

A GREETING: THE PICTURE OF A MODEL CHURCH UNDER ATTACK AND PERSECUTION 2 THESSALONIANS 01:01–05

Introduction

This passage is a clear picture of what it takes to make a church strong. A church never needs strength anymore than when it is under savage attack and persecution. The Thessalonian church was being fiercely persecuted, yet it was standing firm for Christ. The Thessalonian believers stand as a model church for all other churches: they are a picture of what a church should be when it is being attacked and persecuted.

- I. The ministers are faithful to the church (v. 1).
- II. The believers have a firm foundation in God and Christ (v. 1).
- III. The believers know the grace and peace of God (v. 2).
- IV. The believers have a faith that grows more and more (v. 3).
- V. The believers have a love that grows and overflows (v. 3).
- VI. The believers have a strong endurance and faith in all their trials (vv. 4-5).

I. 2 Thessalonians 01:01 Ministers — Church

The ministers are faithful to the church — no matter the circumstances. Ministers are always to be faithful to their churches, but there are times when ministers need to give *special attention* to their flock, *special times* when the flock of God needs to be strongly encouraged and exhorted to hold firm to Christ. The Thessalonian church was facing one of these times.

- 1 The church was being savagely attacked and persecuted by both the world and the religionists (see Th. 2:1-12). They were being...

- ridiculed
- ostracised
- mocked
- threatened
- cursed
- rejected

There is a chance that some had even been physically attacked, beaten and martyred (see 1 Th. 4:13). Whatever the case, the point is this: the believers desperately needed the help of their ministers; they needed their encouragement and comfort.

2. The church was confused about the return of the Lord and the great day of the Lord, and about the awful day of His wrath. Apparently some had begun to feel that the tribulation — the terrible time of trouble that is to come upon the earth — had already begun. Some felt this because of the savage persecution they were suffering. There were other matters concerning the second coming that were misunderstood as well. In fact, there was great confusion in the church about the Lord's return. These will
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be covered in a later passage. For now, the point to see is how confused the believers were over the return of the Lord Jesus. They needed the help of their ministers; they needed to be taught the truth about the coming again of Jesus Christ.

Thought 1. When special needs arise among believers, the minister of God must give special attention to the flock of God. It is a *very special duty* of the minister to comfort and encourage his people when they...

- suffer persecution
- suffer disease or accident
- need correction
- need counsel
- need to be taught
- face death
- need reproof

The list could go on and on, but the point is clearly seen. The minister must give special attention and help to his people when they face special needs. A church can be a model (strong) church only if its ministers are faithful — especially faithful when its people are facing trying times.

Acts 20:35 *“In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”*

Rom 15:1 *We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.*

Gal 6:2 *Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.*

Heb 13:3 *Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.*

James 1:27 *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

II. 2 Thessalonians 01:01 Foundation of the Church

The believers have a firm foundation in God and Christ (See *Jesus Christ, Deity*, 1 Th. 1:1).

III. 2 Thessalonians 01:02 Grace and Peace of God

The believers know the grace and peace of God (See *Grace and Peace*, 1 Th. 1:1).

1 THESSALONIANS 01:01 CHURCH FOUNDED IN GOD AND JESUS CHRIST

Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. 1 Thessalonians 01: 01

A strong church is founded “in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Jesus Christ is said to be equal with God the Father. God is acknowledged as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the distinctive belief upon which the church is built. We believe that “God so loved the world, that He gave His *one and only Son*, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (Jn. 3:16).

=> We believe that God the Father sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into the world to save us from perishing and to give us eternal life.

=> We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

=> We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is *the Lord* sent from heaven, that He is God, the eternal Son embodied in human flesh and sent to earth by God the Father.

=> We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is *Jesus the Carpenter* from Nazareth.

=> We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is *the Christ*, the Messiah and Saviour who had been promised from the very beginning of history.

As stated, it is upon this confession that the church is built. This confession is the one distinctive mark of the church.

Thought 1. A church that is not founded upon *God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* is not a church, not a true church, no matter what it may call itself. It is nothing more than...

- a man-created fellowship
- a man-created assembly
- a man-created meeting
- a man-created gathering
- a man-created body
- a man-created worship

Mat 16:15-18 “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”

Mat 21:42 Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes’?”

Acts 4:11 He is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.’

Rom 10:9 That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Eph 2:20 Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

1 Pet 2:6 For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

1 John 2:22-23 *Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist — he denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.*

1 John 4:15 *If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. □*

1 THESSALONIANS 01:01 GOD'S GIFTS OF GRACE AND PEACE

A strong church possesses God's supreme gifts — grace and peace.

1. Grace (charis) means the undeserved favour and blessings of God (see *Grace*, Tit. 2:11-15; See Rom. 4:16; *Grace*, 1 Cor. 1:4). No church can be strong...
 - without the favour of God.
 - without the blessings of God.

When we see a strong church, the hand of God is immediately noticed: the hand that favours the church and blesses it. What is it that brings the hand of God's grace to a church? Note the exact wording of this verse: "To the church...*in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*: Grace and peace to you." Grace comes from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. God pours His grace out upon the church that commits itself to the confession...

- that God is our Father.
- that Jesus is the Lord Jesus Christ.

The church that really commits itself to this confession is the church that God favours and blesses, that experiences the outpouring of His grace. Every strong church is a church that is confessing God to be the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ and confessing the Lord Jesus Christ to be the *one and only* Son of God. When this confession is forcefully made and demonstrated by a church, it is then that the grace (favour and blessings) of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ pours forth.

Eph 1:2-3 *Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.*

Eph 2:8-10 *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Eph 3:7-8 *I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's*

people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

1 Tim 1:14-15 *The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the worst.*

2. Peace (eirene) means to be bound, joined and woven together. It means to be assured, confident and secure in the love and care of God. It means to sense and know that God will...

- guide
- deliver
- provide
- encourage
- strengthen
- empower
- sustain
- bless

But again, note that peace comes only from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. In order to have the peace of God and Christ, a church has to have a strong confession...

- in God as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- in Jesus as the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Father and Christ alone can bring peace to the hearts of men, and that peace can be given only to those who come to God for peace. The Father and Christ cannot give peace to a person who does not come to God for peace.

The point is this: a strong church is a body of people who know and experience the peace of God as they walk throughout the world day by day.

John 14:27 *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*

John 16:33 *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

Rom 5:1 *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Rom 8:6 *The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.*

Eph 2:13-14 *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.*

Col 1:20 *And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. □*

IV. 2 Thessalonians 01:03 Faith that Grows

The believers have a faith that grows more and more. The words growing more and more (huperauxanei) mean to grow beyond measure; to grow far beyond what would be expected. What a glorious testimony! Faith that just grows and grows more and more. Imagine a church full of believers whose faith in Christ Jesus grows explosively — beyond measure — beyond what we could ever imagine. And remember: the church was growing in faith while they were in the midst of savage persecution. This is the reason Paul says: “We ought always to thank God for you.” The word “ought” (opheilomen) means compulsion and obligation. The church’s growing faith compelled Paul to thank God for the church — for their faith. Imagine how a minister’s heart would joy and rejoice over his people growing like the Thessalonian believers did.

What does it mean to have a growing faith? Faith in Christ simply means that a person believes in the Lord Jesus Christ; he trusts Christ to take care of his life...

- of his past life (sins and transgressions).
- of his present life (to provide the necessities, protection, deliverance and guidance needed in life).
- of his future life (deliverance from death and judgment and the gift of eternal life).

A growing faith in Jesus Christ simply means that a person learns to trust and depend upon Christ more and more:

=> to provide for his daily necessities (Mt. 6:33).

=> to deliver him through the trials and temptations of life (2 Th. 2:4f).

=> to comfort him through the losses of life (2 Tim. 4:18; 1 Pet. 5:7; Psa. 23:4).

=> to teach him the truth (2 Th. 2:15; 3:3).

=> to guide and help him to hold fast to the teachings of Christ (2 Th. 2:15; 3:4).

=> to strengthen him to walk a life that is separated from the world and totally dedicated to God (2 Th. 3:3, 6-7).

Thought 1. A person who grows in faith is a person who learns to depend upon Christ more and more in every *area of life* — all the areas covered in the list above. What a glorious testimony to have a faith that grows more and more!

Thought 2. Too many believers have their minds upon growing and increasing in the comfort and possessions of this world. They think little, if any, about growing in faith. They are satisfied with just enough faith to salve their conscience. Growth in faith and Christ are of little concern to them.

Mat 8:13 Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go! It will be done just as you believed it would.” And his servant was healed at that very hour.

Mark 9:23 “If you can?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for him who believes.”

Mark 11:22-24 *“Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. “I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”*

Luke 17:5 *The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”*

Eph 6:16 *In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.*

Heb 4:3 *Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, “So I declared on oath in my anger; ‘They shall never enter my rest.’” And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world.*

Heb 11:6 *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*

James 1:5-6 *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.*

1 John 3:22 *And receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.*

1 John 5:4-5 *For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*

2 Chr 20:20 *Early in the morning they left for the Desert of Tekoa. As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, “Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful.”*

Psa 31:19 *How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you.*

Psa 34:22 *The Lord redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him.*

Psa 37:3 *Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.*

Psa 37:5 *Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this:*

Prov 3:5 *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.*

Isa 26:3-4 *You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord, is the Rock eternal.*

V. 2 Thessalonians 01:03 Love that Grows and Overflows

The believers have a love that grows and overflows toward one another. Note: the love being spoken about is the love of believer for believer, not for the world. In the letter of 1 Thessalonians, Paul had exhorted the church to grow more and more in love for one another. They had needed the message because there was some tension in the church surrounding the Lord's return. Paul's exhortation had worked: the church had straightened out the differences and the differing parties were now walking hand in hand with one another, overflowing and growing in love for one another. This is the reason Paul thanks God for their overflowing love.

What does it mean to overflow with love for one another? An overflowing love is the kind of love...

- that binds individuals together as a family — as the family of God.
- that binds individuals in an unbreakable union.
- that holds individuals with the deepest affection.
- that nourishes and nurtures one another.
- that shows concern and looks after the welfare of one another.
- that always cherishes one another and comforts, supports and encourages one another regardless of differences or circumstances.

This was the kind of love that the model church at Thessalonica had. This is what an *increasing love* is. This is the kind of love every single believer is to have for all other believers.

John 13:34-35 *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

John 15:12 *“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”*

Rom 12:9 *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.*

Gal 5:13 *You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.*

1 Pet 1:22 *Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.*

1 Pet 4:8 *Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.*

1 John 2:10 *Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble.*

1 John 4:21 *And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.*

VI. 2 Thessalonians 01:04–05 Strong, Enduring Faith

The believers have a strong patience and faith in facing persecution and trials.

=> The word “perseverance” (hupomones) means to be steadfast, to endure, and to persevere. The Thessalonian believers endured and held firm to their faith in Christ through all the persecutions and trials thrown against them.

=> The word “trials” (thlipsesin) is a more general word than *persecutions* and refers to any kind of trial or trouble (Leon Morris. *The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians*. “Tyndale New Testament Commentaries,” p. 115). The Thessalonian believers were persevering and holding firm to their faith through all the trials of life: temptations, peer pressure, disease, accident, loss of job, death — whatever the trial was, they remained faithful to Christ. They did not buckle under and give in to the crowd nor to discouragement and despair. They held on to their faith in Christ. Note three points.

1. Their endurance and faith was a strong testimony to others. Paul says that they were so strong that he actually boasted of them to others.

Thought 1. What a dynamic testimony: to stand up for Christ to such an extent that Paul would boast of them! What an example for us: to stand fast in our faith to such an extent that ministers boast of our testimony.

2. Their endurance and faith were a sign of God’s coming judgment upon unbelievers. The believers received a supernatural strength — God’s strength — when they were persecuted. Their strength was so forceful that it was clear that it was being given by God. The believers...

- were not becoming hysterical.
- were not retaliating.
- were not accepting the persecution like passive sheep.

Contrariwise, they demonstrated a serene peace and responded in an active love, exhorting and encouraging their persecutors to trust the Lord — all while they were in the midst of being mistreated. Their response could not be attributed to mental discipline nor to the commitment to some human cause. Why?

=> Because there were too many of them, and they were all standing firm and demonstrating some supernatural strength.

=> Because there was both the spirit of glory and of God resting upon them — the spirit of glory and of God that is promised to the believer who suffers persecution.

1 Pet 4:14 *If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.*

The point is this: the presence of God and His glory in the believer is a clear sign that God exists and is going to vindicate his dear believer. He is going to judge and

take vengeance upon the persecutors of His dear people. Persecution is a clear sign of God's coming judgment.

2 Pet 2:9 *If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment.*

Rom 2:2 *Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth.*

2 Pet 3:7 *By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.*

Jude 1:14-15 *Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him."*

3. Their endurance and faith proved that the believers were counted worthy of God's kingdom. Note the phrase "counted worthy" (*kataxioo*). It does not mean to make worthy; it means to count, reckon, and declare worthy (see *Justification*, Rom. 5:1). A believer is not saved because he remains faithful through the sufferings of this life; he is saved because he believes in Jesus Christ as his Saviour and Lord. However, when he suffers in this world and endures through the suffering, he is counted worthy of God's kingdom. He does not disappoint God. He proves his grit — that he is truly a man or a woman of God. He is worthy to enter heaven, for he has proven his faith.

Luke 21:19 *"By standing firm you will gain life."*

John 15:-20-21 *"Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me."*

Phil 1:4 *In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy.*

2 Tim 3:12 *In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*

2 Cor 4:11 *For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.*

Heb 10:36 *You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. ■*