

1. My opening question is how does one deal with pain and suffering caused by others? What do we do with people who have caused us pain and suffering, what should we do about them?
  - a) Remember that the bible says “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:2, NIV). This is a fact we can count on just as much as our salvation itself. (Now isn’t this a happy way to start a lesson? ☺)
  - b) Remember that Satan doesn’t want you to be a good witness for Jesus. His time on earth is limited and is based on a fixed number of people becoming Christians (see Romans 11:25; i.e., “the fullness of the Gentiles”). Only God the Father knows that number. The longer Satan can delay that number, the longer the time he has on earth.
    - i) In order for Satan to slow down that final Christian from being saved, He persecutes believers. If you are being persecuted for your faith, you might become timid about being a good witness. A question to ponder is, “If it was a death sentence to tell others about Jesus, would you do so?”
  - c) We tend to think of persecution as someone with weapons trying to kill us. Other times it is less severe. Sometimes, it doesn’t occur to us that whatever physical pain we are going through might be demonic based in order to prevent you from being a witness for God.
  - d) Here’s something we all need to consider: If we have never experienced any suffering as a Christian, we don’t have to question our salvation, but we should question how good of a witness we are for Jesus.
    - i) “If you don’t believe Satan is real, try opposing him for awhile”.
    - ii) I’m not saying you have to look for suffering, just expect that it might happen. Daily we should pray for God’s protection. This is what Ephesians 6:11-20 is all about. This section is nicknamed the “armor of God.” It reads like a checklist for us to do to prepare for spiritual battle. Daily we need to pray “the armor of God” the same way an airline pilot completes a checklist prior to take off.
    - iii) God allows persecution to keep us close to Him. It’s not a matter of “I failed to pray the Ephesians 6 checklist today so I’m going to get it”. It is a matter of God allowing persecution to occur as to keep us close to Him, to mature us, and to remind us that God the Father, Lord Jesus and Satan are all very “real”.
      - a) “Suffering is not to be thought of as evidence that God has forsaken you, but evidence that God is perfecting you.” John MacArthur
    - iv) If you understand Satan is real, than God Himself must be real as well. If there is an evil force, there must be a greater force that created that evil. God created Satan knowing that he was going to rebel. “Good and evil” are not equal forces. God is greater than whatever evil exists. What we have to remember is that we cannot overcome evil on our own strength. We depend upon God to fight our battles for us. Our job is to trust in God and let God take care of the details.
  - e) With that said, the issue of the moment has to do with our attitude.
    - i) Are we interested in seeking revenge? Is this our motivation for living?
    - ii) Are we busy having a pity party for ourselves? Are we so busy feeling sorry for ourselves that we can’t deal with any other issue in our lives?
    - iii) The reason I state this is that both hatred of those who caused the pain and sitting around feeling sorry for ourselves both block our relationship with God. In either case, the focus is on ourselves or others and not God.

2. To discuss our attitude toward those who hurt us, let me state what Jesus said:
  - a) “With that, one of Jesus’ companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. “Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:51-53 NIV)
  - b) In that story we learn that when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, one of the apostles drew a sword and cut off someone’s ear. We learn from John’s gospel it was Peter (18:10). In Luke’s account, we learn that Jesus took the time to heal the man’s ear (Luke 22:51). Jesus last recorded miracle, other than the resurrection itself, was to undo the damage done by a follower of Jesus!
  - c) Let me paraphrase what Jesus is saying to His disciples: “Yes I knew these guys were here to arrest me. If I wanted to seek revenge, I could wipe out this whole group with the snap of my fingers. I, Jesus came to earth to give my life for sinners and this arrest is all part of God’s redemptive plan.
  - d) The point of this part of the story is that Jesus focused on what God the Father called Him to do, and not the fact He was being persecuted. Jesus neither sought revenge nor had a pity party for the suffering He was going through.
  - e) That is the attitude that Christians need to strive for. God has called us to serve Him. Daily we should pray, spend time in God’s word and go about our lives living for Him and not for us. We need to focus on that calling despite any outside situations.
3. Now that I’ve gotten all of that out of my system, welcome to a study of 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians. ☺
  - a) That church was being persecuted. A 1<sup>st</sup> century Christian in Thessalonica was probably a death sentence. At the least, it meant a loss of property rights and privileges if you swore allegiance to God and not the pagan gods of that culture.
  - b) The main theme that runs through Chapter 1 is how to deal with that persecution.
  - c) The chapter talks about how their suffering is making them a good witness for Jesus.
  - d) The chapter talks about how God will eventually deal with those who persecuted the Thessalonians, so they don’t have to worry about that. On a related note Christians don’t have to just stand there and, say be beaten up. We’ll discuss this more in the lesson itself.
  - e) While we as modern Christians don’t necessarily live in a world where it is a death sentence to believe in Jesus, we can count on suffering. We shouldn’t be paranoid about it, just know that it can happen to us.
  - f) If it can happen to us, then we should also be aware it happens to other believers as well. This is a call to pray and support those who are going through such suffering at the moment. One of the things we can learn from both letters to the Thessalonians is how to help and support those going through such situations.
4. Before I start, let’s do a little bit of background on 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians.
  - a) By putting together some references from 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians along with some from Acts 18, we know Paul wrote 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians from Corinth. Corinth is another city in Greece.
  - b) We don’t know the exact date of 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians, but the logical date would be sometime soon after the first letter. Most scholars date the letters about 51-52 AD.
  - c) A purpose (not the purpose) of this letter is to clear up some further issues that arose since the first letter was written.
  - d) It is almost as if 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians was written, and then delivered. After some time, that church in Thessalonica had some more questions, and Paul and his friends responded with this second letter.
  - e) Paul was in the City of Corinth for 18 months (Acts 18:11). Most likely 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians was written a few months after 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians.
  - f) The authors of both letters (Paul, Silas and Timothy) are the same. The first two verses of 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians, which state the authors, are identical to those of the first letter.

5. Verse 1: Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: <sup>2</sup> Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- a) Verses 1 and 2 are identical, word-for-word to 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians, Verse 1.
  - b) It's hard to add commentary on something you've already written on, so I'm not going to go into a lot of detail. (For more background on these two verses, you may want to read the study on 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians, Chapter 1.)
  - c) This introduction does show who wrote the letter.
    - i) Time for my first disclaimer of the day. ☺ I'm going to use the term "Paul" throughout the letter as the author when I should be saying "Paul, Silas and Timothy". We get the impression that Paul was the primary writer, but these three agreed as one as to its content. When I say, "Paul said" in reference to this letter, please understand I mean all three guys.
  - d) So why repeat these exact same words? Don't the Thessalonians know they were "in" God the Father and "in" the Lord Jesus Christ?
    - i) For starters, it is a reminder to them that they are still "ok". There is a desire in all people to be accepted. We all want to be accepted by our peers and our teachers. Sometimes, a nice greeting, after not hearing for someone for a long time is a reminder that you are still loved.
    - ii) It is also a reminder to whom we belong:
      - a) By putting God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ in the same sentence, it not only teaches us about their equality, but of whom we serve.
      - b) Verse 1 reminds the reader that we are in God the Father and in Jesus.
        - (1) To be "in" is to be part of their family. We belong to Them.
      - c) Verse 2 reminds us that we receive grace and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus.
      - d) We belong to Them and through Them we receive their love.
        - (1) That love gives us grace and peace.
  - e) Remember that the Thessalonians have been dealing with persecution for some time now.
    - i) I suspect that between the period of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> letters, the Thessalonians had watched members of their own flock be killed for their belief. This is a church that had to meet in secret in order to survive.
    - ii) While most of us never have to deal with something that painful, we in our way do go through suffering in different stages of our lives. Sometimes it goes on for long periods of time. Sometimes we have to remember that we are in God the Father and in Christ Jesus. We are part of their family. Our dependence is upon Them. And through Them, we get unmerited grace and peace in our lives.
    - iii) When you through a long period of suffering, nothing helps like a little encouragement. Sometimes just a simple statement like the fact that they are still in Jesus Christ is reassuring.
6. Verse 3: We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.
- a) The key word in Verse 3 is the word "ought". The word is meant as a command.
  - b) Paul is proud of the Thessalonians church.
    - i) Notice Paul does not take credit for its success.
    - ii) Notice Paul does not give credit to the Thessalonians themselves.
    - iii) Paul says we ought (i.e., should!) give God the credit for its growth.
  - c) Church "success" is prayer-based. That prayer is not just a laundry list of needs, but one of gratitude for what God has accomplished already.
    - i) We pray our grateful list not so God in heaven can say, "Oh yeah, I did do that, thanks for saying so". ☺ We pray our grateful list to remind us of what God has accomplished. It keeps our focus on God on not on our egos.

- d) This gets back to the idea of the proper perspective when going through difficult times. If we can recall the wonderful things God has done for us in the past, it reminds us that God is real and is still there during those times.
- i) This is why a lot of Christians journal. Journaling can simply be a written list of prayer requests and answers. It can be observations of how God has been working in your life. A reason to journal is so when those dark times come, you can look back and see how God has been working in the past and remind yourself that God is still there.
- e) Which leads us back to “ought”. We ought to thank God for the victories in our lives. We ought to be grateful of all the good things God does for us.
- i) During those moments when we are having pity-parties for ourselves, it is often best to stop and make grateful lists. Ask yourself, “What are 10 things I am grateful for right now in my life?” Even if you can’t think of 10, try a few. Then thank God for providing those benefits to your life.
- f) Now that we’ve discussed “ought” to death, ☺ Let’s look at the rest of the verse.
- i) Paul is thanking God that the Thessalonians has grown in their faith and grown in their love for each other. If you had to summarize the Christian life in a few key terms, you can’t go wrong with “faith and love”.
- ii) This ties to a key verse of 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians:
- a) “We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 1:3 NIV)
- b) 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13 is about the topic of Christian love. It is considered the bible’s best source on examples of what Christian love is all about. Paul’s final words in that chapter were: “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13:13 NIV).
- c) Notice both 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 1:3 and 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13:13 teach that the three key characteristics of a Christian are “faith, hope and love”.
- d) Yet here in 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians, Paul says we “ought” to thank God for you because your “faith and love” are growing. Before I discuss “faith and love”, why is “hope” not mentioned in 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians?
- (1) I don’t believe it is ignored. It is simply not the focus of this sentence. Paul is commending the Thessalonians for how they have grown in their faith and their love for one another.
- g) Since the Thessalonians were commended for their faith and love, and Paul said we ought to thank God for their growth in these issues, I thought it would be a good idea to talk about each of these traits. Let’s start with faith.
- i) The book of Hebrews defines the word “faith”: “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” (Hebrews 11:1 NIV)
- ii) God does not, as a general rule speak to us audibly. God is not physically visible on a moment-by-moment basis. Therefore, faith is trusting in something we can’t see, touch, hear, etc.
- iii) Faith has best been described as a muscle. If you work on that muscle, it grows even stronger. If you ignore it, the muscle grows weak.
- iv) Paul commends the Thessalonians for their growth in their faith.
- v) Let me give some practical examples of how to grow in faith:
- a) There may have been a time in your life where you believed in Jesus, but were too timid to say anything publicly. Now it is “no big deal” to discuss Jesus with others. You have grown in your faith.

- b) There may have been a time in your life where you didn't give a lot of money to your church because you were afraid to "let it go". Now you give more, trusting that God will provide. You have grown in your faith.
- c) You may be going through a painful situation, but you find you are worrying less than you were say, a year ago over a similar situation. You have grown in your faith.
- d) In any time or any situation where you find you are trusting God more and yourself less, or your circumstances less, you are growing in your faith.
- vi) Remember that the Thessalonians were being persecuted for their faith. Paul is commending them for "sticking to their guns" despite this persecution.
  - a) When people who proclaim to believe in Jesus start getting persecuted, they either abandon their faith or they "dig their heels in deeper" and grow in their belief.
  - b) There is a classic story that took place in Russia before the fall of Communism. There was a group of Christians meeting in secret. All of a sudden, some soldiers came in, bearing rifles. They asked, "Is this a meeting of Christians?" Some immediately fled. The rest answered, yes. The soldiers replied, "Good, because we came to worship too!" Those believers who were willing to trust God and state the truth were rewarded with new people to worship with them!
- vii) One of my favorite bible teachers says, "Sometimes I think God stays up nights thinking of new ways to get me in trouble so He can ask, "Do you trust me, do you really trust me?" When we are going through such trials, I believe God is sitting there in the background waiting to see how we react. The same way we test our children to see their reaction is how God works on us. He wants us to grow in our faith despite any negative circumstances of our lives.
- h) Next, let's talk about "growing in love".
  - i) The best definition of Christian love came from Jesus himself:
    - a) "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." (John 15:12-13 NKJV)
  - ii) Christian love is about giving of ourselves for others. It is about putting other's needs above our own.
  - iii) Jesus laid down His life for us. He expects us to have the same attitude for others. Most parents would be more than happy to give their life if it meant keeping their children alive. Most husbands and wives feel that way about each other when "push comes to shove". Soldiers are often willing to do that for others.
  - iv) I remember getting into a discussion with a Jewish friend. I was trying to explain to him that Jesus freely gave His life and the Jewish nation did not kill him. The Jewish nation was guilty of 2<sup>nd</sup> degree murder, which is to unknowingly kill someone (Think about: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." Luke 23:34 NKJV). Jesus freely gave up his life.
    - a) My friend responded with, "So are saying Jesus committed suicide?"
    - b) I responded with "It's more like a soldier falling on a live grenade so his comrades could live. That grenade was "meant for me". Jesus freely gave up His life so I could live."
- i) Paul spends a whole chapter on Christian love in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians Chapter 13. This chapter is full of examples of Christian love. A good test for us is to fill in our own name in all those examples in that chapter. Occasionally, we need to pray to be more like that list.

- j) Let me give some examples of “growing in love”:
  - i) You volunteer to do some work at your church that you would never have dreamed of doing, say a few years ago. You are growing in love.
  - ii) You volunteer to help some stranger do a simple task like helping a person load a car. You don’t even care if it takes a few minutes out of your life. You are growing in love.
  - iii) I’ve been told that a great marriage is one where both couples are busy trying to outdo each other in love. It is like one saying, “You did that for me? I’ll show you. Watch what I’m going to do for you!” ☺ That is the idea of growing in love. You do it, not for ego’s sake, not for gaining points with God, but just because you “want to”. You just want to please that other person. You “grow” in God’s love.
  - iv) Let’s say somebody cuts you off in traffic. To help calm yourself down, you take a moment and pray for that person. A similar idea is praying for a stranger in front of you while waiting in line for something. You are growing in love because you have compassion for someone you don’t even know.
  - v) If you are filled with God’s love and don’t let it out, you are going to get spiritually constipated. ☺ There has to be an outlet for the love that God has put inside of you.

7. Verse 4: Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.

- a) Imagine Paul telling the Corinthians, “Hey, you want to see a real church? Check out the Thessalonians. This is a group that has got their act together!”
- b) That is what Paul is saying about the Thessalonians to other churches. Paul is so proud of how this church has preserved and matured despite the persecutions.
- c) Think about this verse from the perspective of the Thessalonians. They were probably busy trying to survive. They didn’t think about what they were doing as an influence on others. This again reminds us that we don’t know who’s watching us.
- d) As I was reading these verses, something else caught my attention that Paul didn’t say:
  - i) Notice Paul did not say, “And to help you deal with your persecutors, attached to this letter is a crate of assault rifles, grenades and other artillery. Good luck.” ☺
  - ii) Don’t get me wrong. I think if Paul was the Roman Emperor, his first order of business would be to make Christianity a legal religion so he could preach the gospel more freely. We should never require that one legally become a Christian, because then one is not giving their life to Jesus out of free will. At the same time, we need to be grateful for freedom of religion.
  - iii) Also notice Paul is not telling the Thessalonians to run away. Notice Paul is not telling them to rebel against the Romans or whoever was causing the persecution.
  - iv) I don’t believe Paul wanted them to be passive.
    - a) There are a number of times when the Jewish leaders wanted to kill Jesus, and knowing “it wasn’t the time yet”, Jesus escaped from their midst.
    - b) When Paul was a missionary, we can read of a number of occasions where other Christians helped Paul to get out of town.
    - c) My point is there is a time to run. The decision usually comes down to personal conviction. One prays and looks for God’s guidance as to what we should do in any situation. There are times to stay put and times to run. The key is to do what is “God’s will”. Usually, the only way of knowing is to study our bible and then go about our lives making good decisions based on that biblical knowledge. On rare occasions we also get other revelations on what to do, but often, we simply have to rely on prayerfully studying what God would want us to do, and just “do it”.

- v) This is a good time to discuss what Jesus meant by “turn the other cheek”:
  - a) Jesus said, “But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” (Matthew 5:39 NIV)
  - b) Yet the one time we read of Jesus being struck on the cheek, notice Jesus reaction: “And when He had said these things, one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, “Do You answer the high priest like that?” Jesus answered him, “If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?” (John 18:22-23 NIV)
  - c) My point is “turn the other cheek” does not mean to just stand there and “take it”. Based on John 18, Jesus teaches that one should not retaliate for evil but at the same time point out the “wrong” that the other is doing.
  - d) This gets back to my opening illustration of when Peter took up a sword and cut off the ear of one of the people arresting Jesus. Jesus told Peter to put back his sword. God is well aware of those who wronged us. We’ll get into the issue of revenge in Verse 6. First of all, we better do Verse 5. ☺
- 8. Verse 5: All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering.
  - a) This verse begins the topic of the suffering of the Thessalonians.
  - b) Let’s start with the word “evidence”.
    - i) The last phrase of the sentence says, “for which you are suffering”.
    - ii) What Paul is saying is the evidence of the suffering that the Thessalonians are going through will help them to be counted “worthy” to be in God’s kingdom.
    - iii) Paul is saying in effect, “Hey, all that pain you are going through, all of that life threatening situations you are dealing with, all of that stress, it is just proof that you are worthy to be a Christian.”
    - iv) You’re first reaction might be “Gee, thanks. ☺ Here I am in physical pain or in stress about my own life and you’re telling me it is just “evidence” that I am “worthy of God? Wow, that helps! I can throw away my medication now because God is putting me through this to prove I am “worthy” of heaven.” ☺
    - v) That would be a proper attitude if our life on earth were more important than our life in heaven! Remember our home is in heaven, not here. Think about how long your life is going to be on earth. Now think about how long you will live in heaven. Try to imagine the longest stretch of time you can think of. Maybe a 1,000 years, maybe a 100,000. What is that in comparison to our time here on earth?
    - vi) The reason Paul is comforting the Thessalonians with these words is he is trying to give them perspective of the short time frame of life on earth versus the “forever” aspect of heaven.
    - vii) Here’s another point. What do nonbelievers expect you to do when you are suffering? Do they expect you to have a pity party? Do they expect you to be angry at whoever did this to you? That is what “they” would do. If you act just like “them”, you will be no different from “them”. Why would anyone want to be a Christian if you act like everyone else?
    - viii) Again this verse is about perspective during suffering. If you can stop and think about the fact you are eternally saved, what is that in comparison to whatever you are going through? True joy is about having peace with God despite whatever circumstances you are going through.
    - ix) A helpful application for faith in tough times is called “baby steps”. It goes as follows: “For the next 30 seconds, I am not going to worry about whatever situation I am in. It is God’s problem. If you survive the 30 seconds, do another 30. Work your way up to a minute. It is called “baby steps” because you are trusting God with “small steps” and working your way up to bigger steps.

- c) Let's get back to the verse. Paul is saying in Verse 5 that the evidence of our suffering proves God's judgment is right.
- i) When we think of God's "judgment", we think of God punishing unbelievers and sending them to hell. That is discussed heavily over the next several verses.
  - ii) The bible also teaches believers are to be judged: "For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? (1st Peter 4:17 NIV)
  - iii) So if believers are saved by definition, how are we "judged"?
    - a) This gets back to the idea of God himself. God by definition is perfect. A perfect God wants to spend eternity with "perfect" people. What is God's definition of "perfect"? We must obey all the laws in the bible. We are never to violate any of those laws at any time. No problem. ☺
  - iv) This is why Jesus had to die for our sins. But a few of you may have noticed that even after we have stated Jesus paid the price for our sins, we still mess up.
  - v) We still have the old "sin nature" as part of our makeup. God does not take that sin nature away from us the day we accept Jesus. Why? So we can appreciate just how bad sin is. If God 100% took away all sin in our life, in a matter of days or weeks or years, we would forget just how bad sin is, and we would not be as appreciative for the price paid for our sins.
  - vi) God works on us one step at a time. He wants to mature us. To "mature" us is to draw us closer to God by trusting Him more and more with every aspect of our lives. That means He is working on our sins. God is allowing events to happen in our life and yes, suffering, in order for us to trust him more.
  - vii) This is what "judgment" is for Christians. There is a "judgment" that happens to us every day as God is working on us to mature us in our faith.
  - viii) There is also a judgment for believers in heaven where we are rewarded for our faithfulness. That is a topic for another day. My point here is that when we think of God's judgment, it is not just for unbelievers, but for believers as well.
9. Verse 6: God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you <sup>7</sup> and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well.
- a) OK, now that I've beaten to death the issue of judgment of our own sins, it is time to discuss those who have hurt us.
  - b) The key word here is God. The verse says He will pay back those who trouble you.
    - i) This gets back to introduction comments that it is God who takes care of revenge.
    - ii) We don't have to. Remember that Paul's letter to the Thessalonians did not come equipped with a crate full of automatic rifles. ☺
    - iii) Remember nonbelievers expect you to retaliate. That is what "they" would do.
    - iv) If you can have joy in your heart despite your suffering, people will look at you and say, "Hey, I want that. I want to have joy during my painful times. How do you do that?"
    - v) This reminds me of one of my favorite illustrations: Suppose you were on an airplane. A stewardess comes by and whispers in your ear, "The landing gear is broken. Hold on to this parachute until I say jump." Later, the stewardess accidentally walks by and spills hot coffee on your lap. Do you let go of the parachute? No, if anything you cling to it all the more. You know that despite the pain of the hot coffee, that parachute will keep you alive. That "parachute" is Jesus Christ. Despite any pain we go through, we cling all the tighter to Jesus despite whatever pain we are going through." (Illustration Source: Ray Comfort)

- c) Let me repeat what Peter said: “For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? (1 Peter 4:17 NIV)
- i) Again God is perfect. If He is perfect, He is perfect in judgment. That judgment will be far more “just” than anything and everything we can do to that person.
  - ii) I personally take comfort in the fact there is a hell. Let’s face it, we see people get away with things. We see injustice happen in our world. In our lifetime, horrible things happen to people, and for all intents and purposes, they get away with it. If there wasn’t a God, life would not be fair. Knowing the fact there is a judgment day coming for unbelievers helps me to sleep at night.
  - iii) What Peter is saying, and what Paul is saying here in 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians is that there is a God and He and He alone will punish those who hurt us.
    - a) If we are “in” God, as stated in Verse 1 of this letter, then God is in charge of our lives. We are dependant upon the most powerful force in existence to not only take care of us, but “take care” of those who hurt us. That is a frightening thought to think of!
  - iv) Before I wrap up, this section, I want to talk a little about passiveness.
    - a) This verse says that we are to let God deal with punishment.
    - b) That does not mean that we are to let all criminals go free. Criminals need to be punished for society’s sake. Prisons are there so those same people will not harm others. Prisons are there so people who think about committing crimes can see prison and have motivation to avoid crime.
    - c) This verse does not mean we are to let people just beat us up. This ties back to my introductory comments about “turning the other cheek”. That expression means to not retaliate, but at the same time, let others be aware of what sin they have committed.
    - d) This verse is about not taking “matters into your own hands”. It is acceptable as a society to punish criminals, but not to go outside the law.
  - v) I’ll end with King David’s comments about wicked people “getting away with it”:
    - a) For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. (Verses 4-15 go on to give examples of their wickedness)... When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. (Psalm 73:3, 16-17, NIV)
    - b) David, who wrote Psalm 73, was bothered by the fact that wicked people were getting away with sin. Then once he realized that God was going to judge them and their judgment was eternal, it gave David peace.
10. Verse 7, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sentence: This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.
- a) The Thessalonians were thinking, “Hey, were the ones going through all of this suffering. Just when exactly does our suffering end and God avenges those who are hurting us?”
  - b) Paul answers that question with this sentence in Verse 7.
    - i) There is coming a day when Jesus is coming back. There is coming a day when he will judge the people living on earth as well as those who have died.
  - c) You might say, “What about the poor Thessalonians? Those who hurt them and hunted them down are long dead. Why didn’t Jesus come back for them?”
    - i) The answer is He will and He did.
    - ii) Remember that God created everything. That means he created time. God lives outside of time. God is not a “thing” with lots of time on His hands. God is outside of time as we know it.
    - iii) Further, souls live forever. They either live in the presence of God or banished from the presence of God.

- iv) Let me give you a modern illustration: A blank computer disk it weighs a few ounces. If you put software or music on that disk, what does it weight now? The answer is the exact same. Software on a computer disk has no weight. The real “you” is like software. Your body is like that disk. When we die our “software” is transferred to a new body. It never dies.
  - v) Therefore, the Thessalonians and those who persecuted the Thessalonians are very much alive. From our “stuck in time” perspective, each of them is being judged. The believers are being judged on how they lived on earth and are rewarded in heaven accordingly. Nonbelievers are judged by being sent to hell for eternity.
  - d) Now let’s get back to the verse. This verse states that a specific event will happen when Jesus does come back to earth.
    - i) Paul expected that verse to happen in his lifetime, almost 2,000 years ago.
    - ii) I expect that event to happen in my lifetime. One day, this will literally happen.
    - iii) All Christians need to live with the expectation that Jesus can come back at any moment. In other words, we don’t necessary have 30 or 100 more years of lifetime for Jesus. It can end at any moment. We can die at anytime or Jesus can come back at anytime. That should keep us motivated to life for God and not ourselves.
  - e) The last part of the sentence says, “from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.
    - i) Whenever this event happens, it will be a spectacle. Jesus does not come back secretly and take up residence in some suburban community somewhere. ☺
      - a) “Look, he (Jesus) is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.” (Revelation 1:7 NIV)
      - b) Think about that before satellite TV, this verse could not literally be true!
11. Verse 8: He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. <sup>9</sup> They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power (the sentence continues in Verse 10).
- a) Now we get to two verses that describe eternal punishment for nonbelievers.
  - b) If you go through the 4 gospels, you will discover Jesus spends a lot more time discussing hell than he does heaven. Jesus uses hell as a motivation to repent and believe the Gospel.
  - c) The bible says a lot more about what hell will be like than heaven. Here’s a sample:
    - i) “And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever...If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” (Revelation 20:10, 15 NIV)
    - ii) In Revelation 20, Hell is described as a lake of fire. Yet three times in Matthew, Jesus describes hell as “outer darkness. Here is an example:
      - a) “But the subjects of the kingdom (referring to Israelites who do not believe the Gospel) will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 8:12 NIV)
  - d) The New Testament also teaches about the idea of “greater condemnation”. For example, when Jesus was scolding the Pharisees, He made this statement:
    - i) “They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely.” (Luke 20:47 NIV)
    - ii) My point is if some people will be “punished more severely”, that gives the idea that some people will suffer more in the next life than others. It is not all equal.
  - e) OK, so what is hell like? (I’d rather try to describe it than to visit there. ☺) Is it outer darkness as described in Matthew? Is it a burning pit like it is described in Revelation 20? How are some people punished more severely than others?

- i) The answer involves remembering a bible rule: “When the plain text makes perfect sense, seek no other sense.” The corollary rule is “If the plain text does not make perfect sense, seek some other sense”. In this case, we have a few passages that when put together, appear to be contradictions.
- ii) The solution is to understand that the bible often works in “word-pictures”.
- iii) For example, Psalm 91:4 describes how we should take refuge under God’s wings. God does not have feathers! It is a word picture of how God protects us. In that case it is not meant to be taken literally.
- iv) As to these descriptions of hell, let me quote Dr. Norman Geisler: “Both “fire” and “darkness” are powerful figures of speech which appropriately describe the unthinkable reality of hell. It is like fire because it is a place of destruction and torment. Yet, it is like outer darkness because people are lost there forever...Its horrible reality, wherein body and soul will suffer forever, goes far beyond any mere figure of speech that may be used to describe it.”
- v) As I stated, Jesus also said some will be punished more severely than others. I believe that simply means some will be in more physical torment than others.
- f) Last, let’s talk about this verse from the perspective of the Thessalonians:
  - i) Here they were suffering at the hands of local residents who didn’t want them to practice Christianity. Paul is saying in effect, “You think you’re suffering? What until you see what happens to these guys!”
  - ii) What that thought should do is not to turn up our nose at others and say, “You’ll get yours!” This should be a reminder to have compassion on those harming us. The eternal punishment is far greater than anything we receive in this lifetime.
  - iii) We all have loved ones who we know are not saved. They won’t “listen to us” so we pray for them. The tricky part is to take that to the next step. Pray for those who cut you off in traffic! ☺ Pray for those who do harm for you!
    - a) Jesus said, “But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you”. Luke 6:27 NIV)

12. Verse 10: on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.
- a) In the same sentence, Paul goes from “negative” to “positive”. We are now back to Jesus’ Second Coming. Because Verse 9 and Verse 10 are one sentence, they are shown as a contrast to what happens to believers versus what happens to nonbelievers.
  - b) Verse 10 says that on the day He comes, “He will be glorified in his holy people”.
    - i) Let me tie this thought to a paraphrase translation of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13:12: “Now we see things imperfectly as in a poor mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God knows me now.” (NLT)
    - ii) Both 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 1:10 and 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13:12 speak (or hint) of the fact that we are not “perfected” as of yet. God is still working on us and trying to make us better people. Yet when we see Jesus, be it on the day we “die” or at the time of Jesus’ Second Coming, we become “completed” as Christians.
    - iii) So how do we become “perfected”? Once we become saved, we become a “construction project” for God. God works on us to mature us. We’re “done” when Jesus comes back or at our death. In heaven we become “sinless”. If God calls us home, that means He is now “finished” with how He wants us to be and how He wants to use us on earth. Remember we work for Him and not vice-versa. It is “God’s problem” as to what He wants to do with us. Our responsibility is to strive to please God and use whatever gifts God has given us for His glory!

- iv) Does this mean we should kill ourselves to speed up the process? ☺ No! God does want to mature you and we work at His pace, and not ours! Further, God wants you to be a witness to others.
  - c) The last thing I want to talk about in this verse is the word “marvel”. At the time of Jesus’ Second Coming we will “marvel”.
    - i) I believe a part of that is we will be like Jesus. We will have our new resurrected bodies. Further, we will no longer have the “sin problem” to deal with.
    - ii) I believe we marvel in that once we see our new beings, we will be all the more grateful for the price Jesus paid for our sins.
13. Verse 11: With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith.
- a) The first thing I want you to notice is that when Paul prayed for the Thessalonians, he did not simply say, “Oh, and God bless the Thessalonians, Amen!” ☺
  - b) God wants us to be specific in our prayers. It does not mean we have to get “lengthy”, just more specific. That way God can get the glory when those prayers get answered.
  - c) The actual prayer itself ties to what we were discussing in Verse 11: The idea of maturity as a believer. If you want a good prayer for how God can mature you as a believer, look no further than Verses 11 and 12 of this chapter!
  - d) Notice that it is God’s power (as opposed to our power!) that does the work in us. Verse 11 states that it is through the power of God that “every good purpose” of ours is fulfilled. This is a personal motivation for prayer. It is ok to pray for yourself. A good prayer is to pray for God’s power to do whatever work God has called us to do!
  - e) Let’s get into some practical examples:
    - i) Suppose there is some church project in which you are involved. Pray for God’s guidance, pray for God to increase your faith so that you can accomplish whatever task is at hand. Remember the “results” are up to God and not you. God just wants to do the work, and let Him worry about the results!
    - ii) Let’s suppose you have an idea for a new ministry. You pray for God’s power to provide the resources and means to accomplish this task. Remember that God may turn around and tell you, “I’ve already given you those resources and means. Why are you asking me for more when you haven’t used what I’ve give you?” You then step and faith and start doing the footwork to get it going.
    - iii) One of the most difficult things to discern is “when and if to stop versus keep going”. Sometimes “resistance” is spiritual forces, and one must also consider the possibility that if you’re not “bearing fruit”, i.e., getting results, that it may not be God’s will to continue that plan. I usually find time is the answer. If a particular ministry over time is no longer getting good results for God, it may be time to do something else. This is also where prayer is essential. God may call you to keep going and be patience, or God may call you to move elsewhere.
14. Verse 12: We pray this 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.
- a) Verse 11 is the prayer itself. Verse 12 is the reason for the prayer of Verse 12.
  - b) The reason for the prayer is so Jesus may be glorified in the Thessalonians.
  - c) There is an old Christian saying that “people are both the pawns and the prizes”.
    - i) We are the “pawns” in that God uses those who follow Him for His purposes.
    - ii) We are the “prizes” in that God calls people to spend eternity with Him in heaven.

- iii) This verse emphasizes both the “pawn” and “prize” aspect. Paul is saying he is praying for the Thessalonians so that they can grow in maturity. This way they can be better used by God for His purposes. In a sense, God wants to make us “better pawns”. To do that, we have to trust Him more and more in our day-to-day life. That is how we are being “glorified”. By being “better pawns”, we become “better prizes”.
  - d) I am convinced that when we get to heaven, some people are going to enjoy it more than others. This is just my personal theory, but I suspect that our level of maturity in heaven is reflective of our level of trust in God here on earth. I believe God makes an exception for children, but for those God has called to a specific purpose, our rewards are based on our faithfulness and our trust in Him. The more we trust in God’s grace, the more we grow and the more we appreciate God’s grace. We will spend eternity thanking God for that grace.
15. In the meantime, until God calls us home, let us keep our suffering in this eternal perspective. Let us focus on what God calls us to do, despite whatever circumstances we live in. May we remember that we live by God’s grace, and that God’s grace is constantly working in us to mature us and make us more in conformity with Jesus. That is our prayer. That is my ending prayer for this lesson. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.