

(Bible used = NIV 1984 translation)

Background: 2 Thessalonians must have been written not long after the first letter, perhaps about 6 months, almost certainly when Silas and Timothy returned to Paul having delivered the letter which is 1 Thessalonians. Nothing much seems to have changed in the new church as a result of the first letter and the visit of Silas and Timothy. So Paul writes in similar vein, again to encourage but with a greater emphasis on eschatology (doctrine of last things) which appears to be main area of concern. In fact, 18 out of the 47 verses (38%) of 2 Thessalonians addresses this subject.

Way in: Over the next two weeks (next 2 studies) we will be covering doctrine which many find difficult and would rather that such teaching was not to be found in the Bible. How does the group feel about the 'authority of the Bible'?

Read 2 Thessalonians 1: 1 - 12

Question 1 Paul starts all his letters by praising and thanking God for the recipients, how they have encouraged him, brought him joy and glory to God.

- a. What is the usual result of starting a conversation/letter/email with something that is not positive or encouraging?
- b. In what ways can you avoid making such a start when you are very very busy and have little time for 'niceties'?

Question 2. Verse 5 states that 'God's judgement is right' because of 'all the evidence'

- a. what evidence?
- b. As Christians, do you believe it is 'just' that crimes require punishment, even for those who are repentant?
- c. In what ways might society work if there were no 'rules'?

Question 3. Tom Wright says 'We (society in general) have become bad at distinguishing between vengeance and justice ... God is the living and loving creator, who must either judge the world or stand accused of injustice, of letting wickedness triumph'. Note: Jesus is the Judge (verse 7-8).

- a. What are the differences in meaning between the words vengeance and justice?
- b. This passage is about God's justice and not vengeance. Discuss.

Question 4. Verses 11-12. Notice how Paul finishes this section on an encouraging note – praying that their actions undertaken for the right reasons (prompted by faith) will be successful, and praying for them always. It might be good have an extra time of prayer for those matters and challenges likely to have arisen in your discussions.