

**Summary**

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.

**Introduction**

The problem of evil is always a challenge. Why does God allow it? What good is it? Psalm 73 addresses this problem and is helpful in times of distress when evil seems to be in triumph. In the text before us, God's righteousness is extolled because while justice is not yet served, it will certainly be in the future.

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

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.

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. Paul makes it very clear here that...

- 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.
  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. The kingdom program of God is one that permeates the Scriptures from first to last and each should strive to understand it.

5. The Thessalonians were suffering for this kingdom. An association with the true and living God often brings persecution. But at least the Thessalonians were not suffering for nothing! They have a great cause. They were not, however, in the tribulation. This relates to chapter 2 and the Thessalonian's doctrinal problem.

God through Paul goes on to further explain the righteous judgment of God. Paul is saying something like this: "If it is OK for God to judge evildoers and give rest to Christians...(AND IT IS)...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 since it is just in the sight of God for the afflictors to reap affliction and the afflicted to be granted rest."

- B. God will give trouble to the troublers – v. 6. The tables will be turned in eternity. The law of sowing and reaping is evident here.
- C. God will give rest for the troubled – v. 5b, 7a.

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.

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

- 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.
  - 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 1 4:6). No man-made, works-based variant will do. It has to be the gospel "of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Don't give an inch on the gospel. To do so is to say that it really doesn't matter which gospel someone believes. God has clearly said 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.
  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 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.

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.

### **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."). See 1 Thess 5:2, Zech 14:1-4, and 2 Peter 3:10 for the extent of the Day of the Lord.
- 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!

### **Conclusion**

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 Thesalonians of their belief in the gospel. They are included among those "saints" and "all them that believe" because they believed what Paul said.

Reader, would you 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!

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