause to rethink God's judgment and he's bolstered the hope of those suffering in Thessaloniki. They've walked faithfully to this point in response to God's work in their lives. They've now been challenged to continue persevering in confidence of what is to come! Paul is a praying man, and he ends this chapter in prayer:**

**2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 – 11 In view of this, we always pray for you that our God will make you worthy of his calling, and your work produced by faith, 12 so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified by you, and you by him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

**1. Our response to God is very real. You and I have been granted freedom to choose the path we will take in this life. And God's sovereignty (His supreme control) is never altered. He orchestrates our salvation from the beginning into all eternity. Paul's prayer is their worthiness in light of God's calling. It's God's calling! He doesn't call us out of His need but out of the abundance of His glory and as we reflect the value and worth of Jesus, He grants us the opportunity to participate in His glory! Not separate from Jesus, but a mutual participation of His glory for all eternity.**

**D. One day soon, Jesus will bring forth His righteous judgment and there will be those who reject His presence and strength and there will be others who will marvel. Maybe God is calling you today? Today is the day of salvation. It's according to grace, not our works. And when the Spirit of God indwells us, we know!**

**Romans 8:16-17 – 16 The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God's children, 17 and if children, also heirs- heirs of God and coheirs with Christ- if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.**