

# The Persecuted Church

2 Thessalonians: 1:1-12

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## 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12 (NIV)

*Paul, Silas and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:*

*<sup>2</sup> Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*<sup>3</sup> We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing. <sup>4</sup> Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.*

*<sup>5</sup> All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. <sup>6</sup> God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you <sup>7</sup> and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. <sup>8</sup> He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.*

*<sup>9</sup> They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might <sup>10</sup> on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.*

*<sup>11</sup> With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith. <sup>12</sup> We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

### v1 – Who was Silas?

*Silas was a long and experienced companion of Paul. He traveled with Paul on his second missionary journey and was imprisoned and set free with Paul in the Philippian jail (Acts 16:19-27). When Paul first came to Thessalonica, Silas came with him (Acts 17:1-9), so the Thessalonians knew Silas well.*

- He also collaborated with Paul & Timothy on the first letter to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 1:1).

### Who was Timothy?

He was the son of a Greek father (Acts 16:1), and a Jewish mother named Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5). From his youth, he had been taught in the Scriptures by his mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15).

- Timothy was a trusted companion and associate of Paul, and he accompanied Paul on many of his missionary journeys.
- Paul sent Timothy to the Thessalonians on a previous occasion (1 Thessalonians 3:2).

### What do we know about the church of the Thessalonians?

Paul himself founded the church in Thessalonica on his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1-9). He was only in the city a short time because he was forced out by enemies of the Gospel.

- But the church of the Thessalonians left behind was alive and active. Paul's deep concern for this young church, prompted this letter.

### v2 – How did Paul greet the Thessalonians?

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:* Paul brought his customary greeting to the Thessalonian Christians, hailing them in the **grace** and **peace** of God the Father.

- It is remarkable that even at this early date the Son is placed side by side with the Father as the fount of divine grace, without any need of comment.

### v3-4 – Why was Paul compelled to thank God for the Thessalonians?

Because of the work God did in the Thessalonian Christians...

- **Exceedingly growing faith.**
- **Abounding love.**
- **Patience and faith in all... persecutions and tribulations.**

This **faith** and **love**, thriving in the midst of **persecutions and tribulations**, made Paul **boast** of the Thessalonians to other churches.

### v5 – What was God’s Righteous judgment?

God’s *righteous judgment* was at work among the Thessalonians, beginning at the house of God (1 Peter 4:17), and purifying them as followers of Jesus.

- The good result — showing them **worthy of the kingdom of God** — was **manifest evidence** that God was good in allowing them to suffer the *persecutions and tribulations* described in verse 4.

### How was the Thessalonians’ suffering evidence of the righteous judgment of God?

Where suffering is coupled with righteous endurance, God’s work is done. The fires of persecution and tribulation were like the purifying fires of a refiner, burning away the dross from the gold, bringing forth a pure, precious metal.

### How would the Thessalonians be counted worthy?

The idea behind *counted worthy* is not “seen as worthy” but “reckoned as worthy” as in a judicial decree.

- Paul’s prayer was that the worthiness of Jesus may be accounted to the Thessalonian Christians.

### v6-7 – What will be the result of God being just?

Many people question the righteousness of God’s judgment. They believe that God’s love and His judgment contradict each other. But God’s judgment is based on the great spiritual principle that it is a **righteous thing with God to repay** those who do evil.

- Since God is **righteous**, He will **repay all evil**, and it will all be judged and accounted for either at the cross or in hell.

### What would God do to those who troubled the Thessalonians?

God was also shown as **righteous** when those who persecuted the Thessalonians were repaid with **tribulation** according to their evil works.

- They probably believed they did God a favor when they persecuted the Christians, but the **righteous** God would **repay** them and not *reward* them.
- We see statements similar to this in the Psalms where the writer happily wishes ill upon his enemies — they are a prayer of entrusting the judgment of these enemies to *God*, instead of personally taking the initiative.

### How is the tribulation of God’s people different from the tribulation of God’s enemies?

The *tribulation* upon these persecutors of God’s people is not like a purifying fire. It is like the fire of a pure and holy judgment.

### v7 – What is promised to those who are troubled?

The time of persecution would not last. A day of **rest** is promised for every believer.

### v8 – What will the day of judgment will be like for those who persecuted the Thessalonians?

For the persecutors, *those* who do not know God, and those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus, that will be a day of vengeance and everlasting destruction.

### What does it mean to *obey* the gospel of Christ?

First of all, to believe the gospel... believing the gospel is obeying the Lord...

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.*

Then of course following believing, to get to know the Lord in order to obey Him in all things.

### The NKJV says God will take vengeance on those who do not know Him, isn’t that vindictive?

The Greek word rendered ‘vengeance’ has no associations of vindictiveness. It is a compound based on the same root as the word rendered ‘righteous’ in vv. 5, 6, and it has the idea of a firm administration of unwavering justice.

- The idea is the application of full justice on the offender; nothing more and nothing less.

### v9 – What makes hell so terrible?

It isn’t the fire that makes hell what it is. In the fiery furnace, the three Jewish young men were completely comfortable, as long as the Lord was with them in the fire (Daniel 3). What truly characterizes hell is that there, people are **from the presence of the Lord**, in the sense of being apart from anything *good* or *blessed* in God’s presence.

- We are made to spend eternity with our Creator so to not be with Him is the worst part of hell.

### Is “*everlasting destruction*” annihilation?

We must not be moved from the idea that the punishment of the wicked is **everlasting**. As the blessings of heaven are eternal, the penalty of hell is also eternal.

- The perpetual duration of this death is proved from the fact that its opposite is the glory of Christ. This is eternal and has no end.

### **Why is it attractive to believe that unbelievers will not experience an eternity of suffering in hell, but will instead be “extinguished” after death?**

Because of the awfulness of the idea of people spending eternity in hell.

- While there are some passages that seem to argue for annihilationism, a comprehensive look at what the Bible says about the destiny of the wicked reveals the fact that punishment in hell is eternal.

A belief in annihilationism results from a misunderstanding of one or more of the following doctrines: 1) the consequences of sin, 2) the justice of God, 3) the nature of hell.

- See GotQuestions.org for a detailed case against this doctrine.
- And I would add: 4) nature of humans (made in the image of God – will exist into eternity)

### **v10 – When will the unbelievers be punished?**

In the day Jesus returns... at the end of the Tribulation for those earth dwellers living at the time.

- For everyone else, it is when they die (see the story of the rich man and Lazarus, Luke 16).

### **What will “that Day” mean for believers?**

For the persecuted saints, those who believe, they will have God glorified in them on that Day, and they will see and admire Jesus more than ever.

### **What will we *marvel* about God? (*admire*, NKJV)**

We will admire what God has done in others and in us.

“Those who look upon the saints will feel a sudden wonderment of sacred delight; they will be startled with the surprising glory of the Lord’s work in them.

- Every saint will be a wonder to himself. ‘I thought my bliss would be great, but not like this!’
- All the brethren will say, ‘I knew the saints would be perfect, but I never imagined such excessive glory for each of them.
- We’ll all say, “I could not have imagined my Lord to be so good and gracious.”

### **What is the big difference between one destined for judgment and one destined for glory?**

The difference is belief in the message Paul preached (**our testimony**), the simple Gospel of Jesus Christ.

- Paul knew what it was like to be transformed from a persecutor to the persecuted. Believing the **testimony** of the Gospel of Jesus Christ had changed his life.

### **v11 – Why did Paul pray regularly for the Thessalonians?**

The Thessalonian Christians were in the midst of persecution and tribulation. Here, Paul assured them that he and his associates **pray always** for them.

### **What did Paul pray for the Thessalonians?**

*That our God would count you worthy of this calling:* God gives Christians a high **calling**, mentioned in the previous sentence. The **calling** is to see Him glorified in us at His coming. Paul rightly prays that the Thessalonians may be counted **worthy of this calling**, and he shows ways to fulfill this calling.

### **v11-12 – How do we live worthy of His call?**

When we **fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness**, living lives *touched* by **His goodness**, and *displaying His goodness*.

- We live worthy of His call when we **fulfill ... the work of faith with power**, believing on Jesus and seeing His work done all around us by faith.
- We live worthy of His call when **the name of our Lord Jesus Christ is glorified in us**. We understand that this means more than the **name of our Lord Jesus** as a word, but also as a representation of His character.
- We live worthy of His call when we are glorified **in Him**, when He alone is our source of glory and exaltation, and who we are in Jesus is more important than who we are in anything else.

### **How are we glorified in Christ?**

*According to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ:* This great work of living worthy of His calling can only happen **according to the grace of God**.

- It happens by His power, favor, and acceptance in work in us, moving along our will and cooperation.

### **What applications come to mind from this passage?**

- Our suffering is the righteous judgment of God, don’t let a good time of suffering go to waste.
- God will see that justice is done; we should not seek retribution.
- The doctrine of annihilation is not biblical; hell is eternal.
- All Christians should live worthy of our call; everything we do should glorify the Lord.