

Day 63, 2 Thessalonians 1

by David Servant

God's righteous judgment is evident in the persecution of believers, and we must take holiness seriously to avoid eternal destruction.

Scripture: Hebrews 10:26

Topics: "Eternal Judgment", "Repentance"

Description

David Servant preaches on Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, emphasizing the importance of enduring persecution as a sign of God's righteous judgment and the need for repentance and obedience to the gospel. He warns against the misconception that one can continue sinning after accepting Jesus and highlights the eternal consequences of unrepentant wickedness. Paul's mention of 'eternal destruction' challenges the idea of Universalism and points to the seriousness of God's judgment. The sermon also delves into the belief in Jesus' two returns, first for the rapture and then to pour out His wrath, aligning with biblical prophecies.

Transcript

It is assumed that Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians was also written when he was settled in Corinth for 18 months. Paul elaborates on some of the same issues as he did in his first letter, so this second letter may well have followed the first by just a few months.

Persecution had not abated in Thessalonica (1:4). Interestingly, Paul wrote that the "persecutions and afflictions" the believers were enduring were "a plain indication of God's righteous judgment" (1:5). He was not saying that the persecution itself was a manifestation of God's righteous judgment. Rather, the current persecution against God's people vindicated His righteous and ultimate plan to punish persecutors and reward the persecuted. Such a plan is "only just" according to Paul (1:6), and those who scoff at the idea of future punishment and reward need to think again. A God who delays judgment upon sinners and pardons those who repent is merciful. A God who does not, however, ultimately punish unrepentant evildoers or reward the righteous is unjust. To claim that there is no such thing as ultimate future punishment and reward is to accuse God of injustice.

In light of these simple truths, it is astounding that so many professing Christians think that they can continue sinning with impunity once they have prayed a prayer to accept Jesus, and that holiness is unimportant since they are allegedly "covered in the blood of Jesus." The New Testament solemnly warns against such "conversions":

For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries (Heb. 10:26-27).

In this same regard, notice that Paul wrote that the gospel was not just something to believe, but something to obey (1:8). It is the gospel of "our Lord Jesus" (1:8), and we must not overlook that word, Lord. The gospel calls everyone to turn from sin and bow their knee to the King of kings and Lord of lords.

It is those who patiently endure their persecutions who prove themselves "worthy of the kingdom of God" (1:5). If our faith does not cost us something, it is worthless.

The idea that everyone ultimately will be saved, even those who are cast into hell (known as Universalism), is debunked by Paul's warning in 1:9: "And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power." The destruction of the wicked is eternal. Incidentally, Paul's words, "eternal destruction," have been interpreted in at least two ways. Some see a never-ending cycle of destruction and reconstruction that will be suffered by the unrepentant in hell. Others, who consider eternal conscious punishment to be unjust, see a one-time annihilation of the wicked--with no hope of resurrection. Thus, it is a destruction that is eternal. Personally, I would prefer to believe that second interpretation of the phrase "eternal destruction," but there are some scriptures that stand in my way.

Did Paul believe that Jesus would return twice, first to rapture His church, and then, seven years later, return once again to pour out His wrath on the world? If the answer to that question has not been clear before, it is today. Paul wrote that Jesus would "give relief" to the afflicted Thessalonian believers when He would be "revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God" (1:7-8). This, of course, harmonizes perfectly with what Jesus taught in His Olivet Discourse. Jesus will rapture His surviving remnant when He returns to pour out His wrath on "the day of the Lord" (see Matt. 24:29-31). This means that there will be a generation of believers who will face the persecution of the antichrist, as foretold by the prophets Daniel (see Dan. 7:21-25) and John (see Rev. 13:7).

Still not convinced? Wait until tomorrow's reading!

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