

SESSION 9

end-time justice

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

2 Thess. 1

BUILDUP THEME



LEARN DOCTRINE

God will deal justly with both believers and unbelievers during the end times.

MEASURABLE RESPONSE

Students will trust God to bring about justice and will be motivated to lead unbelievers to Christ.

MEMORY VERSE

"Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels" (2 Thess. 1:6, 7).

Teacher Preparation

- ☐ How do you respond to reports of people getting away with crimes? How do you respond to reports of innocent people getting punished or mistreated?
- ☐ Read 2 Thessalonians 1. The Thessalonian believers might have thought their persecutors were getting away with their evil acts. Paul assured them that God is a righteous judge Who will justly judge all people in the end. Christ will justly punish those who persecuted the believers. And Christ will give believers their just rewards.
- ☐ If we aren't careful, we might think that we need to right all injustices. That would be an impossible task, for the world is unfair and full of unjust people. But God is just. He will bring about His justice and make all things right in the end. God will punish unbelievers and give rest and reward to believers. That means we should focus on telling others about God's grace.

Session Summary

Paul wrote a second letter to the Thessalonian believers, who were still suffering persecution. Paul thanked God for their growing faith and increasing love for each other. He had boasted about their steadfast faith in his first letter. Their endurance of persecution was proof that they were truly saved. Paul encouraged the Thessalonians by assuring them of God's justice. He wrote that God justly sustains believers during persecution, repays persecutors, rewards faithful believers, and punishes all unbelievers. Paul assured the Thessalonians that they would glorify Christ both at Christ's return and as they lived their daily lives.

Session Starters

Option 1—Trust in the Justice System

Steps

1. Discuss justice in the criminal justice system.

We would like to think that everyone sent to prison was justly convicted. But there are people in US prisons who were unjustly convicted and sentenced. The national registry of exonerations lists over 3,000 names of people who were wrongly or unjustly convicted of a crime. Some of those now released prisoners spent decades on death row.

ASK: Describe your level of trust in the criminal justice system in the United States. (Q1)

ASK: Why can't we trust the criminal justice system to always be just? (Q2) *The people in the criminal justice system aren't perfect. They make mistakes. Some of the people in the system act unjustly on purpose.*

2. Transition to the Bible lesson.

We may wonder why God allows people to be unjustly locked up for crimes they didn't commit. The Thessalonians wondered why God continued to allow their enemies to persecute them. Doesn't God care about injustices? Paul assured the Thessalonians that God would deal justly with all people in the end. This study will encourage you to trust that God's judgments are always righteous and just.

Option 2—Justice Illustrations

Gather

- Paper.
- Colored pencils and markers.

Steps

1. Students draw illustrations of justice. They can work individually, in pairs, or in small groups.
2. Students or groups display and explain their illustrations.
3. Discuss justice.

ASK: How would you define justice?

ASK: Which of your classmates' illustrations do you think best depicts justice?

ASK: In what settings have you heard cries for justice?

4. Transition to the Bible lesson.

The Thessalonians continued to face persecution, which caused them to question God's justice. Paul helped them by assuring them that God will always act justly. Paul's teaching will help us to focus on serving God well rather than on worrying about the many injustices in our lives and in the world.

Bible Study

Gather

- End-Time Events poster.

Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonian believers to encourage and comfort them with hope of Christ's return. Soon after sending his first letter, Paul's team heard more news about the Thessalonians (2 Thess. 3:11). Some of them had stopped working while others feared Christ had already returned. Paul wrote a second letter to correct their misunderstandings about the Day of the Lord and to deal with idleness. But first he reassured those who faced continuing persecution.

I. God Enables Believers in Trials (2 Thess. 1:1–4)

A. He gives grace to grow (1:1–3)

READ: 2 Thessalonians 1:1, 2.

Paul opened his second letter with a typical greeting, but that doesn't mean we should read right by it. He asked God to give grace and peace to the Thessalonians. He did so because they could not grow without God's grace and endure persecution without God's peace. We need God's grace and peace too.

READ: 2 Thessalonians 1:3.

God's grace caused the Thessalonians' believers' faith and love to grow exceedingly. So, Paul felt compelled to give thanks to God. Believers grow spiritually because of God's gracious work in their lives.

Paul didn't thank the Thessalonians for their spiritual growth because they were powerless to grow without God working in their hearts. God helped the Thessalonians put their faith in Him even as they faced persecution. The more the Thessalonians put their faith in God, the more God grew their faith and the more He caused the Thessalonians' love for each other to continue to abound. God causes a believer's love for others to abound like a river overflowing its banks.

ASK: What might love that is overflowing look like in your life? (Q3)

God had answered Paul's previous prayer that the Thessalonians' love would abound (1 Thess. 3:12). Paul's prayer for them was essential to their growth in faith and love.

ASK: Who is praying for your spiritual growth? For whose spiritual growth do you pray? (Q4)

B. He gives patience in persecution (1:4)

READ: 2 Thessalonians 1:4.

Because of the Thessalonians' endurance under persecution, Paul held them up as a model for other churches. He boasted about them, not because they were perfect Christians, but because they had submitted themselves to God, Who was working powerfully in their lives. It was their submission that Paul recognized as a model for others. God works in us as believers, but we don't stand by passively waiting for Him to act. When facing hardships, we put our faith in God and then move forward in His strength and under His direction. The Thessalonians had submitted themselves to God and patiently endured persecution for their faith. For that Paul boasted on their behalf.

ASK: How should the Thessalonians have responded to Paul's boasting about them? (Q5) *They should have been grateful for his kind words and then recognized God's enabling as they successfully faced persecution.*

ASK: What might be some indicators that believers are serving God out of pride rather than humble dependence on God? (Q6) *The believers credit themselves for their accomplishments, get upset when they don't receive recognition, and tend to serve in ways that are public.*

II. God Justly Judges All People (2 Thess. 1:5–9)

A. He justly sustains believers (1:5)

READ: 2 Thessalonians 1:5.

The Thessalonians' endurance of persecution proved God judges righteously or justly. So, God was just (right) in allowing the Thessalonians to endure hardships for their faith. That seems backwards.

ASK: Would you say God is right in allowing believers to suffer persecution while their persecutors seem to go unpunished? Explain. (Q7)

Paul explained that the believers' endurance under persecution was evidence that God is just. Their suffering was not a sign that God had

abandoned them. Their ability to endure suffering proved that God was working powerfully in their lives. The Thessalonians' faith under trial proved they were truly saved and, therefore, God considered them worthy of His kingdom. Their suffering had nothing to do with their becoming saved, but it did provide ample evidence that they were saved.

In Philippians 1:29 Paul stated that the Philippians had received the gift of suffering persecution. To suffer for Christ means a believer is living for Christ. And to live for Christ is the believer's best life. So, the way of suffering for Christ's sake is a privilege and a blessing for the believer.

B. He justly repays persecutors (1:6)

READ: 2 Thessalonians 1:6.

God's just judgment will also include repaying the Thessalonians' persecutors. They will receive trouble and affliction in return for the trials and suffering they had caused for the believers. God always judges persecutors justly; He will not allow their evil to go unpunished (Ps. 37:9–20). Since we can trust Him to carry out His promises, we should not feel the need to get personal revenge. God will fairly repay those who persecute believers.

ASK: Name some Biblical examples of God repaying persecutors with the same persecution they used on God's people. (Q8) *God had Daniel's persecutors thrown to lions and the persecutors of Daniel's three friends cast into the fiery furnace.*

READ: Psalm 37:20. **ASK:** Given their future judgment, what should be our desire for those who persecute believers? (Q9) *That they will repent of their sins and put their faith in Christ.*

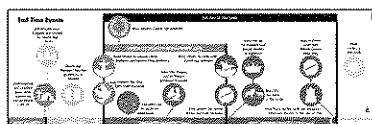
C. He justly rewards believers (1:7)

READ: 2 Thessalonians 1:7.

Paul comforted the Thessalonians with God's promise of rest for the persecuted. Even if the Thessalonians had no relief at that present time, God would make all things right. At the Rapture, believers will find immediate rest and will join Christ in Heaven. But when Christ returns to the earth with the church to begin His thousand-year reign (the Millennium), persecuted believers from all the ages will have complete rest on the earth. The word for "rest" signifies a release of tension—like slipping the string off one end of an archer's bow.

DISPLAY: End-Time Events poster. Review the difference between the Rapture and Christ's second coming to earth to set up His Kingdom at the end of the Tribulation.

Paul wrote that when Jesus returns from Heaven with His angels, all the Thessalonian believers will find rest along with his team members. By



including his team, Paul encouraged the believers with the truth that they would all be reunited on earth under Christ's perfect, worldwide rule.

ASK: What differences will we notice between Christ's rule and the rule of nations today? (Q10) *Christ will rule justly; there will be no corruption in His government; no one will get away with evil.*

When believers experience troubling, difficult times, we can remember God's promise that one day all troubles will end. We will have no more worries, pain, or sadness.

D. He justly punishes unbelievers (1:8, 9)

READ: 2 Thessalonians 1:7–9.

The phrase "in flaming fire" (1:8) may complete the thought from verse 7 so that it describes Jesus' appearance rather than the mode of His vengeance. In that case, the fire may serve to show God's presence, as in Moses' experience with the burning bush (Exod. 3:2–5) and God's descent upon Mt. Sinai (Exod. 19:18). On the other hand, it may represent the method of vengeance, as in Isaiah's description of God's judgment rendered with flames of fire (Isa. 66:15, 16). Either way, when the Lord appears, God will take His vengeance on the unbelievers still living after the Tribulation ends (2 Thess. 1:8, 9). All such unbelievers will have given their allegiance to the Antichrist and will hate Christ's appearing. Christ will strike them dead, sending them to Hell to await their resurrection and final judgment after Christ's earthly Kingdom (Rev. 20:11–15).

God's vengeance is nothing like man's personal revenge. It is just and according to His holy standards rather than our selfish ways. God will give punishment perfectly and justly.

In verse 9, Paul describes the final judgment Christ will hand down at the Great White Throne Judgment. All the lost of all the ages will stand before Christ. He will judge them for their sins and give all of them the sentence of everlasting destruction from the Lord's presence and from the glory of His power.

Some people believe that the final punishment for sin will be annihilation, reasoning that if something is destroyed, it doesn't exist anymore. Paul clearly explained, however, that this destruction means a final, complete separation from the presence of God. Apart from God and His saving grace, no hope of redemption remains. The sinner will have no appeal to make, no leniency to hope for, no suspended sentence, and no time off for good behavior. Sin and its ruin will be completely realized for all unbelievers for all eternity.

ASK: How should 2 Thessalonians 1:7–9 motivate us to pray and to interact with unbelievers? (Q11) *Knowing that all unbelievers are*

facing eternal punishment should motivate us to pray consistently for them. Our love and concern for them should inspire us to share the gospel with them.

ASK: How do the truths in the passage affect your perspective on the seriousness of sin? (Q12)

ASK: How does the passage affect your understanding about being able to get away with sin? (Q13)

III. God Enables Believers to Glorify Christ (2 Thess. 1:10–12)

A. On the day of Christ's return (1:10)

READ: 2 Thessalonians 1:10.

In verse 10, Paul spoke generally about the Day of the Lord that begins with the Rapture and includes Jesus' return to earth to set up His Kingdom. Christ will be glorified in His saints during the events of the Day of the Lord. All believers are saints because we are holy or set apart by God.

When we as believers return to earth with Christ, we will glorify Him. We will recognize His greatness and His amazing grace. Paul added that the Thessalonians will be among those who worship Christ because they believed the gospel when Paul shared it with them.

ASK: What do you think you will admire most about Jesus when you return with Him to be a part of His Kingdom? (Q14)

B. Every day of our lives (1:11, 12)

God called the Thessalonians to salvation and to holiness. Paul prayed that their lives would be consistent with their calling.

READ: 2 Thessalonians 1:11.

Paul wanted the Thessalonians' salvation to motivate them to live worthy of their calling. He wanted them to live holy lives that reflected what God had done in saving them from their sins.

Paul added that He wanted God to bring to pass the Thessalonians' desires to glorify God and their attempts to do good deeds by faith in God's power. Of course, God will always do His part in empowering believers to glorify and serve Him. Paul's prayer didn't show he doubted God, rather it helped the Thessalonians know that God was interested and active in their lives. God wouldn't let them down.

READ: 2 Thessalonians 1:12.

Paul prayed that Jesus' name would be glorified in the believers and the believers glorified in Him. As the Thessalonians continued to walk

steadfastly in their faith even under persecution, their lives would glorify Jesus' name. Their actions would confirm God's power and sustaining grace in their lives. The promise of rest and relief from earth's trials and of God's justice upon persecutors would motivate the believers to continue living faithfully until Christ's return.

ASK: Who do you want people to talk about as they observe your life—you or Christ? (Q15)

Session Application

Gather

- Whiteboard and marker.

Steps

1. Write the word JUSTICE vertically on the board to create an acrostic. Students think of words and phrases that contain one of the letters in "justice." Their answers should describe God's justice or give reasons we can trust God to judge righteously.
2. Discuss the believer's concern for unbelievers.

Knowing that God's justice is ahead for all people brings comfort to believers. But we should also be concerned about the lost. We should pray specifically for unbelievers and that God would help us lovingly share the truth with them.

ASK: What might be some ineffective ways to share the gospel? (Q16) *Confronting people with harsh warnings, becoming angry or frustrated when they don't want to listen, insulting them when they don't understand or disagree with something you've said, forcing a conversation.*

While we must be honest about God's coming wrath on sin, we should focus more on the hope we have in Christ and the eternal life He offers.

ASK: When you think about lost people being forever separated from God, who comes to your mind? (Q17)

Pray specifically for the salvation of that person this week. Pray for an opportunity to share the gospel with that person. (Q18)

3. Close in prayer, asking God to give your students boldness and compassion to share the reality of God's judgment and the hope of eternal life with an unbeliever.