

Glorifying God in Tribulation

by John F. Walvoord

John F. Walvoord emphasizes the importance of glorifying God through faith and love amidst tribulation in his sermon on 2 Thessalonians.

Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 1:6

Topics: "Persecution", "Glory Of God"

Description

John F. Walvoord preaches on 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12, addressing the occasion of the epistle which was to correct the Thessalonians' misunderstanding about the Day of the Lord and the persecutions they were facing. The salutation emphasizes the believers' position in Christ regardless of their earthly circumstances. Paul expresses gratitude for the Thessalonians' growing faith and abounding love for one another, setting them as an example for other churches. He highlights the coming judgment of God on the wicked and the glory that awaits believers when Christ returns. Paul's prayer for them is that they may live worthy of their calling and bring glory to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Transcript

2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

Occasion of the Epistle

The Second Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians followed the first epistle by a relatively short time of a few months. Its occasion was the receipt of the news that the Thessalonians had received a spurious letter, apparently an intentional forgery, teaching them that they were already in the Day of the Lord and its awful judgments. The background of both the Thessalonian epistles indicates that the church was going through a terrible time of persecution. In the midst of these trials, they began to wonder whether they were in the Day of the Lord, a period described at great length in the Old Testament and concerning which Paul had taught them in 1 Thessalonians. The beginning of this period of tremendous trouble and conflict in the world is identified with the great judgments which are poured out on the world before the second coming of Christ. The Thessalonians, on the basis of the forged letter, wondered whether they were in this time of trouble, in contradiction to Paul's teaching that the church would be translated before the Day of the Lord began (1 Thess. 5). Paul is, accordingly, writing this letter to straighten out their misunderstanding. Paul's answer, in a word, is that this predicted time of trouble which begins the Day of the Lord was still future. The persecutions they were undergoing were the normal persecutions that can be experienced by all Christians throughout the church age.

Salutation

The second epistle opens with a salutation practically word for word the same as the first epistle. Silas, called here Silvanus, and Timothy, called Timotheus, join Paul in this letter. These three had brought the gospel to the Thessalonians and so together they send their greetings. As in the first epistle, the church is declared to be "in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 1). Though their earthly circumstance was one of great trial and affliction, their position before God, like all other believers, was in Christ and in God the Father. It is a marvelous truth that we as Christians have the same position in Christ regardless of circumstances, whether affliction or joy be our portion. The fact that we are in Christ continues unchanged all through our life and will continue through eternity.

Apostolic Greeting

In verse 2 the apostolic greeting is repeated, "Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." In our English version most of the words in verse 2 are monosyllables. But what profound truth: "Grace unto you, and peace." It would be difficult to find two words more meaningful than "grace" and "peace." These words represent God's answer to the greatest need of the human heart. Grace, a relationship between God and man, is established and based upon the fact that Christ died for sinners, resulting in God's unmerited favor--God giving to man the opposite of what he deserves. Grace gives eternal life and blessing and promises for joy throughout eternity instead of judgment which man justly should have. Coupled with grace is peace. How the human heart longs for peace. There is, of course, so much involved in this word. All Christians have peace with God. The enmity or the wrath of God has been put aside for us and we are the objects of His favor. There is also the possibility for Christians to have the peace of God, the experience of peace. It is probable that this is what is meant in this passage of Scripture. He wanted them not only to have the realization that everything was right between them and the Lord, but that they might experience the peace of God in their trials and afflictions. Paul is reminding the Thessalonians that though they were in trouble and persecution they were, nevertheless, the recipients of God's wonderful grace and His satisfying peace.

Thanksgiving for Their Growing Faith

In verse 3 Paul bears testimony to them, as in the first epistle, that they had been faithful to God in all their troubles. "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet [fitting], because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity [love] of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth." Because of the tidings of their faithfulness in trial, he writes, "We are bound to thank God." The word for "bound" is the word for paying a debt. He is saying that he owes it to them to thank God always for them. Certainly thanksgiving is fitting. Sometimes Christians forget to thank God for things He has done for them.

Two things in particular are occasions for thanksgiving--their faith and their love. He writes, "because your faith groweth exceedingly" (v. 3). The Thessalonian Christians had come to know Christ as Savior only a few months before. It was true from that moment on that they believed in God and in Christ. But Paul is not talking about the fact of their faith. The reason for his thanksgiving is that their faith had grown.

How is it possible for one's faith to grow? Is not faith in Christ as Savior enough? It is enough for salvation, but there is still room for deeper experience. While a Christian will not question the deity of Christ and the sufficiency of His wonderful salvation provided through His death and resurrection, it is possible to learn by experience really to trust the Lord concerning all things. That is a process of spiritual education. As

Christians go through life, they learn to trust God. They find by experience that He is altogether trustworthy and that they can not only trust Him regarding eternity but can also trust Him about time. In other words, it is possible to grow in faith, and the area in which one trusts God increases.

It is a remarkable factor in personal experience that some Christians are perfectly willing to trust God about eternity, but the little problems of today and tomorrow seem too big to commit to the Lord. It is, of course, unreasonable and ridiculous to trust God about eternal things and not to trust Him about temporal things, but that is human nature. The Thessalonian Christians, however, were in a position where they had to trust God from day to day. They were in danger of their very lives. In this situation their faith grew, and that is what trial does for us. Tribulation works patience, patience experience, and experience hope (Rom. 5:3-4).

Thanksgiving for Abounding Love

Not only did their faith grow, but Paul writes, "the charity [love] of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth." It is one thing to trust the Lord; it is something else to have a true love for the brethren. Sometimes in our churches there is little evidence of heresy, but there is also little evidence of love for the brethren. The Scriptures bear witness that in the Thessalonian church the believers not only increased in faith, but they also had love one for another and love which abounded. In many ways this Thessalonian church was an ideal Christian assembly.

Their Example Before Other Churches

In verse 4 Paul continues, "So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God." He uses the Thessalonian church as an illustration. "We glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure." To faith and love he adds the virtue of patience. The word for "patience" is a very significant word in the Greek New Testament. The word used here is the word for "remaining under." Christians have burdens and cares and sometimes would like to get rid of them. It is possible to become impatient with a situation. The person who is patient "remains under" and he keeps carrying the load that is given him, and adjusts himself to the circumstances in which he is required to live. He regards his lot as something that God has given him. These Thessalonian Christians are described as having a testimony that grows, a love that increased and abounded, and a patience that continued. This certainly is a marvelous testimony.

Having presented to them their resources and blessings in Christ, Paul contrasts their situation to that of their persecutors in verse 5: "Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer." Here is a profound principle though it is not stated explicitly in this verse. For the Christian the present age is a day of suffering, a day of trial, a day of temptation, but in the future the glory will be ours. It is the pattern which Christ Himself went through, suffering first and the glory following.

The pattern for the world is just the opposite. The ideal for the world is eat, drink, and be merry now, for the suffering will follow. Judgment will come later. The Thessalonians were in trial now, but this was to them the evidence of their future glory. The very fact that they were in trial caused by their persecutors was the token or sign that their persecutors were going to be tried in the future.

The result for them was that they were going to be counted worthy of the kingdom of God for which they were suffering. The first part of verse 5 can be considered parenthetical: "the charity of every one of you

all toward each other aboundeth... that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God."

The Coming Judgment of God on the Wicked

In verses 6-9 the judgment upon the wicked is portrayed: "Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels [angels of might], in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."

This portion of Scripture is very clear that the destiny of the wicked is something horrible to contemplate. The judgment of the living unsaved will take place at the time Christ comes back. The character of that judgment is plainly portrayed. It will occur when Christ returns to earth with His holy angels. It is a judgment of "flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God ... who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." It is true that the Thessalonian believers were going through trials, but the prospect before them was one of glory, one of reward, and one of blessing. The prospect before their persecutors was one of terrible judgment from God, as is pictured here in Scripture. Once again the contrast is drawn between trial and trouble as it comes to the Christian, and the just judgment of God which will overtake the wicked who do not obey and believe the gospel.

The Coming of the Lord

The time for this judgment is revealed in verse 10: "When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired [or wondered at] in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day." In the Scriptures in general and in Thessalonians particularly a contrast is drawn between the coming of Christ for His church, which is pictured in 1 Thessalonians 4, and the coming of Christ to set up His millennial kingdom. At His coming for His church, according to 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, the dead in Christ will rise first and living Christians will be caught up to be with the Lord. It is revealed in John 14 that after the church is translated Christ will take her to heaven to be with the Father in the Father's house in the place which Christ has prepared. This is the glorious prospect for the Thessalonians as well as for us.

In the Thessalonian epistles the coming of the Lord to the earth to set up His kingdom is also revealed. This event is not the same as His coming for His church. The question arises in verse 10 as to which coming is being discussed. The best explanation seems to be that in this verse Christ is referring to the coming to establish His kingdom. When He comes to take His church home to glory, the earth is not judged. The church is taken out of the world very quickly--in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye--and is taken to heaven. Christ also goes back with the church to heaven. It is not His purpose to judge the wicked then.

When He comes back to establish His kingdom, however, the Scriptures make it quite clear that He will judge the world in perfect righteousness. This judgment is illustrated in Matthew 25, where He gathers the Gentiles before Him and separates the sheep from the goats, that is, separates the saved from the lost. This judgment has to do with the living people in the world at the time of His second coming. In Ezekiel 20 the fact is revealed that He will judge the Jews in a similar manner when He regathers them from all over the world and purges out the rebels from among them. In other words, when Christ comes back it will be a time of separation of the wheat from the tares. He will separate the saved from the lost.

The very fact that He is coming back in such power and glory will result in many marveling at the power and the glory of Christ. When He comes back He will be accompanied by the saints. The event will be such a tremendous spectacle that it will impel worship and admiration on the part of all who believe. This is described in verse 10: "When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired [wondered at] in all them that believe." This will be true not only of the church, which is with Christ as His bride, but it will be true of all others who might be comprehended in the term saints.

The Need for Prayer

In verse 11 an application of the truth is made to Paul's prayer life: "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." Future things are not made known to satisfy our curiosity, but with the purpose of presenting practical truth upon which we can base our lives. This is the point Paul makes here. He has reviewed their sufferings, and how God is able to take care of them. He has discussed how the wicked will be punished in due time. Then he makes a practical application. If this is our destiny, if there is glory ahead, if we are to be in the very presence of our glorious Savior, what an exhortation it constitutes to live for Christ right now! In verse 11 Paul is praying always for them that this may be fulfilled in their lives.

Paul must have had a very long prayer list and must have spent a great deal of time in prayer. The burden of his prayer was that God would count them worthy of this calling. He did not mean by this that they were worthy of salvation, because no one could be worthy of salvation. It is rather that, being believers in Christ with such a glorious destiny, they should have a life that was in keeping with this. They would in this sense be "worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power" (v. 11).

Glorifying the Name of the Lord

The result to be achieved is given in verse 12: "That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." In this portion of Scripture the ultimate goal of experience--whether it is testimony, or enduring tribulation as the Thessalonian Christians did--is that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ might be glorified in them. In other words, as they lived their lives, sometimes in real affliction and trial, they could nevertheless live them in such a way as to bring honor and glory to the Savior. As we face our lives, in different walks of life, in different opportunities for service, is it true of us, as it was of these Thessalonian believers so long ago, that our lives are the means of bringing glory to the Savior? Are we really manifesting Christ as His trophies of grace, that we belong to Him and that He belongs to us?

It is possible for a Christian to live in such a way as to bring glory to Christ. But what does it mean to bring glory to Christ? This is an expression often used but perhaps not always analyzed or understood as it should be. The Scriptures state: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge" (Ps. 19:1-2). What does it mean when it is said that the heavens declare the glory of God? The heavens declare that God is perfect. The heavens manifest His wisdom, His power, and His purpose in designing all creation for an intelligent end. The heavens are manifesting the glory of God in the sense that they reveal what God is and what He can do. But the heavens are not designed to reveal the love of God, the grace of God, nor the righteousness of God. That is where Christians come into the picture. We are designed to show "the

exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ" (Eph. 2:7).

If we are going to manifest the glory of God, we must become an illustration of what the power of God and the grace of God can do. Therefore, as we yield our lives to the Lord and seek to serve Him, we are able to glorify God. In other words, our daily life and testimony can be an example of what the grace of God can do for us. The result is that "the name of our Lord Jesus Christ is glorified" in us. An additional thought is given, however, that Christians are also glorified "in Christ." This is more than simply the matter of our glorifying God. It is revealed not only that Christ can be glorified in us but that we can be glorified in Him. Just what does this mean? It is stated that we are in Christ, that we have this wonderful position which has been given to us because we have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ. When Christ is glorified we are glorified in Him. This is His contribution to us and will be fulfilled particularly when He presents us in glory as the passage in closing indicates. However, it is all "according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

The Challenge of This Chapter

In this first chapter some of the practical things that undergirded the Thessalonian church have been considered. Paul's thanksgiving for their faith in the midst of persecution is declared. In contrast to their trouble, the coming judgment of the wicked is revealed. The chapter closes with their need for prayer. The Apostle Paul prays for them that in their trial and affliction they might truly manifest the glory of God in faithfulness and testimony.

What was true for the church at Thessalonica is certainly the standard for us today as well. God challenges our hearts as we face these Scriptures in this modern generation that regardless of our circumstances or difficulties we may live a life that is faithful, a life that is well pleasing in the sight of God, a life that brings honor and glory to His name.

Questions

1. What was the occasion of writing 2 Thessalonians?
2. Why does Paul include Silas and Timothy in his salutation?
3. What does Paul mean by grace and peace?
4. Why is Paul thankful for the Thessalonians?
5. What can be said of the example of the Thessalonian Christians?
6. What does Paul reveal about the coming judgment of God on the wicked and when will it occur?
7. What is the content of Paul's prayer for them?

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-f-walvoord/glorifying-god-in-tribulation/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net