

In Flaming Fire

2 Thessalonians 1:3 – 12

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~ The age-old persecution of Christians worldwide continues as I type this report and as you read it. Despite the so-called declarations of religious tolerance, intolerance of sound doctrine pervades global societies; and I mean in *EVERY* nation, every country, on every continent, and in every town, village and city you can locate on a world map. Many are added to the roll-call of martyrs every day. That list will continue to grow until Christ returns to establish His Kingdom. Even so, these troubling problems, and the world's hatred of the Word of God, *IN NO WAY* indicate that the Great Tribulation period has arrived, nor that the Lord Jesus will be returning "*soon*" to establish the Millennial Kingdom. Frankly, the disturbing events we see happening today are *nothing* compared to the days of darkness this earth is coming to in the future. Well, the apostle Paul is speaking to the church in Thessalonica in this epistle about their present persecution and the coming judgment of unbelievers at the second coming of Christ; and it isn't very lovely. This section of Scripture doesn't lend good material for a prosperity sermon.

There is going to be a judgment of believers to see who will even enter the Millennial Kingdom, friends. Many who have said, "*Lord, Lord*" will be met by Jesus with His frightful response of "*depart from Me - I never knew you...*" Then comes the Great White Throne of Judgment, at which unbelievers are afforded a legitimate, fair, and ample opportunity to present their case of good works before God. Unfortunately for them, it is already written that no one shall be saved at the Great White Throne – only condemned. Condemned by their own words, I might add. We make our decision to accept or reject Christ Jesus in *THIS* life, my beloved. If you have rejected Him here, then He is going to reject you over there; make no mistake about that truth. Christ died for you and paid the price for your sins while you were *ALREADY* dead in trespasses. You are *already* a hell-doomed sinner. Believe – don't believe – it's your choice. God doesn't send sinners to hell – they send themselves *willingly*. We could say they elect damnation.

The main purpose of persecution for believers is discipline. God disciplines His Own children. Specifically, the Bible teaches, "... whom the Lord loves He chastens." That is a big difference from the way God punishes the wicked. The suffering of the saint is a rehabilitation effort because God wants to see all lost men become born again of water and of spirit! Now, I know that sounds contradictory; and I know most people who know me think the Gospel I preach - and the Spiritual Safari, in general - is absurd. My Bible teaching is not popular; never has been, and never will be. But it gets results. Some have said things to me like "... I'm not going to Heaven on the back of anyone else." They honestly and sincerely believe they will stand on their own merits before the judgment seat of God. They honestly, but tragically mistakenly, believe they will justify themselves to a holy God Who holds the keys of hell and of death. If that's how you feel, then I have no message for you; except to say you're in for a big surprise....

3 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth;

4 So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and afflictions that ye endure:

5 Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer:

~ We cannot grow in grace or knowledge, and we cannot grow closer to the Lord in a relationship if we do not genuinely love our brother and sisters in Christ. We grow towards God in wisdom and understanding of our faith; but we grow closer towards our fellow Christians in love. Without the discipline of trouble and suffering, there is no possible way you and I could learn patience. Suffering is the way God teaches patience. Frankly, I have a *WHOLE LOT* of trouble and suffering in my life, but I seem to have learned very little about patience; but I digress. I'm sure that's not *YOUR* problem – but it is my problem. Either way, my suffering enables me to look way down into the future and have a purifying hope. It also enables me to witness properly, correctly and completely. Candidly, if you are not having trouble

in this life, then something is radically wrong in your relationship to God; and that something is: it doesn't exist. It simply cannot be otherwise. Peter said, *"... think it not strange, my beloved, concerning the fiery trials which are to try you as though some strange thing had happened to you..."* — first Peter chapter four verse twelve. Jesus said, *"in this world, you will have trouble."*

Most people want the benefits they are promised by God, but they do not want to be subject to His authority and providence. They are constantly seeking blessings, and to have their territories enlarged – and everything else connected with prosperity; and they are leaning on their own understanding. They aren't interested in instruction from Holy Writ. No, they're too impatient to wait on the Lord; and they seek myriad ways that they themselves might work their own way out of the problems they are having. Well, only the man who is truly patient in suffering is able to abide in the sovereignty and supremacy of God Almighty. These genuine saints don't shirk their responsibility in esteeming others better than themselves and in placing the welfare of others above their own. They don't attempt to discharge their responsibility as someone else's problem. Enduring these troubles are what gave the church in Thessalonica – who was under the iron heel of Rome – a real, true, and valuable testimony for the Lord Jesus Christ.

I hear people say things like, *"... I don't know why my problems are happening because no one has ever suffered like I am suffering."* Well, I don't know what your problems are as you read this report – but – what I *DO* know is that whatever it is you are going through, you aren't the only one who is going through it. You have a multitudes who join you in your hurting, my friend. Peter also said, *"... rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified..."* Of course, we don't suffer as the criminal or evil-doing murdering thief – we suffer in righteousness for His Names sake.

Most Christians are constantly in trouble that they cannot get out of for one reason and one primary reason alone: *THEY TALK TOO MUCH*. That leads to complaining about personal problems. That's not the type of suffering or discipline we're talking about in this report. That's called getting what's coming to you. I see many people around this forum on which I teach saying they are just going to keep proclaiming the Bible, irrespective of what other people think. Well, that's fine as long as you are proclaiming sound doctrine. If you're espousing a half-baked, self-righteous, and self-serving religious philosophy, then it's no good. You are actually doing more harm to the cause of Christ than anyone else. Either way, God disciplines His children for the development and growth of their patience and love for others. Those who get too comfortable down here stop looking for the Lord to come and take His church out of the world. All of this prepares us for our eternal state of existence. I believe some of us will look back one day and wish we had received just a little bit more discipline than we did....

6 Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you;

7 And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,

8 In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;

10 When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.

~ Beginning at verse six we see the judgment of the wicked at the coming of Christ; and we have seen very graphic details of this in our recent study of Isaiah. God is righteous in His judgment, friends; even as bad as it will be. Whatever God does is right; and if you think God is wrong then *YOU* are

wrong. The only reason men complain about what God does is because they are ignorant of truth. I know it's difficult to understand why God does certain things — believe me, I have my own questions for Him. We'll get those answers someday; but, in the meantime, verses eight and nine are a frightful reality. If you don't believe in a literal, eternal hell, then you don't believe the Bible is the Word of God.

The Word of God says very little about Heaven. First of all, we cannot comprehend it; and the Lord doesn't want us to get so Heavenly-minded that we become useless on earth. We need to keep our eyes focused on the pathway of our walk in the Spirit. We also need keep our nose to the grindstone, as the old saying goes. Even less is said about the condition of the eternally lost dead man. There is nothing in the Bible to satisfy the morbid curiosity-seeker or a lust for revenge. God does not judge in a vindictive manner. His judgment does, by de facto, vindicate His righteousness and His holiness; but we're only given enough information to serve as a warning. Candidly, that's all I want to see. That doesn't mean it is any less real or mitigated, however. Of course, Jesus Himself said more about hell than anyone else; but even Jesus' statements are restrained reticence! The lost are those who do not know God, and obey not the Gospel. I'm going to leave it at what is said right here by the apostle Paul because, frankly, it's bad enough.

Interestingly, the atheist ridicules the idea of a literal hell, while incessantly demonstrating against God; and their number one objection is the judgment of sins; or, "*eternal torture*" — is their preferred phrase. They couldn't get any more confused than that. Well, there was a time, pre-World War Two, when men said the bloody holocaust, and determined self-destruction of Germany by plunging Europe into a flaming fire of war by Hitler and Mussolini, would never happen. It happened. A man with an umbrella who met with Adolph and Benito said, and I quote, "we'll have peace in our time." We haven't had peace since then, friends. And we won't have peace until Christ returns.

Likewise, there was a time when no one — including our own government intelligence — believed Japan would attack American soil — it was determined to be impossible. It happened, too. The liberal churches in that

day were teaching abject pacifism. One can deny the holocaust and Pearl Harbor all day long; but, my friends, those things happened. My point is: there is a real and literal hell. Christ is coming to this earth after He takes His church out of the world; and His rule will be a terror to the wicked, such as they have never experienced before. It's called judgment. It's real – and it is a terror to contemplate.

Further, as we conclude this leg of our Spiritual Safari expedition through the entire Word of God, let me say this: I hear many people giving what they call a *"testimony."* Almost everyone around this forum seems to have a book of some sort. Unfortunately, and I have read some of them, they are literally filled with *"me," "myself"* and *"I."* Nothing about the Lord Jesus Christ; other than how Jesus made them rich and gave them a great personality, and saved their home from foreclosure, or their marriage from divorce – *EVERYTHING* is just wonderful in those books. Well, maybe it is wonderful; but I hear nothing in the average testimony today from a person who says *"... I was a lost and hell-doomed sinner according to the Word of God and the Lord Jesus Christ saved me."* Even when I do hear the vocabulary, it seems to be accompanied by gory details that, ultimately, circle right back to *"I," "me," "mine"* and *"myself."* That which we have been delivered from is meaningful – but only in a well-balanced way. That balance is: God gets all the glory. We decrease so Christ might increase. That's the way the scales balance.

God didn't come to make us wealthy successful businessmen who never have a sickness or disease – no, Christ came to deliver us from the flames of hell. I should also add that the Bible is not a tool to rail against false teachers and all of that, either; it is the Word of God by which we proclaim the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ – period. If we do that, Scripture defends itself. We wield a razor-sharp sword. If we go off on tangents about other people – either good *OR* bad – then we'll never get around to proclaiming Christ Jesus as the Savior of the world; and that proclamation just happens to be our commission.

Look, friends, I *K-N-O-W* none of this is popular. I *KNOW* these so-called safari reports aren't going to make the religious books best-sellers list. People don't like what I teach – *AT ALL*. Well, no one likes to be told they

have cancer and they're going to die. I'm telling you the truth that you have spiritual cancer, my lost friends – and some of you who are self-professing believers, too. You can ignore it, and they'll bury you just as deep as anyone else. The difference is: you will go on to judgment, and be punished with everlasting destruction, separated from the hope of salvation; and it will be for the glory of God Almighty that you do so. You might want to turn that over in your mind a few times today....

11 Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power:

12 That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ ~

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