

Week 11: 2 Thessalonians 1:5–12

Hook



Main Point: Believers can look forward to the Day of Judgment.

Are you a fan of reality courtroom TV? From *Judge Judy* to *The People's Court*, *Divorce Court* and others, it seems that viewers simply cannot get enough of the drama. But how does it work?

Production teams go fishing through small claims court to find interesting cases with colorful characters. They then offer for the case to enter arbitration, a process by which an arbiter will hear both sides of the case and make a legally binding decision. *The People's Court*, the original arbitration-based television program, will cover travel expenses and pay the settlement if the case is ruled in the participant's favor.¹ Although the courtroom may not be real, the decisions certainly are.

Q: What's your favorite reality courtroom TV show?

Q: What do you find interesting about this genre of television shows?

Q: If you were in a reality television courtroom and you were able to choose any television personality to judge your case, who would it be and why?

Transition: Today we will discuss the believer's hope in the coming Day of Judgment.

Week 11: 2 Thessalonians 1:5–12

Book

Main Point: Believers can look forward to the Day of Judgment.

2 Thessalonians 1:5–7 [Read]

Talking Point 1: We can have confidence in God’s righteous judgment.

Q: How do we know that God’s judgment is righteous?

Q: What does it mean to be considered “worthy of the kingdom of God”?

The format of this passage (1:5–10) in the original Greek is not written in prose paragraphs as we see in the English translation, but in couplets like ancient poetry. This reflects the same language and style the Old Testament uses to talk about the Day of the Lord in the Psalms and the Prophets. Hebrew poetry uses parallelism in couplets, where the second line is connected to the first, as either a contrast or a repetition, sometimes repeating with greater emphasis. Because of its arrangement in couplets, scholars have suggested this is an ancient Christian hymn, creed, or catechism (teachings students memorize), like many other passages Paul used in his letters.ⁱⁱ

This passage describes what will happen when Jesus returns in judgment. In the first two and a half verses (1:5–7a), the first part is a full paragraph, and then there is a couplet at the end:

“Affliction to those who afflict you
And to you who are afflicted, relief with us” (vv. 6b–7a)

This couplet is clearly a contrasting one. When Christ returns in righteous judgment, there will be affliction for those who afflict us and relief for us who are afflicted. As the Old Testament teaches over and over, the Day of Judgment will be a day of punishment for the wicked, but vindication for the righteous. In this context, it’s specifically talking about those who have been mistreated, oppressed and persecuted versus those who mistreated them. Those who oppress and afflict others will finally get a taste of their own medicine. This is a direct reflection of what God tells His people in Deuteronomy 32:35, which Paul quotes in Romans – vengeance belongs to the Lord. This is why Paul wrote, “Repay no one evil for evil ... but leave it to the wrath of God.... Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord” (Romans 12:17, 19). We don’t need to worry about repaying those who have hurt us. God will take care of it on the Day of Judgment.

Paul was writing to people who were suffering persecution for their faith, encouraging them that their suffering was “evidence” of the righteous judgment of God. The Greek word here is *endeigma* – “proof” or “sure token.” This is the only place this exact word is used, but a related noun (*endeixis*) is used four times, one of which is in a similar context; the Philippians were also suffering persecution: “[do not be] frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a *clear sign* to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God” (Philippians 1:28).ⁱⁱⁱ

Suffering persecution for Christ is a clear sign that you are a disciple (Matthew 5:10–12; John 15:18–25). Jesus told His disciples to be glad when they suffered persecution because “your reward is great in heaven” (Matthew 5:12). The disciples considered it an honor to suffer for the name of Jesus (Acts 5:41). Here Paul wrote that this suffering was evidence that they were “considered worthy” of the kingdom of God, but this doesn’t mean that God makes us suffer in order to inherit the kingdom. F. F. Bruce wrote, “The kingdom of God is entered through tribulation (Acts 14:22), but the kingdom cannot be said to be the purpose of the tribulation on the part of those who inflict it or even on the part of those who endure it.”^{iv} Enduring through trials doesn’t save us; Jesus does. Our endurance is not the currency needed to enter the kingdom; it is evidence that God is working in us. Because of our relationship with Jesus, because of the Holy Spirit’s living in us, we have the power to endure suffering.

We all endure suffering in this world, simply because it’s a fallen world. If we’re Christians, we will suffer for the Gospel. But in our suffering, Christians have a sure hope – a promise of the kingdom of God and of righteous judgment – that God will punish those who should be punished and show grace to those who should be shown grace. Even more than a wise human judge, God knows who should be sent to prison and who should be acquitted. We are not righteous judges; we don’t know people’s hearts the way God does. We have a habit of seeing the tiniest speck in someone else’s eye while missing the huge log in our own (Matthew 7:3–5). But the Lord sees the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). His judgments are righteous. The “since indeed” at the beginning of verse 6 tells us that there is not even a shadow of a doubt where the righteousness of God is involved. We can trust that God will do what is just and right.

Q: How does it make you feel to be able to let go of taking vengeance for yourself and trust that God will take care of it?

Q: How does it change the way we endure suffering? The way we relate to those who hurt you?

Q: How does the promise of God’s righteous judgment change the way you live today?

2 Thessalonians 1:7–9 (v. 7 is repeated intentionally) [Read]

Talking Point 2: Christ is the Lord who comes in judgment.

Q: How does this passage describe Christ's coming in judgment?

Q: On whom will Christ pour out His vengeance on the Day of Judgment?

In the Old Testament, the Day of Judgment was called “the day of Yahweh” or “the day of the Lord.” In this passage, Paul makes it clear that “the Lord” is not just the Father, but also Christ the Son. Note the intentional use of “the Lord Jesus” in verses 7, 8 and 12. Not just “the Lord” or just “Jesus,” but “the Lord Jesus” together. The language and the imagery of the first couplet of this section are reminiscent of the vision Daniel had of the throne of God:

“With His mighty angels
In flaming fire” (vv. 7b–8a)

This is similar to the description of the Ancient of Days (God the Father) in Daniel's vision. “His throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him; and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him” (Daniel 7:9b–10). And in Isaiah, “For behold, the Lord will come in fire, and his chariots like the whirlwind, to render his anger in fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire will the Lord enter into judgment” (Isaiah 66:15–16a).

But in our passage, Paul said it's the Lord Jesus who comes in flaming fire to judge. Later in his vision, Daniel saw “one like a son of man” coming with the clouds of heaven. And the Ancient of Days (God the Father) gave Him “dominion and glory and a kingdom” (Daniel 7:13–14). Also, John writes, “[The Father] has given [the Son] authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man” (John 5:27). This passage is all about Christ. It is Christ who comes to judge with mighty angels and fire. And Christ and His Gospel are the basis for the judgment. Look at the second couplet, “inflicting vengeance to those”:

“who do not know God
and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (v. 8)

Jesus bases His final judgment not on our works, but on whether or not we know Him. It's all about relationship. This couplet equates those who “do not know God” with those who “disobey the gospel of Jesus.” To “disobey the Gospel” is to reject the reconciliation with God that the Gospel brings, which means that those who don't know Jesus don't really know God. British Bible scholar F.F. Bruce wrote, “It is not inadvertent ignorance that is meant, but that inexcusable refusal to know God for which the pagan world is condemned in Romans 1:19–28. If eternal life consists in knowing the only true

God (John 17:3), not to know Him implies exclusion from that life.”^v As Paul wrote, everything is garbage compared to the “surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Philippians 3:8).

Jesus said He will say to those who do not enter the kingdom of God, “I never knew you” (Matthew 7:23). Judgment is based on knowing Jesus alone. But biblical “knowledge” of someone isn’t just knowledge about them, it’s intimacy with them. Saving faith is not just knowing facts about God. It’s not just believing He exists or even believing that He is Lord. It’s having a personal relationship with Him. This is the deciding factor for God (the Father and the Son) in their judgment, because they don’t see as man sees; they look at the heart. The defining question of salvation is, “Do you know Jesus?”

The third couplet describes the penalty for those who don’t know Him:

“Away from the presence of the Lord
And from the glory of his might” (v. 9)

They will get what they asked for. They didn’t want a relationship with God, so they are sent away from His presence. But what they don’t realize is that being away from His presence is not a good place to be! If being in God’s presence is the fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11), what is being out of His presence? If eternal life comes in knowing God, then not knowing Him means exclusion from eternal life – eternal death and destruction (Matthew 25:31–46).^{vi}

This doesn’t mean there is no hope for those who have afflicted believers to ever know God. Paul himself was once the chief persecutor of Christians. There is *always* hope that a sinner may repent and turn to Christ as Paul did. We should hope and pray to that end, as Christ prayed for His crucifiers while He was on the Cross. We should not wish for anyone’s destruction but pray for their repentance. Pray they will come to know Christ, who is both our Savior *and* our judge, the one who inflicts punishment on the wicked, but also who shows grace to the humble. This gives us hope. Our judge is both righteous *and* rich in mercy (Ephesians 2:4–10). All we have to do to receive that mercy is repent and return to Him, to come to know Him in relationship.

Q: How does this passage affect what we believe about the Gospel? How does it affect what we think about other religions? How does it affect how we witness to others?

Q: What does it say about God that the criteria He uses to judge is whether you know Him?

2 Thessalonians 1:10–12 [Read]

Talking Point 3: When we persevere through suffering, God is glorified in us.

Q: How is the name of Jesus glorified in our lives?

The next couplet goes back to what will happen “when he comes on that day” (v. 10a):

“To be glorified in his saints
and to be marveled at among all who have believed” (v. 10b)

This couplet is a repetition for emphasis. Believers will be glorified *with Him*. At the Second Coming, we will see Christ coming in all His glory. But we will also see His people glorified. Christians will receive new glorified, imperishable bodies (1 Corinthians 15). Our physical bodies will finally reflect the spiritual reality we have been living since we first accepted Christ, that we are a new creation in Him (2 Corinthians 5; John 3). We will be able to physically see the glory of God in our bodies, whereas before, on earth, people could only see His image in the way we lived.

This teaching about God being glorified leads to Paul’s opening prayer for them – that the name of Jesus (His reputation in the world) would be glorified in them. Not just at the end times, but in their daily lives, by “every resolve for good” and “every work of faith by his power” (v. 11). “Every good work” in Greek is literally “every good pleasure,” as in Philippians 2:13. God is at work in us for His good pleasure. The goodness people see in us is *all* from the Holy Spirit, not ourselves, whether it’s our “good works” (moral behavior) or a “work of power” (supernatural things). When we hear “works of the Spirit,” we tend to think of miracles, healing, etc., but kindness, selflessness, generosity, love and other spiritual fruit are also works of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–25). They are also “works of faith by his power” (v. 11). Our good works are not our own but the Fruit of the Spirit working in and through us. Our righteousness is like filthy rags. It’s only “according to the grace of our God” that we may glorify Him (v. 12). This is why our lives bring glory to God, not ourselves. Whether it’s the physical glory of our bodies rising at the Rapture or the spiritual glory of our moral behavior in the here and now, it all comes from the Holy Spirit.^{vii}

Q: What do you think it will be like to see Jesus, coming in glory? What will it be like to see other believers’ bodies glorified, too?

Q: In what ways is your life bringing glory to God right now? In what ways might you need to change your behavior to bring God glory?

Q: If our good works are the work of the Holy Spirit in us, not ourselves, what practical steps can you take to make your life glorify Jesus more?

Week 11: 2 Thessalonians 1:5–12

Took

Main Point: Believers can look forward to the Day of Judgment.

A witness in court will provide sworn testimony, evidence that carries the penalty of law if provided falsely. If you were given the responsibility to provide sworn testimony about your personal walk with Christ, how would you answer this question: In what areas of your life is God not being glorified? Take a moment of reflection to consider your answer and offer that area of need up to the Lord.

CHALLENGES

THINK: In what ways is your life *not* bringing glory to God right now? Be very honest with yourself and very specific. How do you need to ask God to change you so that every part of you glorifies Him? Knowing that the power to change comes from the Holy Spirit, what practical steps can you take to allow the Holy Spirit to work in your life?

PRAY: For God to be glorified in His Church. The Church is meant to reflect God's image to the world, and yet it is made up of flawed human beings, and the Church doesn't always shine the image of Jesus to the world. It doesn't always draw people in. Pray for every layer of the Church to reflect God's glory – the Church around the world, the Church in America, the church in your city, and yourself individually.

ACT: Share the hope you have in Christ with one person this week. Whether it's someone you've been witnessing to for a while or someone you've met this week for the first time, make a point to share the hope you have in the Day of the Lord. That you *know* you will be able to stand before God justified. That you can have confidence in God's righteous judgment. And how that affects the way that you live your life today.

ⁱ <https://www.businessinsider.com/truth-behind-scenes-tv-court-show-2018-10>

ⁱⁱ Carl Von Weizsacker, *The Apostolic Age of the Christian Church, Vol 1* (New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1895).

ⁱⁱⁱ Strong's #1730 and #1732

^{iv} F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians, Word Biblical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982).

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^{vi} Gordon D. Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009).

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