
The Thessalonian Letters

God's Righteous Judgment

2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

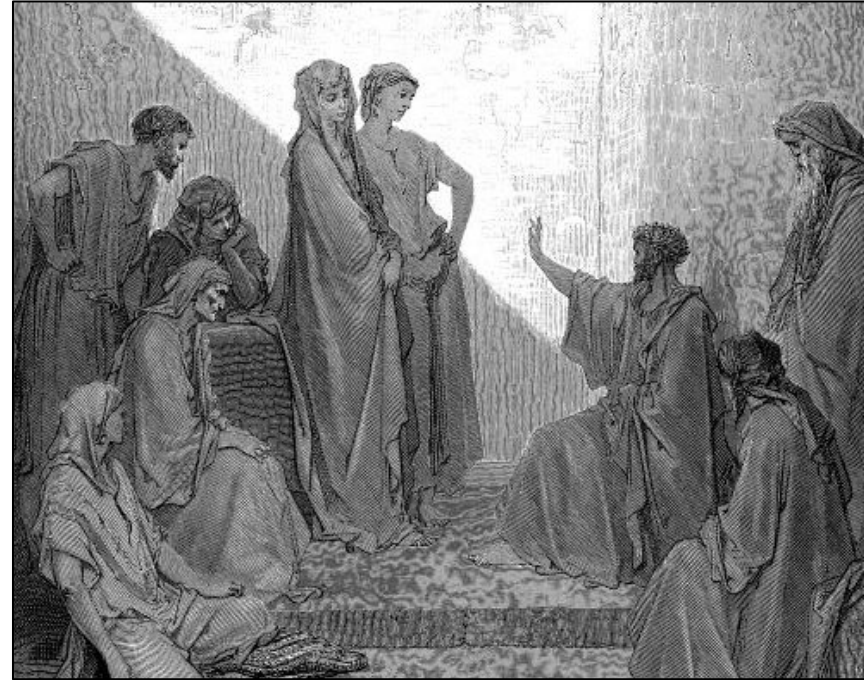


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Background to Paul's second letter

- We can assume his first letter was read aloud publicly to all the brethren in Thessalonica.
- Paul does not continue defending himself in his second letter, so we assume that his initial defense was effective.
- Paul heard news of the results of his first letter, and he was inspired to write to them again to address three areas of concern.



Paul's signature, address, and salutation (1:1-2)

- The ***signature*** and ***address*** are identical to his first letter.
- **"in Christ"** ~ at the time of their salvation, believers were placed into the body of Christ through the Holy Spirit's special baptizing ministry for the church age (1 Cor 12:13). As a unique entity, the church had its beginning on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and it will culminate at the Rapture of church-age saints (1 Thess 4:16-17).
- Paul's ***salutation*** included both **"grace"** and **"peace."** Paul wanted to emphasize the grace and peace of God in light of the ongoing persecution in Thessalonica which had intensified.
- **"God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"** ~ a clear statement of the absolute deity of Jesus.

Paul gives well-deserved praise (1:3)

- Paul began the **ascription of appreciation** by giving thanks to God for his beloved “**brethren**” at Thessalonica.
- “**ought**” (*opheilō*) ~ he was duty-bound to praise them because it was no more than they deserved. As in the first letter, Paul was “**always**” in the habit of bringing his thoughts, concerns, and desires to God whenever they came to mind.
- “**fitting**” (*axios*) ~ suitable, appropriate, and well-deserved.
“**because**” (*hoti*) introduced two reasons this was appropriate:
 1. Their faith had been “**greatly enlarged**” (*hyperauxanō*) ~ to increase beyond measure.
 2. Their “**love**” (*agapē*) for others had “**grown greater**” (*pleonazō*).

The Thessalonians were an example to others (1:4)

- **“Therefore”** (*hōste*, “consequently”) ~ what Paul did as a result of hearing about the growing faith and love of the Thessalonians. Their obvious spiritual growth provided an opportunity to encourage other churches using the Thessalonians as an example.
- **“speak proudly”** (*enkauchaomai*) ~ to boast or talk about something with proper pride and satisfaction.
- **“perseverance”** (*hupomonē*) ~ to remain under (see 1 Thess 1:3).
- **“persecutions”** (*diogmos*) ~ harassment, especially for religious reasons.
- **“endure”** (*anechomai*) ~ to hold oneself upright and firm. This pictures a person holding himself straight and tall while others are trying to bend, weigh down, and break him with an excessive load.

God's coming judgment (1:5)

- The believers' life of faith in the midst of suffering is a "**plain indication**" (*endeigma*) that they have been "**considered worthy**" (*kataxioō*) ~ not "to *earn* worthiness," but "to **declare** worthy."
- "**kingdom of God**" ~ Paul referred to the prophesied messianic kingdom when Christ will come in power and judgment to establish His kingdom and to rule the world from David's throne in a restored Jerusalem (see 1 Thess 2:12).
- People "**suffering**" for their faith may wonder why God allows the righteous to suffer without punishing their persecutors. This led Paul to affirm that God's righteous judgment will occur in the future and that God will not allow their unjust sufferings to go unpunished.

The ultimate justice of God (1:6)

- “it is only **just**” (*dikaaios*) ~ translated “righteous” in 1:5, linking these two verses. In 1:5 Paul had mentioned “God’s righteous judgment” and here he makes it clear that God’s righteous judgment involves repaying those who persecute others with persecution in kind.
- “**repay**” (*antapodidōmi*) ~ a double compound word that means to give back again, to repay in kind, or recompense fully.
- Justice demands that a righteous God punish those who are persecuting His saints. Ultimately it would be unjust for the persecutors to go unpunished.
- In the following verses Paul will provide a revealing description of this ultimate judgment.

Relief for the suffering saints (1:7)

- Just as it is right to punish the wicked, so it will be fitting to give rest to those who are afflicted.
- “**relief**” (*anesis*) pictures letting loose or relaxing the pressure, which is the perfect antidote to persecution (*thlipsis*, “pressure”).
- This “**revealing**” of the Lord Jesus is identified as a coming “**from heaven.**” At the time of this revealing, Christ will be accompanied by “**His mighty angels**” (literally, “the angels of His power”). Jesus Himself mentioned His angelic companions in Matthew 16:27 and 25:31.
- “**in flaming fire**” ~ pictures Jesus at the time of His coming in judgment (see Isaiah 66:15). This is the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ in judgment at the end of the Tribulation period (Rev 19:12).

People who are ripe for God's judgment (1:8)

- **“dealing out retribution”** (*ekdikēsis*) ~ from the root word *dikē* meaning “justice,” so retribution is literally “out-justice.”
- **“do not know God”** ~ This does not mean that these people are completely ignorant concerning the existence of God. They have deliberately chosen to place no value on God (Rom 1:28).
- **“do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus”** ~ This describes people who have heard the gospel but do not obey or submit to it. They are included in the group designated as unrighteous ones.
- This verse describes the people who are ripe for God's righteous judgment.

The ultimate penalty: *separation from God* (1:9)

- **“pay the penalty”** (*tinō*) ~ by itself this verb means to pay a penalty or incur punishment, but Paul added the word **“just”** (*dikē*) which also has the idea of a sentence of punishment and a righteous judgment. This combination communicates that the ungodly will only be given what they rightly and justly deserve.
- **“destruction”** (*olethros*) ~ not annihilation or the end of existence. The same word Paul used in 1 Thess 5:3 ~ complete and hopeless ruin, with the loss of everything that gives meaning to life.
- **“Eternal”** (*aiōnios*) ~ literally, throughout the age.
- **“presence”** (*prosōpon*) ~ literally, “the face” or the actual face-to-face presence of God.

Christ is glorified in the glorified church-age saints (1:10)

- **“When”** (*hotan*) ~ does not specify the exact time of His coming but affirms the absolute certainty of it.
- **“glorified in His saints”** ~ Christ’s glory is manifested in the glorified church-age saints who accompany Him to earth.
- **“marveled”** (*thaumazō*) ~ to regard with astonishment. Christ’s descent from heaven to earth in flaming fire with His mighty angels (1:7) and a vast company of resurrected church-age saints (1:10) is sure to cause intense awe and wonder. **“among all who have believed”** ~ those living believers who will have survived the Tribulation period.
- **“our testimony to you was believed”** ~ the Thessalonians themselves will be in the vast group of resurrected believers who return with Christ.

Paul always prays for their faithfulness (1:11)

- **“to this end”** ~ connects what he will say here to what he had said previously. “In light of the fact that you will be among the believers who return with Christ at His second coming, we pray for your continued steadfastness in the faith.”
- **“count you worthy of your calling”** (*axioō*) ~ declared worthy (see 1:5).
- **“fulfill every desire for goodness”** ~ He wanted the Thessalonians to delight in goodness which would lead to good actions.
- **“work of faith with power”** ~ It is only when God’s work is done through God’s power that God Himself will receive the glory.

All the glory goes to the Lord (1:12)

- **“So that”** (*hopōs*) gives the purpose ~ **“our Lord Jesus will be glorified.”**
Their character and behavior should point others to Jesus so that He receives the glory.
- They in turn will receive His praise as a result. God will be **“glorified in you, and you in Him.”** (see John 17:22)
- They are to behave properly by cooperating with God’s **“power”** that works in them (1:14), and they are to make it clear that God deserves the praise and glory for the results.
- Believers who bring glory to God do so **“according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”** Their accomplishments are only through the grace of God which is at work in their lives.