

Are You Guilty

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We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore, we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the inflictions that you are enduring. This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God for which you are also suffering. Since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us. When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heavy with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus, they will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints and to be marveled at among all who have believed.

Because our testimony to you was believed to this end. We always pray for you that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you and you and him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you that you've included us as members of your church, or it goes back over 2,000 years. People have faithfully lived for you, shared the gospel, led others to Christ, and are looking forward to that day when Jesus will be coming back

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again. We look forward to that day. And we realize we have the responsibility to live worthy of the calling our life. I pray that you'd help us to do that.

Lord, as we look at this passage, open our eyes and our ears and our hearts to receive your word. And just prepare us and strengthen us for the battle that we face in this world. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. You may be seated.

Okay. We're gathered together as a church today. The church isn't the building, right? The churches, each one of us is believers. But for just a few minutes, I want you to consider that this is not a church.

This is a courtroom. Anyone been in a courtroom before? I'm sure many of us have. And I'm going to be the judge in the courtroom. And you're going to be the defendants, every one of you.

And you might Ask, well, what's my crime? You have been accused of being a Christian.

In many eyes, that is a crime. And your job this morning is not to prove that you're innocent. Your job is to prove you're guilty. Guilty as charged, your honor. Okay, so I'm just going to throw this out.

If this really were a courtroom, and we will stand before the Lord God Almighty one day and get an account. And he asked, what's the proof? What's the proof that you're a Christian? Anyone have an idea? And it could be a lot of different things.

There's no right answer. What's the proof that you are a Christian? Just speak up. Love for Jesus. What's that?

How we speak, what we say.

Come on. I hope there's more proof than that. Okay. How we walk with men, how we treat other people.

The confession of our mouth. Okay, what was that? The blood of the Lamb that changes our lives. What's that one? He's changed us.

The life we live compared to the life we used to live. These are all good answers. But with these answers, there are probably people out there that answer the same way that are not Christians. Anyone agree with that? And so evidence is important in a trial, and not just say so, but solid evidence.

Well, we looked at this a little bit two weeks ago, but Paul, he says in verse five, this is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, which you're also suffering. And the evidence that he gave, we look back just a few verses after he gives thanks for them. He gives three evidences that someone is a Christian. And we looked at two of these two weeks ago. The first was because your faith is growing abundantly.

If you're a Christian, then you should be growing in the faith. How do you know if you're growing in the faith? You'll keep his commands. It's that simple. I trust God.

I believe God. I'm going to give my life to him and do what he says. That's the first evidence. The second. And again, we looked at these two weeks ago, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.

We know that God is a God of love. For God so loved the world he gave his one only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish. And that love that he has for us when he comes into our life, we should be seeing that love increasing, growing more love for the brothers and sisters. And that's not just you and I and this congregation, that's for other congregations. That acknowledge the name of Jesus Christ, that we love them, we want to see them do well and be successful.

And so that's some of the proof. Now, why is this important? We'll look at one more reason. Well, the reason this is important because if you're not guilty of a Christian, then it says in verse 8 and 9, when Jesus comes again from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus, they will suffer the punishment of

eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might. I can't even begin to comprehend the suffering for all eternity for those who have not given their life to Jesus Christ, who have rejected the message, who live for this world instead of the world to come, who live for themselves instead of Jesus Christ.

It says they will be shut out from his presence. If you're shut out from his presence, where is that? Hell. And he says it's eternal destruction. And God doesn't want anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance.

It's not his goal that any should die and go to hell. He wants everyone to be saved. But on the other hand, if you're declared guilty of being a Christian, and I pray that everyone here is, that you are guilty of as charged, we see the Reward in verse 10. It says, when he comes. And again, 2 Thessalonians is mainly concerned with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we'll be looking at that in the weeks to come. But when he comes on that day, and there will be a day when Jesus will appear in the heavens and the dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive will meet them in the air when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints and to be marveled at among all who have believed. Because our testimony to you was believed. Our testimony is that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that he died on the cross for your sins, that he paid your penalty, that he wants to come into your life and he is coming again for those who love him. And we look forward to that day.

And 2,000 years ago, they looked forward to it. I guarantee you we're a lot closer today than they were. Right. And we should be keeping our eyes on Jesus. It says we will marvel at Jesus.

Can you imagine, you and I, Creation, sinners, the salvation that will be ours because of Jesus Christ for all eternity. And don't know exactly what that be, but we will experience the joy of his salvation, perfect joy, amazing love, restored bodies, no pain, no sorrows, no regrets. And all because we put our faith in Jesus, not because of anything we've done, but because of what he's done. So those are two of the

evidence. There's one more to prove, probably the greatest evidence that we can experience to prove if we're a Christian or not.

And that is the issue. And when we stand before God, he's not going to ask, how nice a person were you? And a lot of things that we claim he's going to ask, did you put your faith in my son, Jesus Christ?

And sometimes people say, I believe in Jesus. Well, James says, you believe good. Even the demons believe in shudder. And then others will say, lord, Lord Jesus said, and I did this miracle. I did that miracle.

And he said, depart from me, you workers of iniquity. I never knew you. And the difference is, is religion. And the fact is, here in America, you may have been born into the right religion, okay? And you were taught some truths and you believe them.

But unless it changes your life to bring a relationship with Jesus Christ, that's all it is, is religion, nothing more. And it can't save you. Only a relationship with God can save you. I remember going to Promise Keepers many years ago, and before the event would start, there'd be men on one side of the crowd and they'd say, we believe in Jesus, how about you? And then the other side would shout back, we believe in Jesus, how about you?

They go back and forth in that. And I'm sure that was true for most people there. But according to what is said here, even the demons believe. There may have been demons there shouting, we believe in Jesus, obviously had not submitted to him, surrendered to his will and allowed him to be Lord of their lives. So the one evidence, the supreme evidence, that we belong to Christ, he says in verse four, therefore, we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and the inflictions that you are enduring.

The greatest evidence that any of us can have that we are guilty of being a Christian is our steadfastness and perseverance and endurance in the face of persecutions and afflictions that no matter what kind of pressure comes against us, we stay faithful to Jesus Christ because of that relationship with him. And we're not experiencing a lot of

persecutions here in America today. They are in many places around the world. But we are experiencing afflictions. Afflictions, they come in a lot of different ways, don't they?

And none of us like afflictions. I don't like afflictions. I would just as soon just make things hunky dory, God, you know, let's walk through the tulips and have a good time. But realistically, we do face afflictions, and that is testing our faith. Now, we want to be careful here because we're not saying we should want persecution or affliction.

Nobody wants affliction. It is saying, though, that if it comes, our faith stays steadfast and our faith is tested, isn't it? When we go through hard times, persecutions, afflictions, God, why is this happening to me? You know that other Christian is more deserving. Give it to them.

And yet it tests our faith. And not because we're worthy. Twice in this chapter it says, considered worthy. And God may make you worthy of his calling, not because you're worthy. We looked at this two weeks ago.

Because he is worthy. Jesus Christ alone. He alone is worthy. He died for our sins. He paid our penalty.

He rose again, and we're trusting in him. But if we are in Christ, then he considers us worthy, not based on what we've done, but based on our faith in Jesus Christ and worthy of the kingdom of God, of spending all eternity with him and experiencing his blessings and in our life. And again, one of the main ways that Christ considers us worthy is he either allows or he brings persecutions and afflictions into our life. Nobody is not going to experience that in some way at some point in their life. And it's the only way that you can know if your faith is genuine or not.

When everything's going well. Sure, I believe. This is fun, you know, thank you for all the blessings. We don't know until we're going through hard times. That's why Peter says you have been grieved by various trials.

So that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. When Christ comes back, our faith will be tested. Was it real that we really love Jesus? Were we set apart from Him? Our faith is so precious that God allows it to be tested to make sure that it is genuine.

That word affliction is the Greek word *thalipsis* *lipsis*. It's also the word for tribulation. I believe we go through tribulations in this life and it's to test our faith and whether or not we're worthy of the kingdom of God, not based on our worth, but our faith in Jesus, who is worthy. And so God brings that pressure. If we're worthy, we will be steadfast and faithful.

In the midst of persecutions and afflictions, I've had the opportunity as a pastor to visit a lot of people, more people than I even care to mention, who were dying. A sickness, an accident, and one of the great testimonies of those people as they held onto their faith in the midst of those trials, they knew that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. They were fully depending on him, and they were going to be faithful to him even in death. And so God is giving every one of us an opportunity to prove our faith by how we live, how we live for him, proving whether it's real or not. There's nothing more important in this world, I believe, than to test our faith.

Is it a real faith? Am I really trusting in Christ? Or is it just kind of a faith that goes out the window when he doesn't do the things that I want him to do? Now, again, God's giving us an opportunity to prove our faith when we go through trials and tribulations and afflictions. And on the surface, this doesn't seem fair to us.

Oh, God, you're God Almighty. You can do everything. Make my life perfect, make my life happy. Take away all those problems. And no one likes suffering.

But it's important. Over in Hebrews 12, it says, for the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant. But later, and that's one of the differences between a non Christian and a Christian. The non Christian is living for now, and we're all in the now. We can't get away from the now, but we are living for the later.

We are investing in eternity. We're preparing to spend our lives with Jesus Christ. But later, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. When you and I go through persecutions, trials, afflictions, God is training us.

He's making us strong. He's helping us be faithful. He's preparing us to reign and rule with him for all of eternity. And so the Christian doesn't just focus on the here and now.

He focuses on that day when Jesus Christ will return in all of his glory. And it talks about God as God's judgment is right. And his judgment in your life is he allows you to go through trials so you have an opportunity to be trained by it and to prove that you belong to him. And ultimately he's in Charge anything that happens, whether he caused it or whether he allowed it, is not the issue. It's to prove your faith that it is real, that it's genuine and you're worthy of spending eternity with him.

He said, that's not going to be fully repaid. God is just. It won't fully be repaid until Christ comes back. And Christians all over the world for centuries have been persecuted and have suffered and have died for Christ. And they didn't see justice in their lifetime, but they're looking forward to that justice when Jesus Christ will come back and he'll make all things right, all things for eternity.

And we can look forward to that. And so those who have afflicted us in this life, if it's a person, often it's not, they will be afflicted when Christ comes back and will be granted relief. Relief not just for another week or two or a couple months or maybe four or five years, but for all eternity. All eternity would be with the Lord, that perfect body, perfect love, perfect relationship with God.

I love that saying. Play now, pay later. That's the world's motive. Got to get all the gusto I can. I only go around once.

So got it. All the gusto. That's not the Christian's motive. Pay now, play later, for all eternity. Some of us as seniors, we've learned that lesson, haven't we, boy?

I should have invested a little more money in my retirement so I could play a little more now. But when we invest our lives in Christ, we'll play for all eternity, not even begin to imagine the joy that will be ours as a result of that. And so what he's talking about here, if you've really given your life to Christ, if you've surrendered yourself to him, not just believe again, the demons believe. Not just say, lord, Lord, I did this, or I did that, or I didn't do that. There's people who did that.

Christ said, I didn't know them. Away from you evildoers. But you have surrendered your life to Jesus Christ. That means you're going to obey his commandments more and more and more by faith. It means you're going to have more and more love for others.

And it means you will persevere in the face of trials, persecutions and afflictions. As a result of that, you will be declared worthy by God Almighty, not based on what you've done, but based on what Jesus Christ has done. There is no more, there's no greater decision we have to make on whether or not we will follow Christ with all of our lives. And yes, we're weak and we have problems, but if the Holy Spirit's in us, he's working and he's changing us and preparing us to spend eternity. And thank God he's strengthening us.

So when we do face those persecutions, trials, afflictions, we will stand strong. And having done all to stand, and we'll give the glory to God for all eternity. And we'll marvel. Sometimes Sandra and I marvel, God, how'd you give us each other? You know, I didn't deserve this.

And we marvel at his grace and his love for us. And just think about that eternity with God. Unbelievable joy. And I believe we'll marvel for our eternity because we know God, I wasn't worth this. I didn't do anything to deserve it.

And yet you gave it to me as a gift. And you're worth everything as a result of that. And so I close with verse 11 and 12 to this end, as a result that God is just that he'll bring affliction on those who afflicted us, and he'll bring relief to those who have been afflicted. He says, to this end, we always pray for you. You and I have a responsibility

to pray for each other because of our relationship to one another through Christ.

To this end, we always pray for you. That our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every good, resolve for good and every work of faith by his power. And we'll speak on that this week. But your resolve is important. When you make that resolve not to lose weight or to do this or that, you know, on New Year's Day.

But when you make it your resolve, Father, I want to live for you. I want to live in a way that's worthy of your calling in my life. And I resolve to do whatever I can. And it says as a result of that that he'll make you worthy. He'll take that resolve and he'll work in that to change you to be more like His Son, Jesus Christ.

Resolve for good and every work of faith by his power. And here's the ultimate reason for all of 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. You and I were created for the glory of God. He's almighty.

Everything that's here is a result of his power, his wisdom, his love. And without him there's nothing, and we are nothing. And so we give him glory and especially glory for sending his son, Jesus Christ, to die in our place and then calling us by his spirit into this relationship with him and giving us the opportunity to live a life that is worthy of that calling. Let's pray.