

Read 2 Thess 1:1-4

1. Why does Paul say that he, Silas and Timothy ought to give thanks for the Thessalonians? Cf. 1 Thess 1:2-3; what is the main difference between these two introduction sections?

Their growing faith, increasing love and their endurance amidst suffering.

Faith, love and hope are there in 1 Thess too... but in 2 Thess, these are increasing (i.e. things have gone well for the Thessalonians regarding their faith in the time period between the two letters despite ongoing suffering for the gospel).

2. Do you ever stop to think about how you are growing as a Christian? If so, how/when? If not, how could you do it better? Do you ever tell others that you are encouraged by their growing maturity, or encourage them in living out their faith?

*See what comes up. Main thing is to encourage each other to be wanting to grow in faith/love/endurance – and that we should see growth if God is at work in us. Here's the 4 tips I gave in the sermon about self-reflection: 1) **Build self-reflection into your routine** (daily, weekly, or monthly). 2) **Keep it Bible-shaped** – we should respond to bible by being challenged and encouraged. It's about the Gospel – how am I responding to Jesus? 3) **Limit how much time** you spend on it (so we don't become too self-focussed) and not see God at work, and opportunities to think of other. 4) **Allow others close enough to moderate your conclusions.** God has given us each other to help with such things. Some of us will over-estimate, others will under-estimate progress. Other Christians who have long-term relationships with us will be very helpful.*

Read 2 Thess 1:5-10.

3. Why do you think Paul is confident that God will count the Thessalonians worthy of the kingdom of God? What encouragements are given in this section for the Thessalonian Christians? How does this make you feel?

'All this is evidence' seems to point to the Thessalonians' growth (incl. endurance) being evidence that God will count them worthy. Why? I presume their growth is evidence that God is at work in them (faith, and the subsequent changes) are all wrought by God, by his Spirit. So God is clearly at work in them, and they persevere despite suffering – and thus Paul is confident that God will finish his work and count them worthy. (In other words, their justification by faith, evidenced with works now, will be formally declared at the last day).

[NOTE: It is possible that the 'all this' is actually referring to what is in the coming verses; that is, God's righteous judgement on the last day is evidence that God will count them worthy, because he is just and will reward his people while punishing those who afflict them. This is a legitimate option, but I think less likely. Not too much hinges on it]

What encouragements? God's right justice – their being counted worthy, and their enemies punished; That they will be included in the picture of v10 with Jesus as part of his holy people.

The point of this is encouragement for the Thessalonians. How do we feel about this section?

4. Many people can quote the Bible saying that “God is Love”, or “God is light”. Not so many quote “God is just”. What do we learn about God's justice in this section? Consider the positive and the negative aspects of God's just judgement; how are the described?

Positive

*God counts his people worthy of his kingdom
God pays back those who afflict his people
Jesus comes to be glorified in his holy people
- which includes them being transformed into his likeness
This includes all who believe.*

Negative

*God pays back those who afflict his people
punishment = everlasting destruction = shut out of God's presence
includes all who 'do not know God' and who do not obey the gospel.*

NOTES:

- The 'not knowing God' and the 'not obeying' are different descriptions of the same person. Just as faith expresses itself in action, so unbelief expresses itself in disobedience.
- 'everlasting destruction' seems to parallel 'shut out from the presence of the Lord'. While some have take this destruction as 'ceasing to exist', it seems that it's better understood as ruin. That is, the picture of judgement in the Bible focuses on separation from God, in an eternal, conscious existence. Hence all of the imagery to describe how bad this will be (cf. Isa 66:24; Matt 13:42; Luke 16:19-24).

5. What is it that guarantees that someone will be part of God's holy people on the last day (v10)? Does this make sense of how you understand the Christian faith?

'belief' about a message – ultimately belief that Jesus is saviour, that we need saving from sin, and that trusting Jesus is the only way to make it to heaven.

Christianity is all about a message proclaimed (the Gospel) and believed. We must keep hearing the message, believing the message, and sharing the message.

6. Read 2 Thess 1:11-12. What does Paul pray for the Thessalonians? What does Paul want God to do, and what does he want the Thessalonians to do?

That God will count the Thessalonians worthy of the kingdom, and he may bring to fruition every good desire they have which is prompted by faith.

It's interesting to see the dual responsibility. In the end, Paul sees that it is God who will enable them to do what is right – God gives the good intentions (prompted by faith), and God allows them to actually do them! And God counts them worthy of the kingdom because they do the things that God enables them to do! This is real dependence on God (hence great that we pray this for each other!).

But the Thessalonians are still encouraged to do good: To live out their faith and suffer well.

7. What is the goal of all of these things (v12)? How do you think about this goal when it comes to how you live? Is it something you think about often? Why/why not?

The glory of Jesus!

Notice that Jesus is glorified in the Thessalonians, and the Thessalonians are glorified in Jesus. That is, Jesus shares his glory with his people. But there's a few ways of thinking about this:

- 1) *v10 tells us that Jesus is glorious, and we will see that in fullness at the last day (and we'll marvel at him!).*
- 2) *Jesus is glorified in his people as the whole universe sees his powerful and loving work in saving a people like us. All of creation will be in awe at Jesus for purifying a people for himself.*
- 3) *The church will be transformed to be like Jesus – thus reflecting his glory, and again showing how powerfully Jesus has worked.*

See how often this is on people's minds.

How do I live for Jesus glory every day? How might I think of this tomorrow in whatever God gives me to do?

Think about:

- How does this passage encourage you as a Christian?
- What things in this passage (if any) do you find hard to understand or hold on to? What can you do about this?
- How does the reaching in this section challenge us to act toward our non-believing friends and family?
- Thank God for his grace, justice, and glory and ask that we might honour him in the way we live each day