# Marks of God in You

2 Thessalonians

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*Strong & Ready! (Books of 1 & 2 Thessalonians)*

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**livinghopechurch.net**

**Introduction**: Open your Bible to 1 Thessalonians 5. I want to bring a teaching to you tonight entitled: “A Growing Church!”[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Though Converted We Still Struggle**

Many of the issues addressed by Paul in his first letter persisted. In many ways their struggles only increased in the short time since Paul wrote his first letter.

* **Persecution** continued to challenge their faith (2 Thess 1:5-10),
* **false teachers** continued to stir up confusion about the Day of the Lord (2:1-3a), and
* **lazy Christians** continued to be a drain on the fellowship (3:6-12).

Despite these significant challenges, Paul begins his letter by stating, “We ourselves boast about you among God’s churches” (1:4).

With all its struggles, this church was, in reality, a church to be proud of, for **five** reasons: genuine conversion, flourishing faith, growing love, persevering hope, and a kingdom attitude.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Reading of Holy Scripture**

**2 Thess. 1:1-5**, “Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: **2**Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

**3**We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. **4**Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring. **5**This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering.”

1. Genuine conversion, vs. 1-2.

**2 Thess. 1:1**, “Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians **in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**: **2**Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

**Union with Christ**

The key word **in** emphasizes the believers’ eternal life with **God** the **Father** and **the Lord Jesus Christ.** Paul’s simple greeting identifies the church as a regenerate church.[[3]](#footnote-3) To be “in Christ” and to be “in God our Father” is to be united with them in regeneration.

**2 Corinthians 5:17**, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”

The Bible teaches that those who put their faith in Christ “become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

Paul wrote: “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

**The Father’s Love**

Paul frequently speaks of believers as being in Christ, *but only here* and in the first verse of the first letter does he describe them as being **in** **God** the **Father**. It is, however, an appropriate reminder of the Father’s care for a church undergoing severe persecution.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**The Flow of our Living Union**

Out of that living union flows **grace** and **peace.** Those two wonderful words sum up the gospel; **grace** is God’s unmerited favor to the sinner, and **peace** is the result of that favor. It is no wonder that they appear in the greetings of all of Paul’s epistles.[[5]](#footnote-5)

1. Flourishing Faith, vs. 3-4.

**2 Thess. 1:3a**, “We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your **faith is growing abundantly**, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. **4**Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring…”

**Impressive Church Growth is in Faith not Buildings or Budgets**

What made Paul most grateful was not the size of the Thessalonians’ congregation, buildings, budget, or popularity. The apostle praised God most of all because their **faith** was **greatly enlarged.** *Huperauxanō* (**greatly enlarged**) is an intense compound word and could be translated “increased beyond measure,” or “grown beyond what could be expected.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

**Persecution Strengthens Faith**

The Thessalonians’ faith had grown not only despite the persecution they were undergoing but also because of it. Persecution destroys false faith. In the parable of the soils, Jesus said, “The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away” (Matt. 13:20–21).

**True Faith Sometimes Falters but is Indestructible**

True faith, on the other hand, is indestructible, because the Lord Jesus Christ will not allow it to be destroyed. He warned Peter, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat” (Luke 22:31). But though Peter’s faith would be severely shaken (cf. Matt. 26:69–75), it would not be destroyed because, as Jesus went on to say, “I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:32; cf. John 21:18–19).[[7]](#footnote-7)

**Example of Job**

After enduring unspeakable suffering, Job reaffirmed his faith in God:

**Job 42:1-6**

“Then Job answered the Lord and said:

**2**“I know that you can do all things,
    and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.
**3**‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
    things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.
**4**‘Hear, and I will speak;
    I will question you, and you make it known to me.’
**5**I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
    but now my eye sees you;
**6**therefore I despise myself,
    and repent in dust and ashes.”

Job’s faith increased during unspeakable suffering!

**Nothing Can Separate Us**

In Romans 8:35–39 Paul expressed the utter impossibility that even the most severe suffering could destroy genuine saving faith.

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? **36**As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

**37**No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.**38**For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, **39**nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

**When I am Weak I am Strong**

Persecution strengthens believers’ faith by driving them to God. Facing a painful, difficult trial, Paul “implored the Lord three times that it might leave [him]” (2 Cor. 12:8). Trouble, distress, affliction, pain, and suffering drive those with genuine faith to a greater dependence on the Lord.[[8]](#footnote-8)

**2 Cor. 12:8-10**, “Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. **9**But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. **10**For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

**Consider it All Joy**

We could go on and on to see this in the Bible. “Consider it all joy, my brethren,” wrote James, “when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (James 1:2–4).

Peter reminded suffering believers, “After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you” (1 Peter 5:10).

1. Growing Love, vs. 3b.

**2 Thess. 1:3b**, “and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.”

**Title**

As he had with their faith, Paul commended the church for their **love** in the first epistle (1 Thess. 1:3; 4:9–10). Yet that did not stop him from praying that “the Lord [would] cause [them] to increase and abound in love for one another” (1 Thess. 3:12).[[9]](#footnote-9)

**Love**, not as fuzzy sentimentality or emotional feeling but as eager, sacrificial service, marks true believers. In John 13:34–35 Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”[[10]](#footnote-10)

In one of the first letters written to the New Testament church, the apostle James wrote these penetrating words:

James 2:14-18, “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothes and lacks daily food and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,” but you don’t give them what the body needs, what good is it? In the same way faith, if it doesn’t have works, is dead by itself. But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without works, and I will show you faith from my works” (Jas 2: 14-18)

James’s words provide the criterion by which genuine faith is measured: genuine faith will always produce **genuine works of love**. This truth is vividly portrayed in the lives of the Thessalonians. Their “flourishing” faith was producing a visible, “increasing” love (1: 3b). These are two of the most distinguishing characteristics of genuine conversion.

1. Persevering Hope, vs. 4.

**2 Thess. 1:4**, “**4**Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.”

Paul praised them in 1 Thessalonians 1:3 for being strong in hope when he wrote of their “steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.” Yet as he did with their faith and love, Paul desired for their hope to increase[[11]](#footnote-11)

**When Trials Do Not Pass**

The person who has a genuine faith in God will view affliction and suffering through the lens of an enduring hope— not the kind of endurance that waits to thank God when the trial passes, but the kind of endurance that thanks God even if the trial does not pass. The very sobering reality of the Christian faith is that the possibility exists that God will not allow your trials to pass. There are tens of thousands of Christians all over the world who live under the incessant daily pressure of trials and persecution.

**Boasting in Trials**

Paul knew this to be true from personal experience: “I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may reside in me. So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, catastrophes, persecutions, and in pressures, because of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Cor 12: 9-10)

**The Pattern of Suffering**

**Romans 5:1-5**, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. **2**Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.**3**Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, **4**and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,**5**and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

1. A Kingdom Attitude vs. 5.

**2 Thess. 1:5**, “This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering.”

**God Centered Outlook in Contrast to Man-Centered Atmosphere**

In contrast to the man-centered atmosphere that pervades many churches today, this young church had only a God-centered outlook. Instead of being consumed with personal happiness, fulfillment, comfort, success, or prosperity, they were living out Jesus’ command to “seek first His kingdom and His righteousness” (Matt. 6:33). That perspective enabled them to successfully endure the inevitable persecution that comes to the bold faithful.

The fact that we are persecuted indicates that God’s Kingdom is coming, and God will righteously judge those who are without Christ.

That kingdom attitude was **a plain indication of God’s righteous judgment.** *Endeigma* (**plain indication**) refers to evidence or proof;[[12]](#footnote-12)

**In Flaming Fire**

2 Thess 1:6ff, “ **6**since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, **7**and to grantrelief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels **8**in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on thosewho do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. **9**They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, **10**when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.”

**Suffering an Evidence that God is With us**

Suffering, when we have come to regard it in this light, is not to be thought of as evidence that God has forsaken us, but as evidence that God is with us. Paul can rejoice that he fills up “that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church” (Col. 1:24). Such suffering is a vivid token of the presence of God. [[13]](#footnote-13)

As God’s Kingdom goes forward, we will suffer. Our suffering is proof of God’s kingdom expanding.

**Conclusion: God Impressed Not with Outward but Inward**

Again, God never evaluates a church based on external features (cf. 1 Sam. 16:7). He is not impressed with innovative, clever repackaging of the gospel to make it more palatable for unbelievers. Nor are a church’s elaborately staged worship services, political awareness, social prominence, or size reasons to boast before God. A church to be proud of is a place where the genuinely converted see their faith increase, their love grow, their hope endure despite persecution, and their focus remain singularly on God’s kingdom.[[14]](#footnote-14)

1. Some of the outline and many thoughts for this study come from Howell, Mark (2015-01-13). *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) B&H Publishing Group. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2002). *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (p. 224). Chicago: Moody Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Leon Morris. *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians,*

 The New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989], 197–98. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. MacArthur, 230. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)