

## II THESSALONIANS 1

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to II Thessalonians chapter 1 as we continue our study through the Word of God.

Keep in mind that the city of Thessalonica was located in the Roman province of Macedonia, in the northern part of modern Greece and it was a thriving seaport city.

And it was not a small city. In Paul's day some 250,000 people lived there, most of them Greeks, but many Romans and a thriving Jewish community also called Thessalonica home.

Not only was this city an important seaport city but it also was located on the major land travel route, the Egnatian Way, which connected Rome with the Orient.

Today this city still exists with a population of some 300,000 people and it is called Thessaloniki, (formerly Salonika).

And if you remember from our study in I Thessalonians, we said that Paul, on his second missionary journey, went to Macedonia because of a vision the Lord gave to him one night of a man from Macedonia pleading with him saying, "*Come over to Macedonia and help us.*"

And Paul and his missionary team went to Macedonia where they first set foot on European soil.

Paul and Silas preached in Philippi and then they traveled west to Thessalonica. (Acts 16)

And we are told in Acts 17:2 that they only spent three Sabbaths teaching them before they moved on.

Now some have a hard time with that, and they feel it had to be a lot longer as Paul was teaching them the deep things of God.

Keep in mind that God does amazing things and by His Spirit, I believe they were able to retain these things that Paul was teaching them.

When Paul left Thessalonica, he went south ministering and eventually he came to Corinth, where he would write both I and II Thessalonians from.

Paul wrote his second letter to the church in Thessalonica probably within a year after he wrote his first letter.

If Galatians was Paul's first letter that he wrote, and I Thessalonians his second, it would make II Thessalonians his third letter, all of them being written in the early 50's.

Now why did Paul write to them so soon?

Paul gives us three main reasons and that will be the basic outline for this letter.

First of all, in II Thessalonians chapter 1 Paul gives them *Encouragement in Suffering*. The persecution against these new believers didn't stop and Paul wanted to encourage them to keep moving forward, to keep growing in spite of all that was coming against them, he didn't want them to give up!

Then, in II Thessalonians chapter 2 Paul gives them *Enlightenment about The Day of The Lord*. In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians Paul spoke of the end times and the Rapture of the church. But there was still some confusion, which opened the door for false prophets, false teachers, deceivers to come in telling them that they missed the Rapture and were living in the Day of the Lord. These false teachers even had a forged letter supposedly from Paul to help support their false doctrine.

Thus, with the persecution they were facing, many wondered if this was The Day of the Lord and many came to believe it was, that they missed the Rapture.

So Paul wants to correct this error and calm their fears that the Day of the Lord had arrived when in fact it hadn't!

And lastly, in II Thessalonians chapter 3 Paul speaks of the *Establishment of Christian Living*. In other words, it is a call to walk worthy of the high calling by which they were called.

Was this a problem for them? It became a problem for some of them because of the misinformation they had regarding the Day of the Lord and the Rapture of the church. Some felt that the Lord's return would come at any moment, which it could, but this caused some to stop working, to become lazy, they were loafers and feeding off of others who were working.

Some may have thought if this is the Day of the Lord, what is the use, why work?

Thus, Paul is going to correct their perspective on this issue and how to walk worthy of the high calling by which we have been called!

Of this letter, William Kelly tells us:

As in the first Epistle, the apostle does not immediately grapple with the error, but prepares the hearts of the saints gradually and on all sides so as to clench the truth and exclude the error once it is exposed. This is the way of divine grace and wisdom; the heart is set right, and not the mere point of error or evil dealt with.

- William Kelly

So this letter is one of encouragement to grow in the faith and correction of the false doctrine that had come into the church.

With that said, let's begin reading in II Thessalonians chapter 1, starting in verse 1 and see what the Lord has for us this evening!

## II THESSALONIANS 1

### VERSES 1-2

As Paul wrote this letter from Corinth, he mentions that Silas and Timothy were also involved. Not really in writing this letter, but they were involved in establishing the church in Thessalonica with Paul and thus, Paul includes them for the people would know them very well.

And, as we have seen, Paul founded this church in Thessalonica on his second missionary journey, (Acts 17:1-10), and he was only able to minister for three Sabbaths or less than one month before they ran him out of town for preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

But what Paul left behind was a church, new believers who were strong in the Lord and they were active in the Lord. They lived what they believed, and others saw it and were ministered by what they saw!

Now we see this phrase, **“God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”** and I think we can miss what it is saying in the Greek. You see, God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are one. Not the same person, but they are Almighty God, one God manifested in three distinct persons, as we need to include the Holy Spirit in this.

One writer put it like this,

The Greek makes it plain that the Father and Christ are one source. 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.

- Morris cites Bicknell

Now, what is interesting here, in these two verses, is that we see Paul speak of “**God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**” twice. Once in each of these verses. Why does he repeat himself?

Keep in mind that Paul is going to speak to them about *Encouragement in Suffering* because this is what they were facing. Thus, he emphasized that our source of strength in the Christian life, the source for our endurance in these times of pressure and persecution, is “**God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**”

And I truly believe that these words are just as important for us in the days we are living in as it was for these Thessalonian believers in their day!

Ray Stedman put it like this,

We, too, are living in difficult days. There is tension, war, disease, crime, unemployment, disillusionment, and every other kind of struggle. There is every reason for us also to emphasize what Paul told the Thessalonians: the Christian’s resource is “God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” The words of a great hymn say this so well:

*What a friend we have in Jesus,*

*All our sins and griefs to bear.*

*What a privilege to carry*

*Everything to God in prayer*

- Ray Stedman, *Hope in a Chaotic World, First and Second Thessalonians*, p. 108

I like that but there is more to this as the hymn goes on to say:

*Oh, what peace we often forfeit,*

*Oh, what needless pain we bear,*

*All because we do not carry*

*Everything to God in prayer!*

Yes, we can bring all our sins and griefs to the Lord, but many times we don't, and we forfeit that peace, we endure all that pain, that is needless. How much better, and what a privilege it is to carry them all and lay them at the feet of Jesus!

We also see here that Paul speaks of the Siamese Twins of the New Testament, Grace and Peace and always in that order.

This is how Paul opens up his letters and, as I have said before, and it truly bears repeating, you will never be able to experience the peace of God until you first make peace with God and you cannot make peace with God until you first receive His grace into your life, the grace that is in Jesus Christ that He extends to us, the forgiveness of our sins!

You see, peace *with* God through Jesus Christ and then the peace *of* God in our lives!

Paul put it this way in Romans 5:1-2, **“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”**

The Amplified Bible puts these verses like this, **“THEREFORE, SINCE we are justified (acquitted, declared righteous, and given a right standing with God) through faith, let us [grasp the fact that we] have [the peace of reconciliation to hold and to enjoy] peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One). Through Him also we have [our] access (entrance, introduction) by faith into this grace (state of God’s favor) in which we [firmly and safely] stand. And let us rejoice and exult in our hope of experiencing and enjoying the glory of God.”**

And now Paul is going to try to encourage them as they go through these difficult times. Look at what Paul says next.

#### VERSES 3-4

Let me ask you a couple of questions.

First, what do churches boast of today?

Why do people go from church to church, what are they looking for?

Those are interesting questions to me.

Many like to boast about what their church is doing, and they forget that our boasting really needs to be in the Lord.

Yes, Paul boasted about these believers, but that boast was what the Lord was doing in them and through them. Their witness of the Lord.

And people move from church to church many times because it is all about them and what they can get from a church. It is not about what gift has God given me that I can bless people with. Thus, when their needs are no longer met, they move on and take from another church, and another church, and another church!

One writer summed this up nicely for us as he wrote,

Churches take pride in many things: their large membership roll or attendance, the size of their campus, the design of their buildings, their wealth, their music, the social status of their members, the prominence of their pastor, their political clout, their influence in the community, or their zeal for a particular theological cause.

Others celebrate their creativity and freedom from traditional modes of worship, trading theology for psychology, choirs and organs for rock bands, and replacing sermons with skits, musicals, and other forms of entertainment in an effort to create an inoffensive, nonthreatening atmosphere for the unbelievers and nominal Christians in their congregations.

They have become the model churches many seek to emulate.

- John MacArthur

Make no mistake about it, that was not the church of Thessalonica.

They grew in faith even though persecutions or the hostility from the enemies of the Gospel were coming against them.

They grew in the faith even though tribulations or afflictions that may have resulted from the persecution that was coming against them.

They did not renounce their faith, cave in, give up but grew in the faith during these times.

Now here's the thing. Satan will use persecution, tribulations to weaken our faith, destroy our faith, ruin our witness.

God will use these same things to test our faith, to show us what is in our hearts so that we may grow.



Now, depending on what a person's faith is made of, their faith may, or it may not grow!

Remember what Peter said in I Peter 1:6-7, **“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”**

Think of it like this.

As you well know, fire will destroy wood and paper, they will burn up.

But, when fire is put upon gold, it will not burn up, but it will purify the gold!

That is what God is doing in our lives, purifying them, testing our faith and as we go through the fires of tribulations, they bring praise, they bring honor, they bring glory to the Lord Jesus Christ who is coming back for His Bride, the Church!

You see, we can know what our faith is made of by how we respond to adversity, trials and sufferings in our lives.

Do they make us bitter or do they make us better?

Warren Wiersbe put it like this,

A faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted. New believers must expect their faith to be tried, because this is the way God proves whether or not their decision is genuine. Faith, like a muscle, must be exercised to grow stronger. Tribulation and persecution are God's ways to strengthen our faith.

- Warren Wiersbe

Also, Tertullian, the historian, writes that the Roman government was disturbed about the early church.

Christians were increasing in number by leaps and bounds.

But, because they wouldn't take even a pinch of incense and put it before the image of the emperor, the Romans felt they might be disloyal.

And, because of that, spies went into the Christian gatherings and came back with a report something like this:

“These Christians are very strange people. They meet together in an empty room to worship. They do not have an image. They speak of One by the name of Jesus, who is absent, but whom they seem to be expecting at any time. And my, how they love Him and how they love one another.”

What a witness!

Remember what Paul prayed for them back in I Thessalonians 3:12, “**And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you.**”

Now we see that come to pass here, they were growing and because of that they were examples to other churches, other Christians, and even to unbelievers!

Back in I Thessalonians 1:2-3 Paul said, “**We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father.**”

Notice; faith, love and hope here in I Thessalonians.

But here in II Thessalonians Paul just mentions their faith and love; he left out hope, why?

Maybe because of the false doctrine that had come into the church saying that they were living in the Day of the Lord, they missed the Rapture!

You see, faith tells us that all our sins are forgiven and because of what God has done for me I live to serve Him.

The love of God in my life causes me to reach out and love others with His love, laboring in love for others.

And hope produces patience or long-suffering endurance because our hope is in the Lord and He will not only see us through the most difficult of things, but He is coming back for us.

They lost that hope which then caused some of them to be lazy, not working, not providing for their family, “What’s the use?” mentality!

Thus, Paul is going to clear up that kind of thinking in this letter with the desire of restoring that hope in them!

Now to say that they lacked any kind of patience or long-suffering is not true. They had some, but when it came to the Day of the Lord and the idea that they missed the Rapture, well, like I said, it caused them to live in a way that was not worthy of the high calling by which they were called!

#### VERSE 5

I am not sure why, but many Christians in America don’t believe we should be persecuted. That God is going to protect us, so these things won’t happen to us.

And the reality is, look at our brothers and sisters around the world and how many have been put to death for their faith in Christ. More Christians are being martyred for their faith today than at any other time in church history!

What is happening in America?

What seems to pervade or permeate many churches today is a man-centered mentality and thus, Christians are concerned about their happiness, comfort, success, to have a feel-good atmosphere, prosperity and the list can go on. It is a self-centered or man-centered focus.

Some say, "I don't feel the love!" You are self-centered.

The issue is, are you giving out love?

And here is the thing that many miss out on. They are so concerned about self and getting all the attention that in the end, they are never satisfied! Why is that?

The reason is simple. If you are so focused on self, you will never be satisfied because there are only more things that self will want, desire and it never ends and you are never satisfied!

But, on the other end of the spectrum you might say, as we reach out to others, as we love others, as we minister the love of Christ to others, God reaches out with His love and we are ministered to not only by God but by others!

We have our focus wrong, but not the believers in Thessalonica. They had a God-centered mentality.

What is a God-centered mentality?

Just what it says it is!

But if you are still unsure, listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, "**But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.**"

The Amplified Bible puts this verse like this, "**But seek (aim at and strive after) first of all His kingdom and His righteousness (His way of doing and being right), and then all these things taken together will be given you besides.**"

Does it really matter?

Of course it does.

One of the things for the Thessalonian believers was the persecution they were going through and because they were God-centered they were able to stand strong in the faith.

If they had a man-centered relationship, as soon as things heated up, they would be gone because it is all about them and not the Lord and what He desires of them.

Let me explain a little more about persecution.

Ladies, the ring on your finger that has a stone on it, do you realize that the stone is nothing more than a piece of coal?

Now don't go hitting your husband for that lump of coal that he gave you. You see, it doesn't look like coal anymore because it was placed under heat and pressure and over time it was formed into a beautiful diamond!

We are like a piece of coal and as God allows pressure and heat to come upon on our lives, He is making us into a beautiful diamond!

Don't run from it but allow God to accomplish in us what He desires as we go through these times!

And please understand that these things that came upon them was not the basis of their salvation, but it was the evidence that they were saved, it showed that their faith was real and not empty!

Now this is tough because the Bible tells us we are to face trials joyfully. James put it like this, **“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”** James 1:2-4.

You see, God is working in us, and thus, the Bible tells us that we are to face these trials joyfully because He is equipping us for glory.

Regarding this, Leon Morris tells us,

The New Testament does not look on suffering in quite the same way as do most modern people. To us it is in itself an evil, something to be avoided at all costs.

Now while the New Testament does not gloss over this aspect of suffering it does not lose sight either of the fact that in the good providence of God suffering is often the means of working out God's eternal purpose.

It develops in the sufferers qualities of character.

It teaches valuable lessons.

Suffering is not thought of as something which may possibly be avoided by the Christian. For him it is inevitable. He is ordained to it (1 Thess 3:3). He must live out his life and develop his Christian character in a world which is dominated by non-Christian ideas.

His faith is not some fragile thing, to be kept in a kind of spiritual cotton wool [protect somebody too much without allowing them to be independent enough], insulated from all shocks.

It is robust. It is to be manifested in the fires of trouble, and in the furnace of affliction.

And not only is it to be manifested there, but in part at any rate, it is to be fashioned in such places. The very troubles and afflictions which the world heaps on the believer become, under God, the means of making him what he ought to be.

Suffering, when we have come to regard it in this light, is not to be thought of as evidence that God has forsaken us, but as evidence that God is with us.

Paul can rejoice that he fills up “that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church” (Col 1:24).

Such suffering is a vivid token of the presence of God.

- Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*,  
The New International Commentary on the New Testament, pp. 197-198

Don’t run away from these things. Don’t try to hide yourself from them. Walk through them and see what God will do in you and through you as you do!

### VERSES 6-8

Jesus warned us that in this world we will suffer persecution, but this persecution will not last forever. There is coming a judgment day you might say.

Remember in the movie *The Terminator*, Arnold said, “*I’ll be back!*”

Well folks, the Lord said it long before Arnold did, and He is coming back to pour out His wrath on a Christ rejecting world and then He will set-up His Kingdom on this earth where He will rule and reign for 1,000 years!

But before He pours out His wrath upon a Christ rejecting world, He will take His Bride, the Church home. It is called the Rapture of the church and once the church is removed, judgment will come and you can read of that in the book of Revelation with the seal judgments, the trumpet judgments and finally the bowl judgments.

Now, is that fair, God judging the world, those that have rejected Him?

God’s judgment is right, and it is fair.

You see, people have a choice, to receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior and if you do you are cleansed of all your sins.

If you reject Jesus as your Lord and Savior, the free gift of God then you will face His judgment as you stand before God in your own righteousness, which are like filthy rags!

You see, all evil will be judged and accounted for, either at the cross or in Hell!

And here's the thing. A holy God cannot leave sin unjudged. People who say, "I cannot believe that a loving God would judge sinners and send people to hell" understand neither the holiness of God nor the awfulness of sin.

Listen to the perspective that Warren Wiersbe gives to us regarding this. He wrote,

A Christian doctor had tried to witness to a very moral woman who belonged to a church that denied the need for salvation and the reality of future judgment. "God loves me too much to condemn me," the patient would reply. "I cannot believe that God would make such a place as a lake of fire."

The woman became ill and the diagnosis was cancer. An operation was necessary. "I wonder if I really should operate," the doctor said to her in her hospital room. "I really love you too much to cut into you and give you pain."

"Doctor," said the patient, "if you really loved me, you would do everything possible to save me. How can you permit this awful thing to remain in my body?"

It was easy then for him to explain that what cancer is to the body, sin is to the world; and both must be dealt with radically and completely. Just as a physician cannot love health without hating disease and dealing with it, so God cannot love righteousness without hating sin and judging it.

- Warren Wiersbe



I hope that makes sense to you. God cannot let sin continue on, it must be judged, and like I have said, either on the cross or in Hell!

Now we may also wonder why God allows His people to face such persecution, even death.

We have talked about the persecution and what God is doing but even in death we are with the Lord, death has no more power over us because Jesus conquered death and took away its sting!

Thus, we don't lose anything in death; we gain eternity with the Lord!

And remember what the Psalmist said in Psalm 116:5, "**Precious in the sight of the LORD Is the death of His saints.**"

So the righteous judgment of God will come upon those who have rejected Him and we see that in Romans as Paul speaks of God dealing with those who are willfully ignorant of God.

Paul spoke of these people in Romans 1:18-32 as he said, "**For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man - and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the**"

**truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.”**

There is no excuse for not knowing there is a God, the heavens declare the glory of God and yet, man suppresses that truth! And they are accountable.

God will also deal with those who do not obey the Gospel of Jesus. It is as Jesus said in John 3:36, **“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”**

Now let me speak for a minute on vengeance, because, when we think of vengeance from a human perspective, we think of getting even with someone who has done us wrong.

That is not what the Greek word for **“vengeance”** is saying.

Heibert tells us, “The term does not contain the idea of human revenge but rather denotes infliction of full justice on a criminal, giving him all, but no more, than his guilt deserves.”

You see, in God's judgment upon the wicked, they will get what they deserve for God's judgment is fair, it is right!

Now some still wonder how God can be just and still be merciful and forgive sinners. If we are all sinners, then justice must be upon all.

In regard to this A. W. Tozer writes,

[The] solution for the problem of how God can be just and still justify the unjust is found in the Christian doctrine of redemption. It is that, through the work of Christ in atonement, justice is not violated but satisfied when God spares a sinner. Redemptive theology teaches that mercy does not become effective toward a man until justice has done its work. The just penalty for sin was exacted when Christ our Substitute died for us on the cross. However unpleasant this may sound to the ear of the natural man, it has ever been sweet to the ear of faith.

- A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 94

Also notice that Paul speaks of our rest when the Lord returns. What does he mean by that?

I think what Paul is speaking of is this rest on this earth when the Millennial Kingdom is established. It is a time where Jesus will rule and reign from Jerusalem and righteousness will fill this land.

There is also a final rest in the new heavens and the new earth as Revelation 21:4 tells us, **“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”**

Do you mean we are not going to find rest now? Or if there is a rest, what rest do we have now? Do we have to wait until then for rest?

The rest that Paul is speaking of here in II Thessalonians is for the future, not now.

But there is a rest we can enjoy now. You see, salvation brings us rest from the crushing weight of sin upon our lives.

Paul, in Hebrews 4:9-11 tells us, **“There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.”**

Make no mistake about it, we can rest in Christ because He finished the work for us, He paid the price for our salvation and we can rest in that.

In saying that, don't expect peace on this earth until the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ returns to set up His kingdom on this earth.

It is as Jesus said in John 16:33, **“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”**

As we read on Paul is going to speak of what is coming for those who have rejected Him, the eternal punishment that is coming.

#### VERSES 9-10

Notice that Paul says the wicked will face **“everlasting destruction”** and that is a hard concept for many Christians. They think that the punishment of the wicked is not eternal, that it is short-lived and then you just vaporize into nothingness.

But think about this. If the blessings of heaven and being with the Lord are eternal, and they are, then the penalty for hell is also eternal!

Calvin put it like this. “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 their punishment eternal, why are they going to spend eternity in the Lake of Fire?

Because they have rejected Jesus Christ they will have to pay for their sins.

And let me say this. The only sin that will send you to Hell is your rejection of Jesus Christ. That is the only sin that will keep you out of heaven!

I know that some are taken back by that because they think that lying, stealing, murder, adultery, fornication and-so-on are sins that will keep you out of heaven.

They will not send you to Hell!

Now before you get mad at me, let me explain. Or, I guess I should say, let the Scriptures speak for themselves because there is only one sin that will keep you from heaven and send you to Hell!

Jesus said in John 16:8-11, in speaking of the work of the Holy Spirit, “**And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.**”

You see, the sin that sends someone to Hell is their rejection of Jesus as their Lord and Savior because the only righteousness that God will accept is the righteousness of Christ.

Thus, Paul tells us in II Corinthians 5:21, “**For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**”

You see, our righteousness before God is like filthy rags, but by having faith in Jesus, by receiving Him as Lord and Savior, the righteousness of Christ is imputed into our lives. If you reject that then God will judge you!

Now you may be thinking, “Hey, wait a minute Pastor Joe! What about all those other things like fornication and-so-on, those other sins?”

Let me be clear on this. They don’t send you to Hell, they only determine the degree of punishment in the Lake of Fire you will have for eternity!

In Revelation 20:11-15, at The Great White Throne Judgment where God will judge unbelievers for their punishment, we are told, **“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”**

You see, they were judged according to their works, not for salvation but to determine the degree of punishment in the Lake of Fire!

Make no mistake about it, God’s judgment is coming, and we await that Day for the evil will be removed and the knowledge of the Lord will fill this land!

And notice what Paul says here in II Thessalonians 1:10, **“because our testimony among you was believed.”**

This shows the difference between one destined for judgment and one destined for glory. The difference is belief in the message Paul preached (*our testimony*), or the simple Gospel of Jesus Christ.

#### VERSES 11-12

Paul's prayer for these believers is that they would be found "**worthy**," what does that mean?

Is Paul speaking of working our way into Heaven and if we have done good, if there are enough good works in our lives as opposed to bad, we then will enter into heaven?

Not at all, that is not the Gospel message but the message of all other religions who have man work his way up to God while Christianity has God reaching down to sinful man and pulling him out of the mire of sin that he is in!

It is the blood of Jesus that cleanses us as white as snow!

Paul tells us in Romans 3:23, "**for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**"

It was a hopeless condition we were in with no way out on our own, but, "**. . . when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.**" Romans 5:6.

You see, "**For the wages of sin is death, but the [free] gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**" Romans 6:23.

That means, "**There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.**"

You see, it is God who makes us worthy.

Paul put it this way in Ephesians 2:8-9, **“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”**

But we do play a role in this, not for salvation, but in sanctification and as we identify ourselves as followers of Jesus.

In Ephesians 4:1 Paul said, **“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.”**

In I Thessalonians 4:7 Paul tells us, **“For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.”**

In Colossians 1:10 Paul said, **“that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.”**

And in I Thessalonians 2:12 Paul tells us, **“that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.”**

You see, as we become more and more like Jesus, as His nature flows from our lives, we are walking worthy of the calling that God has placed upon our lives!

Again, not for salvation but our identification with Him and it is a lifelong process, sanctification!

And this is important because many Christians today are looking to make a name for themselves, but the ultimate purpose is not that our name should be glorified but that through us the Lord would be glorified – even through our persecutions, our trials, our tribulations, as we walk we will bring glory to God!

As we allow God to work in us, He will also work through us so that we can touch others for Jesus!



But we are in a battle and the world is looking to discredit us.

Maybe you heard the story of the missionary who was confronted by a tribe of cannibals!

He was, of course, very nervous and what made him even more uncomfortable was one of the natives who kept staring at him. He looked him up and down and really did not take his eyes off of him.

Finally, the missionary got enough courage to walk up to him and he said to this native, “I am uncomfortable with you staring at me like that. Why are you doing that?”

And he responded back, “I am in charge of the food inspection for the tribe!”

Make no mistake about it, the world is watching us trying to see how they might devour us, destroy our witness.

We need to stand strong in the faith and finish the race that is before us.

Ray Stedman gave us this perspective. He wrote,

Finally, Paul prays for the Thessalonians – and for us. He is saying: “Hold on. Keep steady. Remain faithful. You have the *resolve* to do so in the desire given you by the Spirit; you have the *faith* to do so in the basis of fact revealed in the Scripture, and you have the *power* to do so since God himself dwells in you.”

All this, “according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Granted that it may sometimes be hard. It is not easy to stand for Christ in your family when perhaps some members are against you. It is not easy to be loving, winsome, and warm toward those who are cruel and caustic to you at work.

This can be a tough, brutal, ruthless world; Scripture faces those facts head on. But we are constantly reminded that the Lord Jesus Christ is even now being glorified when we hold steady, when we do not give up, when we do not allow ourselves to fall into evil practices, but are able to say no and walk away from them. That is when Jesus is being glorified, says the apostle.

And, says Paul, you also are being glorified. Inner changes are taking place in your life that you cannot see. Others may be able to catch a glimpse of them now and then. But when the Lord Jesus shows us off before the whole world at the time of the unveiling of His presence, the glory He has been shaping within us will blaze forth to such a degree that the whole universe will gasp!

What a hope! What a motivation to keep on keeping on!

- Ray Stedman, *Hope in a Chaotic World, First and Second Thessalonians*, p. 117

I am sure that many of us have heard of the Pony Express but do you realize the dedication of these men, that should be the dedication of us in our prayers, that is then manifested in our lives as we step out in faith, living as we are praying!

Listen to what they were all about and then apply that to your life, their dedication, their willingness to lay it all on the line to deliver the mail!

We are told,

The Pony Express was a private express company that carried mail by an organized relay of horseback riders.

The eastern end was St. Joseph, Missouri, and the western terminal was in Sacramento, California. The cost of sending a letter by Pony Express was \$2.50 an ounce.

If the weather and horses held out and the Indians held off, that letter would complete the entire two-thousand-mile journey in a speedy ten days, as did the report of Lincoln's Inaugural Address.

It may surprise you that the Pony Express was only in operation from April 3, 1860, until November 18, 1861 – just seventeen months.

When the telegraph line was completed between two cities, the service was no longer needed.

Being a rider for the Pony Express was a tough job. You were expected to ride seventy-five to one hundred miles a day, changing horses every fifteen to twenty-five miles.

Other than mail, the only baggage you carried contained a few provisions, including a kit of flour, cornmeal, and bacon.

In case of danger, you also had a medical pack of turpentine, borax, and cream of tartar.

In order to travel light and to increase speed of mobility during Indian attacks, the men always rode in shirtsleeves, even during the fierce winter weather.

How would you recruit volunteers for this hazardous job?

An 1860 San Francisco newspaper printed this ad for the Pony Express: ***“Wanted: Young, skinny, wiry fellows not over 18. Must be expert riders willing to risk [death] daily. Orphans preferred.”***

Those were the honest facts of the service required, but the Pony Express never had a shortage of riders . . .

Like the Pony Express, serving God is not a job for the casually interested. It's costly service. He asks for your life. He asks for service to Him to become a priority, not a pastime.

- Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, pp. 109-110

May we grow in faith, trusting in God, believing in His promises to us, looking at all He has already done for us and believing that He is not done yet!

May we grow in love, receiving His love and giving His love to others.

And may we grow in hope of His soon return for us, His Bride, the Church!

You see, service is costly but as you serve, it will bring glory to God and your faith, love and hope will grow!

And notice how Paul closes this chapter out. He says, **“according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”**

It is not according to how good we are, how much work we do, it is according to the grace of God, which we don't deserve, but He freely gives to us. Thus, may we walk accordingly!