The Righteous Judgment Of God
2 Thessalonians 1:6-12

Introduction

The second letter of Paul to the Thessalonians begins with comfort (chapter 1); continues with correction (chapter 2) and ends in concern (chapter 3). Remember Paul is encouraging them because they are under great pressure; suffering hardship and persecution. Paul reminds them that suffering helps us grow (vv. 6-10); and now Paul points out that suffering prepares us for glory (vv. 11-12); and that suffering glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ (vv. 11-12).

How in the world could suffering and persecution bring glory to the Lord Jesus Christ? Clearly the answer is one that is contrary to human thinking and worldly wisdom. We usually think of pain, suffering and hardship as the absence of God; not the presence of God! Paul takes the opposite position and points out their suffering, their hardship and their persecution was evidence of God’s presence in their lives! When suffering is coupled with righteous endurance; perseverance under pressure; we begin to understand God’s sovereignty (Rom. 8:28); we are driven closer to God (1 Pet. 4:14); we are given insight into God’s nature (Rom. 8:14-15) and we become examples to others (1 Thess. 1:6-7).

“We judge ourselves by what we feel capable of doing; others judge us by what we have done” (H.W. Longfellow)

In moments of crystal clear clarity; we realize our suspicions of others are aroused by our knowledge of ourselves. The Bible has a lot to say about judgment. Clearly judgment takes place in reference to time, place, subject and results. There is a judgment that is already past; the judgment of the Cross of Calvary (John 5:24; 12:31; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; 1 Peter 2:24). At the Cross judgment against Satan and His power over the believer was broken; the sins of the believer were judged and put away. But there is also a present judgment which is taking place daily in the life of the believer. This continual ongoing judgment must be going on or there will be judgment from God because of the consequent failure to grow and mature in grace. There must be constant and continual judging of sin as it comes up in the believer’s life (1 John 1:5-7). There is a future judgment of the saints; often called the Bema; or the judgment seat of Christ; with reference to the Believer’s Works; but not salvation (2 Cor. 5:1,5,7,9; 1 Cor. 4:5--which says that those who are judged “shall have praise of God”. This is not true of the wicked. This is a judgment, not a destiny; but for adjustment; for reward or loss according to our works, for position in the kingdom; every person will receive according to our works. We are saved by Grace. Some people think the presence of Grace means the absence of obedience; and clearly the Bible encourages us to read the Bible; believe the Bible, submit to its authority and obey its commands.

The future judgment includes the nations (Matt. 25:31-46) and an event that has been called “The Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11-15). It has been called the judgment of the dead; and it would appear that at the judgment of the nations judgment is handed out for the living; and at the Great White Throne Judgment; judgment is handed out for the dead. Other judgments
The Righteous Judgment Of God
2 Thessalonians 1:6-12

include Israel (Ezek. 20:33-34) and judgment even of fallen angels by believers (Jude 6; 2 Peter 2:4 and also 1 Cor. 6:3).

Why Will There Be A Judgment? (v.6)

2 Thessalonians 1:6 (NKJV) since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you,

“The righteous judgment of God is seen in two ways--punishment for the persecutors and then rest for the persecuted” (William McDonald; p.84).

The simple answer to the question; an innocent party has been offended by a guilty party. Paul embraces a play on words to make a point; tribulation and trouble are related words; the noun thlipsis; the verb thlibo (same as in verse 7 “troubled”); the literal meaning is to press; like one would press grapes; crushing them; so the literal meaning is to press hard; a crushing pressure; and so to trouble or to afflict; or to distress.

Have you ever said to anyone; “I am going to make life miserable for you!”

Acts 17:5-8 (NLT) But the Jewish leaders were jealous, so they gathered some worthless fellows from the streets to form a mob and start a riot. They attacked the home of Jason, searching for Paul and Silas so they could drag them out to the crowd. Not finding them there, they dragged out Jason and some of the other believers instead and took them before the city council. “Paul and Silas have turned the rest of the world upside down, and now they are here disturbing our city,” they shouted. And Jason has let them into his home. They are all guilty of treason against Caesar, for they profess allegiance to another king, Jesus. The people of the city, as well as the city officials, were thrown into turmoil by these reports.

Acts 17:13 (NLT) But when some Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God in Berea, they went there and stirred up trouble.

Clearly the purpose of judgment is to rectify injustice! God is a righteous God. Sin will not go unpunished. God is a Holy God. Out of God’s holiness comes the righteousness and justice of God. Holiness is an expression of God’s character. Justice and righteousness are expressed in God’s dealing with human beings. We can quickly say three things about the righteousness and justice of God:

1. The imposition of righteousness by laws and demands, which may be called legislative holiness; and may be called the righteousness of God.
2. The executing of penalties attached to those laws, which may be called judicial holiness;
3. The sense in which the attributes and justice of God is carried out in the Holy Nature of God in the government of the world. In the righteousness of God we have His love of Holiness and in the justice of God His hatred of sin.
The Righteous Judgment Of God
2 Thessalonians 1:6-12

Aesop’s famous fables were written by a slave. Sydney Harris wrote; “...only those who chronically suffer injustice can have a true insight into what justice consists of. (Whereas those who benefit from it have a hundred ways of rationalizing it into something else.)

People who have a wrong view of judgment also have a wrong view of justice.

“A world in which justice was not done at last would not be God’s world at all” (Hiebert).

The pain and persecution the suffering and trauma was horrific. Paul offers a word of encouragement. But he also offers a word of warning as well; God is righteous and God is just. God is going to reward the righteous and punish the unrighteous. All unjust behavior of men will bear the terrible judgment of God; murder, mocking, cursing, criticizing, defrauding, ridiculing, fighting, arguing, misusing, rejecting, ignoring, cheating, abusing, stealing, deceiving, lying, hoarding... We live in a wicked world filled with unjust people. Williams translates verse 6; “...Indeed, it is right for God to repay with crushing sorrows those who cause you these crushing sorrows”; another translation; “It really is just for God to pay back with suffering those who make you suffer” (Beck). Most unbelievers don’t believe that... some Christians are reluctant to believe it. The Bible makes it clear that God would not be just if he failed to ignore or overlook even one sin. Psalm 96:13; “For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with His truth.”

Who Shall Judge? (v.7)

2 Thessalonians 1:7 (NKJV) and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels,

The man on the Cross now becomes the man on the throne. Clearly Jesus will judge. Jesus is not simply judge; but he comes to execute judgment. Jesus comes to give rest to the believer—but retribution to the unbeliever and the make-believer. The believer is released from injustice and suffering. The Pulpit Commentary adds;

“(HEAVEN) is rest to the weary, freedom to the enslaved, release from sorrow, suffering, and pain, relaxation from toil, the quiet heaven of peace after being tossed about in the tempestuous ocean of this world” Vol. 21; p.2).

At first glance you might think the word “rest” is a verb; but it is in fact a noun; anesis; here literally it means “a loosening, relaxation; but here relief; one Greek scholar translates this “Grant, in turn, rest to those who are oppressed” (Arndt and Gingrich); we might say “rest” or “relief”. The point? When the enemies of God are experiencing judgment; God saint’s will be experiencing “rest”.

Jesus is going to personally return to the earth and judge the nations. The expression “revealed” is the well known word apokalupsei which means to be unveiled or uncovered. The Day is
The Righteous Judgment Of God
2 Thessalonians 1:6-12

Coming when Jesus will rip a distinct tear in the Heavens and return to the Earth in Judgment. Hundreds of years ago Matthew Henry described it “He will come in all the pomp and power of the upper world”. The one who is revealed from Heaven is fit to judge “because he is the Son of Man”; as man He sympathizes with humanity; as God He knows all things and is able to render a just verdict. Jesus comes with His mighty angels; no one will be able to resist His judgment. **The time of God’s righteous retribution is at the revelation or unveiling of Jesus Christ. Jesus comes from Heaven with angels in flaming fire.**

Who Shall Be Judged? (v.8)

*2 Thessalonians 1:8 (NKJV)* in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul reminds the believers that God is righteous (v.6) and now that God is wrathful (v.8). Later Paul will point out that God is good (v.11) and in the next chapter that God is loving (2:16). When the Lord Jesus Christ exacts vengeance, it is not vindictiveness, but righteous recompense. Jesus Christ is not simply getting even; but rather handing out punishment based on His Holy and Righteous and Just character. Who will be judged? “those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ”. Do you know God? What does it mean to obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ?

**AW Tozer:** The Bible knows nothing of salvation apart from obedience. Paul testified that he was sent to preach “obedience to the faith among all nations.” He reminded the Roman Christians that they had been set free from sin because they had “obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.” In the New Testament there is no contradiction between faith and obedience. Between faith and Law-works, yes; between law and grace, yes; but between faith and obedience, not at all. The Bible recognizes no faith that does not lead to obedience, nor does it recognize any obedience that does not spring from faith. The two are opposite sides of the same coin. Were we to split a coin edge wise we would destroy both sides and render the whole thing valueless. So faith and obedience are forever joined and each one is without value when separated from the other. The trouble with many of us today is that we are trying to believe without intending to obey” (PATHS TO POWER pp.24-25).

Those who do not know God are those who have rejected the knowledge of the True and Living God; revealed both in nature and in conscious (Rom. 1&2). Those who have not obeyed the gospel are those who have heard the gospel but have willfully rejected it. The gospel is not simply a statement of facts to be believed but a real Person who must be obeyed. Belief in the New Testament always carries the idea of not simply agreeing with the content; but also of obeying. Paul points out in Romans 3:23; “…for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” pointing out human need. In Romans 6:23 Paul writes; “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This has been rightly called “sin’s penalty”. Paul also talks about God’s provision; Romans 5:8; “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”. In Romans 10:9; Paul
The Righteous Judgment Of God
2 Thessalonians 1:6-12

calls his reader to a response; “that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

The Bible teaches that God loves us and wants us to know Him; and experience fellowship with Him. We have sinned against God and our sins separate us from God. This separation leads eventually to death and judgment. God has orchestrated all of human history in one direction; the coming of Jesus Christ; born of virgin; living the perfect life we could never live and dying on a Cross for our sins; this Cross becomes a life giving bridge; we must personally receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior; trusting Him to forgive our sins; when we do that we can cross the bridge; everyone must individually receive Jesus as their Savior and Lord (John 3:16 and John 5:24). The people who reject God’s plan of peace and life; who reject our common problem of sin and separation; who refuse God’s remedy; who fail to respond; and who reject God’s offer embrace judgment.

You may want to believe and have no intention to obey the Gospel.

What Will The Judgment Be? (v.9)

2 Thessalonians 1:9 (NKJV) These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power;

Look carefully at the expression “be punished”; it is in the Greek a combination of verb and noun; the verb “tino” (only here in the Greek New Testament) and means “pay”. “Dike” has an interesting history as given by Thayer and means custom or usage then right or justice. Then it came to have the technical meaning of “a suit at law”. The next step was “a judicial hearing, judicial decision; and more precisely “a sentence of condemnation”. The final step was the execution of the sentence. The noun and the verb together mean “pay the penalty” or “suffer punishment”; and the judicial sentence is “everlasting destruction from the presence (literally ‘face’) of the Lord”. The wicked are punished with “everlasting destruction”. The same word used to describe “everlasting” life is used here. Everlasting life goes on forever. Everlasting punishment goes on forever.

To learn how Americans feel about prayer, Life magazine interviewed dozens of people. One person they talked to was a prostitute, age 24, in White Pine County Nevada. “I don’t think about my feelings a lot,” she said. “Instead I lie in my bed and think onto him. I meditate because sometimes my words don’t come out right. But he can find me. He can find what’s inside of me just by listening to my thoughts. I ask him to help me and keep me going. “A lot of people think working girls don’t have any morals, any religion. But I do. I don’t steal. I don’t lie. The way I look at I’m not sinning. He’s not going to judge me. I don’t think God judges anybody.” Few notions are more comforting than the idea that God judges no one. The problem is that soothing idea is false.

When Shall The Judgment Take Place? (v.10)
The Righteous Judgment Of God
2 Thessalonians 1:6-12

2 Thessalonians 1:10 (NKJV) when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be
admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.

“. . .and to be admired” or “to be marveled at”. The verb is thaumazo (46 times in the NT;translated in the KJV “marvel” 30 times and “wonder” 14 times; only here “admired” and once
“have in admiration” (Jude 16). Clearly this is not its usual meaning; the phrase most often was
used to describe wonder and amazement over the miracles of Jesus; and here the admiration
comes from the believers know about Jesus.

Look at what Paul writes; “because our testimony among you was believed”. What was Paul’s testimony? Paul was a persecutor who became persecuted! Paul believed the
gospel of Jesus Christ; it changed his life! This is the difference between one who is destined for
judgment and one destined for glory. The difference is in the message Paul preached (our
testimony); the simple gospel of Jesus Christ.

How Can A Person Escape The Judgment? (vv.11-12)

2 Thessalonians 1:11 (NKJV) Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count
you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith
with power,

The Lord God is the one who makes you worthy. His pleasure and goodness of faith with
power belong to all who know and love the Lord Jesus Christ. A person can escape the
judgment by believing and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ.

How do you get a great parking space at a New York Yankees baseball game? One man thought
he had a way. The man pulled his car into the VIP parking lot and casually told the attendant that
he was a close personal friend of George Steinbrenner, owner of the Yankees. Unfortunately for
the imposter, the person attending the parking lot that day was George Steinbrenner himself,
doing some personal investigation of traffic problems at the stadium. The surprised imposter
looked at Steinbrenner and said, “Guess I’ve got the wrong lot.” You can be sure that he did not
park in the VIP lot that day or any day. God knows who his friends are and who the imposters
are.

Conclusion

2 Thessalonians 1:12 (NKJV) that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you,
and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

What should be my proper reactions to suffering? How should I as a Christian in the will of God
and the word of God respond to painful trial and testing? Paul reminds us to thank God for His
salvation and for His presence in our lives. We expect suffering (John 15:19-20; 2 Tim. 3:12);
The Righteous Judgment Of God
2 Thessalonians 1:6-12

and refuse to despise our suffering (James 5:13). We weigh our current suffering against the coming glory we have in the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 8:18).

Romans 8:18 (NKJV) For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

We not only thank God for our sufferings; we surrender to the will of God without complaining.

Hebrews 12:12-13 (NKJV) Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

In other words the writer to the Hebrews is asking his readers not to act like self-made martyrs because of suffering and hardship. Ask God to give you wisdom to understand His will; and watch for opportunities to witness and glorify God in your situation.

James 5:10 (NKJV) My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience.

Disobedience brings God’s chastening; and if we decide to walk outside of God’s will; we must expect consequences.

In the spring of 1995 columnist Charles Krauthammer wrote an article explaining why the 1994 baseball strike dealt a fatal blow to many fans. The cancellation of the World Series reduced the entire ’94 season to meaninglessness, a string of exhibition games masquerading for a while as a championship season. No championship, no season. The real scandal of the ’94 season is not the games that were canceled but that were played. The whole season was a phony. The fans who invested dollars and enthusiasm in the expectation that the winners and losers and homers and averages would count were cheated. More than cheated. By canceling the season in a dispute over money, the players and owners mocked the fan who really cared whether Ken Griffey broke Roger Maris’ record or Tony Gwyn hit .400.

Hitting records and the World Series give meaning to the regular season. Judgment day gives meaning to life. Because God will call every deed into account, everything we do matters.