

## 19. Helping Our Children Learn to Experience Comfort in Persecution

In our topic today, we want to learn how to help our physical and spiritual children learn to experience comfort in times of persecution. Persecution is something that has happened throughout the history of the church and continues to happen in many countries in the world today. We will learn about the persecution that the church at Thessalonica was suffering. Since Satan is in opposition to Christians everywhere, we need to prepare our children so that they will be prepared if or when persecution comes in their lives.

Like 1 Thessalonians, this second letter to the Christians in Thessalonica was written by Paul, Silas and Timothy. The Lord had used them to bring the Gospel to Thessalonica and establish the church in that city. Although persecution forced them to leave, they had a great concern for what was happening to the Christians in that city. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 says, “Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” These men wanted the Christians in Thessalonica to experience the grace and peace that comes from the Lord.

2 Thessalonians 1:3-4 says, “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, 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.” We see that Paul, Silas and Timothy were continually giving thanks to God for the spiritual growth and development of the new Christians in Thessalonica. In 1 Thessalonians 1:8, we see that people throughout Greece had heard about these Christians. That verse says, “For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.” As a result, these three men were continually giving thanks.

Here, we see that the faith and love of these Christians was continuing to grow. In fact, we read that their faith was growing exceedingly. In addition, the entire church showed a strong love for one another. Here, we see an ideal example of the way that the faith and love of new Christians will grow when they are really learning to walk in the Lord and be led by the Holy Spirit. Paul, Silas and Timothy had prayed that these very things would happen in the lives of the Thessalonians. In 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3, we read, “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father.” The Lord had answered their prayers. In fact, their patience and faith were growing in spite of the fact that they were experiencing tribulation and persecution.

As Paul heard about the growth of the Christians in Thessalonica, he also heard about the persecution that they were suffering. As a result, this letter was written to comfort and encourage them in that persecution. 2 Thessalonians 1:5-8 says, “*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; since *it is* a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to *give* you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His

mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The word that is translated “manifest evidence” means *proof or evidence*. Here, we see that their attitude toward suffering was proof of their patience and faith.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12, we read, “You *are* witnesses, and God *also*, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father *does* his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” These Christians had chosen to walk in a way that was pleasing to God because of their great concern for the kingdom of God. Here, we see an important lesson that we want to help our children understand. It is more important to seek the kingdom of God even when it means suffering than to desire an easy life here on this earth. God is using that suffering to help us grow and mature. At the same time, God saw the suffering of the Christians in Thessalonica for the kingdom of God and so they could be assured that God would be righteous and would judge those who were making them suffer.

In fact, we see that it is a righteous thing for God to repay with tribulation those who persecute Christians and make them suffer. Romans 12:19 says, “Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.” Then Galatians 6:7-8 adds, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.” God promised that He will judge those who persecute Christians and make them suffer. As a result, we can leave all judgment to Him.

Paul, Silas and Timothy also offered some words of encouragement to the Christians as they suffered. They told the Christians that were suffering to rest with them. The word that is translated “rest” means *to relax or rest as they waited for the coming of the Lord when they would have a permanent rest from all tribulation*. These three men had experienced much suffering for Christ. As a result, they had learned to experience that rest. After Paul and Silas had been beaten and put in stocks, Acts 16:25 says, “But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.” Paul and Silas were suffering but at the same time they were praying and singing hymns of praise to God.

We can also experience that rest, because we know that God will one day bring eternal judgment on those who reject the payment that Christ made for sin. Here, we see that those who reject Christ will experience that judgment when Christ comes to bring the final judgment. Revelation 20:15 says, “And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” Here, we see that all those who reject the salvation that Christ has provided will one day be cast into the lake of fire. Those who have persecuted other Christians will experience their own judgment.

2 Thessalonians 1:9-12 says, “These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed. Therefore we also 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, that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Here, we see that those who experience that judgment will find that their judgment is eternal. They will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord. Luke 3:17 says, “His winnowing fan *is* in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire.” Here, we see that the judgment of those who reject is eternal and they will burn with fire that cannot be put out.

In addition to the physical suffering that those who reject Christ will experience, we see that they will be excluded from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power. Matthew 25:30 says, “And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Here, we see that this eternal judgment will be in outer darkness. Not only will all unbelievers be excluded from the presence of the Lord but they will also be in total darkness. Firemen say that when you are inside a building that is fully on fire that the flames make everything else darkness and you cannot see anything. This means that every person who rejects the payment of salvation provided by Christ will suffer alone for all eternity.

In contrast, all those who have followed Christ and may be suffering for Him can look forward to His coming. Christ will come to be glorified with his saints. We will be able to look at Christ with wonder and admiration. This is the reward to which all those who have heard the Gospel and chosen to believe in Christ can look. In 1 Thessalonians 4:17-18, Paul had promised these Christians, “Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.” This is the confidence that we all have as Christians.

That is why Paul prayed in both verse five and verse eleven of 2 Thessalonians 1 that God would count the Thessalonians worthy of His calling. The word that is translated “worthy” means *to consider worthy or deserving* and has the thought that we will live our lives as Christians in a way that is pleasing to the Lord. As we live lives that are pleasing to God, because they are in agreement with His goodness, we cause the name of Christ to be glorified. In 1 Corinthians 10:31, we read, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” We want to show our physical and spiritual children how to live their lives in such a way that their lives will always bring glory to Christ. As we show our children how to live such lives by our example, we see that Christ will also be glorified in us. They will see our example and they will also grow in Christ so that their lives also bring glory to Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children to experience comfort in persecution and bring glory to Christ in their lives.