

JJ<sup>1</sup>

Of all the cases that could go to trial these days, the majority end up settling outside of court. Some studies have shown that settling outside of court often ends up being better for the person who has been wronged. That's probably because the defendant sees it as more valuable to pay out more money than to have their name or company dragged into the public courtroom. Deals are cut by the guilty. Even innocent defendants often pay off those false accusing them rather than risk losing in the courtroom.

Because there is so much wheeling and dealing happening inside and outside of the courtroom, many people think this is how it will be on the Last Day. Even if they don't let on that they believe there will be a Last Day or don't really think it will matter, many people think they will be able to cut a deal with God. Then there are many who live their lives exactly that way, thinking: "I can stand in the courtroom of God, no problem. I was good enough. Surely I was better than a whole bunch of other people."

Much of the same was certainly going on in the hearts of so many at Paul's time too, when he wrote his second letter to the Christians living in the Greek city of Thessalonica. Their courtrooms were

much like our own. But there was one major difference between the Thessalonian Christians and us today. Today you and I are judged guilty of all sorts of things in the courtroom of public opinion. We're judged as small-minded, misogynists, bigots, racists, homophobes and the list can go on and on. While the Thessalonian Christians faced those things too, an added burden was that they were facing judgements in the courtrooms of their city as well.

It had started about a year before Paul and his companions wrote this second letter to them. It started not long after they first arrived in Thessalonica. There were some Jews who believed their message and many Greeks were also converted, including prominent men and women in that city. The Jews who didn't believe became jealous. They started a riot in the city, accusing Paul and his companions of treason. When they couldn't find Paul and his fellow missionaries, we're told in Acts 17 that "they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: 'These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here,' and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.' When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials

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<sup>1</sup> JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

were thrown into turmoil. Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.” (Acts 17:6-9)

Sadly, it didn’t stop there. Things got so bad, Paul and his fellow missionaries had to flee to Berea. The angry mob followed them to Berea, forcing Paul to flee to Corinth all alone. But with Paul and his companions gone, persecution only grew for the Thessalonian Christians. Paul and his companions wrote the first letter to encourage the Thessalonians. To remind them that it was worth it to stick with God. That even facing the loss of their lives would all be worth it.

After their first letter, Paul and his companions received news that in spite of the persecutions and hardships they faced for being Christians in Thessalonica, both from jealous Jews and pagan Greeks, they not only endured, they flourished! In the two verses before our text, Paul writes: “We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. Therefore, among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring” (2 Thess. 1:3-4).

That being true, the believers in Thessalonica still needed encouragement. Their pain, sorrow, suffering and persecution was still ongoing. To encourage them,

Paul reminds them that **THE JUDGE IS JUST**. “All this (your endurance in persecution) is evidence that God’s judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. God is just...”

Friends, the Christian life is proof of God being a just God. Just as the Thessalonian believers needed to hear this long ago, you and I need to hear this today, too. And all the more as our culture’s intolerance for Christ and his followers grows!

I know it’s entirely counterintuitive, that it doesn’t compute in our soggy noodles, but that is what is so wonderful about our God. Not only are his thoughts and ways grander and higher than our thoughts, ways and understanding, but that which makes his so much greater is where we see his greatest glory and love! Jesus says to us, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven...” (Mt. 5:11-12). Later, Peter and the other Apostles would rejoice after being arrested and flogged for teaching about Jesus because “they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name” (Acts 5:41).

You see, friends, the fact that we suffer *because we are Christian* is evidence to you and to me that we do belong to Jesus! It’s evidence of God’s gracious choice that

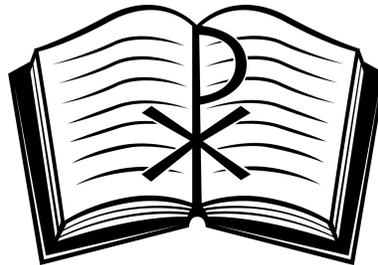
*The one who*  
**STANDS FIRM**  
*to the end*  
**WILL BE SAVED**

chose us from eternity to be his own! It's evidence that we are indeed different from this world because God in his love has changed us and given us a new heart that loves him and wants to follow him all the way into his heavenly kingdom!

But the Judge's justice doesn't stop there. Paul also puts to rest any temptation or desire to lash out or get revenge on those who do persecute us. "God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you."

The day is surely drawing near. The day when the Lord will at last deliver his people, and bring his holy vengeance on those who have denied him and harmed his people. **THE JUDGE IS JUST.** On the Last Day, the Lord Jesus, the Judge, will bring trouble on all those who brought trouble on his people, unless of course they repented and believed like the Apos-

tle Paul. And the trouble the Just Judge will bring will be far more severe than that which any of them ever brought on us. Paul says that they "will be punished with everlasting destruction." What will this destruction be like? God says it will be blazing with fire, both physical and spiritual. But the worst part of the punishment is that they will be "shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power." To be in the presence of the Lord means to be in the presence of his love and grace. To be shut out from the presence of the majesty of his power is to be shut out from the very thing that is most majestic about his power: his power that saves sinful people.



### **THE JUDGE IS JUST.**

There isn't going to be any wheeling and dealing. The facts, plain and simple, will be presented and the Lord Jesus will make his judgment according to his perfect, holy law. He will not veer one little bit to the left or to the right. He won't be influenced by anyone's last name; how much money they made or gave away to charity; how much they suffered in this life at the hands of other people, accidents or disease; how nice they were, etc. He won't need to hear a single word of defense from anyone's mouth. He'll simply look into their hearts to find whether they believed the free gospel, or decided they had their own solution for sin through the works of the law. Those who try and find their own way, rejecting God's solution for sin through faith in Christ, leave

God no choice. **THE JUDGE IS JUST** and his justice is perfect and he will carry out the judgment he has threatened to bring on all who reject him in this earthly life. The judgment is final and everlasting.

Friends, this justice is terrifying, and it should terrify our sinful natures. It serves as a warning for us, not to turn away from the Lord. But remember, that is our Lord's judgment on those who rejected him. **The Judge is also Just** towards those who believe in him. He will give us what he has promised. The promise Jesus made to the thief on the cross is the same promise he makes to you and me. As we take our last breaths, he says, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (Lk. 23:43). This was true not because the criminal was paying for his own crimes as he suffered on the cross, but because he believed in Jesus who was suffering his hell for him. He literally saw his Savior's blood pouring out for him and for all, and believed in Jesus and his full and free forgiveness!

Friends, this is what gives us the strength to endure all things—God's promises. Not only will the Lord carry out vengeance against those who afflicted us in this life because of our faith, but relief will also be ours. As our Lord Jesus comes to be glorified in us, we shall be glorified in him and marvel in his

majesty. Know that this does include you "because you believe [God's] testimony to you." Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.