

The Righteous Judgment of God

2 Thessalonians 1:5-12

I'll never forget being a small boy in grade five and not wanting to go to school.

I didn't want to go to school because I was scared to death of my teacher.

I remember the class room had windows that opened with a latch that was fairly high so there was a wooden dowel about three quarters of an inch in diameter with a metal hook on the end that the teacher could use to operate the latch.

She would walk around the classroom and if a student was doing something that she thought she shouldn't be doing she would slam the window opener down on the desk and scare the life out of the student.

Getting yelled at was also a fairly regular occurrence.

I remember getting a good tongue lashing on one occasion because of a poor performance on a spelling test.

Truth be told I likely deserved the reprimand for failing to study for the test, but at the time I didn't consider whether or not I deserved it I just remember being scared.

From there things seemed to get worse, looking back on it I'm not sure if she treated me much different than her other students, but it sure seemed she had a special dislike of me and so I lived in fear pretty much every day.

Seeing no way out I tried my best to stay home.

It wasn't long before my mom figured things out and sent my dad to the school to try and work things out.

Shortly after that I was transferred to another class and only had to deal with her glaring death stare in the hallway.

I was sure happy about that and when I eventually transferred out of the school all together that experience faded into the background of my life.

At the time though it seemed like an impossible situation that would never end.

I often wonder what it would have been like if I had a better handle on the bigger picture of life in that situation.

If I would have trusted more in my parents, if I would have seen the situation as something that would only last a short time, or if I could have seen that her power over me was not nearly as big in reality as it was in my mind, maybe I would have been a little less afraid.

[I can't tell you the number of times in my life I have struggled to see the bigger picture and felt fear, helplessness, or anger as a result. Every time that has happened the LORD has graciously pointed me back to the bigger picture in life. Things are never as bad as they seem and they are certainly never without hope. That is the encouragement we find in our text this morning

2Thessalonians 1:5-12. Paul is writing here to people in a difficult spot. They are being persecuted and mistreated at the hands of people who are rejecting Jesus as king. As the apostle Paul seeks to encourage these believers in trying times, he points them and us to the big picture concerning God's justice. What we are taught here is both comforting and sobering at the same time. It's comforting to know that God is concerned about the suffering of His people and it is sobering to be reminded of the necessary consequences that come from being opposed to the LORD. While we have it fairly easy in the time and place we live, the worldwide church is being persecuted more now than at any other time in the history of the church so we need the truth of these verses every bit as much as the Thessalonians did. One of the things we need to keep at the forefront of our minds is that...]

Point #1 – God takes action against evil because He is just. (Verses 5-8)

The Lord has established moral laws in keeping with His nature and when those laws are broken He is compelled by His nature punish those actions.

Verse 5 acts sort of like a bridge between verse four and verses 6-12.

The evidence that he is talking about here is the enduring faith of these believers as they go through persecution and trial.

We should ask the question, "Why do Christians keep trusting in Christ when they face tremendous consequences for continuing to believe in Jesus?"

The only answer is the work of the Spirit that is enables the Christian to remain faithful.

Because the work of God is happening in the people of God they are 'considered worthy of the kingdom of God'.

That is not something they are earning through endurance it is something that is being revealed through their endurance.

Listen, the LORD remains faithful to those that belong to Christ because He is just.

But there is more to God's justice than keeping His people according to His promises. **(Verses 6-7a).**

Persecution will come to an end at some point.

God has set a limit on the evil that is done to those that belong to Him.

In addition to bringing the affliction of believers to an end He will bring affliction, which is punishment and suffering, to those who have committed these offenses against the church.

Why? Because He is just. There is no wrong that the LORD ignores.

Sometimes God's opposition to evil is felt in this life.

[How many kids here know the story of God delivering the people of Israel from Egypt? Who remembers what God did to the king of Egypt when he refused to listen to the LORD?]

We also need to remember that the Israelites were in Egypt 400 years before God sent Moses to deliver them.

Often times God's people endure hardship for a long time.
Paul knows that and points us to the big picture. (**Verse 7b-8**)

Notice the certainty of what is said here.

This is a matter of 'when'. As I have said before the Bible is very clear that no one knows the exact timing of Jesus' coming, but the certainty of His resurrection from the dead makes His return certain.

Also, notice the great display that will take place.

This is an event that is impossible to miss. When Jesus comes with 'his mighty angels' they sky will be set ablaze with the glory of heaven.

He will come with deliverance for His people and with 'vengeance on those who do not know God and those who do not obey the gospel.'

Not knowing God is likely referring to people who turn what God reveals about Himself in creation into the worship of false gods/religion.

Those not obeying the gospel are those who have been clearly told who God is and that Jesus is the only way and have rejected that message.

Both groups of people are opposed Jesus and the gospel to varying degrees and that opposition is expressed in evil action which harms people in general as well as the church specifically.

Because it is in God's nature to be just He will take action against that evil.

[Kids, just imagine I go to a grocery store and buy \$300 worth of groceries and I also take a \$2 chocolate bar. Is that ok for me to take the chocolate bar because I spent \$300? What would you say if a judge told the store it was the store's fault for putting the chocolate bars by the checkout? Would that be a good judge or a bad judge? He would be a bad judge because he wouldn't be doing what is right.]

You see God is more than a good judge, He is a perfect judge which means He has to give consequences for every wrong thing that everyone does.

Nothing that happens in the world goes unnoticed by the LORD.

When people mistreat you for being a Christian, God sees that and He is going to hold that person or people accountable for everything.

It is impossible for Him to do anything different because He is just.

[We often speak of God's love and rightly so, but to speak of love without justice is to empty love of its meaning. To genuinely love someone is to desire their highest good, how can someone desire what is good and allow evil to go on without any consequence? It is impossible. In order for there to be love there must be an objective moral law that must be objectively enforced. That is what God does because He is just. That leads us to this second lesson which is both difficult and encouraging. Here is the lesson, that...]

Point #2 – The consequences of God’s justice are eternal. (Verses 9-10)

When the LORD deals with people in a final sense the outcomes of His judgements last forever.

As we look together at verse 9 I am keenly aware that this is a hard truth!

I also know that as mere creatures we have no capacity to alter reality.

Denying or softening what the bible teaches on this subject can only serve to give people false comfort and there is nothing good in that.

With that in mind, let’s read together **verse 9**.

Some Christians have argued that eternal destruction means that after a period of time the people under this punishment are taken completely out of existence.

If that were the case then using the word ‘destruction’ by itself would make more sense.

Further mentioning ‘the presence of the LORD and the glory of His might’ in relation to the object of this punishment would have no meaning to someone who no longer exists.

The intent of this verse seems to be that there will be an awareness on the part of those under this ‘punishment of eternal destruction’ that the LORD is the one enforcing the punishment.

It is not that there is no sense of the presence of God in hell, for God is present everywhere, it is that the every sense of awareness of the LORD is hated by those being punished.

Some object saying that eternal punishment is far beyond what the crimes deserve.

People think that because they fail to see or acknowledge that even the smallest of sins is an offense against the glory of God Himself which is infinite and therefore makes every act of disobedience an infinite offense.

It is a hard truth, but it is true nonetheless.

Paul compares that to what will happen among believers (**Verse 10**).

The believer has quite the opposite experience.

Instead of being eternally destroyed at the coming of Christ, Jesus will be glorified in His people and all of His people will marvel at Him.

While the word ‘eternal’ is not used here we need to understand that is the nature of what is being discussed.

How long will Christ be glorified in the church?

Anything short of forever falls short of the worth of Who Jesus is and what He has accomplished.

If Jesus is glorified forever ‘in His saints’ then His saints will be around forever to marvel at the wonder of Who He is.

That is the only right outcome for eternity on account of what Jesus has done and because God is always perfectly

just, meaning He always does what is right, His justice requires this to be so.

So whether we are speaking of the outcome of those who reject the LORD and His gospel or those who believe it, we are speaking of something lasts forever.

[Over the years I have had the occasion to work with concrete a time or two. It is amazing stuff. When you first mix it is can be moved and formed into all kinds of shapes for all kinds of purposes. People who know what they are doing can make really amazing things, but the time you have to work with it is limited. Once it reaches a certain point it becomes hard and that is it you have what you have and little can be done to change it.]

While we are alive upon the earth we have the opportunity to change.

The one who wrote this letter is an excellent example of that.

Paul was a persecutor of the church and he had refused to obey the gospel for a time, but Christ opened his eyes and he believed.

That opportunity to change though is a limited time offer.

Once a person breathes their last or the sky is set ablaze with the appearing of Christ from heaven with His mighty angels our eternal destiny is fixed and cannot be changed.

[As I said earlier I am fully aware that is a hard reality to accept when we are talking about people being under the punishment of eternal destruction. We should never become indifferent or uncaring about what is taught in here, but neither should we turn away from it or lessen the severity of these things. The last two verses of chapter one give us the reason why. They show us that...]

Point #3 – God’s justice magnifies God’s grace. (Verses 11-12)

The more we can rightly see what we are saved from, the more we can appreciate the mercy the LORD shows us in Christ.

Look with me at first part of verse 11. (Verse 11a...end at you)

In light of the eternal ramifications of what will happen at Jesus’ coming, the apostle and his co-workers are in constant prayer for these believers.

Why does he do that? Because he knows the hope for the people in this church is in the strength and power of God.

Listen to what is being prayed for here. (**Verse 11**)

No one makes himself or herself worthy of the call of God.

That is something God does.

No one lives faithfully in the face of trial according to their own power.

That is something that happens according to God's power.

Now look at the goal of this prayer in **verse 12.**

When He speaks of the 'name' of Jesus he has more in mind than a word that identifies the person being referring to.

Commentator Robert Thomas points out that these believers would have associated Jesus' name with the 'dignity, majesty, and power of the LORD's revealed character.'

Now we need to be careful how we think about this.

No one can add to the glory of Jesus' name. Jesus is now, always has been, and always will be infinitely glorious.

To think of our lives as making Jesus' glorious would be wrong.

What he means is that God's work in His people calls attention to the greatness of Who Jesus is in and of Himself.

When that happens it says that believers are glorified 'in Him'

As the LORD answers the prayer of verse 11 we end up looking more like Jesus which means we share more in His glory.

[Think of it like the moon reflecting the light of the Sun. The moon has no light on its own but the more we can see the surface of the moon come in line with the light of the Sun the more of the Sun's light we can see reflecting off the moon.]

As the prayer of verse eleven is answered, more of Jesus' glory is reflected in the life of the believer until the reality of verse ten comes to pass at His coming and we live in the light of His glory forever.

Why does that happen?

It happens is says here '*according to the grace of our God and the LORD Jesus Christ.*'

I like how Leon Morris puts it, he says, "*Grace is favour shown by God to the unworthy, and made available for them through the work of Christ.*"

The only way we can have a true appreciation for the grace of God is to realize what we deserve according to the justice of God.

Apart from the work of Jesus we deserve to suffer "the punishment of eternal destruction" that is talked about in verse 9.

Because God is just He must deal with every act of disobedience.

In His love He sent Jesus into the world to live a perfect life and according to His perfection offer Himself as a sacrifice for us.

What Jesus did on the cross is so much more than die. He absorbed the eternal wrath of God on our behalf taking our punishment for us.

Do you see? If we make the justice of God into a small thing we make the work of Christ into a small thing.

If we say that hell is a temporary situation we are saying that what Jesus did for us is smaller than it actually is.

We cannot erase hell without erasing the cross.

On the other hand when we take seriously the justice of God we begin to see that the magnitude of the cross is far beyond what we can understand.

[It is sort of like a child learning the value of a dollar. When kids are small they have little to no appreciation for how they come to have clothes to wear and food to eat. They hardly notice the work and sacrifice that mom and dad often make to provide for their needs. Then they get a job, buy a car, start paying rent, and maybe start a family of their own and if they experience some hardship they appreciate the cost of things and begin to appreciate more fully what mom and dad did for them.]

If we fail to appreciate the uncompromising perfect justice of God and what that means for us as sinners, we will find it an easy thing to see the grace of God as something small.

On the other hand, if we can begin to appreciate the real and lasting consequences that we ought to experience under the judgment of the LORD, then we will be able to have a better sense of the grace of God in the LORD Jesus.

Much is said these days about the love of God.

I wholeheartedly agree with the idea of taking about the love of God as often as possible, but I fear much of what is said these days teaches little of genuine love because there is little sense of the justice of God.

A love that passes over evil with no regard is empty and meaningless.

Praise the LORD His love is full of meaning because He is just and takes action against evil.

Whatever wrong is experienced in the present will be made right at the judgment seat of Christ when He comes.

For the one who obeys the gospel that means eternal life, but for the one who rejects it that will mean eternal destruction.

That is a heavy truth but it is one that we need to see if we are going to really appreciate the grace of God that He shows us on account of Jesus.

There is no greater gift and there is no other way to see that than to see and trust in the 'Righteous Judgment of God.'