

2Thessalonians 12-07-27b

We resume our study now in 2 Thessalonians. This is our second class, now that we've done the introduction, looking at Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the Church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. And we now should be able to see a little bit of extra meat in that introduction, both what's there and what's not there.

He says, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. And again, this familial tone is emphasized when he says God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is a reminder that when the truth comes to us in whatever form, whether it is exhortation or encouragement or rebuke, correction, and instruction, it is sourced in God the Father.

It is sourced in the Lord Jesus Christ. That's where its authority resides. And even as you acknowledge the authority of the messenger, Paul, an apostle, Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, you recognize that the only reason he is an apostle, a sent fourth one, is that somebody sent him.

The only reason he is a servant is that there is a master. There is a plan, there is a purpose, and there is something larger than ourselves in which we are engaged and involved and of which we are a part. And we want to constantly remember that God is in his heaven and whether someone is exerting authority or whether someone is engaged in service or whether someone is comforting or being comforted, it is all woven into the fabric of God's plan.

And Paul is always careful to direct the attention of his letter recipients heavenward at the very beginning and to remind them of what it is that binds us together, what it is that defines us as people, what it is that unites us as the body and bride of Christ. And he has done that here as always. He goes on to say in verse three, 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.

That's a mouthful. And typically, if you're just kind of breezing through this letter, you say, well, you know, it's kind of like, it was so nice to see you last week. It was just kind of a little chatty introduction and we'll get to the real sermon here in a minute.

This is just kind of the buttering up phase. In more modern sermons, this is typically where the speaker will tell a little joke, kind of warm everybody up or, oh, I'm so glad to be in your city. I've been staying at so-and-so's house and they've just, you know, it's just a little bit of kind of a warmup.

I am here to tell you, Paul doesn't do warmups. Everything he says fits his purpose. And under the superintending ministry of the Holy Spirit, it really counts.

So look at this. He says, we are bound to give thanks or 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. Now, I mentioned before the break that there's something in the introduction to which this all connects.

Do you see anything that you could construe as symmetry? If I said, all right, all I want you to do is have your Bible in front of you, get out a piece of paper, find something symmetrical in these first three verses. Find me a symmetry. You say, well, hmm, there are two things in verse two that are mentioned.

What are they? Speak up, what are they? What's mentioned in verse two? Grace and peace. Chorus and Irenae, right? What's mentioned in verse three? Do you see two things that are mentioned in verse three? Your faith and the love of every one of you, right? And you think, you know what? This is kind of like a garden, a vineyard, a place where useful plants grow because grace and peace come from one another. God and the Lord Jesus, right? This is Paul's prayer, he's expressed, wish grace and peace to you from God and the Lord Jesus, right? And we are so thankful because you, in the grace and peace of the Lord, are producing faith and love.

It is as though grace and peace are the sunshine and the rain and the faith and love are the leaf and the fruit. In the environment of God's grace, in that inner peace that is the gift of God, the last thing Jesus gave his disciples, he said, my peace, I leave with you. How many times does Jesus use the word Irenae? Even to the wind of the waves, peace, be still.

Peace, grace and peace, not necessarily freedom from circumstantial strife or challenge, but inner calm, inner stability. God's grace and a focused, balanced soul characterized by peace. What is the response? What is a wonderful result of this that Paul would be thankful for? We are bound, he says.

This Ophelio word in Greek has the idea of an obligation or something that is owed. We owe God thanks. We're compelled to be thankful for you.

We just can't help but be thankful because in God's grace and in God's peace, your response is faith. That's like the leaf and love. That's like the fruit.

So we are bound to be thankful. Eucharistain, the infinitive there. To God, always concerning you.

That's the word order. To give thanks, we are obligated to God, always, perihumo, concerning you all, brethren. As right it is.

Axion, you know what an axiom is, right? It's a sort of a standard of measure. This is axiomatic. It's a truth that we use to navigate the world of physics or whatever, geometry.

And he says, as axion estin, as is proper, as is in accord with a standard of reality. Because your faith super abounds. You've got hoop areas at the beginning of this verb.

It's hyper, you know, you becomes a Y. It's, there's a super fluidity. There's an overflow idea here

of your faith. Your faith is more than adequate to the task.

You've got faith and to spare. And your love, the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other. Now, this is the ideal.

You know what's kind of a difficult situation is when one person is putting the interests of others ahead of themselves, and they're really exhibiting love that's based on divine integrity and not on the merits of the object. And the other people aren't. If you're the only one doing the selfless love and other people are being selfish, you really start being tempted to think you have the short end of the stick.

What's ideal is if everybody is looking out for each other and nobody's looking out for themselves, everyone is looked after, but there is a reflection of divine glory. There is a reflection of the mind that was in Christ Jesus who didn't look out for himself, didn't think equality with God was something he had to hang on to. He emptied himself and took on the form of a servant.

And in the same way that he denied himself on our behalf, if we deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him, this love equation gets squared and cubed and quadrupled. It becomes exponentially greater than any one person. And so when he says your faith is super abounding, it's growing exceedingly, and the love of all of you, he says we are so thankful to God because it's not just a few of you, your group is characterized by this.

And that's where the real dynamic is, is that you've got a fellowship that understands this and is practicing this and is living this out. It's the fruit of their faith. It's not just an empty faith.

It's not an academic faith. It's not a sort of an ivory tower theological faith. It's a living, practical, outworking kind of faith.

It's what we heard about last night. I will show you my faith by my works. And these works are in the sphere of love, in the sphere of sacrificial towards self, beneficial toward others.

And when everyone is doing it, the sky is the limit. There's no end to what can be accomplished. So, and what is Paul's response? Well, I just want to tell you, we think we're such great teachers because no sooner did we leave you, then y'all really started coming up with this faith and love.

And I credit those outlines I left behind after I gave you that three week series on love. And you know, you might want to refer back to that outline. You'll notice it says Paul Laws down at the bottom.

He's not taking credit for this at all, does he? He says, we thank God always. We are bound, we're just compelled to give thanks to God. Every time we think about this, it's just such a strikingly great thing.

Well, wouldn't it be great if when the Lord Jesus Christ looks at us, he has the same feeling. He

turns to his father, he's sitting at the right hand of the father, he says, father, I thank you that those people right there are part of my body and my bride, that they are part of the gift that you gave me as a victory gift for the work on the cross and for redeeming Israel and for fulfilling your will. And this is my great reward.

I'm the firstborn among many brethren and look at who they are. Look at the change in them wrought by the Holy Spirit and the truth that they have aimed their faith at, that they've laid hold of by faith. Look at the glory.

And the Lord Jesus is just as interested in reflecting the glory of the father as we are in reflecting the glory of the son and the father. That's his motivation. He wants his, he says, you're coming to the father through me in John 14, six.

Jesus isn't making a big issue of himself. He says, you're coming to the father through me. Jesus is the fullness of deity and bodily form.

He is the reflection of the characteristics that originate in and are expanded and shown forth that fanero idea of shining forth from the father. And the Lord Jesus has voluntarily subordinated himself, people that get hung up about, well, why do I have to submit? Lord Jesus has no trouble with it. He's the son and here's the father.

What's the relationship? Is that a 50-50 partnership? Well, father, I'm exercising my 50% vote and I ain't going to the cross. It didn't happen. And Jesus wouldn't use a bad contraction either.

But he said, father, not my will, but thine be done. Why? He is co-equal. He is co-eternal, shares the same essence, same deity.

And yet for the purposes of this operation, he has voluntarily subordinated himself. And it's a great thing to remember for any of us that are under authority. So we owe thanks to God.

We're bound, we're obligated. We're just, we cannot help but give thanks to God for you always brethren. And it's axios, it's plum and true.

It's totally right to do so because your faith is growing. Here's oppression, here is harassment, here is the kind of thing that just makes you righteously indignant and you want to lash out, you want to sink to their level. You want to get caught up in pettiness and the selfishness and the squabbling and the, well, you poked my eye, I'm going to poke both of your eyes and this sort of accelerating human level contention.

And he says, instead, your faith is rising to and above this fray. It's just super abounding. And the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.

This hardship is doing nothing but stimulating your growth and you're growing beautifully. Growth in faith, growth in love. Is this something by which we can measure ourselves when we look at

ourselves and our dealings with family, friends, co-workers, employees, employers, customers, the general public, people in traffic, here's a hard one.

Can we measure ourselves? Can we look at ourselves and say, am I, I've got some faith, but is my faith growing? Is my faith increasing? Is my love growing? Am I getting better at it? Am I more patient? Am I more thoughtful? Am I more courteous? Am I more long suffering? Am I more gentle? Am I more humble? Do I not get up on my high horse and try to ride it around and trample everybody down just so they can see what a wonderful horseman I am? Am I making any progress or am I just walking up the down escalator? What's, I saw a guy imitating Michael Jackson's moonwalk and they show him and it looks like he's moonwalking and then they back up a little bit and he's on a treadmill. That's why he's not moving. But you know, you can think you're walking, but if you're on that human life treadmill, you're not actually making any progress.

You say, well, look, my legs are moving. Well, Michael Jackson's legs moved, doesn't mean he's going anywhere. And we so easily deceive ourselves.

This is the standard. When does the apostle Paul give thanks? When is the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven going to give thanks for us? When our faith is increasing, when our love for one another is growing and abounding. So Paul points that out because we know from the greeting, this is a letter of encouragement.

And what does he do? Does he immediately, has he heard that some people have failed in Thessalonica? Did Timothy come back and say, well, you know, Carpus and Crispus over here are finagling and ne'er-do-welling and backbiting and sniping. And here's a couple of women and they're snipping and sniping and fighting with one. What do you lead with if you're writing a letter of encouragement? Paul doesn't find some little niggling thing to find fault with, does he? He says, one thing I can say about you all is you all have this increasing love and this growing faith.

And this is the way you encourage. You overlook small things and get to the issues, get to what counts. So that's what he does here.

And it's a wonderful example for us. Paul, even though he doesn't invoke apostolic authority or servanthood or anything else, he is their example, isn't he? Isn't he the one that introduced them to Christ, established their church, helped them to grow. And they look to him and his example means a lot.

And it's unspoken. He doesn't say, Paul, you're a mentor and you're a discipling pastor. He just sets an example by his own faith.

And you cannot be a leader in faith or a leader in love if your own faith and your own love are atrophied, are anemic. We have to look to ourselves before we start looking around at others. So he says, therefore, verse four, we ourselves boast of you in the church.

What's he saying? We're proud of you. We just, we're just so grateful to God. And we're so pleased that when we labored and taught, you took it on board and did so much with it.

And this of course goes back to God. It's the grace of God. And it's the inner peace that God grants that enables him to do this in the face of some pretty adversative circumstances.

So we ourselves talk about you just like a parent will talk about their child that has attained things and accomplished things and is meeting challenges and excelling and overcoming them. We can't help but talk. We're just so proud of them.

Not in a boasting way, not in a arrogant way, but we're just so pleased to see them take what's been given to them and do something with it. That's his attitude. We boast of you in the churches of God for what? Your steadfastness and your faith.

This is what we need, isn't it? We know what faith is. We know it's got an object. It's the truth of the word of God.

And this is in our daily circumstances. Something comes up. Are we going to panic? Are we going to look to our own devices? Are we going to seek human solutions? Are we going to try to look at this as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, empowered and enabled by the spirit of God and in the service of God, our heavenly father and the Lord Jesus Christ? Are we going to try to live in these daily mundane circumstances like royal family, like people who have a destination in heaven? My citizenship is in heaven.

My inheritance is in heaven. My family is in heaven. My father is in heaven.

My Lord and savior is in heaven. And I'm living for heaven. I'm living for the future.

I'm living for reunion with God. I have a taste of it with the Holy Spirit. I have a taste of it with the indwelling of the father and the son, but that's what I'm living for.

That's what I'm preparing for. That's why I do what I do as I drive my car, fold the laundry, mow the lawn, clean my room, put up with the slings and arrows of daily tasks. I'm doing this with a goal.

I've got one eye on what I'm doing and I've got the other eye on the future. That's my hope as a part of my faith and a part of my love. So Paul says, your steadfastness and faith.

He doesn't repeat faith and love here. He says that faith has got to be steadfast. What does steadfast mean? Inconsistent or consistent? Daily thing or once a week thing? Twice a week thing? Steadfast.

When you talk about somebody who's steadfast, what are they? What are the synonyms? Reliable, predictable, accountable, trustworthy, steadfast. Here's a hard question to ask

ourselves. Can the Lord Jesus Christ look down from the right hand of the Father in glory at me and say, there's a guy who is steadfast in his faith? Look at that consistency.

Look at that dedication. Look at that commitment. Now these have almost become bad words when we say, oh, sincerity, and this partakes of emotional Christianity.

Listen, there is a valid kind of commitment, devotion, dedication, consistency that we call steadfast. It partakes of endurance. It partakes of patience.

Let patience have its perfect work in you that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. Steadfast. Paul says, we are proud of you because you're steadfast.

You're not just faithful in the crunch. You're not just loving when it's real obvious that it's a good time to do it. You're consistent.

You're always doing it. In all your persecutions and in the afflictions which you are enduring. Persecutions and afflictions.

What is the consequence of being persecuted and afflicted? If we feel like we are being ill-used by others, what does that typically produce in the human soul? Wah, wah, wah. Self-pity, self-centeredness, self-justification. Nobody knows the trouble I've seen.

You just can't understand what I'm going through because I'm in a place where no man has gone before. I have a kind of persecution you cannot imagine. You're privileged.

You don't have any testing like I've got. There's a word that starts with a great big A that that reflects in all of us. We're made out of this stuff.

Anytime you think, you know, I know somebody that's just like that. Just turn those little fingers back around and point them this way. We are all made out of the same stuff.

And persecution and affliction, hardship, ill treatment by others in all of us makes this well up. It's ingrained, it's inherent. It's probably in our junk DNA.

How dare you treat me as you treat me? Don't you know what a really great person I actually am? Don't you understand that I shouldn't be treated? And we just, that first person pronoun just starts coming up in all of our thoughts. How can you treat me this way? Don't you realize I never intend, you're misconstruing. This is very unjust, this is unfair.

Oh, me, me, me, I, I, what happened to the Lord Jesus? What happened to the throne in glory? What happened to the kingdom? What happened to the inheritance? What happened to peace? What happened to grace? What happened to faith and what happened to love? Well, I'll get to that in a minute, but right now I am just really feeling incensed and indignant at my treatment. How can someone treat me this way? I wish that God the Holy Spirit could blind me anytime that

thought comes up and flash a vivid snapshot of the Lord Jesus Christ during his trial. Do you really think you know what it is to suffer at the hands of men? I mean, try being the Lord of glory.

Try being the second person of the Trinity, co-equal and co-eternal creator of the universe. Your word is holding the atoms together that this person is made of, that's pulling out your beard and spitting on you and lashing you and humiliating you, reviling you, mocking you, and the Lord Jesus opened not his mouth. Grace and peace.

Grace of God claimed under pressure. Peace of God claimed under pressure. If God before us, who can be against us really? It's like the great mighty fortress him.

The body they may kill, God's truth abideth still. His kingdom is forever. Momentary light affliction, not worthy to be compared with the eternal weight of glory.

That's what Paul is referring to here. And he says, I'm so proud of you because you all have taken this relatively short season of teaching and you have made it count. Your faith is growing.

Your love is burgeoning forth. And even in your persecutions and afflictions, which you are enduring, you're steadfast in your faith. We could stop right here.

The letter could stop right here. And it would take us weeks to really fully digest and bring home to ourselves how needful this is, how necessary, how important it is for us to take this on board and live in its light. But of course, Paul's just getting started.

This is just the beginning of his letter of comfort and encouragement. And he commends them. He points out what they're doing right.

All the afflictions which you're enduring. Verse five, this is evidence of the righteous judgment of God. And in your English, got too many Bibles open here.

It says, this is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God. Manifest evidence. And it says of the righteous judgment of God that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God.

Isn't that what we've been talking about? God is looking at us and He's, if you'll forgive the anthropopathism here, He's planning the kingdom. He's looking at us and He's looking to the kingdom. Who will I be able to use? Who will I have walking with white with my son, walking in white? Who will I have in that hidden manna, white stone, new name crowd, sitting with my son, the Lord Jesus on His throne? Who is qualifying themselves? Who is getting ready? Who is prepared? Who is shining? Who's going to the head of the class here when it comes to patience and faith and love? Who gets it? Who can think my thoughts and anticipate my will in these circumstances? Who's doing that? God's looking.

It's the righteous judgment of God. And what I love here is in Greek, it says, it says, *endegma tes dikaios*. *Endegma* means it is the, it's in accordance with, or it is reflective of, let me get my page

back here, the manifest evidence idea.

You know, dike numi. This is your, this is sort of your courtroom case evidentiary phase. Here's, here are the facts.

Here's the case. Manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God. That's, that's your dikaios chriseos, you know, chrisis.

This is judgment. And you know what dikaios is. But then it says, this is what I really want to get to, of God, ace.

Ace. You remember E-I-S. Into, unto, with a view toward.

What is the view? This is, this is evidence. This is proof. This is concrete manifestation of reality with regard to the righteous judgment of God with a view toward the kingdom.

This life is with a view toward the kingdom. It's not an end in itself. It doesn't really matter if we end up in this life with a mansion or in prison with our head cut off.

This, this life is not the objective. With a view toward, ace. That probably, in my mind, one of the most important words in this whole sentence.

With a view toward the kingdom of God. That you may be counted worthy because your salvation isn't an automatic, oh, saved, counted worthy. Doesn't say that, does it? Here, you beloved Thessalonians, that you've got your faith and your love and your perseverance under pressure, your patience, your endurance, and your growth in spite of these afflictions.

This is evidence that God is going to be judging rightly when he finds you worthy for the kingdom because he's judging now, believers, to see who is worthy for the kingdom. He doesn't say, well, everybody that's saved is worthy for the kingdom because we're not. What qualifies us? What makes us? And you say, worthy? Oh, well, I am unworthy.

I am depraved. I'm hopeless and helpless and useless. And what do I have that I do not receive? And it's all of God and righteousness imputed.

And I'm just a stretcher and you carry me to glory. What does it mean when it says God is looking to see who he can count worthy of the kingdom? And people try to theologically skew this around and say, well, he's just looking for the application of the worker price. No, he's not.

What has he been talking about in this context? Faith, endurance, love, demonstrated, manifested on a consistent basis. God will be judging rightly when he counts those believers worthy. It is a righteous judgment.

So, application. When I look at how I invest my time, God says through the apostle Paul, we need to be redeeming the time because the days are evil. Left to themselves, it's gonna be evil time.

It's gonna be useless time. It's gonna be sand through the hourglass. It does nothing but hit the bottom pile.

Accomplishes nothing. You know, the difference between sand running through the hourglass or the days of our lives, I like to think of the time in our lives when we are living in God's plan and purpose, we are like a mighty rushing river going over a water wheel. And the rush of that time through our lives is accomplishing something.

It is producing something. It is converted into something that produces. What did they used to use those water wheels for? Use them to power a mill.

Use them to power machinery, to manufacture and create things to benefit and to supply and to make better the lives of people for whom these processes were being accomplished. And our lives can either just be dry sand running through the little port and piling up on the bottom. The only thing it does is tell you the time has passed or it can be the water of life rushing over a water wheel and it counts.

It is converted into something useful. That's what God wants to do with our lives. That's why it is so important for us to grow.

It's not enough to just abstain from sin. Well, I'm not like the sinners. I'm not like those Romans chapter one people.

I'm not suppressing the truth. I gather myself together and listen to the truth. Not enough.

We want to be these people that God looks at and justly, righteously judges as worthy of the kingdom. The kingdom is the destination. The kingdom is a gift of the Lord Jesus Christ just like we, his people, are a gift to him.

Do you want to be an imitation brass plated gift or do you want to be a gold, silver, precious stone studded gift? We're deciding in our daily existence what we are when God the Father gives us to the Lord Jesus. We're going to be the wrapping and the box that gets set aside or are we going to be the gift that's inside that has value and meaning and intrinsic worth? God is judging. What is he judging? What do we need to be looking at? We say, okay, I get it.

God's judging. I want to do better. I want to live better.

What do these verses tell us? It is progress in faith. Progress. Am I really doing a better job on a day-to-day basis in trusting God for the little things as well as the big things? Am I doing a better job on a daily basis of suppressing my carnal, sinful, old nature and living in the power and strength of God's Word and God's presence, the grace and peace that have been rained down on me? Am I responding with the leaf and the fruit of faith and love? It's not hard to evaluate.

Examine yourselves and see if you are in the faith. If we judge ourselves, we won't be judged because we'll see it. We'll go to that looking glass that James talks about.

We'll see our reflection and we'll see what needs fixing and we can do something about it because God in His grace has given us the means. He's given us His Holy Spirit with regenerating power. He's given us His Word that is alive and powerful.

We'll slice out anything that needs cutting away. He will prune us in the vines so that we can bear more fruit. The only hindrance is like that old cartoon strip years ago we have met the enemy and he is us.

Weenie, weekie, mee-ee. We came, we saw, and I conquered myself. We have been given so much grace from God and Paul spells it out so beautifully for these people that are really living it out and he commends them and encourages them for it.

And let's hope that we too can find ourselves commended and encouraged to further growth by the things that God has done in our lives. Well, let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for this great letter and the truth that it contains.

Thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit who does so much for us on a minute by minute basis. Thank you for the Lord Jesus who made our salvation possible, who intercedes on our behalf, who is the head of all things to us and the gathering together to Him, we look forward to so much and we pray that we will be ready that in the time that remains to us in this life we will grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus and find ourselves thoroughly equipped not only for good works in this life but in the kingdom to come. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.