

Why Do the Righteous Suffer?

The *International Sunday School Lesson* for Sunday, July 11, 2010
2 Thessalonians 1:3-12

“To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power” (2 Thessalonians 1:11—NASB-U).

“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” (2 Thessalonians 1:11—NRSV).

“Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power” (2 Thessalonians 1:11—KJV).

Why do some of the best people we know suffer? Paul thanked God that the Thessalonians' faith grew abundantly and their love for one another increased; yet, in spite of these facts, they suffered persecutions and afflictions. Is it possible that their suffering together strengthened their trust in God and drew them closer together as Christians? During their times of trial, Paul could boast to other churches about their steadfastness and faith; but, since they lived as model followers of Jesus Christ, why did they suffer?

In his letters, Paul gave some surprising reasons for why the righteous suffer. Perhaps most surprising is that a Christian's suffering for righteousness will reveal in the future the righteous judgment of God – when God in strict justice repays with affliction those who afflicted His people. More immediately, suffering afflictions and persecutions can help believers develop the character traits, such as patience and perseverance, that show their worthiness to live in the Kingdom of God. Suffering gives the righteous the opportunity to prove that they truly believe the gospel of Jesus Christ and are not Christians only for the benefits, but because God deserves to receive people's love, honor, obedience, and service. Moreover, in troubled times, Christians learn to pray more fervently for one another; as Paul prayed not only that each believer would continue to lead a worthy life before the Lord, but that the Lord would empower each believer to keep their good resolutions and receive God's grace to do good works of faith in spite of their trials. — Copyright 2010 L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

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Questions for Further Thought or Discussion

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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.