

## 2 Thessalonians 1:1-5 – “Strength in Suffering”

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### Introduction:

Paul wrote this second letter to the Thessalonians soon after he wrote the first letter. It was probably only a few months that had passed between these two writings. We know that Paul, Silas (or Silvanus, the Greek form of Silas) and Timothy were together in Corinth for a time, and since they’re all listed in the intro, it would give evidence that Paul wrote this closely after the first letter.

Paul’s first letter was written to follow up with the new believers who he had to leave abruptly. He was there with them at least 3 weeks on his second missionary journey before he was driven out by persecutors. But a church was formed and Paul wanting to know how they were doing sent Timothy to them to check in. Timothy came back with a great report. They were growing in their faith and continuing to serve Jesus. But they had questions centering around the coming of the Lord. They were concerned that those who died may miss out when He comes again. So Paul wrote to encourage them and clear some things up regarding the return of the Lord.

Now it seems that word has come once again of further questions these believers in Thessalonica had regarding the end times. It’s not so much centering around the *Return of the Lord*, but on the *Day of the Lord*. Paul wrote about that in 1 Thessalonians 5 but it seems it brought some concern to this church that they were perhaps living in the day of the Lord presently because of the persecution they were experiencing. Furthermore, it appears that false teachers were coming in to discount what Paul said and claim that the Lord had already come and they were now living out the day of the Lord – a period of judgment and tribulation (see 2:1-2).

So Paul writes back to this church to once again bring clarity on these events and refute these false claims.

The fact they thought they missed the return of the Lord also caused some to take an attitude of laziness. They stopped working and began shirking various responsibilities wondering what the point of it all was anyways.

Paul writes to say, don’t give up. Jesus is coming again, and He’s at work today, so keep going strong in the Lord and for the Lord. We have a blessed hope and we can stand fast in this future hope.

Again, 1 Thessalonians is about the Return of the Lord for believers.

2 Thessalonians is about the Day of the Lord and the repercussions for unbelievers.

## 2 Thessalonians Outline:

1. Anticipation for the Day of the Lord – 1
2. Description of the Day of the Lord – 2
3. Exhortations in light of the Day of the Lord – 3

## Summary Statement:

In this passage Paul commends the Thessalonian church for their steadfast faith and endurance in the face of persecution. He encourages them by affirming that their suffering is not in vain but serves a purpose in God's kingdom.

## 1. Our Position in Christ – 1:1-2

### **1:1 - *Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:***

It's amazing that this church was born under such adversity and trial. Paul came into this city and had just 3 weeks of teaching (that we know of) before people rose up to try and quash this message. Remember as they stood before the rulers of the city to accuse these missionaries and evangelists, their persecutors said: "*These who have turned the world upside down have come here also*" (Acts 17:6).

- It's not that Paul and his team were turning things upside down, but rather right side up. They were showing how things were really to be in God's economy and kingdom.
- And sometimes that kind of overturning is going to come through trials and adversity. In fact, we read in **Acts 14:22b**, "*we must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.*"
- There are times we're going to go through some shaking, but often times that's what needs to happen to get the world, or people's lives, turned right side up. But don't lost heart. God is at work! A church in Thessalonica is proof of that.

And it's not just the church ***of the Thessalonians***, it's more so the church ***in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ***. We're His! We're called to come together to serve and worship Him and encourage one another. The church is

the called out one's, an assembly = **ekklesia**. It is a group, as the word means, called out from their homes into a public space to gather. Church is not to be some religious rite we do to make ourselves feel good. Church is about gathering together in Jesus and making Him known. So, yes, church is not a building. But staying in your home and doing church is not constituting what church is to be as well. So come and gather.

## 2:2 - **Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Here's Paul's well known greeting that he often gave. **Grace** and **peace**! And he always put them in that order because you are not going to experience the peace of God until you understand His grace. Grace is the word *charis*, where the word charity comes from. What do you think of when you think of charity? Something given to you freely. It's a gift. And God in His grace gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have everlasting life. He didn't do this for the righteous, or the holy, or the good, He did this for all. He provided what you needed for salvation. He gives it to you not because you deserved it, but because of His grace. So when you truly begin to understand salvation is by grace, you stop fearing and wondering if you've done enough to earn it.

- When you know it has nothing to do with your performance, but all about His provision, you will have peace!

And this is not just peace from God. It is certainly that because He's the God of peace and true peace is going to be found in Him. But because of the salvation given to us, where we have been forgiven and reconciled by His grace, we now have peace **with** God (Romans 5:1).

If you are lacking peace today or doubting that God can really save a messed up person like you, then you need to come and know His grace. He loves you and has given this salvation to you freely.

- **Romans 3:24**, "being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,"

Grace and peace were the common greetings of this day. Grace [*charis*] the common Greek greeting and Peace [*shalom*] the common Hebrew greeting.

- Grace was said to imply God's blessing and goodness upon you in everything according to His will. Peace was to imply God's comfort and blessing on you in every circumstance you may find yourself in.

And the source is **from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**. This is the only place you will find it. But notice, God and Jesus are listed as co-sources of these blessings, meaning there is equality between the Son and the Father.

## 2. Our Progress in Christ – 1:3

**1:3 - We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other,**

This word **bound** implied a debt. This was something Paul saw as being owed to God. We saw in the previous verse the great things we have received from God, but do you ever consider yourself indebted to God? We should. This isn't in some harsh, pain-staking way, but rather as a joy that we get to give our lives to the One who has done it all for us.

And again, Paul's not necessarily thanking the people, he's thanking God for them. This means that whether they were a joy or a pain, Paul could thank God because God was at work. He brought them into his life and He can take them out again. But in the meantime, the best thing he could do was thank God for them because they must be there for a reason.

- Paul said in **1 Thessalonians 5:18**, “*in everything give thanks...*”
- That's how we're to be, not just with the circumstances in life, but with the people around us in life. We may have people in our lives that bug us or rub us the wrong way but thank God for them. They probably won't be bothering you as much if you're thanking God for them.

Paul did however have much reason to be genuinely thankful for this church. They were growing in their faith! It was growing **exceedingly**...

- How about you? Are you growing in your faith? We should be. Our life in Christ is referred often in the Word to a walk, run, or race. That all speaks of progression. Moving forward. Everything we go through is a chance to grow through. Even persecution and suffering. That's what this church was enduring.
- But praise God He's called us together to be a community. And it's here in the community and support of the church that we can endure the hardships and difficulties in strength of numbers rather than in isolation.

One of Satan's devices in attacking Christians is removing them from the body. If he can get you to withdraw and isolate, you become an easy target to pick off. Stay close in community with the body of Christ. This aids us in truly abiding in Christ.

And notice, their love **abounds toward each other**. They had a genuine love for each other. It was bursting out. Living in a place where people were on the prowl to take them out, it was good to have people around you where you were on the same team. It's great to be with like-minded people. But even if they're not like minded, we are to exercise love to each other.

- Love is the Greek word *agape*. This is that unconditional, sacrificial love. It's a love that doesn't expect anything in return. It's the love Jesus demonstrated toward us and the love He told us to model in our lives.
- **John 13:34–35**, "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*"
- Dolly Madison, wife of the fourth president of the United States, was one of the most popular women in American history. Wherever she went, she charmed and captivated everyone obscure and well-known, rich and poor, men and women alike. She was once asked to explain the secret of her power over others. Surprised by the question Mrs. Madison exclaimed, "Power over people? I have none. I desire none. I merely love everyone." And those who love are richly rewarded by love returned.

### 3. Our Proof of Christ – 1:4-5

**1:4 - *so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure,***

This church was going through some hard times – **persecutions and tribulations**. We often forget that's in the small print when we sign up to follow Jesus. It's not really actually in the small print because Jesus doesn't hide this from anyone. He calls those who want to follow Him to die to self. And when you die to self, those trials don't knock you out, you're already out (to self at least). And your life is being lived to the glory of God.

You see, sometimes the Lord allows things in your life not just to do a work in you, but to let your life do a work in others. And here's Paul bragging about these new believers to other churches to say, look at how they're continuing on with

patience and faith despite undergoing persecution. Do you think that would have been both encouraging and convicting to these other churches? Absolutely!

- Will you allow God to disrupt your life if it means he can help and strengthen others through it?

**1:5 - *which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer;*** Paul shows this church now that the persecution that they are going through is actually proving ***the righteous judgment of God.***

How so?

Typically we'd think of the persecution of believers as evidence of unrighteousness rather than righteousness. But this is not the case here. God is going to be shown as just and righteous *through* their suffering and trials. I think it's good to link this first part of verse 5 back with verse 4, where Paul has been boasting that they are standing firm in all their persecutions. It's God who is strengthening and enabling them to endure through suffering. This goes beyond human capacity and proves the power of God in their lives.

Not only does it prove the power of God, but their endurance through suffering proves the genuineness of their faith. And because of that, they will be ***counted worthy of the kingdom of God.***

- It's not that their suffering *made* them worthy, but rather their suffering caused them to be *counted* worthy.

God is preparing us and perfecting us for His kingdom through the trials and sufferings we may endure.

**Acts 14:22, "strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God. ""**

We don't always see at the time how God is at work in our trials. But understand that God has a purpose for it all.

- Take as an illustration the original Karate Kid. Daniel Larusso was being trained by Mr. Miyagi so he could defend himself and take out the bullies. He was being persecuted and thought Mr. Miyagi is going to be the answer. So young Daniel begins his training, and he's told to paint the fence. Then he's told to wax the car. All along, Daniel is getting annoyed thinking this is just more suffering. Things aren't getting better.

Until Mr. Miyagi shows him that the work and suffering Daniel was enduring was actually training him for what was to come. There was a purpose for it all.

So God's righteous judgment is at work in believers through suffering in providing for them the strength to endure, but also in preparing them for the kingdom to come.

- **2 Timothy 2:12, "If we endure, We shall also reign with Him..."**

But that righteous judgment of God will also be seen toward unbelievers in a future day. We'll get into that next time.

#### Points to Ponder:

1. Has hardship driven me closer to the Lord and to church or has it taken me deeper in isolation? God wants you experiencing the blessing of community.
2. Is my faith growing or wilting? God wants you to be nourished in Him to where your faith is growing exceedingly.
3. Do I see suffering as an interruption or an invitation? God wants to draw you closer to Him and find strength in Him through seasons of suffering.