

TEXT: 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10

TITLE: The Certainty and Comfort of Divine Justice

THEME: Paul informs the Thessalonians that justice will be meted out in their case at the future judgment of God. The judgment is demonstrated to be righteous by their present situation, it will result in eternal destruction (but not annihilation!) for unbelievers, and will benefit not only the Thessalonian and all other believers, but also glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. While the Thessalonians are presently faithfully enduring persecution, they can look forward to ultimate relief from trouble because God's righteous judgment will surely occur.

PROPOSITION: God's future judgment will punish the wicked and give relief to believers.

INTRODUCTION: <Read the text.>

Have you ever been perplexed by what seems to be the prosperity of evil people? Why is it that they can get away with all kinds of evil? This brings to mind Ps. 73, a psalm which addresses this very problem of the prosperity of evil people. Asaph explained that he had gone astray in his thinking when he said <Read Psalm 73:2-5>. The wicked seemed to be doing so well. This caused Asaph to almost "slip" up.

Yet when he got his thinking cap functioning properly, he realized the following: <Read Psalm 73:17-20>. It was not Asaph who would ultimately "slip" up, but the wicked who would. God will trip them up in their own devices and their end will be destruction. Those who move away from God, 73:27 says, will perish. On the other hand, those who trust in him have the benefit of being able to draw near to Him, 73:28.

Likewise in our text, those people who run away from God, who do not know him nor believe the gospel, will get just what they want – the Lord will remove his presence from them. But he will add to the removal of his presence something else: eternal trouble in their eternal death.

On the other hand, believers will get a share of the presence of the Lord and His glory. The **certainty** of this twofold result of God's justice permeates the passage and is a **comfort** to those who are presently suffering persecution.

Transition from introduction to body: Let us examine exactly how Paul explains this twofold judgment, where punishment will come to the wicked and relief to the righteous.

I. The present circumstances of the Thessalonians demonstrate the righteousness of God's twofold judgment – vv. 5-7a.

The judgment that Paul talks about here is, in this text, limited to the future judgment that God will carry out at the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is because of the context,

namely that the future aspect of judgment dominates the following verses.¹ Paul makes it very clear here that...

From the previous book, as well as this very section (1:4,5,6 present tense verbs), it is clear that the Thessalonians were enduring great persecution.

- A. Faithfulness in persecution is evidence of the righteousness of God's judgment – v. 5
 - 1. The "which is" (KJV) refers to the whole of the previous verse. Faith, patience, and endurance textually surround the idea of persecutions and afflictions.
 - a. Their Christian faith was the cause of the persecution and their faith helped them stand under it. They were suffering for the kingdom of God, not for something else.
 - b. The persecutions by themselves gave evidence of the reality of the Thessalonians' faith—that they would not abandon the gospel because of the persecution.
 - c. Therefore, we cannot separate their endurance from the persecution. The idea is not complete unless both are present.
 - 2. Their suffering for the sake of the kingdom, their faith, patience, and endurance are all positive qualities that can be used as proof that God's judgment is right. In other words, the Thessalonians response to their situation is an evidence of the rightness of God's blessing them with the kingdom rest and the presence and glory of the Lord. Had they run away or something other than enduring the persecutions, there would be no external evidence that God was making the right judgment.
 - 3. As far as verse 5 is concerned, Paul only alludes to one side of the judgment, namely that the believers would be counted worthy of the kingdom of God. This reckoning is done by God, at the time of the judgment, and the result of it is that the believers will be demonstrated, shown, counted, seen to be worthy of the kingdom. Plenty of evidence will be available to back up this conclusion of the judgment. God's judgment is right, by definition, but there will be plain evidence to substantiate the outcome for the Thessalonians.
 - 4. What is this kingdom of God? Many are confused about this, thinking that we are "bringing in the kingdom" or "working for the kingdom" and so on. Such terms should be used carefully. The kingdom of God in the Scriptures usually refers to the earthly, 1000-year reign of the Messiah from Jerusalem. We can see the whole kingdom program of God throughout the Bible in 10 stages [go through quickly, if time is available].

¹ For further justification, see the exegetical notes section later on in this document.

- a. In preparatory stages in Genesis and early Exodus (dominion mandate)
- b. Establishment at Sinai in Ex. 19ff.
- c. Disfunction in the dual-monarchy period after Solomon.
- d. Disbanded in Ez. 10.
- e. The prophesied reinstatement during the "golden" age in the OT prophets.
- f. The offer of this kingdom by the Lord Jesus Christ early in Matthew's gospel.
- g. The rejection of the kingdom by the Jews by Matt 12, 23.
- h. The postponement of the kingdom program in parables of Matt 13.
- i. The establishment of the kingdom at the second coming of Christ in Matt 25. The Church will rule and judge with Christ, as his bride (2 Tim 2:12, Rev 20:4, 1 Cor 6:3). This phase of the kingdom will last 1000 years (Rev. 20). So, right now God is calling out people into his church in this age, and preparing them to work under Christ in the kingdom age.
- j. The merging of it into the eternal state.

5. The Thessalonians were suffering for this kingdom.

- a. First of all, the cause of their suffering was their association with the kingdom of God. These unbelievers ultimately hated God's rule, God's kingdom, and anyone associated with His kingdom.
- b. On the other hand, the Thessalonians would receive comfort from Paul's statement because their suffering was not "for nothing." There was a bigger cause in mind than just themselves. Sufferings are bearable when they are endured in this light. Such present suffering in Paul's mind are not really comparable to eternity's benefit (2 Cor 4:17, Rom 8:18).
- c. It is true that this suffering would tend to mold the character of the Thessalonians as well as test their faith to prove its genuineness. But here Paul is not looking at this aspect of suffering in this text. The suffering is a negative thing produced by wicked unbelievers which because it is endured faithfully, points out that God's justice is truly justice!
- d. Finally, we note that the suffering was "for the kingdom" and not "because you are in the tribulation." This was, in part, an answer to the Thessalonian's doubts about the Day of the Lord, further developed in chapter 2.

Transition: God through Paul goes on to further explain the righteous judgment of God. Paul makes a statement like "if it is OK for God to judge evildoers and give rest to Christians...AND

IT IS²...then what I've just said above is perfectly to be expected. That should be no surprise! "The persecuted will be deemed worthy of the kingdom (v. 5b), since (eiper) it is just in the sight of God for the afflictors to reap affliction and the afflicted to be granted rest."³

B. God will give trouble to the troublers – v. 6.

1. The **rightness of God's judgment** is also made plain by the persecutions which the Thessalonians were undergoing. This is evidence of the rightness of God's condemnation of unbelievers which Paul mentions in verse 6, and will explain in more detail later in the passage.
2. Whatever side you are looking at then, God's judgment is right. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Gen 18:25, Rom 3:5.
3. The idea here is that God will "repay" or "give back in return." The law of sowing and reaping seems evident here (Gal. 6:7-8). Or, the law of *lex talionis*, a fair payment for injury done.

Application: We are told as Christians to leave judgment in the hands of God (Rom 12:19).

4. The way Paul says it (with a cognate construction) emphasizes the idea of "trouble". The troublemakers are going to be in trouble, Paul says. In other words, God is going to turn the tables on the persecutors.

C. God will give rest for the troubled – v. 5b, 7a.

1. Part of this turning of the tables will be that the believers will be paid for their tribulations very handsomely—the ultimate rest of a believer with God. The idea of rest is that of the kingdom (Is 2:4, 11:6). Of course, for the believer, there are related rests—not just the kingdom, but also after death "with the Lord" (2 Cor 5:8) or after the rapture if we live until that time. But such rest is manifested for all to see when the Lord comes again.
2. In other words, two outcomes flow out of the single situation that the Thessalonians are faced with at present. Just like 1 Peter 4:14 and Php 1:28 where two outcomes come out of one event, here God is using one side of the coin (faith and patience) to justify blessing; the other side of the coin (persecution) to justify his judgment on the unbelievers.
3. When does this all happen? At the second coming of Christ. Some have looked at this text and said that it supports a post-tribulational rapture position. Not so!
 - a. Paul is tying ultimate rest on the earth to the coming of the kingdom.
 - b. For him to do so does not deny that the believer will be raptured seven years before the kingdom begins. The completion of God's judgment is a package deal and will come to full realization at the

² The first-class conditional statement at the start of verse 6 gives this indication. See exegetical notes for more justification.

³ Martin, p. 207.

start of the Messiah's kingdom. Paul simply here is compressing his view of end time events, and assuring the readers of kingdom rest.

Transition: The text now gives further detail on the two outcomes of God's future judgment, starting with the punishment of the wicked and then moving to the positive side of judgment. The Bible "unfolds" itself here for us to get more detailed glimpse of this two-outcome judgment and says...

II. The Lord will punish unbelievers at the judgment – vv. 7b-9.

Illustration: In a court of law, there are two main parties: the judge and the accused (omitting jury trials for now). When the accused is convicted, he is being labeled by the state or federal government as a criminal who is liable to the punishment due his deeds. This punishment is called the sentence. We have a similar kind of thing going on in the next couple of verses. Notice that...

A. The judge is the Lord Jesus Christ – v. 7b-8a. The king, God the Father, has appointed Him to be the judge.

1. He will be revealed from heaven. Just where he awaits now – Acts 1:11. He will be disclosed or brought "out of obscurity" when he comes back to establish his kingdom on the earth after the tribulation.
2. He will come with his angels. These angels possess miraculous power. which will be used to assist the Lord in judgment.
3. The Lord will be accompanied by "flaming fire." Such literal fire often accompanies a Theophany. In this case, we technically have a Christophany. We can see similar instances in Ex 13:21, 19:18, Rev 1:14.

B. The criminals are unbelievers – v. 8b. Two primary and one secondary charge against them are given:

1. The criminals do not know God. Paul speaks here of a personal relationship of a person with God. A believer has that.
2. The criminals do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul speaks here of the required faith, spoken of as "obedience" here, of the gospel. A believer also has that. The idea of obedience, or "duty faith" as it is sometimes called, is that the gospel is not only an invitation, but also an exhortation. Acts 6:7, 16:31, 17:30 are examples where the gospel is urged onto people in a command form (Rom 1:5 also).
3. They are also personally responsible for their afflicting unbelievers. So, in a sense, they are judged by their works. No works-based judgment in the question of salvation ever turns out favorably for the person doing the works; here though, the primary problem is that they do not know God nor do they obey the gospel.
4. These charges amount to basically the same thing - unbelief. There are three implications to the whole point:

- a. First, Paul is saying that it is a criminal activity to not obey the gospel. Such disobedience is not to be taken lightly. It is a serious matter.
- b. Second, Paul is making it very clear here that there is a very exclusive way of salvation. You must be one who knows God and obeys the gospel if you are to avoid future destruction.

Transition: This brings us to the third implication of these charges—not only that it is criminal to reject the Lord, and that there is no other way to avoid destruction, but ...

- c. That way is only through the Lord Jesus Christ. To know God, as our text says, is the same as eternal life (John 17:3). Jesus gives eternal life (John 10:28). He is the only way to get this life and know God (John 14:6). No man-made, works-based variant will do. It has to be the gospel "of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Good opportunity to give the gospel here in fuller form!

Application: Hold the line on the truth of the gospel. Don't give an inch. To do so is to deny this text, to say that it really doesn't matter which gospel someone believes. God has clearly said here the kind of people who will be punished. Any deficiency in the gospel they hang on to is eternally dangerous!

C. The sentence is everlasting destruction – v. 8a, 9.

Illustration: Punishment is obviously not a popular topic any time, much less these days. For example, discipline such as spanking of children is almost universally frowned upon in society. But the purpose of this is to correct the child from going further away from God and from what is right. The society has lost this common sense, has forgotten that the universe is basically designed on a system of morals (God's!) and thus punishment is a valid and necessary thing.

1. The ultimate punishment, is pictured by Paul as a "giving" of vengeance in v. 8a. Interesting that he would use this term given the idea that the gospel itself is something "given." But God "gives" out punishment as well.
2. The "everlasting destruction" is the penalty to be experienced by these folks. This does not mean annihilation, as Jehovah's Witnesses teach. What it means is eternal conscious death, a death that lasts forever, ruination. This is everlasting in duration and destruction in quality, as opposed to eternal life, which has the same duration but a totally different "standard of living."
3. It will be "from the presence of the Lord." This is why we say that one aspect of Hell is eternity apart from God. The terrible sentence is this: "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Mat 7:23).
4. It will be "from the glory of His power." Again, the unbeliever will eternally be apart from God's glorious power. Not even a glimpse of it will be seen in Hell. Compare this with Rom 1:20, where all the world plainly

sees God's power in natural revelation. Even this will be missing from Hell.

Application: It is urgent to tell others about the way of escape from such judgment. Face it, it helps a person to be saved if they know they are lost and destined for Hell. We don't have to apologize for any mention of "hell, fire, or brimstone" because it is certainly true. God has said it right here.

Transition: The text continues to unfold the two outcomes of God's future judgment, now focusing on the beneficial outcome for both the Lord and His saints.

III. The Lord will give rest to believers and Himself be glorified at the judgment – v. 10.

A. The time of the judgment is during the Day of the Lord ("When...on that day.")

The Day of the Lord is the time period from just after the rapture, through the tribulation, through the 1000-year kingdom, until the end of the kingdom. How do we know this?

1. 1 Thess 5:2. The Day of the Lord will come quickly on the heels of the rapture in 1 Thess 4.
2. Zech 14:1-4. The Lord's second coming is included in "that day."
3. 2 Peter 3:10. The destruction of the heavens and earth happen in the day of the Lord after the kingdom is finished (Rev 21:1).

Transition: But this is sort of a minor point in the text, because the focus is on what happens to the Lord and to his saints in that day. Notice that...

B. Believers will take part in the glorification and admiration of the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. For the Lord to be glorified means that he will be held in high esteem, he will be honored. This will occur "among his saints."
2. For the Lord to be admired means that he will be respected, wondered at. This will also occur among his saints, mentioned as "all those that believe."
3. The evident assumption of Paul is that, unlike unbelievers, the believers will be blessed with the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power. He will be "among" them or in their midst, as some translate "in His saints" and "in all them that believe." They will be in the kingdom age, which is an age of rest. All of these benefits will accrue to believers!

Paul wraps up the whole benefits package of verses 5, 7, and 10 here!

Application: Rejoice in this truth!

CONCLUSION:

But let's be honest with ourselves. At present, we do not face any trouble like the Thessalonians did. Oh, there is an occasional bump in the road, but usually the pothole is not that big. So how does this text apply to us?

The text has showed us the certainty of God's future judgment. Certainty leads to a need for urgency and accuracy. It is urgent to present the gospel, to tell others of their lost-ness. Accuracy in presenting the gospel is a must because the true gospel is the only way out of trouble.

The text has also showed us the comfort of God's judgment. There is no cause for ultimate despair, even in times of harshest trial. The Lord will be glorified "in you, and you in him." You will share in his presence, his glory, and the rest of the kingdom of God.

Paul adds toward the end of verse 10 the statement that "our testimony among you was believed." The purpose of such a statement is to remind the Thessalonians of their belief in the gospel. They are included among those "saints" and "all them that believe" because they believed what Paul said.

Is there any among you would believe Paul's testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ? Would you believe that right now, today? That you can avoid eternal destruction by obeying the gospel of Christ, which tells you that you must believe in Christ? That you are by nature a sinner? That you personally commit sins? That these bar you from heaven? That Christ died for your sins and rose again from the dead to verify his claims? That the greatest sin is to reject God and the Lord Jesus Christ? That eternal destruction awaits if you do not bow to the Lord? Oh make the decision today!<pause>

For you believers here, how about Paul's testimony of future judgment? in all its implications? Do you believe that? Will you be different because of it?<pause>

<Prayer>

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Sentence Flow Diagram – UBS4 Text

- 5 ἔνδειγμα
 τῆς δικαίας κρίσεως
 τοῦ θεοῦ
 εἰς τὸ καταξιοθῆναι ὑμᾶς
 τῆς βασιλείας
 τοῦ θεοῦ,
 ὑπὲρ ἧς καὶ πάσχετε,
- 6 εἶπερ δίκαιον
 παρὰ θεῷ ἀνταποδοῦναι ⁴
 τοῖς θλίβουσιν ὑμᾶς
 θλίψιν
- 7 καὶ
 ὑμῖν τοῖς θλιβομένοις
 ἄνεσιν
 μεθ' ἡμῶν,
 ἐν τῇ ἀποκαλύψει
 τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ
 ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ
 μετ' ἀγγέλων δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ
- 8 ἐν πυρὶ φλογός,
 [again speaking of Jesus Christ from the "revelation of the Lord Jesus" above]
 διδόντος ἐκδίκησιν
 τοῖς μὴ εἰδόσιν θεὸν
 καὶ τοῖς μὴ ὑπακούουσιν
 τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ
 τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ,
- 9 οἵτινες δίκην τίσουσιν
 ὄλεθρον αἰώνιον
 ἀπὸ προσώπου
 τοῦ κυρίου
 καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς δόξης
 τῆς ἰσχύος αὐτοῦ,
- 10 ὅταν ἔλθῃ ἐνδοξασθῆναι
 ἐν τοῖς ἀγίοις αὐτοῦ
 καὶ θαυμασθῆναι
 ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς πιστεύσασιν,
 [ὅτι ἐπιστεύθη
 τὸ μαρτύριον ἡμῶν
 ἐφ' ὑμᾶς,]⁵
 ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ.

⁴ This repayment of evil for evil and good for good governs the rest of the passage (at least how I have it outlined). This repayment happens at the revelation of Jesus Christ from heaven. This two-outcome judgment is a major focus of the passage.

⁵ This is a side note of Paul, indicating the connection of the Thessalonians with "those who have believed."

Exegetical Notes

Verse 5

MacArthur, 229. He seems to take antecedent of *endeigma* (manifest token or plain indication) as the combination of their patience in persecution. Their kingdom-first attitude "enabled them to successfully endure the inevitable persecution that comes to the bold faithful."

This idea seems to tie patience and persecution inextricably together, as I was thinking they were, because such persecution would not come to those of weak faith. The persecution seems to require such faith; and faith would not be noticeable unless it was in a context of persecution which highlights its reality.

"**God's righteous judgment** to His chastening **so that** they would be considered **worthy...**" But it is not a basis of their salvation but an evidence of it, God preparing them to be worthy for the kingdom. He goes into the whole discipline idea and Heb 12:7-8.

He doesn't define kingdom of God, unfortunately. He follows Morris, 197-198 in quoting him, "the means of making him [the believer] what he ought to be.]

Morris, 198. On the "also" he suggests it links Paul with the Thessalonians, or less likely, link present suffering with future glory.

Martin, 204. Suggests idea that Paul is encouraging them to persevere. He mentions without comment the 2-outcome judgment of God in the future.

Martin, 205. Martin chides Wanamaker for saying that only one or the other (patience or persecution) can be taken as antecedent. "It does demonstrate a Pauline style that can draw multiple inferences from a single sign." (footnote 14). Singular *endeigma* indicates narrower focus than "all this" of NIV. He mentions possible that Paul's boast is the antecedent, (206) but then takes both patience and persecution as antecedents. This then justifies God's 2-outcome judgment, a great role reversal.

Martin (206) says judgment is not always negative (supporting his point), it can be rewardish. Persecution demonstrates believers are on God's side, AND their patience indicates the genuineness of their faith – a double-edged sword supporting their worthiness for the kingdom.

Commenting on non-redemptive nature of these sufferings, he says, "'As a result you will be counted worthy' is best understood in relation to the rightness of that judgment... Their membership in the kingdom was based on the certainty of God's justice, not the efficacy of their suffering."

(207) "For which you are suffering" indicates a good reason for suffering! I didn't think of that myself... Cross reference Acts 14:22 among others. But he also doesn't define the kingdom.

Thomas 308. Compelled to take judgment as future due to ctx. The focus for Thomas is on the righteousness of the judgment (good!) with a 2-fold nature. (310) Worthiness already established at their salvation (based on Christ). This is a theological argument. But the confirmation of that happens throughout circumstances in life. "Also" indicates experience common with Paul *and others* (latter is added idea by Thomas that previous commentators didn't have).

The emphasis seems to me to be on the *righteous* judgment, and not just the *judgment*, as Compton seems to take it. There is no unrighteousness with God (Rom) shall not the judge of the earth do right (Gen 18).

McGee (111-2) takes suffering as preparatory for heaven (me: there is no detailed kingdom idea here—most people probably think of "kingdom" as generic "being saved" or "heaven" or something like that.) Made me think that most interpreters fall into two categories: the suffer-

ings are either "preparatory" or "confirmatory" and some in between. Can these ideas be found elsewhere in the scriptures? I take Paul as referring to the latter, McGee and others to the former.

Green, 285. Sufferings test character. But he does seem to take sufferings as a necessary pre-requisite to citizenship in the kingdom of God.

Hiebert, 307. Either *endeigma* is accusative in apposition to previous sentence, or is to be taken as a nominative with an ellipsis before it. He says the sense is the same either way. Judgment is future; sign is both patience and persecution. Their endurance is evidence to themselves of new life.

308. *eis to* is purpose or result; either way ends up being an encouragement to the Thessalonians. The counting worthy is not "made worthy" but judicial; salvation determines this. Suffering is an outcome of already having been saved, he says. (This is correct—their suffering cannot be taken apart from their patience).

Note: Since they suffered *for* it, they are guaranteed to be benefited *by* it. In other words, everyone will see at that day of judgment that those who suffered on behalf of the kingdom of God will be allowed to enter into it; the others will have nothing to say against that! Hiebert (308-309) says that this suffering in behalf of the kingdom is a conscious thing on their part. They are willingly doing it for the sake of God's work and ultimately his kingdom.

As in Rom 3:25-26, where there is an outward manifestation of the righteousness of God, the death of His son, here there is an outward demonstration of the righteous judgment of God. He doesn't leave the world with no sign that his people are indeed his people. There is justifiable evidence that they are indeed his own and are worthy of the kingdom of God.

Hiebert 308 indicates that the suffering is confirmatory in the sense that it "will show that there is a moral fitness in them" for the kingdom. But earlier on he says there is a benefit to these sufferings. He emphasizes the former idea.

Hiebert 309 doesn't decide what also means—either distinguishes present/future or ties them with Paul's suffering.

Wanamaker seems to accept idea that suffering makes them worthy, but makes the judgment of verse 5 future. This seems quite inconsistent.

We can tabulate the various positions this way, including mine which follows Hiebert, Martin, and Thomas.

Verse 5	Compton	Green		MacArthur		McGee	Morris			Wanamaker
Antecedent of <i>endeigma</i> *	Persec/afflictions	Persec/afflictions	Both	Both?	Both	?	Both	Both	Both	Persec/afflictions
Judgment Present or Future?	Pres	Pres	Fut	Pres	Fut	Pres	Pres	Fut	Fut	Future
Suffering prepares or confirms?	Prep	Test of Character	Conf ?	Prep	Conf	Prep	Prep	Conf	Conf	Conf

* Patience/faith, persecutions/afflictions, or both patience/faith *in* persecutions/afflictions.

Present or Future judgment indicates whether the suffering is discipline or whether the judgment spoken of is wholly future.

Prepares or confirms goes with the idea of "worthy" in the verse. Preparatory indicates that Paul's main idea is the suffering as judgment prepares the hearers for the kingdom (purification and chastening), whereas the confirmatory idea takes Paul's main idea to be the evidence or proof of their kingdom citizenship.

It seems that all the commentaries I looked at hardly made mention of the connection of vs. 5 with vs. 6 and the conditional construction. This is not helped by the NIV translation, for example.

MacDonald (2049) takes the antecedent to be both; the judgment of v. 5 is present, and it both confirms and prepares the hearers for the kingdom. The worthiness is shown through endurance; this endurance prepares us morally for the kingdom. This is not an addition to the work of Christ but demonstrates the one who has been made worthy by Christ. But 2052 he talks of "God's righteous purposes" which seem to be different (to me) than his righteous judgment.

Martin, 209. Suggests, interestingly, that the discussion in 5-10 is used by Paul to bolster his case that the DOL had not yet arrived—**they were suffering as an evidence of the righteous judgment of God, not as an evidence that the DOL had arrived** and they were in persecution.

Wanamaker seems somewhere off in left field on this one. He does summarize the view that most English commentators take the combination of faith and patience in persecutions as the antecedent of *endeigma*. But he argues against this for grammatical reasons. However, he quotes a text which is not clearly from either verse 4 or 5: he speaks of the "persecution and affliction that you suffer." But the word from verse 4 is endurance, not suffering, as in v. 5!

Furthermore, he says the evidence "can only be a reference to future judgment associated with the day of the Lord." (p. 223, 1st full paragraph) but this contradicts what he said earlier (222 middle of page) in stating (and supporting) Bassler's case, that "the evidence for the righteous judgment of God is the actual suffering of the Thessalonians that has the effect of making them worthy of God's dominion." To this writer, it not clear which position he is taking.

Wanamaker's idea of the kingdom is deficient. He doesn't not define it at all except to say it has to do with God's "dominion."

Bassler (quoted by Wanamaker, p. 222, last full paragraph) suggests "the community assumed that the day of the Lord had come..., but their experience of persecution directly contradicted this." It seems just the opposite—that they wondered if they were in the tribulation and so the DOL had come, and they thought this *because* of the persecutions.

Verse 6

Not really an imprecation going on here. But it is just a basic truth (Morris, 199). The scriptures, even the NT, are full if imprecations. (I could list many examples but will save that for a sermon on imprecatory texts!)

Verse 7

MacDonald (2049) says that rest does come to a believer at death or at the rapture. But at the second coming, the world will see this rest. That's a new (to me) answer to the question of how to harmonize this with the rapture. See also 2051, lower right side. 2052: What has been true all along will be manifested (Christ's coming, the judgment, the rest, etc.)

Morris 200 indicates that we are not bad to look forward to this rest; we don't look for it in the wrong way, but it is a true result of God's judgment—a benefit to Christians. Also, "with us" indicates that Paul knows firsthand their troubles—he can comfort those who are being afflicted because of the comfort he himself has received of God (2 Cor 1).

Morris 201 says the power is not of angels but of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Martin 210 agrees.

MacArthur 233. This revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ will make it clear who He is, unlike at his first coming.

Verse 8

MacDonald (2049) takes flaming fire not as a symbol of God's presence (Ex. 16:10). But is a picture of the fiery judgment. He refers to Ps. 50:3, Isa. 66:15. Hmm. Compton doesn't have a preference here. Fire is associated with the coming of God, but it's not clear to me that the fire actually is a means of judgment in this case—certainly the flames of Hell are these folks' final destination, but not until after the kingdom period. MacDonald takes either as a "picture". I prefer to take literal fire and prefer the former instead of the latter. MacArthur 235 takes it as fire of judgment but then he is somewhat inconsistent, using it as presence of deity.

Martin 211 takes flaming fire with the previous verse, as part of the presentation of the revelation of Jesus. Wanamaker takes the flaming fire as going with the judgment, and not the coming.

MacArthur 236 ties retribution with Stephen's account of Moses taking vengeance on the Egyptian.

Morris 203 – the punishment is not vindictive but firm justice.

Morris 203-4 agrees with me that this is a single group of people spoken of in parallel terms. Martin 212 agrees: either Jews or Gentiles can be described with either term.

Martin 213: olethron aionion speaks of extreme disastrous punishment, not annihilation.

Verse 9

MacDonald 2051. Punishment is necessary for God to perform.

Morris 204. Again God's justice is seen. Everlasting destruction is not just a duration thing, but a quality thing, just like eternal life has a duration but also a quality to it. McGee 113 this justice is not vindictive but is to satisfy God's righteousness and holiness. 114 he conveys true earnestness

in telling souls of Christ. And of being thankful for what Christ did for us in delivering us from certain judgment.

Verse 10

Morris 206 A sharing of glory going on here.

MacArthur 248. Two things happen to give relief – glorification of Christ and admiration. I wouldn't say it like this, but he does tie the kingdom rest/relief of 5 and 7 with 10. That's what I'd do.

Wanamaker suggests possibility that those who are punished will glorify the Lord and this will vindicate the saints. I doubt it.

My Exegesis

Note especially structure, observations, textual issues, grammatical issues, key terms, word study results, theological import, context.

There are no important textual issues in this text.

5 Which is a manifest token

This is probably the most difficult grammatical issue in chapter 1, so in addition to the copious notes I've laid out above, I will put some justification here as to why I took the approach I did.

of the righteous judgment of God

How can God be just and allow such persecutions? The answer is that his justice will come later in judgment. For now, he is allowing tribulation to happen to the Thessalonians to build a public case against the persecutors to justify their ultimate punishment, and to build a public case on behalf of the Christians to justify their ultimate blessing.

See the related idea in Rom 3:25-26. This is actually almost verbally parallel, with the word *endeixis* being used twice in that context, and in 3:26 followed by *eis to + infinitive*. The activity of the crucifixion serves as a demonstration of God's righteousness—past and present. With respect to the past, it showed that God was just in patiently enduring the sins of the OT period. With respect to the present, the crucifixion answers the great question as to how God can be just and yet justify a sinner. Similarly here, a present event, faithful endurance in persecution, is a demonstration that God's future judgment is righteousness. The result of the judgment will be an accounting of worthiness for the kingdom for Christians, and a terrible sentence of eternal condemnation for unbelievers.

What is the antecedent of *endeigma*?

1. I take it as the combination of patience/faith in persecutions. As noted below, one cannot be taken without the other. Patience is enduring afflictions which are due to faith, and faith is the cause of the persecutions. Those who take either/or seem to miss the integral connection between these two in verse 3. Some writers take Paul's boasting as part of this as well, but that is too far away textually and hard to fit in coherently.

2. Php 1:28 is not a precise parallel because it does not talk about the judgment of God. However, it is helpful because it illustrates a situation where there is a single event that points to two outcomes. The Php not being terrified by their opponents is a double-sign: one outcome will be the perdition of the persecutors, the other outcome will be the salvation of the believers. A similar construction is seen in 1 Peter 4:14, where a reproach for the name of Christ has two outcomes: the slanderers are blaspheming God, and you are glorifying God in enduring such. In this case, we have a single situation which leads to two outcomes. Martin suggests it is possible to have multiple inferences from a single sign (205, fn 14).

3. *Endeigma* is singular; this plays into my decision to take the combination of faith in trials as the antecedent, because Paul wraps up this whole concept into one idea. Persecutions and tribulations are plural so it seems less likely to me he is referring with the singular *endeigma* to those.

Some take verse 5 as present, 6-10 as future. I take them all as a reference to future judgment. Why is this judgment a future judgment?

1. Christians already are worthy in Christ of his kingdom. This fits with 1 Thess 2:12. There is no merit here that can be gained for entrance into the kingdom of God, as if needing to endure a certain amount before being qualified. Green has this idea of being measured worthy to become a citizen of an ancient city and parallels that with the kingdom. But Christ has done all to make us worthy.

2. The whole context speaks of future judgment. The juxtaposition of verse 5 with 6-10, and the obvious teaching of the second coming of Christ being the time of judgment seems to tie the judgment of 5 with that of 6-10.

3. Verses 5 and 6 share the "righteous" judgment as their main subject. This advances the above argument.

4. Paul is not concerned in this text with the ultimate source of "Permitter" of the afflictions. The blame for them lies squarely at the feet of the wicked. God is not pictured here as the agent of the persecution: the unbelievers are (vv. 6, 7). There are texts in the Bible that teach that God does use trials as a way to build our faith (James 1). Heb 12:4-11, for example, pictures God as "dealing with you as sons" in a more direct way. Heb 12:3 and 1 Peter 4:13ff indicate that this is a share of the sufferings of Christ. Trials are not always direct "discipline" from God.

5. The suffering is "for" the kingdom. This means "on account of" the kingdom and gives a reason why unbelievers are persecuting the Thessalonians (the wicked hate the kingdom), not that the Thessalonians are suffering to be made ready for the kingdom.

6. The point of verses 5-7a in this writer's view, is not "judgment now" vs. "judgment later" but is instead the righteousness of God's future judgment, which will have two outcomes. This is made plain in verse 6-7a, where the two outcomes are listed explicitly. In verse 5, Paul only deals with one side of the coin.

7. If there is any present/future contrast here, it is not between judgment now and judgment later, but is between persecutions now and justice later; between enduring now and relief later. Paul's whole point is that the believers, though having to heroically demonstrate their faith through endurance now, will be given rest later. The tables will be turned on the persecutors.

8. The whole package from vv. 5, 7, and 10 go together in the future rest of the saints: the kingdom, rest from trouble (particularly related to the kingdom age), and the participation in the glorification and admiration of Christ, along with being in his presence and witnessing the glory of his power (as in contrast to the punishment of verse 9).

9. Many commentators don't treat the first-class conditional structure of verse 6 in their explanation of verse 5. But it does seem very relevant. Paul is using a very strong statement there which is assumed true. He does this with *eiper* in other contexts (Rom 3:30, 8:9, 8:17, 1 Cor 15:15, 8:5). In each case, he is making an argument which is strongly assumed to be true and which forms the basis of his argument of the text immediately before the *eiper*. I think that Paul is saying this: "(6) If indeed it is a righteous thing for God to repay affliction to the afflictors and (7a) rest to the afflicted (and indeed it is!) then (5) your situation now of faith and patience in persecutions is a clear sign of God's ultimate justice—you've suffered for the kingdom and you will be granted its rest in the future. God's judgment will demonstrated by this evidence to be right on both counts: your entrance into the kingdom, and your afflictors' ultimate destruction.

How does the judgment relate to the purpose clause "eis to..." "that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God." I take it that the result of God's judgment will be an declaration

of worth to enter the kingdom. It is based on the Thessalonians' faith: their worth *in Christ*. Their sufferings are confirmatory of the righteousness of this judgment. Some suggest that the sufferings are preparatory for their entrance into the kingdom. While sufferings do strengthen faith and aid in the believer's sanctification process, I don't think Paul's point in this text is that. Other texts amply support this idea.

Martin summarizes well: "Their membership in the kingdom was based on the certainty of God's justice, not the efficacy of their suffering." The certainty of God's ultimate justice is what shines through in this text.

that you may be counted worthy

This is a reckoning, a demonstration or a showing to be worthy, but not a "making" worthy, since the worth-making work of salvation has not been done by any of us, but by the Lord. It is judicial.

of the kingdom of God

There is a comfort in this for the believers. Ultimately their pain "will be worth it all" when they are with the Lord.

Many commentators gloss over what this kingdom is, and take it as a generic reference to being in the sphere of believers, under God's rule, or something like that. We can be more specific with the idea: I've included several points about this kingdom in the sermon manuscript above and not duplicated them here.

for which also you suffer.

There is no doubt that to Paul, an attachment to the kingdom of God in any form or fashion would bring suffering. See also Acts 14:22, 2 Tim 3:12.

Their sufferings are not worthless or useless. It is a good cause they suffer for. This is an encouragement to the believers.

They suffered for it; they will be rewarded with it. None will be able to argue against that.

Paul again uses a present tense verb "suffer" here. So we could translate it "for which you are suffering (presently).

Mention James 1, etc. here as related. Two purposes of our suffering: evidence against unbelievers (2 Thess 1:5-7a) and our own growth (James 1, 1 Peter 1:7, etc.)

6 Seeing it is a righteous thing with God

This is a first-class conditional which is so certain that Paul can start it with "if" or "if indeed" to buttress his argument from the previous verse. See explanation in verse 5 for details.

"Righteous" ties us back to the righteous judgment of God in verse 5, linking the two verses together: they are speaking of the same idea.

to repay trouble to those who trouble you

Certainty here of divine justice. This is a eye-for-an-eye kind of payment. They will reap what they sowed.

Here cognate terms are used in the Greek to suggest an exchange, a turn-around, a turning of the tables, a sowing-reaping thing. Emphasize this in the sermon.

Mention imprecatory idea.

7 and rest to you who are troubled, along with us.

Paul is obviously not talking about "rapture rest" or "rest with the Lord after death" here because he specifically ties this judgment in 7b to when the Lord is revealed from heaven at the second coming. Yes, those other two things are rest for the saints, but Paul is focusing his thoughts here on the earthly rest of the saints when wrong will be made right! Rest refers to the millennial kingdom specifically, where there will be relief from such afflictions that they are undergoing now. This is also Paul's compressed view of things: he is not unpacking all of eschatology here for us.

To me, the two-outcome judgment seems to be a main idea—so I'd rather not make the rest a parenthesis to the rest of the text. Furthermore, Ryrie's idea of rest being "relief because God's justice is vindicated" is problematic: it doesn't fit the context (though it this mental relief will come at that time), but even more important is the idea that Paul's very letter to the Thessalonians would have given them such mental relief, knowing about God's ultimate justice NOW, rather than having to wait in the future to know about it. Yes, they will wait to experience it, but they know about it right now and can go on in their Christian life without being blown about by every wind of doctrine.

"With us" indicates that Paul is suffering too—and it is obvious from 1 Thess and other texts that he had! He was about to face more in Corinth, if he hadn't already, when he was brought before Gallio.

at the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ

From this point, the text seems to unfold the two outcomes of judgment: one the punishment of the wicked, and the other the blessing of the righteous.

This revelation is, BDAG, an unveiling, disclosure of a secret (eschatological reference).

The Lord is God's agent of judgment (Acts 17:31).

The Lord is the **judge**.

from heaven

From where the Lord is now (Acts 1:11) he will return.

with his mighty angels

Some debate in the lit regarding "mighty". True that both the Lord is mighty, and his angels have miracle-working power given them by God. I've taken it to modify angels, but it doesn't make a huge deal either way.

8 in flaming fire

Again debate here as to whether this goes with the coming of the Lord or with the judgment. Opinion seems to be split in my reading. I take it as a prepositional phrase going with the Lord's coming, so it would fit with the previous verse. There is often fire associated with a Theophany/Christophany (Ex. 19, other places noted in the manuscript).

This fire is literal (please!)

This fire may also have a judgmental aspect as in those who are obstinate, rebellious, will also be judged, but this is more of a symbolic idea than the literal idea I prefer above. Ultimate Hell-fire won't come until the Great White Throne judgment.

taking vengeance

There is no doubt of the Bible's insistence on the moral qualities of God's universe. Punishment will happen. Because of this moral backing to the universe, we should have punishment today: for criminals, for wayward children, for example.

The Greek has the idea of "giving" out punishment. You either are gifted with the gospel or given punishment.

This punishment is not vindictive or hateful but is firm justice (note word *ekdikesis*). There is no unfairness or unrighteousness here (Rom 3:25). In fact, due to God's just nature, he MUST do this.

on those that do not know God

These are the **criminals**. They do not have a personal relationship with God.

and that do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

Many texts give the idea that the gospel is a command to be obeyed (Acts 6, 16, 17).

This, with the above, basically boil down to the same thing – unbelief. There is just one large group of people in view here.

This is an exclusive message. If you don't have these two things, you are lost ☹

9 Who shall be punished

Does this give us any impetus to tell the good news to others? It should!

with everlasting destruction

This is the **sentence**. It is lethal. But not annihilating. It is too terrible to contemplate. Not covered in gory detail in the Scriptures, as if this is enough and we shouldn't have to hear any more to be a fervent witness telling others of their lost condition.

Hell, fire, and brimstone here. Old-time preachers were justified in giving this kind of sermon.

Look to the deliverance from this destruction that is available from God.

Compare this to everlasting life: duration and quality.

from the presence of the Lord

This will be a benefit of heaven. Unbelievers will not have a shred of the Lord's presence to console them in their ultimate trouble.

"From" indicates a separation from the presence of the Lord. Green took it as the punishment "sourcing" from the Lord's presence, but "prosopon" seems to have a spatial idea, not a source idea.

They wanted to be away from God in this life; they will get their desire in the after-life.

and from the glory of his power.

This will also be a benefit of heaven. But not for unbelievers. There is here also an "apart from" idea.

Not even natural revelation will be available any more to the unbelievers, in which (Rom 1) God's eternal power and Godhead are revealed in sketch form.

10 when he shall come on that day

"When" indicates the time of the Lord's coming, but this idea is not really the big point in this verse. The remainder of the verse is where the main idea lies.

to be glorified among His saints

The infinitive to be glorified has a purpose idea. Jesus will be glorified, and He will come for to that end.

The idea of glorification among others may be a link to Ps. 89:7, but this is a reference to believers and not to angels (seems to me).

Glorification means to hold in high esteem, to be honored.

and to be admired among all those that believe

Similar idea to glorification. Admiration is to respect, to wonder at.

Both this and the above are "in the sphere of" the saints. Believers will be taking part in this glorification and admiration, and will share in it because they are *in Christ*. Dr. Compton argues it is not "glorified **by**" or "marveled at **by**" believers. I see his point wrt the following prayer, but I doubt believers will NOT be glorifying their Lord or admiring him at that time!

– (and that includes you) because our testimony to you was believed.

An ellipsis seems necessary here. Paul is apparently including the believers at Thessalonica among the company of those who will be admiring and glorifying their Lord, and partaking in that as well.