

“God’s Perfect Justice”  
2 Thessalonians 1:5-10  
(Preached at Trinity, June 7, 2020)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Paul and his companions made their way through Macedonia, Berea, Athens, and then to Corinth preaching the Gospel of Christ. Some received Christ with joy, others continue in rebellion against Him. The Gospel always demands a decision. Will you continue in rebellion against your Creator or will you submit to His Son, trusting yourself to Him? Will you receive Christ or reject Him?
2. The Thessalonian Christians had made their choice.  
**1 Thessalonians 1:6-2:1 NAU** - "You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, <sup>7</sup> so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. <sup>8</sup> For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. <sup>9</sup> For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, <sup>10</sup> and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come."
3. Most rejected the Gospel. Paul was ultimately forced to leave Thessalonica due to the intensity of the persecution.  
But the Thessalonian Christians continued to endure the fires of affliction.  
"You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,"
4. One of the sure signs of saving faith is steadfastness in the face of affliction. The Thessalonians had this faith—a lively, growing, steadfast faith.  
**2 Thessalonians 1:3-4 NAU** - "We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is *only* fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows *ever* greater; <sup>4</sup> therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure."
5. But what about those who are doing the persecuting? They stand opposite to believers. They are the unbelievers—faithless ones. Paul writes of them in **Chapter 3**  
**2 Thessalonians 3:2 NAU** - "that we will be rescued from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith."  
Paul describes them as perverse and evil men.  
Their actions also reveal their condition.
  - A. They hate God. They hate His Son, Jesus Christ. They hate His Word.  
And they hate those who follow Christ. They don’t mind religious people, but they despise those serious about following Christ.

- B. If we would be content to be good people and cease walking with God the world would applaud. If we would be more flexible, more compromising, more tolerant, less dogmatic – and most important if we could just keep our mouth shut they would love us. But we cannot.
- C. We all experience sorrow over conflict we've experienced because of our unwillingness to bend on principles of truth. We don't want conflict. We all want peace. But sometimes conflict is inevitable.  
**Luke 12:51-53 NAU** - "Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division;<sup>52</sup> for from now on five *members* in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three.<sup>53</sup> "They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."
6. In **Verse 5** Paul says, "*This is* a plain indication of God's righteous judgment" Is Paul saying their persecution is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment or is it their faith, or is it their perseverance? The answer is all three.
- A. Persecution is often described as inseparable from entering the kingdom of God. God uses tribulations to bring His people to perfection. And it would seem that God brings tribulations to mark us.  
 As Paul traveled throughout the churches his message was always:  
**Acts 14:22 NAU** - "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."  
 1. They had been appointed unto salvation. God was preserving them, keeping them, sustaining them. Their endurance in persecution testified to God's preservation and to the genuineness of their faith.  
 2. Persecution as evidence of our faith is the plain teaching of Scripture.  
**1 Peter 4:12-14 NAU** - "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;<sup>13</sup> but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.<sup>14</sup> If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you."  
 3. Paul spoke of our fellowship in the suffering of Christ.  
**Philippians 3:10 NAU** - "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;"
- B. Faith and perseverance are evidence of God's grace, plain indication of God's righteous judgment. It is evidence of God's calling and election. It is entirely outside the realm of human effort. It is all of grace, God's work in the lives of His elect.  
**Ephesians 2:8 NAU** - "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God;"
7. Paul is saying that not only was their faith and steadfast perseverance evidence that God has considered them worthy of His kingdom, the opposition of the wicked was sure evidence of God's righteous judgment upon them.  
**2 Thessalonians 1:6 NAU** - "For after all it is *only* just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you,"

8. This has both temporal and eternal aspects. At the final judgment God's just judgment will condemn them for their unbelief and hardness of heart. It is also true that the persecution they inflict upon the righteous is indication of God's judgment upon them.  
**Joshua 11:19-20 NAU** - "There was not a city which made peace with the sons of Israel except the Hivites living in Gibeon; they took them all in battle. <sup>20</sup> For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, to meet Israel in battle in order that he might utterly destroy them, that they might receive no mercy, but that he might destroy them, just as the LORD had commanded Moses."
9. This is similar to Paul's words in **Philippians**  
**Philippians 1:28-29 NAU** - "in no way alarmed by *your* opponents-- which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that *too*, from God. <sup>29</sup> For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,"
10. God allows the wicked to persecute us to further their condemnation  
**Matthew 10:14-15 NAU** - "Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet. <sup>15</sup> "Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for *the* land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city."
11. In general, persecution comes from those who hate Christ. God gives them over to their deluded heart.  
**2 Thessalonians 2:11-12 NAU** - "For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, <sup>12</sup> in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness."
12. Paul is writing of God's perfect righteous judgment. It is in the context of the final judgment but it has implications in life.  
**2 Thessalonians 1:7 NAU** - "when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire,"  
 Paul is saying that the lives of men upon the earth give clear indication of the outcome this judgment.
- I. God's justice is perfect – God's judgment will be a perfect judgment  
 God's judgment will occur in three phases.
- A. The first phase is the examination  
**2 Corinthians 5:10 NAU** - "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."
1. As human beings and God's creation we owe Him homage. We owe Him love. We owe Him obedience. This is the obligation of all.
  2. God gives us His Law which is a reflection of His holy character. We are to submit to Him and obey him with worship and praise.
  3. All men will be examined to see if we have complied with these obligations.
    - a. Have we worshipped our Creator in love and gratitude?  
 The common word for worship is  $\text{הָרַץ}$  which means "to bow down"  
**Psalms 95:6 NAU** - "Come, let us worship and bow down, Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker."

- b. Have we showed Him the weightiness He deserves?  
The Hebrew word for “glory” is **כְּבוֹד**  
**Psalms 24:10 NAU** - "Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory."
- c. Have we given Him the obedience He demands?
- d. God’s examination will be perfect. His knowledge is full and infinite.

**B.** The second phase is the verdict

- 1. We have not fulfilled our obligation.  
Instead of love we have issued vicious hatred.  
Instead of worship and homage we have displayed vile idolatry, denying God His rightful worship. We prefer to ignore Him and establish our own dominion. Instead of obedience we have despised His rule and have lived in open rebellion.
- 2. Most egregious of all, they will not submit to God’s Son. They despise God’s Gospel of grace.  
**John 3:16-19 KJV** - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. <sup>17</sup> For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. <sup>18</sup> He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. <sup>19</sup> And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."
- 3. The verdict is plain - GUILTY.
- 4. The Bible is clear that all of us share in Adam’s verdict.  
**Romans 3:23** – “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;”  
**Rom. 3:10** – “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:”

**C.** The third phase is the sentencing

- 1. We all deserve the justice of God’s wrath – Divine retribution, Divine punishment. The greater the fault, the greater the punishment.  
**2 Thessalonians 1:8 NAU** - "dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus."
- 2. If we are guilty of an infinite fault, it is just for God to inflict an infinite punishment that is infinitely dreadful.  
If we guilty of failing to love God, our just punishment must be in proportion to our obligation to love Him.  
If we are guilty of failing to obey God, our just punishment must be proportionate with our obligation to obey Him.  
Our punishment must be infinite and everlasting.  
**2 Thessalonians 1:9 NAU** - "These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,"

II. The final judgment will come in the context of Christ's return.

**2 Thessalonians 1:7 NAU** - "when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire,"

Paul uses the word ἀποκάλυψις

A. At this judgment there will be the exercise of justice

1. Paul uses the words "relief" in **Verse 7** and "retribution" in **Verse 8**
2. Paul is saying that those who afflict the righteous are testifying to their condemnation. They will receive God's justice

**2 Thessalonians 1:6 NAU** - "For after all it is *only* just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you,"

God will repay the temporal persecution that they inflict upon the righteous with eternal affliction

B. God leaves them to the wickedness of their heart

1. They are demonstrating their hatred of God and their hatred of God's people. Paul says it is only just for God to repay them

**2 Thessalonians 1:6 NAU** - "For after all it is *only* just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you,"

2. Paul describes God giving them over to their corruption

**Romans 1:28-31 NAU** - "And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, <sup>29</sup> being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* gossips, <sup>30</sup> slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup> without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;"

3. Their sentence is just.

**2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 NAU** - "dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. <sup>9</sup> These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,"

4. The ultimate issue is that of faith or of unbelief. But we need to understand the sovereignty of God as the ultimate determining factor. He grants faith to the elect as a gracious display of His mercy while leaving the rest in unbelief as a perfect display of His justice.

III. The perseverance of the righteous is evidence of their calling and election. It is the fruit of their faith.

**2 Thes 1:7 NAU** - "*to give* relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire,"

A. God preserves His elect – He grants to them "relief"

1. It is the evidence of God's electing grace.

**Romans 8:30-35 NAU** - "and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. <sup>31</sup> What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? <sup>33</sup> Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; <sup>34</sup> who is

the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. <sup>35</sup> Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"

- 2 The steadfast faith of the Thessalonian Christians is a sure indication of God's righteous judgment that they are considered worthy of the kingdom of God. The plain teaching of Scripture is that true believers will press on even in the face of fiery persecution. It is important for the modern church to ponder this.

Richard Phillips: "Paul's teaching on persecution prompts a question about the church in our time: If being a Christian were made illegal by a hostile government, so that believers risked arrest by gathering for worship, how many of the people who fill evangelical churches today would still do so? There can be little doubt that the attendance in many churches, especially those that attract numbers by means of worldly entertainment, would plummet. Paul's teaching suggests that not all who profess Christ in times of ease will persevere under trials. He also asserts that those who do stand up for Christ despite suffering for the kingdom receive a testimony that they are saved and will inherit eternal life.<sup>1</sup>

- 3 Although we are afflicted in this life we rejoice to be considered worthy to suffer
4. We persevere because of God's grace. He has displayed His mercy upon us while leaving the non-elect in their wickedness.

B. Some would call this unfair

1. They claim it is unjust to deal out retribution to some and show favor to others. If the redeemed persevere because God is preserving them is it fair for God to condemn those He has not preserved?
2. God never deals with man unjustly. If God condemned all and sent all to hell it would be an act of justice. Is it unjust for Him to show mercy to some while leaving others to perish? God is just to deal with some according to justice and others according to His mercy. But He is never unjust towards any.
3. God justly deals out just retribution to those who do not obey the Gospel **2 Thessalonians 1:8 NAU** - "dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus."
4. God's sovereignty and human responsibility coexist in perfect harmony  
No man willingly decides to love and serve Christ. Because of his sinful heart he lacks the ability. He must be born again. This is God's work. God grants life so some while He leaves others to perish in their sin.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard D. Phillips, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Reformed Expository Commentary, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 285.

- IV. This does not diminish God's free offer of grace to all.
- A. The Gospel is offered to all
1. It is a genuine offer—It is not presented as an option. The Gospel comes to us as an imperative. It commands all men to forsake their sin and follow Christ. It commands all men to admit their guilt and trust in Jesus Christ alone to satisfy God's justice in dealing with our guilt.
    - a. Notice the wicked are described as those who "do not obey the gospel."
    - b. All who obey the Gospel will be saved.
  2. Retribution is poured out upon those who do not obey – **Verse 8**
  3. The only ones who obey are those who are effectually called. Those who are effectually called are those Jesus came to redeem.
- B. But you say how can this be a legitimate offer of grace?
1. How can they be saved if Jesus did not die for them?
  2. How can it be a genuine offer if the lost man is unable to turn from his sin and unable to believe and unable to come to Christ?
  3. Human depravity does not diminish the duty of all men to come to Christ. Their inability does not diminish their duty to come. And no one knows the identity of those for whom Christ died, so all are to assume there is a Savior for all who embrace Him.

#### Conclusion:

1. God's righteous judgment is perfect. No one can call into question His righteousness. Those who persecute God's people will receive a just recompense. And those who suffer for the sake of righteousness will receive a reward.
2. This will take place at the return of Christ when the tares will be gathered to be burned.  
**2 Thessalonians 1:7 NAU** - "when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire,"
3. God grants to the elect the grace of faith while leaving the rest in their sin.
4. But the Gospel truth is never diminished—If you forsake your sin and trust in Christ as Savior you will be saved:  
**Acts 16:31 KJV** - "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."  
**Romans 10:13 KJV** - "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."