

Commentary on 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Series*) for **July 11, 2010**, is from **2 Thessalonians 1:3-12**. Five **Questions for Discussion** follow the Bible Lesson Commentary. These are my preliminary verse by verse study notes before writing my Bible Lesson for *The Oklahoman* newspaper. They may help you in your class preparation and discussion. I do encourage you to write your own verse by verse notes and questions before reading the notes and questions below.

3 We must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of everyone of you for one another is increasing.

The Bible's most important virtues are mentioned here: their faith is growing and their love is increasing. These virtues can grow from the study of and the application of the Bible's teachings -- especially during times of testing and persecution. Love for others and the church can increase as believers pray for one another and look for opportunities to serve one another -- especially in troubled times.

4 Therefore we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith during all your persecutions and the afflictions that you are enduring.

Think of how wonderful it would be if our churches were so biblical that if Paul and the other apostles were here they could boast of us among other churches. Think of what our church would be like if it were so biblical both inwardly and outwardly that the devil and the world took enough notice to persecute and afflict us, and therefore our steadfast faith would be applauded. In such a case, we would want to pray fervently and put on the full armor of God.

5 This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, and is intended to make you worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering.

God's righteous judgment is made manifest in this present life and in the future. If we are suffering for the kingdom of God, then that suffering should make us worthy of the kingdom of God. Persecution and suffering at the hands of unbelievers gives us the opportunity to maintain and strengthen our faith under stress, and perhaps the opportunity to show forth the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

6 For it is indeed just of God to repay with affliction those who afflict you,

God will justly judge unbelievers based on the standard He has revealed in Christ and the Scriptures. We try to help others come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ and conform their lives to God's standards, with our help and that of the Holy Spirit. When people repay our loving and merciful efforts by afflicting us, God will repay them with affliction -- just judgment.

7 and to give relief to the afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels

God's just judgment includes giving relief to the afflicted, and in the future that includes the revealing of Jesus Christ from heaven. When Jesus walked the earth during His public ministry, no one saw the heavenly host that accompanied Him. In the future, all of us will see the heavenly host of angels with Jesus and know we are secure -- and judgment has come.

8 in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

Fire can destroy and fire can purify. In this sense, the fire brings deserved punishment and suffering, for punishment that does not include some form of pain and suffering is not punishment. Vengeance is just, and according to just and revealed laws of God, for these people had every opportunity to believe in God and then come to know God, but they chose instead to persecute those who told them about God, which is disobedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

9 These will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, separated from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,

Some argue that "eternal destruction" means annihilation and the end of all conscious existence, but that would be the end of punishment, for that would be the end of suffering; and there would then be no eternal consciousness of being separated from the presence of the Lord. The person goes where they do not experience the loving presence or help of God, whom they chose to reject. Having rejected God and His people in this life, in spite of God's goodness revealed in the world, some have argued that unbelievers would be more miserable in heaven than in hell.

10 when he comes to be glorified by his saints and to be marveled at on that day among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, as those who believe in the Scriptures (the apostle's testimony), when Jesus comes we will glorify Him with public praise and honor as expressions of our love for Him. We will marvel at Him and His appearing for His glorious and loving presence will be totally beyond our expectation and imagination.

11 To this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call and will fulfill by his power every good resolve and work of faith,

As we pray for ourselves and others, one of our requests needs to be that we live moment-by-moment worthy of His having called us into His family. Also, that we have good intentions and resolutions to serve Him, and that He would give us the power to fulfill these resolutions -- that we work for Him and trust that He will help us accomplish our tasks.

12 so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We also pray for ourselves and others, that when people meet us and get to know us, that they will see enough of Jesus' love, power, and wisdom working in and through us to honor and praise Him -- that they might see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven -- all the time recognizing that who we are, what we have become, the good we are doing, is the result of Jesus' unmerited favor and power working in us.

Five Questions for Discussion

1. What kinds of evidence demonstrate that church members are growing in faith and increasing in love? Is it possible to grow in one of these virtues and not grow in the other? Explain your answer.
2. Why do you think growing in faith and increasing in love can lead to persecution, rather than attracting everyone to the gospel life and way of living? Why do those who try to live godly in Christ Jesus also sometimes suffer persecution from fellow church members?
3. In what ways does God demonstrate now, and will demonstrate in the future, that He reigns as a just judge? Why is it important for God to exercise just judgment against those who afflict and persecute those who love and follow Jesus?
4. How might you use some of these verses to encourage a fellow Christian who is suffering affliction and persecution?
5. Why is "the punishment of eternal destruction" a necessary judgment for some people? If these people hated God in this life and persecuted His family on Earth, do you think they will hate God more, or repent of their sins, while undergoing God's just punishment? Give a reason for your answer.

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