

Are You Worthy Of Your Calling?

II Thessalonians 1:1-12

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The return of Christ is mentioned about 318 times in the New Testament, which is more than any other doctrine and this is certainly a major concept in II Thessalonians 1-2. The return of Jesus Christ is a reassuring and joyful hope for God's church, but His revelation from heaven holds awesome and terrifying implications for those who have not trusted in Him.

II Thessalonians is the theological sequel to I Thessalonians, which developed the theme of the coming of the Day of the Lord in I Thessalonians 5:1-11. However, not long after receiving that letter they fall prey to false teaching or outright deception, thinking that the Day of the Lord had already begun. This is similar to what we are seeing in the world today in mainstream Christianity with expectancy of the false doctrine of the rapture.

Paul writes his brief letter to correct the error and also to encourage those members whose faith is being tested by the difficulties presented by persecution at that time. He also reproves those who have decided to cease working because they believe the coming of Christ is near. II Thessalonians deals with Paul's encouragement and persecution.

In I Thessalonians 1 there is all the wisdom of a wise leader. It seems that the Thessalonians had sent a message to Paul full of self doubting and had been nervously afraid that their faith was not going to stand the test and that they were not going to make the grade. They were genuinely concerned, as we all are, of whether or not they were going to be able to live up to what God expected.

Paul's answer was not to push them further into the quagmire of hopelessness by pessimistically agreeing with them, but rather to pick out their virtues and achievements in such a way that these despairing, frightened Christians might stand up straight and stiffen their resolve and say, "if Paul thinks that of us, we will make a fight of it yet." His confidence and encouragement helped to stimulate the church at that time under their trials and persecution.

Paul blessed the Thessalonian church of God by helping to heal them of their self despair. He knew that often thoughtful praise can do what indiscriminate criticism cannot do, and that wise praise never makes a person rest upon his laurels, but fills him

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with the desire to do better.

This is even more encouraging when we consider the coming destruction of sinners. Think about how devastating that will be to them and what God has offered to each and every one of us. In II Thessalonians 1:10, Paul says:

II Thessalonians 1:10 when He [Christ] comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony [the testimony of the apostles] among you was believed.

Now I and II Thessalonians, which are the apostle Paul's earliest letters, both give very great prominence to the thought of the second coming of Jesus Christ to judgment. In the immediate context we have that coming described with circumstances of both majesty and of terror.

II Thessalonians 1:1-2 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.

Notice that there is no Trinity mentioned there at all, and Paul opens all of his letters that way proving that there is not a Trinity. He only mentions God the Father and Jesus Christ, he never mentions a third person, ever.

II Thessalonians 1:3-5 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, 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.

So Paul writes to explain God's program for the age and to encourage these suffering Christians to remain true to the Lord.

He points out three purposes behind their suffering here. The first is that suffering helps us to grow in spiritual character. The Thessalonian Christians had a reputation for growing faith, abounding hope, and radiant love. Their difficult experiences were

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causing their faith, hope, and love to grow, which is the right way to go from tough experiences.

Also their witness of God's way of life and the coming Kingdom of the God was growing as well and the other churches of God heard about them and their stand for Jesus Christ. Paul was able to glory in them among all the churches and their steadfast endurance was an encouragement to the other believers, the other church groups, as well.

They were also growing in patience. Difficulty and suffering produces perseverance that produces patience. Earlier Paul told the church in Rome in that:

Romans 5:3-4 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Perseverance in the New Testament is not simply just waiting it out; not picking up your feet, saying you have faith in waiting for God to solve everything. Rather, it is steadfast endurance in Christ. It is keeping going when the going is tough.

The Christian who prays for more patience must expect more tribulation because tribulation is the spiritual tool God uses to make us more patient and to give us more perseverance.

When suffering comes, it will either make us or break us, and if we accept the suffering, yield to God's will, and by faith, continue to stand true, then the suffering will cause us to grow. Without God's help and Holy Spirit suffering tends to depress and discourage.

The word translated as "faith" in II Thessalonians 1:3-4, can be translated faithfulness, and actually the two go together. We reveal our faith in God by our faithfulness in the way we live.

The Thessalonians were faithful to God and to one another in spite of the troubles that they endured. It strengthened their unity and strengthened their care for one another. We are going to be facing hard times in the future and that is what it has to do for us as well, just as long as we stay close to God and utilize God's Holy Spirit producing the fruit of that Spirit.

When a person in difficulty forsakes God and the church, he shows that either he has

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never been converted, or that he is spiritually very weak. A true Christian who is growing will be faithful in no matter what situation he finds himself in.

If we resist suffering, complain to God, and give up in unbelief, then the suffering will break us and weaken our witness. Here I Peter 4 it has to do was suffering for God's glory.

I Peter 4:12-19 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.

So we are told that while we are suffering for the will of God, we are to do good. We are not to be disparagingly negative with each other but rather do good to one another.

Now the second purpose behind their suffering is that suffering prepares us for glory.

II Thessalonians 1:6-10 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. 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.

Paul does not look upon suffering as a burden but rather as a blessing and a privilege.

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Suffering for Christ is a gift, we should be honored to be able to go through it. It is something that we can be thankful for and something that we should appreciate.

Philippians 1:29 For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.

When Paul said that “they should be counted worthy of the kingdom,” he was not suggesting that they could earn a place in God’s Kingdom by their own merit. Salvation is only by grace, we cannot earn it.

The term “worthy” describes fitness, not merit. God makes us fit through suffering for the glory that lies ahead. Suffering and glory cannot be separated. Humility comes before honor, as the scripture says.

Matthew 5:10-12 “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. [So both of those are said to be blessings and blessings are gifts from God.] Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Salvation is a gift; responsibility is a reward. We will be rewarded in God’s Kingdom according to what we have done. Our suffering today is nothing more than preparation for the glory yet to be revealed, as it says in Romans 8.

Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

There is no comparison whatsoever. It is hard to tell yourself when you are going through a serious suffering, trial, tribulation, or health problem. Steadfastness in suffering is also a witness to the world.

It may seem that God is not judging the sins of the world but this is not true. If we walk in unbelief, we will get discouraged and think that God is not vindicating His own. However, God is preparing judgment for the wicked, you can be sure of that. Knowing this we can rest in confidence.

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God will recompense judgment, that is, He will dish out to the same measure to the wicked that they have dished out to Christians, all the way back to the time of Adam. God will reward people equally for what they have done *for* others. Repentance is what helps keeps that same judgment from falling upon us. As we repent and overcome our sins we are forgiven.

Pharaoh drowned the babies in Israel and God drowned the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. Judas betrayed Jesus to be hanged on the tree and Judas went out and hanged himself. Saul tried to slay David with a sword and was slain with a sword himself. If you live by violence you will die by violence. Sinners will reap what they sow.

When Christ comes to earth with His church, He will judge the wicked, who will then be living on earth, and they will be condemned for two main reasons: 1) that they would not come to know God, which is willful ignorance and, 2) that they would not obey God, which is willful disobedience.

God commands sinners to repent, rejecting Christ is disobedience. The world will not be ready for Christ's sudden return and judgment, and His coming will catch them unaware.

II Thessalonians 1:8-10 in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God [or *refuse* to know God], and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. 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.

These verses might be summarized in this way: "Christ will be revealed, with the angels, of His power; flaming fire will proclaim His coming, and vengeance will be in his hands. Punishment will follow His sentence, age-lasting destruction will be at the end of evil when confronted with the face of the Lord."

All these facts and images are piled up in half of the apostle Paul's view of the sky as he writes I Thessalonians. The way Paul is looking at the judgment of Jesus Christ and God the Father is like looking at the sky in two different ways. On one hand in thunderously loud and shocking multitudes and on the other side, there is the clear blue and peaceful sunshine. God's church is under that clear blue and peaceful sunshine.

All this terror, destruction, flashing fire, and punitive vengeance come to pass when He

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comes in that day to be glorified in His saints and be admired among all those who believe.

There are two aspects of that day here. One is to the day to those whom it is the revelation of a powerful stranger, because the world does not know Jesus Christ. The other aspect is of that day to those whom is the glorifying of Jesus Christ who is their life and Friend. So we would rather be on the side of those glorifying Him who is his Friend.

The third purpose behind church members' sufferings is that suffering glorifies Christ today. We find that as a subject matter in verses 11-12.

II Thessalonians 1:11-12 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.

Jesus Christ shall be glorified in His saints in that day, but we must glorify Him every day that we live. It is our duty and responsibility every day to be conscious of this.

This is the burden of Paul's prayer for us, that God might fulfill His purpose in our lives and that the name of Christ might be glorified through us. Paul's ministry was passionate for the Word of God and prayer for God's people. The 12 apostles, probably Peter as the spokesman for them, said:

Acts 6:4 but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

That is what Peter promised the apostles the ministry would do. The original expression used here, "give ourselves," indicates that Peter was promising that he and the other apostles would apply themselves to the responsibility they had to God and to the brethren with intensity in perseverance. Peter, the other apostles, and later Paul, taught the people God's truth with diligence and then prayed for them to live out what he had taught them.

By ordaining seven deacons, in this context here in Acts 6:4, the apostles intended to make prayer and ministry of the Word their constant and main objective, not distracted by the cares of life or even by attention to the physical needs of the church.

Believers can be confident in suffering because God has chosen us and five times He says will never forsake us. The good work that God begins He will complete.

Philippians 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Now if the sinful world seems to be winning the battle today, we can rest in faith knowing that they will lose the battle tomorrow. We have this confidence and we have this promise, told to us multiple times throughout Scripture. Our responsibility is to live worthy of this high calling, as mentioned in II Thessalonians 1:11, and to help God to work out His perfect will in faith and power in our lives.

Faith is mentioned in II Thessalonians 1, connected to other attributes. Faith and love in verse 3; faith and patience in verse 4; and faith and power in verse 11. In a sense, these essentials are inseparable.

Now what should we, who are in the will of God, do when we go through painful testing and trials? We should thank God for His salvation and that He is with us. We should surrender to God's will without complaining. We should ask God to give us wisdom to understand His will. We should watch for opportunities to witness and glorify God, and we should wait patiently until God's purposes have been fulfilled.

Waiting patiently does not mean kicking back, doing nothing, claiming to have faith in God. It means persevering and that has a lot of action and determination behind it.

Of course if we are out of the will of God, trouble will come, and we must accept and appreciate His discipline when it does come. II Thessalonians 1 is a great encouragement for us in these trying times when the world is going downhill toward destruction at a breakneck speed. People do not want to hear or heed the Word of God and they will do anything to avoid it.

Faithful Christians are suffering while godless unbelievers prosper. It seems as though God has forsaken His own, but that is not so, as Paul says in II Thessalonians 1.

II Thessalonians 1:7 and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels.

So we persevere now knowing that beyond a shadow of a doubt we will receive a rest

from these trials and tribulations. We are promised rest at the proper time from all this suffering and all these trials today. This word 'rest' means, the relaxation of strain. So not only the trials and tribulations but even the stresses of living in this world we will be given rest from.

We know that God is at work in the world and that one day He will vindicate His own and bring vengeance on his enemies. That is going to happen and I feel for the world because they do not see it coming.

Now shifting gears here, I want to concentrate on being worthy of our calling. We will read verses 11-12 again because these are the pivotal scriptures here.

II Thessalonians 1:11-12 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.

I have to admit that over the years that I would read over such scriptures as this and think what an encouraging scripture, but not really realize the depth in these scriptures. In the past few years I started to realize the dynamic ability and quality of the scriptures. They are active, not passive and what they have in them is unbelievable in how it comes out every time you read the same scripture. You get some different take or different application in life every time you read it.

Now in the former letter to the church of Thessalonica, the apostle Paul wrote what sounds like a prelude trumpet of God on the coming of Christ at the end to judge the world and to gather His servants into His rest.

That thought seems to have excited some of the more excitable members of Thessalonica and led to a general feverishness of unwholesome expectancy of the near approach of the day of Christ return. As we know, He did not return back then in the first century, but they convinced themselves that He was going to, so they stopped doing anything.

This letter is intended as a supplement to Paul's former epistle to the church in Thessalonica and to tamp down the fiery attitudes which had been kindled in those people who had gotten so excited about Christ coming back with His judgment on the world.

II Thessalonians dwells, with emphasis, on the necessary preliminaries to the dawning of that Day of the Lord, and throughout seeks to lead the overly-excited minds to patience and persistent work and to calm their overly intensive expectations. This purpose is woven through the whole letter of II Thessalonians.

Those in mainstream Christianity, and even in the greater church of God, all tend to get carried away with things at times just as they did. Today we are becoming obsessed about the Shemitah and the blood moons, that are so widely talked about.

The Protestant preachers are getting on the bandwagon and writing books about the blood moons coming on God's holy days, but yet they do not even believe that they are to be kept. What hypocrisy! The Protestant churches are expecting the rapture and getting feverishly excited about it and in the meantime making money on it. That is, in a sense, what was happening in II Thessalonians.

So how can they know what they are talking about? They cannot know, however we do know that there is something to the blood moons and the Shemitah because God does not provide these signs for no reason. We just do not know what they mean yet.

Paul praises the church tremendously but he warns them not to get too excited over the signs, just make sure you keep your own life in line with God's way of life so that you will be worthy, not only of His calling, but also to escape these things that are to come.

Another remarkable characteristic of II Thessalonians is the frequent flows of short prayer for the Thessalonians, with which Paul strays from the main theme of his writing. In its brief scope, there are four of these prayers, which taken together present many aspects of the Christian life and greatly encourage our hopes and boast our efforts. Today, we are analyzing only the first of the four prayers.

II Thessalonians 1:11 Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling.

This is the prayer that we are going to be focusing on today. The other three prayers, which I am not going to go into detail today, are these: II Thessalonians 2:16-17; II Thessalonians 3:5; II Thessalonians 3:16.

II Thessalonians 2:16-17 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good

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word and work.

II Thessalonians 3:5 Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.

II Thessalonians 3:16 Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all.

Those are the prayer requests of a true Christian leader and of a true Christian friend for those to whom he ministers and whom he loves.

In contrast poor love cannot express itself in prayer. Earthly love does not desire the greatest of blessings for others because earthly love and poor love is a selfish love.

In looking at Paul's prayer for the saints in II Thessalonians 1:11-12, we notice that he begins the sentence with "therefore." "Therefore" is equivalent to "and because of all I have just said." Paul is referring here to the return of Christ to be glorified in the saints and to judging the lost.

II Thessalonians 1:11 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.

The future prospect of glory motivated Paul to pray for the saints. We must never neglect a present responsibility because of a future hope. That is, that we are not to be so strong in hope, such as that Christ's return is on Trumpets this year, and ignore the overcoming of sins in our lives and the growth we should have.

This "counting as worthy," refers mainly to an estimate to be made by God of our completed witness in permanent character. That is obvious from the whole strain of the letter, which is mainly concerned with the future coming judgment by Jesus Christ.

The same expression "counting worthy" also occurs in verse 5, where its reference is exclusively to the future judgment.

II Thessalonians 1:5 which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment

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of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer.

So then we are brought face to face with this thought of an actual stringent judgment which God will apply in the future to the lives and characters of professing Christians. Now what is the promise to those who trust in Jesus Christ? Here are three judgment scriptures to help explain that.

John 5:24 “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into [condemnation] judgment, but has passed from death into life.

I Peter 4:17-19 For the time has come for [righteous] judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now “If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?” Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good [meaning actively doing something], as to a faithful Creator.

Hebrews 10:30 For we know Him who said, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. And again, “The Lord will [righteously] judge His people.”

Those are just three examples about the judgment and it is wise for us to take this truth to heart. Because we are Christians we stand nearest to God and therefore we are sure to be searched through and through by the light that streams from Him. We are being more closely scrutinized than anyone else in the world right now. However we have God’s Holy Spirit which enables us to be completed by God in His time frame.

No one will escape the righteous judgment of God. Forgiveness does not mean that He tolerates our sins for very long or allows them to remain upon us unjudged. Just as day by day there is an actual estimate by God, according to the truth of what we really are, so at the last God’s servants will be judged before His throne.

Psalms 50:4-6 He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that He may judge His people: “Gather My saints together to Me, those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice.” Let the heavens declare His righteousness, for God Himself is Judge. Selah

So if the actual passing of the divine judgment day by day, and a future solemn act of judgment after our characters are completed is to be looked for by Christians, then what is the standard by which our worthiness is to be judged?

What of our calling? "Calling" does not mean vocation or employment, rather it means the divine fact of having been summoned by Him to be His. Consider who it is that calls people, it is God Himself. Consider how He calls people, it is by the gospel, by Jesus Christ. Now consider what is this calling to? We get our answer to this in I Thessalonians 4.

I Thessalonians 4:7 For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.

II Thessalonians 2:13-14 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

By all the subduing, restraining, and impelling tones in the sacrifice and life of Jesus Christ we are summoned to a life of self-crucifixion, in a sense. We are subject to the flesh of aspiration after God, of holy living according to the pattern that we shown to us in Him, that is Jesus Christ. We are summoned to a life of purity and righteousness, self sacrifice and also, as it says in I Thessalonians 2:

I Thessalonians 2:12 that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

That voice sounds from above now and rings in our ears. The same invitation which calls us to a life of righteousness, self responsibility, and purity, also calls us with the promise that is firm and sure. Therefore considering who summons, by what He summons, and to what He calls us, if it were Paul's supreme prayer, should it not be our supreme goal as well? That we may be worthy of Him who called us and that we will be worthy of the responsibility for which we are called?

Next in II Thessalonians 1:11, Paul includes in his prayer that God will supply the help to meet that test of who is worthy, that is, who is truly living God's way of life. If it were a matter of our own effort alone, who of us could pretend to reach the height of conformity

with the great design of the loving Father in summoning us?

But here is the great characteristic and blessing of God's gospel. That it not only summons us to holiness and to the Kingdom, but it reaches out a hand to help us in the direction of these things, and that is by God's Holy Spirit.

This contrasts all other voices that come into our ears. Whether it be the voice of conscience, human ethics, or of the elite, who have, in every age, been as counterfeit voices crying in the wilderness. All of these call us but yet reach no hand out to truly help us to improve our character and integrity. The voices calling from the world want our labor and money but do not care what happens to us.

We do not have a God who merely tells us to be good and then watches to see if we will obey. We have a God, who with all His summons, sends us the help to keep His commandments, to improve our character and integrity, to perfect us in faith, hope, and love. Our God has more than a voice with which to call and command us. He has a hand to lift us up, to help us accomplish our God-given responsibility.

There is the blessing and glory of the gospel that its call has in it, an impelling spiritual power which enables us to be what it commands us to become. It is dynamic, not passive in any sense of the word, as I mentioned earlier. There is a blessing and a glory in the gospel.

In this sermon we are looking at the prayer that God would count you worthy, which contemplates God judging our conformity with the ideal revealed in our calling. This requires faith in God who works in us to help us accomplish His will.

Now there are two directions of God's work in us specified in II Thessalonians 1. First, Paul asked that God would fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness, and second, the work of faith with power. Two things we may hope that God will do for us, as Paul prayed for the Thessalonians and for all brethren down through the ages.

He will fulfill every longing in our hearts for righteousness and purity and He will perfect the active energy which faith produces in our lives. Paul says, in effect, first that God will fulfill every desire that longs for goodness. We are scarcely deserving of being called good if we do not desire to be better.

Aspiration must always be ahead of performance to accomplish spiritual growth. A goal must precede action to achieve proper results. The very signature of the Christian life is hungering and thirsting after unaccomplished perfection.

Hebrews 6:1 Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.

That is what we are to continue to do. That is why we cannot just sit back and say we have faith and let God do the job. We have to make an effort, we have to work at having good works that are counted to us.

We live not only by admiration, faith, and love, but we also live by hope and he who does not hunger and thirst after righteousness has yet to learn the first principles of the gospel of Christ. God cannot make you better if you do not want to be better. There must first be the aspiration and then there will be the satisfaction.

If you are not worthy of the vocation with which you are called, then you have not because you ask not. If you have no desire for goodness God cannot make you good. Paul says “God will fulfill every worker faith.”

Our faith in Jesus Christ will naturally influence our lives and manifest itself as a driving power which will set all the wheels of conduct in motion in our lives. Without that we see the aimlessness of people in the world. Paul is sure that if we trust ourselves to God all the good works that flow from such confidence will be fully perfected by Him in us. The apostle James wrote in James 2:

James 2:14-22 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?

We are expected to do our part, whether it be with regard to the gospel, or to healing, or whatever God's will is. God's fulfillment is to be done with power. The gospel is dynamic

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and our action and reaction to the gospel should be dynamic. God will enable us to be worthy of our calling, He will answer our desires, He will give energy to our faith, and He will complete, in number and in quality, His will in our lives.

Next in verse 12, Paul includes in his prayer that the name of Christ is glorified in the worthy.

II Thessalonians 1:12 [Fulfillment of every desire of goodness and work of faith is in order] 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.

We have, as a result of the fulfilling of our Christian desires after goodness and the work of our faith, the glory that adds to Christ from perfected saints. We are His workmanship and in a sense, Christ's reputation is in our hands. People judge Him by how they see us living our lives.

The glorification of Christ's name in the saints occurs when we exalt Him as Lord in our daily lives. The name of the Lord is glorified in us if we live in a humble, patient, and forgiving way. Paul tells the Ephesians that in Ephesians 4.

Ephesians 4:1-4 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling.

There are a lot of people who have been part of the greater churches of God that have caused great disunity in the church and have disrupted the peace very detrimentally. We see these in the splits that have happened in the groups over the years.

It is one thing to split away from a church that has gone to apostasy, as the WCG did, but when it is just a matter of personalities and things like that the people leave over, then they have a problem because it is not endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The simple truth is that if we in God's church consistently live the lives that we should live and manifest the fruit of the Spirit as we should, then the name of Jesus Christ is

glorified.

There is glory accruing to sanctified saints in Christ, there will be a union so close that nothing closer is possible between Christ and the saints who trusts Him, love Him, and serve Him. That union leads to a participation in His glory which will exalt our limited, stained, and fragmentary humanity into being fully developed and fully alive with Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 4:13 till we all come to the unity of the faith [unity is mentioned because it is so important] and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

This will continue until we all come to such unity, in our faith and knowledge of God's Son, that we will be spiritually mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. In oneness with Christ we will be transformed into His own image, and like Him, be light which will radiate through the universe.

So what must you and I do? We should meditate on our calling, the fact that we are called, its aim; its methods; its obligations. Cherish your hopes and desires for goodness, they are the only hopes and desires that are certain to be fulfilled. Cultivate your life of faith working by love. Live your life in the light of that solemn expectation that God will righteously judge His people.

Paul expresses additional concerns for the brethren in his prayer about their worthiness. In II Thessalonians 1:5, Paul had stated that he wanted them to be worthy of the Kingdom when they entered glory in the future, but in verse 11, he emphasized their present situation.

II Thessalonians 1:11 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,

God's calling was in grace and love and Paul desired that they might live up to that calling. Now we will turn to II Thessalonians 2.

II Thessalonians 2:13-14 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit [the helping hand] and

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belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel [the reason for our calling], for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Trials do not make a person, they reveal what a person is made of. When our faith is tried we are revealing our worth.

I Peter 1:6-9 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.

God knows our hearts, even before we are tried, but we do not know our hearts and others do not know what we are worth either. We need to pray that God will build our worth and make us more valuable Christians because of the trials that we have to endure.

Now another one of Paul's concerns in his prayer is about the brethren's character development.

II Thessalonians 1:11 (NIV) With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith.

This has to do with our sanctification and character development. Character must lead to conduct and Paul prayed that the Thessalonians might have a resolute will, empowered by the Spirit of God, to do what He wants us to do. Obedience and service do not spring from human talent and efforts, but rather from God's power as we trust Him.

Paul had linked faith with love in II Thessalonians 1:3; and linked faith with endurance in II Thessalonians 1:4; and here in verse 11, he links faith it with power. If we believe God we will receive His power, that is, His Spirit.

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If we are baptized and received a laying on of hands, we have God's Holy Spirit and that power already. The old saying "if you don't use it, you lose it," the same goes for God's Holy Spirit—we must produce fruit. We cannot be victorious in tribulations if we only trust ourselves, but we can be victorious through trusting Him. Trusting God is another way of saying "having faith" in God.

Another one of Paul's concerns in his prayer was about the brethren's' witness. The ultimate purpose of his prayer is the glory of God, specifically that God's glory might be manifest in and through the lives and witness of the saints, both immediately and at the return of Jesus Christ. When this happens the vessels that manifest the glory of God are themselves glorified by association with Him.

II Thessalonians 1:12 We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the Bible, the name stands for the person named—his character, his conduct, his reputation, and everything else about him. Praying as Paul did here, he was asking that God would fully glorify Jesus Christ in these saints and in us.

Answers to prayers depend on, and are traceable to, God's grace. Such high request as these can only be fulfilled by God's grace. Jesus Christ will be glorified in His saints when they return with Him, but He should also be glorified in our lives today. Unbelievers *blast* His name, but believers *bless* His name and seek to glorify it.

The amazing thing is that the believer who glorifies Christ is likewise glorified in Christ. How can this be done? The answer is according to the grace of our God and Lord Jesus Christ. Grace and glory go together, as do suffering and glory.

Romans 5:2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

I Peter 5:10 But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.

God is quite busy with us even though we do not see or feel it. As we receive His grace we reveal His glory. Our testimony and witness helps others. Not only can suffering help

us to grow but we can then help others to grow. God encourages us with the expectation that we will encourage others.

II Corinthians 1:4-7 [God the Father] who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation.

Right there Paul explains how the apostles, as they suffered, were able to comfort, give consolation to, and help with advice, the members that were suffering. Where did the apostles get the consolation and the help? They got it of course from God the Father and Jesus Christ.

We are not to be cisterns that receive and keep, but rather channels that receive and share. The more blessings we receive the more we should bless others. Blessing others with our blessings is not limited to brethren only, although our family and brethren are our first priority.

In putting together all that Paul was concerned with II Thessalonians 1, we find that there are three things Paul picked out as being the characteristics of the spiritually growing church. The first is a faith which is strong.

It is the mark of the faithful Christian that he grows sure of Jesus Christ every day. A faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted either. Novices in the faith must expect their faith to be tried because this is the way God proves whether or not their decision is genuine.

Faith, like a muscle, must be exercised to grow stronger. Allowing or causing tribulation and persecution is God's way to strengthen our faith. An easy life can lead to shallow faith. The great men and women of faith in Hebrews 11 all suffered in one way or another.

Paul had prayed for the members of Thessalonica that their faith might be perfected, then he thanked God for the answered prayer, because he was sure of God's reaction

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to the prayer, that God will fulfill His promise.

The second characteristic is a love which is increasing. A growing church is one which grows greater in service. A person may begin serving others as a duty, which his Christian faith lays upon him, but he will end by doing it because in it he finds his greatest joy. A life of service to opens up the great discovery that unselfishness and happiness go hand in hand.

The fact that brethren's love was abounding was an answer to Paul's earlier prayer in I Thessalonians 3:12. Granted, suffering can make some people selfish, but when suffering is mixed with grace and faith it produces love, it is faith working for love. Paul tells us this in his letter to the Galatians.

Galatians 5:6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

When we suffer our faith reaches up to God, and God's love through us, reaches out to our fellow brethren. Our own suffering does not prevent us from sharing love with others who are suffering.

The third characteristic of the spiritually growing church is a hope which perseveres. The word Paul uses for patience and/or perseverance, depending on the translation, is from the Greek word *hupomone*, which is usually translated as "endurance." But it does not mean passively, the ability to bear anything that may descend upon us.

It suggests a determined constancy; a determined or dynamic constancy under trial; a constancy which endures. It describes a spirit which not only endure the circumstances in which it finds itself, but also masters them. It accepts the blows of life but in accepting them, transforms them into stepping stones to new achievement.

The Thessalonian's perseverance was intensifying. The literal translation of Romans 5:3 is, "tribulation works out endurance."

Romans 5:3 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance.

You do not become persevering by reading a book or listening to a lecture, you have to sacrifice and suffer.

Now what were the church members enduring? Paul used several words to describe their situation. Persecutions, which means attacks from without, or trials. Tribulations, which literally means pressures or afflictions that result from the trials. Another word used is trouble, which means to be pressed into a narrow place. No matter how we look at it, the Thessalonian Christians were not having an easy time of it.

God never wastes suffering. Trials work for us, not against us and God makes the best use of it. We will read II Corinthians 4.

II Corinthians 4:15-18 For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

If we trust God and yielded to Him then trials will produce patience, perseverance, and spiritual maturity in our lives.

James 1:2-3 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

If we rebel and fight our circumstances then we will remain immature and impatient. God permits trials so that He can build good character into our lives.

Paul's uplifting message to the Thessalonian brethren ends with the most uplifting vision of all. It ends with what might be called the reciprocal glory. When Christ comes He will be glorified in His saints and admired by those who have believed.

Here we have the breathtaking truth that our glory is Christ's and Christ's glory is connected with ours. The glory of Christ is in those who, through Him, have learned to endure and to conquer and to shine like lights in a dark sky.

For example a teacher's glory lies in the scholars he produces, a parent's glory in the children, a master's glory is in his disciples. To us is given the tremendous privilege and responsibility that Christ's glory can lie in us.

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We may bring discredit or we may bring glory to the Master whose we are and in whom we seek to serve. Can there be any privilege and responsibility be greater than that!