

LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for February 8: You can feel safe

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There is an apocryphal story about General Robert E. Lee that says one of the his subordinates had been publicly making a number of derogatory statements about Lee. Someone else asked Lee what he thought about that subordinate. Lee replied the man in question was a very capable leader and soldier.

The other man then asked, “But don’t you know what he has been saying about you?” General Lee replied, “Yes, but you asked to know my opinion of him, not his opinion of me.”

As we study the Scripture, we are challenged to probe within our hearts and minds, and identify what our attitude is toward God: What do we think about him? What are our deepest convictions concerning him? How does what we believe about God shape how we feel about our own lives and experiences?

Our study passage reminds us God’s dealings with mankind are built on a foundation of God’s perfect righteousness and justice. Because God is just, we can fully trust him to provide for our needs and keep us safe.

As the title of the book implies, 2 Thessalonians is the second letter written by the Apostle Paul to the Christians in the city of Thessalonica, which is contained in the New Testament. It is a brief letter, containing only 47 verses, but it is filled with assurance and encouragement for the struggling young Thessalonian congregation.

In his greeting, Paul told the Thessalonians his faithful co-workers Silas and Timothy stood by his side both physically and spiritually as he took pen in hand to write (v. 1). He commended his readers that their faith in God was increasing, as was their love for one another. The manner in which they were bearing up under persecution with spiritual strength, was causing them to become examples of faithfulness to other churches (vv. 3-4).

In verse 5, the apostle made an interesting statement: "All this is evidence that God's judgement is right ..." The phrase "all this" refers back to what Paul had stated about them in verses 3-4: Their faith in God was growing, their love for one another was increasing, they were growing inwardly stronger as they persevered through persecutions and other troubles, and they were serving as a positive example to other churches.

The fact that they were being continually provided for, that God was meeting all their needs, and he was causing good to come out of the bad in their lives, all was evidence that "God's judgement is right" and that "God is just" (v. 6). Their very lives testified to the fact that God was for them (Romans 8:31), and was taking care of them. We also can feel safe because God knows what he is doing, and what he does always is right and just.

Because God is just, he will not permit evil to triumph or go unpunished, nor faithfulness to be unrewarded. Verses 6-7 state "He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you, and give relief to you who are troubled ..." The ultimate revelation of God's justice, when all wrongs will be righted, will take place "when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels" (v. 7).

We might feel at least a twinge of dissatisfaction as we read those statements, because we might be experiencing hurtful situations in our lives we want resolved right now. We don't want to wait until Christ returns; we want closure. Sometimes that closure comes quickly, but other times we must continue to wait and trust God, believing he knows what is

best for all concerned, and always will do what is right and just.

Ronald Ward, in his commentary on 1 and 2 Thessalonians, expresses it this way: “The God who sustained them in the sufferings of faith would continue to sustain them up to and including the Day of Judgement. God upheld the right in Thessalonica; he would uphold it at the judgement”

Verse 5 speaks of our “being counted worthy of the kingdom of God,” but this in no way indicates that if we persevere and remain faithful to the end, we somehow earn the right to hear Christ’s words “Well done, good and faithful servant ...” The blessings—whether temporal or eternal—God gives to those who remain faithful under trial always are gifts of God’s grace. He does not, in any sense of the word, owe them to us.

Jesus once told a parable about the appropriate attitude of a servant of God. He stated that, having done our very best, we should be content to say to the Lord, “We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty” (Luke 17:7-10). But God’s grace moves him to acknowledge and reward our faithfulness to him.

By the same token, we should not interpret verses 8-9 in a way that suggests revenge or spite on God’s part. These verses speak to the revelation of God’s glory in Jesus Christ, which will be known by all at the time of his return; and to the full revelation of God’s character of holiness and righteousness which stands unalterably opposed to sin.

Verse 9 says the punishment of the wicked is “everlasting destruction,” but that phrase should not be taken to mean annihilation or the utter cessation of existence. That this is the case is affirmed by the very next phrase, which states that the wicked will be “shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.” The eternal destruction of the wicked thus consists (in part) of their being eternally separated from God.

Once again God's justice is revealed through these warnings of coming judgement, because the punishment that those who reject God will receive simply is the fullest measure of what they have chosen for themselves: Separation from God.

Commentator Ronald Ward has written, "Exclusion from the presence of the Lord is what (the wicked man) has been seeking all his days. Now he has it. He has cut himself off from divine goodness and love, and God judicially implements his decision."

But by God's grace and love, a glorious destiny awaits those who have obeyed the gospel and trusted Jesus: We shall behold the majesty of his power (v. 9), and we ourselves shall be instruments through which the glory of Christ will be eternally and perfectly shown (v. 10).

What is your opinion of God? What does the Scripture, as well as your own relationship with God through Jesus Christ convince you of concerning him? In 2 Timothy 1, Paul wrote: "I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day." A living and growing relationship with Christ convinces us God is righteous and just; and because he is just, we know we are safe in him.