

# STEADFAST CHRISTIANITY

## A STUDY OF 2 THESSALONIANS

### STUDY TWO

## When God Gets the Last Word

*2 Thessalonians 1:5–10*

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*We don't want a sovereign God who waits. We want an action God who responds now—the God of the quick fix. We struggle with a good God who allows bad things.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**O**URS is a day of instant gratification. We're accustomed to fast food, fast internet searches, fast cell phone connections—faster everything, thanks to AI. We don't like waiting. When disease strikes, we expect healing—now. When injustice occurs, we demand justice—now. When pain hits, we seek relief—now.

We also want God to act—now. When He delays or allows something bad to happen, we wonder what went wrong. Did God hear our prayers? In our lowest moments, we may wonder if He cares about us. Or whether He can help. Just when we think we've finally tied the bow around relief from our struggle, a new struggle appears, casting us into a pit of disillusionment, despondence, and dejection.

The age-old problem of pain and suffering presents a significant stumbling block to our understanding of God. Often, when Christians suffer, we doubt God's power and love. When overtaken by persecution or affliction He seems distant and distracted with other things, and we wonder if God really cares.

The suffering Thessalonian believers valiantly clung to Christ through persecution, but there might have been moments when they questioned God too. In the passage for this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, Paul pulls back the veil on our persecution and affliction to grant us a peek into God's perspective of our pain. In His sovereign, good, and all-powerful purposes, God uses pain and suffering for growth in Christlikeness in His children.



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### PREPARE YOUR HEART

Jesus experienced peace throughout His suffering, and He offers that same peace to you:

*“I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.”*  
(John 16:33)

As you approach your study on God’s good but unsearchable ways, prepare your heart by seeking God’s perspective and His peace. Record your prayer below.



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As we learned previously, the new believers in Thessalonica were facing afflictions *within* and *without*. From within, someone in the church had spread rumors that the day of the Lord had begun, which caused some to be shaken and disturbed, fearing they missed the Lord’s return. Others reacted by quitting their jobs and becoming passive busybodies—all because of a false report or a spurious letter wrongly attributed to Paul.

From without, an avalanche of religious persecution threatened to crush the believers’ fledgling faith. Despite the attacks, their faith was “flourishing” and “their love for one another [was] growing” (2 Thessalonians 1:3). So much so, that Paul boasted of their “endurance and faithfulness” among the churches of Macedonia (1:4).

Still, questions remained. Why would God permit so much suffering for such a young church? What hope could Paul offer these new believers? Let’s see how Paul addressed these issues.



### Observation: Perspective . . . and Relief

Observation is the foundational first step in any Bible study.<sup>1</sup> Take your time as you read [2 Thessalonians 1:5–10](#) in both the NLT and in the NASB. You may wish to also read the passage in *The Message*, a modern-day paraphrase. Try reading a verse at a time in each version, noting the differences in each translation.

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Also, notice the way that Paul switches subjects back and forth from believers to unbelievers. Believers (2 Thessalonians 1:5). Unbelievers (1:6). Believers (1:7). Unbelievers (1:8–9). Believers (1:10).

### **Suffering According to God’s Perspective—2 Thessalonians 1:5**

According to 2 Thessalonians 1:5, what does our persecution and suffering reveal about God? What is God’s purpose in our suffering? How does God use what others intend for our harm to be for our good?

### **When God Sets Things Right—2 Thessalonians 1:6–7**

What *two aspects* of God’s future righteous judgment did Paul promise in 2 Thessalonians 1:6–7?

When will this promise be fulfilled?

### **Those Who Reject and Those Who Believe—2 Thessalonians 1:8–10**

Detail the dramatic aspects of the Lord’s return in 2 Thessalonians 1:7–8. Why will unbelievers receive judgment? What did they reject?

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Jesus' righteous judgment on those who reject Christ is vividly described in 2 Thessalonians 1:9. Because they have rejected Christ's payment for their sin at the cross, what penalty will they pay, accompanied by what two stark realities?

In 2 Thessalonians 1:10, Paul described what we can expect when the Lord returns. According to the NASB, what two verbs capture their experience? How else might you phrase those two words? What is the foundation for that remarkable experience, found at the end of 1:10?

*Do you know what the initiation is into the real rights and privileges of kingdom life? Pain. Disappointment. Mistreatment. Suffering. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### **Interpretation: Diving Deeper Into Suffering, Repayment, and Relief**

As painful as suffering is, it is part of God's plan to bring us closer to Christ. Early Christians considered it an honor to suffer for their faith because it joined them to Christ (see Acts 5:41). "I want to suffer with Him," Paul said, so that he might "know Christ" (Philippians 3:10).

Paul told the Thessalonians that God was using their persecution "to make [them] worthy of his Kingdom, for which [they were] suffering" (2 Thessalonians 1:5). How does suffering make us "worthy"? Paul wasn't saying that we earn entrance into the kingdom through suffering; rather, that suffering makes us more like the kingdom people we already are. What kingdom qualities was Paul referring to that suffering might produce?

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God uses suffering to make us more stable in hard times, more submissive to God’s will, and more sensitive to God’s plan—which eventually brings relief. Paul promised that “God will provide rest for you who are being persecuted” (2 Thessalonians 1:7). What does this “rest” (or “relief” in the NASB) mean? How will we experience this kind of rest for eternity?

Paul also said that “those who do not know God” and “those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” would “pay the penalty of eternal destruction” (1:8–9 NASB). To help understand what Paul meant, review the article, “*What Does It Mean That Hell Is Eternal Separation from God?*” at [gotquestions.com](http://gotquestions.com).

Paul’s phrase, “eternal destruction” (1:9), can be misunderstood as annihilation, meaning to be completely destroyed, obliterated, or ceasing to exist. Review the phrase *eternal punishment* in the opening sentence, and “The New Testament” and “The Apostles’ Teaching” paragraphs from *Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* at [bibleportal.com](http://bibleportal.com).

From your research, how would you paraphrase and capture Paul’s intended meaning of “pay the penalty of eternal destruction”?

*This is eternal destruction. Again, you can’t think like a human thinks. You have to think like God thinks. This is when God steps into space and He brings before Him these individuals who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus. And He causes these who are lost to pay the penalty of everlasting, unending destruction. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

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## Correlation: God's Ways Are Higher Than Our Ways

With the topics of suffering, God's repayment toward unbelievers, or God's abundant and unmerited grace toward believers, Scripture affirms that God's ways are higher than our ways.

Read *Ecclesiastes* 8:11. How does this verse explain the mind-set of those who do wrong today? What is the value of consequences for sin?

Some view God's patience as absence—maybe He isn't there. Or His delays in judgment as canceling justice—maybe He won't set things right. But we dare not make assumptions about God. Consider *Romans* 11:33 and *Isaiah* 55:6–9. What is your takeaway about God's ways?

According to *James* 1:2–3, what fruit is produced through trials? How did James suggest we view life's promised troubles?

*We see now. God sees forever. We see today. God sees the end. We see the offense. God sees it all. In light of what we see, we read into that how God ought to react. He, seeing all, waits, waits, patiently waits. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

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### **Application: Truth to Recall and Summon**

Maybe you've suffered injustice, and the scars of mistreatment still mark your life. As painful as life is at this moment, it will not last forever. Remember how the story concludes. Christ's return will be your moment to shine—because Christ is King! His glory will bring an end to all suffering. The closing curtain that ends this life's drama will be the curtain that unveils a whole new stage and begins a whole new play—where persecution and affliction have no part.

What excites you most about the Lord's imminent, dramatic, and glorious return? What aspects of sin, suffering, and sorrow are you most eager to leave behind?

How is God currently growing you in the refining fire of life's trials? Are you suffering? Where do you see His gentle hand of grace, mercy, and comfort in the throes of your circumstances?

Do you have a loved one who is outside of a saving relationship with Jesus? Briefly record here your prayer for this person, asking God to soften his or her heart and prompt him or her to receive Jesus by faith—today!

“Justice is on the way,” Paul reassured the Christians in Thessalonica (2 Thessalonians 1:6 MSG). As certain as the sun rises on a new day, the Son's return will signal the dawn of a new age. In all its splendor and glory, God's kingdom will come to earth, and Christ will reign in justice and peace—of this we can be certain.

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## A FINAL PRAYER

*Forgive me, Father, for the days and maybe even months I've wasted trying to understand Your timing rather than simply trusting You in the crevices and valleys. Forgive me for blaming You. Forgive me for racing ahead as though You ignored and overlooked me, when all the while You have my maturing at heart. Forgive me for the wasted years of unbelief, running from You rather than toward You. Thank You that today I turn around and I come to You. In Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.*

## ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "*How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?*"

For the 2026 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Marshall F. Davis in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 1986, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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