

## Worthy Faith

Jonathan K. Dodson | 2 Thessalonians 1 | November 4, 2018

In 1 Thessalonians Paul wrote to answer questions like: What does it mean to be a Christian? What does it mean to be the Church? In 2 Thessalonians Paul follows up to address more questions like: When is Christ coming back? *Who is worthy of the kingdom of God?* Now that's the most important question you could ever ask yourself. How do I know if I'm worthy of the kingdom of God? You'll receive Worthy Thanks, a Worthy Judgment, and possess a Worthy Calling.

### Worthy Thanks

The question of worthiness is raised several times in the passage: v.11 *we pray that you would be made worthy of his calling.* V. 5 *that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God.* v. 3 *we give thanks for you, for it is worthy or right* (same word). So how do they know they are worthy of thanks? Paul says *because their faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing* (3). There's something about their faith, and their love, that's distinct. What is it? They're *increasing*. The word behind "growing abundantly" means *hypergrowth*. The word for increasing is the same we saw in 1 Thess 3, *super-abounding*. Are you increasing in faith in God and love toward others? What can you do to accelerate your growth? Paul expresses gratitude because they're making progress with what he entrusted to their care. What was it? *Our gospel came to you.* When you're entrusted with something valuable, a project, a product, a child, how do you evaluate your stewardship? If the child is maturing, if the numbers are up, if the product is improved, it's a sign you're treating the valuable *with the respect it deserves*. *Are you treating the gospel with the respect it deserves?* If so, you're worthy of thanks. If you're coasting, you're not. **Now**, back to our question. Does this make us *worthy* of the kingdom? Verse 4 says Paul *boasted* about the Thessalonians to other churches. Why? Their steadfastness and faith. There it is again—growth—and not in easy circumstances. So it looks like their progress in adversity is what makes them worthy of thanks. *But* when he says he "ought" to give thanks, the word is "owed," and it is owed "to God for you." Gratitude is to God. Why does God get the gratitude for our growth? Because the church is verse 1 *"in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."* What does that mean? Our very *existence* comes from him. He also says the church receives *grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus* which means our *ability* to grow comes from God. So our existence and ability to live worthy of the kingdom is all of grace! No wonder he's thanking God. But sometimes Christians act more "God-centric" than God. We say things like *it's not about you; it's all about God. Audience of one.* But, Paul isn't so one dimensional. He doesn't just point away from the church, he points through the church. He give thanks *for* them. Their faith and perseverance *uniquely* glorify God. God has called *you* to *uniquely* glorify *him*. How will you do it? What steps can you take to increase in faith and love, to so treasure God's grace *you're worthy of gratitude?*

### Worthy Judgment

Verse 5 returns to the question who is worthy, not of thanks, but of the kingdom of God, *This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God.* So there's evidence to point to worthiness. A lawyer uses evidence to

prove something. What proves they're worthy of the kingdom? It could be their growth in faith and love, v.3. Or their perseverance, v.4. Probably both. But how is persevering faith and love evidence of the righteous judgment of God? You'd think he would say evidence of the grace of God. To get at this, we need to know what the righteous judgment of God is. In verses 7-9 we see the righteous judgment of God is his just judgment on those who do not know God. The section is littered with courtroom imagery: just, righteous, punishment, vengeance (has the root justice in it, means the meting out of justice). Imagine an cosmic courtroom where every person is called to account for their actions. Every injustice, every sin, held to account. This is good news. Justice will be served, but *it will be served to all*. Anyone who has sinned, in the slightest will be held to account for suppressing the righteousness of God. If that's righteous judgment, who is worthy of the kingdom of God? Aren't all unworthy? Indeed. Then what's this evidence, this testimony (10) that *considers* the Thessalonians worthy? The word for considered is also a courtroom word; it means to count the evidence. You may recall from 1 Thess 1:10 [they turned from idols to faith in the living God to wait for Christ who "delivers from the wrath to come."](#) The evidence counted by God is that Jesus suffered their righteous judgment, delivered them from wrath, by enduring wrath ahead of time, at the cross. In the divine court, Jesus was judged in their place, and their faith in him was admitted as evidence in court: Not guilty, acquitted, blameless! Jesus suffers our judgment so we can be counted worthy in the kingdom of God. Talk about a gospel worth respecting. But you may have noticed the evidence points, not just to faith but also to superabounding love, perseverance in adversity. So are we counted worthy because of our love and growth? When you purchase a ticket to a show, you're required to prove you bought a seat by showing a ticket to gain admission. Which gets you in—the ticket or the money used to purchase the ticket? Obviously its the money spent, which is proven by our possession of the ticket. Similarly, faith in Christ purchases a seat in the kingdom, but proof of your place there is a faith that grows, loves, and perseveres. The faith that saves is the faith that sanctifies. We can't have one without the other. Our evidence is faith in Christ alone, but faith is never alone. It grows. And when you sit in this, when you take a good look at what you deserve, and what Christ did to give you what you don't deserve, you're moved to faith, hope, love, even in the hardest of circumstances. Andrew Brunson is the missionary who was recently released of two years of imprisonment in Turkey. When asked about his suffering he said, "The disciples of Jesus suffered in his name; now it is my turn. I am an innocent man...I know why I am here. I am here to suffer in Jesus' name." What you may not know is that he had an emotional breakdown in prison, had to be given anxiety medication. And yet, he said, "As I get emotions that come back, I say, 'I forgive.'" He doesn't take in what Jesus did for him just to get into heaven, but each time hardship reappears, he forgives again and again. *His faith perseveres in love.* How did he do it? Because God forgave me. Has God forgiven you? Is Christ your righteous judgment? Then forgive, grow, love. **Now** this isn't the full picture of Jesus. We're told [the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire](#) (7-8). A a momentous event, a point in time when the heavens will be peeled back to reveal the King of glory, an image taken from Isaiah 66, where God descends from the heavens on chariots of fire to judge the wicked. And we're told those who do not know God will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction. Now that's not something we should talk about lightly, but it is something we should talk about. What is it? Obviously something can't be destroyed eternally, so its describing some kind of never-ending torment. Isaiah

describes it as their *worm not dying, their fire shall not be quenched* (66:24). This too is righteous judgment. You say, how can a good God permit such horror? Well, he hands people over to their preference. The synonym, living “[away from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might](#).” But if he’s a God of love, how can he punish like this? On what basis can you assume he is a God of love? If it’s the Bible, then we must also accept he’s a God of justice. To accept God as a God of love, apart from the Bible is an act of the imagination, founded in sentiment, thin air. We cannot make him a God of love, and not a God of justice. In fact, his justice demonstrates his love. Jesus endures the righteous judgment of God to make us worthy of his never-ending love. How to respond? Like CT Studd, “Some wish to live within the sound of Church or Chapel bell; I want to run a Rescue Shop within a yard of hell.” We’re in church on Sunday, but will you set up shop this week?

### Worthy Calling

Worthy faith, worthy judgment, and now our response, worthy calling. Paul prays “[that our God may make you worthy of his calling](#).” How do we live worthy of the calling? Through “[resolve for good and every work of faith by his power](#)” (11). What good can you resolve to do, what work of faith can you set your hand to? Perhaps you need to get serious about seeking God, pursuing holiness, making disciples. Or maybe you need to get more gospel into everything. Don’t just talk to non-Christians, talk about the redemptive news of Jesus. Eternal destruction is on the line. Run a rescue shop. Don’t just show mercy to the marginalized; speak of God’s mercy at the cross. Resolve to do good, to work in faith. How to do it? Notice the little phrase, “[resolve for good and every work of faith by his power](#).” The faith that saves is faith that grows, *but it grows by the power of God*. Why do it? [So that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him](#). If any name is worthy of adorning, it’s his. Work harder at drawing attention to him than to your SM presence. God wants to work uniquely through you for his glory. *And, for your glory*. You will be glorified in him. What God has started, *he* will complete. Alex Honnold, the climber who climbed El Capitan last year, with no ropes, talked about his summit, “You know it feels good to be perfect, even if it is only for a moment.” Don’t we all want that? To feel perfect not flawed. With Christ, you have it, judged perfect because the righteous judgment of God. Christ is your power, glory, perfection. Believe it; you may not feel it. But when Christ returns, those with enduring faith will stand on the mountain of his new creation and look out on a perfected world, purified by his flaming fire, shimmering with his glory to forever enjoy glory in him, glory in us. Til then, may he find us leaning forward to be worthy of thanks, worthy of the kingdom, worthy of our calling.