

IS HELL REAL?

Leader pages on pp. 152-155

THE POINT:
ETERNAL PUNISHMENT
AWAITS THOSE WHO DO
NOT FOLLOW CHRIST.

2 THESSALONIANS 1:3-12

³ We ought to thank God always for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, since your faith is flourishing and the love each one of you has for one another is increasing.

⁴ Therefore, we ourselves boast about you among God's churches —about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and afflictions that you are enduring.

MEMORY VERSE

⁵ **It is clear evidence of God's righteous judgment that you will be counted worthy of God's kingdom, for which you also are suffering,**

⁶ since it is just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you

^{7a} and to give relief to you who are afflicted, along with us.

.....
^{7b} This will take place at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with his powerful angels,

⁸ when he takes vengeance with flaming fire on those who don't know God and on those who don't obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

⁹ They will pay the penalty of eternal destruction from the Lord's presence and from his glorious strength

¹⁰ on that day when he comes to be glorified by his saints and to be marveled at by all those who have believed, because our testimony among you was believed.

.....
¹¹ In view of this, we always pray for you that our God will make you worthy of his calling, and by his power fulfill your every desire to do good and your work produced by faith,

¹² so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified by you, and you by him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

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KEYWORDS

Powerful angels (v. 7b)—Angels are often presented as participating in executing God's awesome judgments and thus are described as powerful (Matt. 25:31; Mark 8:38).

Those who don't obey the gospel (v. 8)—This phrase is probably a reference to many Jews who had rejected the witness of the apostles to Jesus

as Messiah and Lord.

His saints (v. 10)—The word saints (hagios) literally means "holy ones" and refers to all believers in Jesus Christ.

In view of this (v. 11)—This probably refers to the whole preceding passage about the people's perseverance in persecution.

WHY SHOULD WE BE MINDFUL THAT HELL EXISTS?

Elon Musk is quite famous for a number of reasons. Besides being one of the richest people in the world, he is the founder and owner of Tesla, Space X, Neuralink, and the Boring Company.

On May 9, 2022, a man engaged Elon Musk on Twitter, and in his tweet he wrote, “As a genius, haven’t you found out that there is a great creator of this world yet? If you did, make sure you confess this before your last heartbeat. Bless u.”

Musk replied, “Thank you for the blessing, but I’m OK with going to hell, if that is indeed my destination, since the vast majority of all humans ever born will be there.”¹³

Wow, what a statement!

While the topic of hell is an uncomfortable subject for many people, it is a reality. Musk obviously did not realize the implications of his comment. This is such an important topic, because hell is real, and we can let people know they don’t have to go there.

Repay Affliction //

2 Thessalonians 1:3-7a

Is hell real? That is a question many people have a difficult time answering. Maybe the main reason

for the difficulty is that people really don’t want to believe such a place exists. Right along with that is the sense that hell is such a bad place that “good” people like themselves surely couldn’t be sent there. The Bible is quite clear that hell does exist, and God, in His revelation to keep from spending eternity there.

In this passage, Paul spoke of the persecution and afflictions that the believers in Thessalonica were enduring. When Paul wrote his second letter to the Thessalonians around AD 50-51, Claudius was the Roman emperor. As head of the Roman empire, he was integrally tied to the dominant animistic worship of the day. In fact, the Roman emperors were identified with the divinely endorsed state religion—with some emperors even being considered living gods. While they didn’t like the fact that competing religions existed in society, they still allowed them to exist unless they caused problems.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE THESSALONIANS ABOUT ENDURING TIMES OF PERSECUTION?

Before Paul’s writing of this letter, the Jews in Rome had put themselves in a position of being considered troublemakers—so much so that Claudius barred them from the city. Romans



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did not make a difference in those days between the Jews and Christians, so the Christians were also banned. They often had their property seized, were kicked out of their jobs, were rejected by their families, were heavily insulted, and in some cases they were even beaten and executed. Regardless of all of this, many Christians in the church were standing strong, and the apostle Paul commended the Thessalonian Christians for their perseverance in suffering, and their continued faith in the face of the persecution they were confronting. He commended them for their flourishing faith and increasing love for one another. He recognized the fact that their faith in Christ was obvious in their lives.

Their testimony of faithfulness was evidence that they “will be counted worthy of God’s kingdom.” The implication here is that they would go to heaven when they died, but that would not be the case for those who were persecuting them. Of those people he wrote, “It is just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you” God is a just God and the evil actions of those causing suffering would not go unpunished. While that punishment might not happen immediately, it would definitely happen. The implication of these words was that those persecutors would ultimately be judged and confined to hell.

To finish the thought on God’s justice, Paul noted that God’s justice would also prove correct those who were suffering persecution. He confirmed this by stressing that He will provide “relief to you who are afflicted.”

Vengeance Will Be with Fire //

2 Thessalonians 1:7b-10

Trying to understand issues related to eternity, whether we are talking about heaven or hell, is difficult because we’re referring to things we have not yet seen or experienced. In spite of this, that does not reduce their existence or reality. God has revealed things about eternity through Scripture that we cannot know based on our own human existence, and that revelation includes this passage in 2 Thessalonians.

In this sinful, evil world, we may be tempted to question where God is or why we have not seen His justice. Be confident, His judgment will come. A part of God’s justice will be the arrival of the Lord Jesus Himself, along with the angelic messengers that come with Him. At that time, Jesus will take “vengeance with flaming fire on those who don’t know God and on those who don’t obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.” God not only takes sin seriously, but He considers it a personal disrespect. He is the holy God over all creation, and any sin is an unholy insult to His holiness. As a result, it will be strictly judged. God’s judgment does not just come against those who outright reject Christ, but His judgment is against those who live in opposition to the teachings of the gospel.

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DIGGING DEEPER THE MARK OF SUFFERING

The Thessalonian Church is an excellent example of the cost and reward of being faithful followers of Jesus Christ. Paul speaks well of them not only for their faith, but their faith through persecution. Word had gotten back to Paul about these faithful brothers and sisters from others, and this news spread like wildfire throughout the churches. The Thessalonians were people who showed how persecution can deepen and strengthen our faith, so our faith becomes known to others. More importantly, the God we have faith in becomes known and the example of our lives draws others to Him. Because Christians are members of the body of Christ, everything we do, good or bad, affects the rest of the body. Even though we may feel as though we’re going through suffering alone, realize God is with us and can use our suffering for His glory and ours according to Romans 8:17.

What marks do suffering leave on followers of Christ?

Judgment comes to those, who “will pay the penalty of eternal destruction from the Lord’s presence and from his glorious strength.” For Christians, the belief in eternity is a glorious thing. Through Christ, we have eternal life. For the one who does not follow Christ, though, the concept of eternity is dark and miserable. Without Christ, they have a guaranteed and certain “eternal destruction”—that is, it continues forever. This judgment is not something that God gives out randomly, but it is something that the unbeliever has earned; it is the payment of a “penalty”—it is something earned.

This final judgment is to a place away from “the Lord’s presence and from his glorious strength.” Those paying the penalty for their sin will do so in an environment where the presence of God does not dwell. This makes hell more than a place where physical punishment takes place. The nature of separation from God is more than mere physical agony. Hell is a place without any light, love, grace, or hope. Without the presence of God, those things that come from God are also absent.

Other Scripture passages give us a brief look into the nature of hell. God has revealed other images in Scripture to help us not only understand the true reality of this eternal punishment, but also its nature.

- Death (Matt. 10:28; Rom. 6:23)
- Darkness (Matt. 22:13; 2 Pet. 2:4)
- Destruction (Matt. 7:13-14)
- Weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 24:51)
- The worm does not die (Mark 9:46-48)
- Unquenchable fire (Luke 16:23-24; Rev. 20:14-15)
- Punishment (Heb. 10:28-31)

Without a doubt, hell is real! And those who choose to live apart from Christ will face eternal destruction.

HOW DO THESE VERSES SUPPORT THE REALITY OF HELL?

Grace for the Godly //

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

Paul had been writing about the coming judgment and the eternal separation from God that would result for those who refused to turn to Him. In verse 11, he shifted gears to encourage the Thessalonian believers to think about their inner motivation. Paul prayed the Thessalonian believers would make the right decisions that would motivate them to live lives worthy of their calling. The Christian life is not achieved by doing good deeds; it is achieved through a relationship of trust in Christ. Even so, it is because of that dynamic relationship, we are motivated with a “desire to do good” and live “worthy of his calling.”



This attitude—this inner motivation—to “fulfill your every desire for goodness,” represents a heart that is pure. We are led to do good deeds based on an inner drive to serve God faithfully. It’s important to note that we do not carry out any work or ministry in our own strength. No matter how strong our desire is, we can only do it “by his power.” By His Holy Spirit, God works through us.

But Paul didn’t stop there. He also wanted them to express the “work produced by faith.” When we live in a close relationship to God, His Holy Spirit displays the power of God through our lives in a way that would reveal itself in holy living .

Look at Paul’s prayer taking into account what he had already said about the perseverance of the

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believers and the reality of eternal punishment that waits for those separate from Christ. Considering the grave and serious consequences of an eternity apart from Christ, when we live lives worthy of Christ and when we do good deeds that point to the One who saved us, we are offering a strong and positive witness to the joys of a life lived in Christ. Our witness in this way is an opportunity for others to discover the love and grace of Christ for themselves and, in turn, be delivered from the penalties of sin, death, and hell.

WHAT ARE SPECIFIC WAYS WE CAN REFLECT GOD'S GLORY IN OUR CULTURE?

Paul expressed the consequences when we live our lives this way: "the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you and you by him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." When a person is living a life that is truly devoted to Christ, God will be honored because all of the people looking at the good results of the believer's life will see the powerful transformation God has made in that person's life.

The glory of God is not the only thing that will result. Paul also prayed that believers will be viewed as friends and will be glorified in Him. Faithful believers will escape the sentence of hell because of their relationship to God. We will be transformed to be like Jesus!

DID YOU KNOW?

Conversations with people about eternity can be challenging when they don't believe the gospel. It can lead to arguments as we awake feelings in the hearts of Christians who rigidly believe in a god who is not compassion. God knew we'd face these encounters and encouraged us to always be prepared with an answer for our faith and hope (1 Pet. 3:15). This verse also instructs us on sharing the gospel with gentleness and respect. Talking about Christ was never meant to be an argument. Our goal is to help people understand that if they reject the good news of the gospel, they will spend an eternity separated from God. John 3:16-17 helps us to understand this. Verse 16 is focused on God's love for the world, and verse 17 reveals God sent Jesus to save the world. This truth shows that we have a compassionate God who is sacrificial because of His great love for people everywhere. God's plan was never for humankind to be in hell. It is reserved for Satan and his demons.

How can you defend God's truths with gentleness and respect?

LIVE IT

Why should we tell others about hell?

Hell is real and people will go there if they don't choose Jesus Christ. Before we help others to avoid hell, we first have to be honest with ourselves and where we stand with God. Do we know where we are going when we die? The truth about hell makes us accountable to God. Once we settle this truth in our hearts, we will be free to impact others with the truth. So where do you stand with God?

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- **Trust Jesus.** If you're not sure where you will spend eternity, you can settle that by faith in Christ. Trust Him to save you. You can receive help by looking at the inside front cover of this book.
- **Study God's Word.** Identify the passages in Scripture referring to hell, read them, and write a description of hell based on your findings. Thank God for delivering you from this place.
- **Tell others.** We're often hesitant about telling others about Jesus, but let the reality of hell serve as an inner motivation. When the opportunity comes, walk boldly into it with the power of Christ.

DAILY READINGS

1. FAITH AND OBEDIENCE // LUKE 12:5

Christ died to save us from our sins through our repentance and trust in Him for our lives. Hell is the reality when we do not believe and our relationship with God is unknown. When we allow God to govern our lives our fear is because of His authority. Jesus said in Luke 12:5, "But I will show you the One to fear: Fear Him who has authority to throw people into hell after death." Yes, I say to you, this is the One to fear! Our obedience to God draws away the fear of hell. But for those who don't believe and follow Christ, hell will be their destination. This should drive them to God to escape the judgment that is to come.

God is our hope for life; we should draw as close as we can to Him.

2. GOD IS JUST // 2 THESSALONIANS 1:9

God is a righteous God. Psalm 145:17 states the Lord is right in everything the does. He is faithful in everything He does. We've learned that Jesus is the only way to God and to show our love for God we should keep God's commands. As believers, by serving a righteous God, we learn He is loving, just, and fair. We are reminded of this in Deuteronomy 32:4. God loves us, and the greatest display of this love was of Him giving His only Son. We are asked to keep His commands and follow Him. The reward in doing so is eternal life. However, 2 Thessalonians 1:9 tells us He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

God's justice is pure just as He is pure.

3. OBEDIENCE OVER PERFECTION // 2 THESSALONIANS 1:8; 2

A common misconception when becoming a believer and follower of Christ is your life will be void of bad circumstances, issues, and trouble. God tells us in 2 Chronicles 7:13-14 "If . . . my people, who bear my name, humble themselves, pray and seek my face, and turn from their evil ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their

sin, and heal their land." We shall pray, repent, and change our wicked ways. First John 1:9 states that God is faithful and fair. If we confess our sins, He will forgive our sins. Jesus never expected perfection, He expected obedience. We will be punished by God if He does not know us, and we do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

Let us grab hold of the promises of God to save those who trust and follow His Son.

5. THE STORMS WILL PASS // 2 THESSALONIANS 1:5

Have you ever heard the saying, "When it rains it pours"? Most likely you are describing a chain of events that keep getting worse as the day continues. It may seem like nothing is going right in your life at that moment. We as Christians know that these challenges are temporary and may be a test sent from the Lord to test our faith. James 1:2 encourages us to consider it pure joy when we face trials of any kind. We know that no one is walking around cheering for the troubles we face. But we are called to keep our eyes on God and know that He is in control.

Second Thessalonians 1:5 reveals that our persecution is worthy of justice.

5. WHO ARE YOU LIVING FOR? // 2 THESSALONIANS 1:12

How important is your name? When the money runs out and the crowd that surrounded you have gone, all you have left is your name. If your parents were anything like mine, they would remind you not to leave the house and get involved in anything that will embarrass the family's name. You may drive a company car. Or have to wear a company uniform. Even when you play a sport, the name on the front of the jersey is more important than the name on the back. But this is only in the world's system. In God's system, your name is important and who you represent is equally as important. Paul says that Jesus will be honored by the way we live and our names will be written in God's book.

Once Jesus is honored, you will be honored alongside Him. How awesome is that!

I LOVE TO THINK OF
NATURE AS AN UNLIMITED
BROADCASTING SYSTEM,
THROUGH WHICH GOD SPEAKS
TO US EVERY HOUR, IF WE
WILL ONLY TUNE IN.

George Washington Carver

