



THRU the BIBLE

with J. Vernon McGee

1 THESSALONIANS

BIBLE COMPANION



EPISTLES

READ THIS FIRST

This Bible Companion is a summary of Dr. J. Vernon McGee's teaching of the book of 1 Thessalonians heard on THRU the BIBLE. These summarized lessons get to the heart of Bible passages and are intended to stir your own thinking, prayer, and study.

Begin with prayer. Dr. McGee said, "We are living in the day of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the day of grace, when the Spirit of God takes the things of Christ and reveals them to us." Before you start each lesson, ask the Lord to use it to grow you up in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as He is revealed in that section. Dr. McGee said, "This is the secret of life and of Christian living."



As you study, read the Bible passage first. Invite God to open your eyes and deepen your understanding of His Word. That's a request God loves to answer!

If you want to listen to Dr. McGee's complete teaching on any specific passage, go to TTB.org/1Thessalonians (or any book of the Bible).



The corresponding audio messages are listed at the top of the summaries. You can also use this Bible Companion to follow along and take notes while you listen to Dr. McGee teach a book of the Bible on the radio or online.

After every lesson, several questions are listed for your personal consideration or, if you're reading this as a group, for your discussion. Ask the Spirit to help you take to heart what He wants to show you.



**LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU
RICHLY IN ALL WISDOM AND TEACHING....**

COLOSSIANS 3:16^A

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LESSON 1	FAITH, LOVE, AND HOPE	1
LESSON 2	WHAT TO DO WHILE WE WAIT.....	9
LESSON 3	YOUR REWARD WHEN CHRIST RETURNS	17
LESSON 4	OUR SOON REALITY	27
LESSON 5	WHAT IT MEANS TO WALK WORTHY	34
LESSON 6	YES, HE'S COMING BACK	41
LESSON 7	WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?	49

LESSON 1

FAITH, LOVE, AND HOPE



Begin with prayer



Read **1 Thessalonians 1:1-3**



Listen at TTB.org/1Thessalonians to ***1 Thessalonians Intro—1:2*** and ***1 Thessalonians 1:2, 3***

The apostle Paul, a great missionary, made it his pattern to start a church and then move on to new frontiers. With each group of young believers he left behind, he left a bit of his heart with them. Around A.D. 52 or 53, Paul wrote to the followers of Jesus Christ in Thessalonica, a Roman colony. This was the first of all the wonderful epistles he wrote.

Located 100 miles north of Athens, Thessalonica beat at the heart of Macedonia and was an important city in the life of the Roman Empire. Paul established this church on his second missionary journey and praised it for being a model church, a testimony to the whole area we would call Greece today. Paul also speaks of this church as being an example to the Corinthians of what it means to live generously and joyfully, even when they were suffering. They begged for the privilege of helping the saints in Jerusalem in their need. They first gave themselves to the Lord, and then they gave out of their poverty—and discovered an abundant life. (See 2 Corinthians 8:1-5.)

Paul only spent a little less than a month in Thessalonica, but in that time he did a herculean task of mission work. Paul was an effective missionary—bringing many to Jesus Christ there. In that brief time, he not only organized a local church, but he also went deep in his teaching about what they needed to know and believe about God's truth.

But things didn't go easily for Paul there. In fact, a group of people opposed him and ran him out of town. Paul went down to Berea, but his enemies followed him and forced him out of Berea, too. Paul left his traveling partners, Silas and Timothy, in Berea and went on to Athens and then to Corinth. Timothy and Silas caught up with him in Corinth and updated him on the Thessalonians. The men also brought questions from the believers in Thessalonica, questions they needed Paul to answer. Paul wrote this first epistle in response to these questions, to teach them more and give them some needed comfort.

Although Paul had been with them for less than a month, he had really impacted their lives—first with the gospel, and then as he discipled them in the truth by teaching them many of the great doctrines of the church. Paul didn't think the subjects were over their heads, even for new believers.

Paul had taught them about Jesus' second coming and that Jesus Christ's return for the church could happen any day. However, since Paul had left, some of the saints who had come to know and believe in Christ Jesus had died, and this naturally prompted the young church's questions: Specifically, would these saints be in the Rapture or not?

Paul reaches out to them in comfort, explaining Jesus' second coming in relationship to believers, dead and alive. This information we get in this first letter of Thessalonians is very different from how Christ's second coming is explained in Revelation—as a catastrophic and cataclysmic return in glory to establish His Kingdom by putting down all unrighteousness. (See Revelation 19:11-16.) Paul's purpose in this letter is to ground these young believers in the basic understanding of what's to come so that in expectation they would be prompted to live godly lives. Jesus' return will be a comfort to them—unlike the story they heard on the streets of Thessalonica that "after death no reviving, after the grave no meeting again."

In this first letter, Paul writes about the rapture of believers, when Jesus takes His church out of the world. Perhaps today He will call us to meet Him in the clouds! This fact alone is purifying and should prompt us to live like we will face Jesus at any moment. Many people today are curious about prophecy and love to argue about it; but really, prophecy should have a purifying effect in our lives (see 1 John 3:3). Does this hope of seeing Jesus at any moment get right down to where you are living? Does it change your life?

In Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, the emphasis shifts to the coming of Jesus Christ to the earth to establish His Kingdom. But this first letter explains that in the Rapture, we are caught *up* to meet the Lord in the air, but in His second coming, He touches *down* on the earth to establish His Kingdom.

“GRACE TO YOU AND PEACE”

When Paul writes the Thessalonians, he includes Silas and Timothy in his greeting. They all knew Paul's young protégés and appreciated their teamwork. Paul always associated himself with the brethren. He wasn't aloof or segregated above the others who were also working for the Lord Jesus. They were all together, in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are one in Christ. (See John 17:21-23.) And any believer who is in Christ Jesus is also in God the Father. That is the very safest place to be. This is the only epistle in which Paul writes this.

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Paul's standard greeting in all his letters). Grace comes first, followed by the peace of God. Both the grace and the peace come from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul prayed for all of the churches he founded. If you make a list of every time Paul said he was praying for someone, you'd be surprised how many different churches, individuals, and groups of people he prayed for.

Paul is thankful for this church because they were an example to other churches. They modeled faith, hope, and love (three graces found in 1 Corinthians 13). Paul tells them, *I am grateful for your work energized by faith, your service motivated by love, and your patience in hope in our Lord Jesus Christ's return.*

Paul calls out three graces of the Christian life. The past is the work of faith. The present is a labor of love. The future is the patience of hope.

Faith, hope, and love are abstract nouns. How can we make them concrete qualities? Paul gets them down to where the shoe leather meets the sidewalks of our hometowns. Look at how he fleshes them out in the lives of the Thessalonian believers in 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10: “How you turned to God from idols ...”—that's the work of faith; “... to serve the living and true God ...”—a labor of love; “... and to wait for His Son from heaven” is the patience of hope.

Work of faith. Didn't Paul say in Ephesians 2:8-9 that by grace we are saved through faith and not of works that we would boast about? Yet here he praises Christians for their work of faith. The way faith is demonstrated to others is a response of our soul to the Word of God. When we respond to the Word of God, then we walk by faith.

"We walk by faith, not by sight," says 2 Corinthians 5:7. The Lord Jesus said the same thing in John 6:28-29, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." We don't come to God with our works, but we come to God with *faith*. Then a faith that is living will make itself obvious; it will reveal itself in the life that is lived.

How does this show up in our lives? The same way. The work of faith is acting upon the Word of God. When you do what the Word of God says, your faith is obvious to the world. Faith connects the believer and God. Faith communicates His Word to your heart, and you respond. This is what happens at our salvation—by faith, you believe God.

These Thessalonians turned to God from idols. When he first met them, Paul didn't say, "Stop worshipping idols!" All he did was preach Christ. When they turned to God, they automatically turned from idols. They saw how repulsive the idols were compared to Him. When someone presents the Word of God to you and you believe it, the Spirit of God does a work in your heart.

These Thessalonians also were known for their "**labor of love.**" Labor and love don't seem to fit together. But love will labor and, when it does, it doesn't feel like labor at all. The Lord Jesus really put it right on the line when He said, "*If you really love Me, you will obey My commandments*" (John 14:15). If you don't love Him, obeying His commandments will feel frustrating. It's not even worth trying. But our love for God is expressed in obeying Him. Forget about being a "dedicated" Christian. Instead, prove it by your love. Love makes itself real in obedience.

The Thessalonians also modeled "**patience of hope.**" After they had turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, they also waited for His Son from heaven. That is the patience of hope and our "blessed hope." Millions today put their hope in "the good of man," thinking we can resolve our problems and bring peace and prosperity to the world. But we'll never be able to do it. If your hope is in this world, it will pop like a bubble in your hands.

So here Paul has brought together faith and love and hope, the three tenses of the Christian life: The work of faith, which looks back to the Cross and produces good works in the life; the labor of love, which is the present basis and motivation on which a child of God is to serve Christ; and the patience of hope, which looks into the future.

What a wonderful trinity of Christian graces! It was the biography of the church in Thessalonica and can be the story of your life, too. These are the abiding, permanent, and eternal features of the Christian life.

NEXT: Do we choose God or did He choose us?



LESSON 1

FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Why do you think the suffering of the Thessalonian church didn't prevent them from being generous?
2. How could a better understanding of what is to come promote godly living in your life today?
3. In your own words, what do you think is the relationship between grace and peace?

7. If you had been a member of the church in Thessalonica, what kind of an impact would it have made on you to know that the Apostle Paul was praying for you?

LESSON 2

WHAT TO DO WHILE WE WAIT



Begin with prayer



Read **1 Thessalonians 1:4-10**



Listen at TTB.org/1Thessalonians to ***1 Thessalonians 1:4-6*** and ***1 Thessalonians 1:5-10***

Certain axioms must be accepted as fact without proof. Here's one: Certain things *cannot* be proven to be true.

When Paul writes to the Thessalonians, he says, "*We know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that He has chosen you*" (see v. 4). Paul doesn't try to argue or prove the doctrine of election; he simply states it as a fact. This is the perspective from God's side of the picture.

Let's take a moment and think about God's role in the universe.

God created the universe. We don't know *how* He did it, but we read in Genesis that in the beginning *God* created the heaven and the earth. Some are willing to say He created it but deny Him the right to *direct* the universe.

Let's acknowledge together that we live in a universe created by God and which exists for His glory. He is God, and beside Him there is none other. He doesn't look to anybody for advice. He directs it for His own purpose. We live in a theocentric universe, that is, God-centered. It's not anthropocentric, man-centered, nor is it geocentric, earth-centered. This is God's universe, and He runs it His way.

Something else needs to be said: God is no tyrant. He is righteous, He is just, and He is holy. Everything God does is right. We may not always think so, but that just makes us wrong. Nothing will happen that will not work out for His glory. He is running this show.

With this in mind, have you ever considered the fact that you were *born*? You could have been nonexistent. God didn't ask if you wanted to come into existence. *He* is the One who thought of it. He's responsible for your existence. He didn't ask you whether you wanted to be male or female, if you wanted to be born in this day and age. He didn't ask you to choose your parents.

Now God is no tyrant of election, either. No one is chosen against his will, and no one is rejected against his will. God is right in all that He does. (See Romans 9:14.)

Let's get back to the place where we recognize we are mere creatures, totally depraved creatures. The human race must tell each other how wonderful we are to make us think we are great down here. The fact is, we are in rebellion against God.

When we grasp the immensity of what Paul said to the Thessalonian believers (and as believers, to us), "*We know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that He has chosen you*," we should fall on our faces before Him and thank Him that He has brought us into existence and given us the opportunity as a free moral agent to choose Him.

Jesus' invitation to the world still stands, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink" (John 7:37). Are you thirsty? Then come to Christ. He stands ready to receive you. You say you aren't thirsty? Then forget it. God offers a full and free salvation to this lost world today. He says to people, "Take it or leave it." We are free to either choose Him or reject Him. There's no middle ground.

When Paul and the other apostles came to the Thessalonians, everyone knew they were just men, just weak human beings with lips and tongues of clay. *All we could do was say words, but we gave out the Word of God. And the Word of God came to you, not in word only, but in power and in the Holy Spirit.* Something amazing happens when we give out the Word of God. As far as the world is concerned, all we're doing is speaking words, but when the Spirit of God takes those words and uses them, they become *powerful!* We can give out the Word of God with confidence that the Spirit of God will use it.

The Bible is the inerrant Word of God. It is God speaking to us. Not only that, but the Spirit of God can cause the Word of God to penetrate our hearts and lives so that we become transformed. We aren't born again just by saying a few words that we hear from the pulpit or the radio or by reading it on a printed page. But we are *spiritually transformed*, "not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever" (1 Peter 1:23). The Spirit of God can take the Word of God and make it *real* to you. He can and will take the Word of God and perform the greatest miracle possible—changing an unbelieving, lost sinner into a child of God!

The Word of God went into Thessalonica—that Roman colony which was pagan and heathen and controlled by one of the greatest political and military powers this world has known—and there it reached the hearts of people and spiritually transformed them. That is what happened in Thessalonica, and it still happens today.

How does it happen?

First, a person must *hear* the Word of God. Romans 10:17 says "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." That is the natural first step of the process, but that's not all because the Word of God is a supernatural book.

Next, the Holy Spirit transforms the gospel from mere words to something powerful! With the Holy Spirit, the Word of God is "the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). This is exactly what the Lord Jesus said the Holy Spirit would do in John 16:7-11.

The Spirit delivers the Word to our hearts with joy, in spite of any suffering we're going through. Paul uses his own story as an example. As he traveled from place to place throughout the Roman Empire, he "received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit" (v. 6). Now, affliction and joy are exact opposites. They are as far apart as the east is from the west. They don't belong together. The world would never associate these two together. *If someone is suffering, he can't have any joy, they think. And if he's having joy in his life, then surely he isn't suffering.*

Yet down through the ages, wonderful saints of God have endured suffering and at the same time have had the joy of the Lord in their hearts. That is real triumph. Some saints of God are a lot more wonderful than we could ever hope to be. Right now, they might be lying on beds of pain or being brutally persecuted for their faith or cut off from those they love—

but they have the joy of the Lord in their hearts. Like a sweet-and-sour sauce, a Christian can endure the sour and bitter in life, but they taste such sweetness in their heart.

The Thessalonians knew what Paul was talking about. Even after only a few months of walking with the Lord, they were examples of joy in suffering, and they were a wonderful testimony of God's Spirit alive and at work.

Wherever Paul traveled, the Thessalonian church's reputation went ahead of him. Other churches were telling Paul about the Thessalonians, how they turned to God from idols and served the living and true God. And how they waited for Jesus to return from heaven. Paul had already praised them for their testimony, of their "work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope" (v. 3), but now he took a different point of view.

When Paul arrived in Thessalonica, he didn't announce that he would give a series of messages denouncing idolatry or telling about the error of being involved in the worship of Apollo, Venus, or any of the other gods and goddesses of the Roman Empire. When Paul arrived in Thessalonica, the only thing he did was preach Christ. When he preached Christ, they turned to God from idols on their own. Note: He doesn't say they turned from idols to God, but they turned to God from idols.

When Paul preached Christ, they turned *to God from idols*. To turn to God is a work of faith (see John 6:29). The Thessalonians turned to God *from idols*. That's repentance. The repentance followed the turning to God. When they turned *to God*, they automatically turned *from idols*.

Take your hand and hold it so your palm faces toward you. Now turn your hand around. When you turned your hand around, the back side of your hand now faces you, and the palm of your hand automatically turned away from you. Just so, you cannot turn to Christ Jesus without turning from something. That turning from something is repentance.

When you repent, you turn to Jesus Christ and away from your sin. Recognize first that you are a lost sinner. We shed tears all over the place, but that doesn't do any good. It is only when we turn *to Christ* that we will turn *from our sin*. If you haven't turned from your sin, then you haven't turned to Christ.

When the Thessalonian believers turned from their idols, they wept over the time they had wasted in idol worship. After they had turned to God, they repented over the misspent years. The turning to God came first, then they realized that turning to God meant turning from idols.

Get the order right. Preach Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world to a world of lost sinners, but preach the message of repentance to the church. After we are saved, we need to get down on our faces before God and repent. Don't go trying to make an unsaved person on the street repent of their sins. They need to know first that they have a Savior.

The Thessalonians now served God as a labor of love. You can't really serve Jesus Christ unless you love Him (see John 14:15). If you don't love Him, then none of His commandments are for you. You think you want to go out to preach the gospel, but you don't love Him? Then stay home. The command to share the gospel with everyone in the world is just for those who love Him. If you don't love Him, don't even try.

The Thessalonians took this command seriously as they patiently waited for Jesus Christ from heaven. They were waiting, but they were also busy. It just follows: If you love Him, you will serve Him. You keep busy for Him while you wait for Him.

“... Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20).

**NEXT: When do you think the Rapture will happen?
Before the Tribulation or after?**

LESSON 2

 **FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION**

1. What does it tell us about God that He not only created the universe (including us), but that He also directs its affairs?
2. How does it change your view of yourself to realize you are no accident, and that God is responsible for your existence?
3. Why can we be confident that God's Word will be used by the Spirit?

4. We cannot be spiritually transformed by the Spirit of God and the Word of God without our cooperation. What do you need to do in order to better cooperate with the Spirit?
5. How can joy and suffering go hand in hand in the life of a believer?
6. What lesson can we learn from the Thessalonians about the importance of repentance?

7. If you had been a believer in the first century, do you think it would have been harder or easier to share your faith than it is now? How can your answer motivate you to be more intentional about sharing the gospel?

LESSON 3

YOUR REWARD WHEN CHRIST RETURNS



Begin with prayer



Read **1 Thessalonians 2**



Listen at TTB.org/1Thessalonians to ***1 Thessalonians 2:1-7, 1 Thessalonians 2:7-13, and 1 Thessalonians 2:14-20***

The Christian community has mixed views on the Rapture, Jesus' call of the church out of this world. All may trust Jesus as their Savior, but some may believe He's coming after or during the Great Tribulation, some think before, and still others don't believe He's coming at all.

No matter what position you hold, we all need to ask one important question: How does your interpretation affect your life? If your view doesn't impact you in a practical way, then you should reconsider what you believe.

The expectation of the return of the Lord should motivate the life of the believer. It's not a doctrine to argue about; it's a doctrine to *live*.

What we think about end times events is not just casual speculation or else God's Word is taught in vain. Paul told the Thessalonians, "*When we came to you, we didn't present some theoretical proposition to you. Our purpose wasn't to share some new or novel philosophy that had no effect on you. We didn't just entertain you for a few days and then leave.*"

No, what Paul presented to the Thessalonians rocked the lives of a lot of people. Many came to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. It brought a church into existence. Paul taught them something that *worked* in Thessalonica. The gospel of Jesus Christ walked down the streets of that city and into people's hearts and homes and lives.

This wonderful truth came to the Thessalonians at Paul's own risk. He had been treated shamefully in Philippi, but that didn't keep him back (see Acts 16). Even in their town he experienced a lot of conflict, yet he still boldly taught the gospel. He could have decided to win friends and influence people, but excessive tact and the soft sell were never Paul's method. His personal risk would never downplay his approach.

Whenever he had the opportunity, he presented the Word of God, straight and true.

If you were asked to choose, which of Paul's sermons would you say was his best? In Athens on Mars Hill? In Jerusalem before Agrippa? In truth, they were all masterful. But perhaps his greatest sermon was not in writing or speaking, but in walking. It was not in exposition, but in experience; not in his profession, but in his practice. Paul brought his points home on the streets of Thessalonica.

Every believer is a preacher. Yes, even you. You can't help it—the greatest sermon you will ever preach is by the life you live.

Paul tells us about the sermon he lived in Thessalonica (vv. 3-6) and pictures his relationship with them like family. He was like a *mother* to them in that he comforted them (v. 7); he was like a *father* to them in that he charged them (v. 11); and he was like a *brother* to them in how he challenged them (v. 14). His ministry to them was not characterized by deceit or greed. He didn't have anything to gain from them. He wasn't even hoping to be ministered to personally. His motives were pure.

It's like he said, "*When I came to you, I had no ulterior motives—I didn't want your money or your praise. I came to give you the gospel and then to build you up in the faith. That was my only motive.*"

Paul took his responsibility before the Lord seriously. God had entrusted him with the gospel. He wasn't a people pleaser, nor did he ever seek a name for himself. He didn't seek flattery. He never received any honorary degrees.

Greater than the lure of money is the temptation of honor and fame and position. But when Paul preached, he didn't care what people thought of him; he only cared what God thought of him. And his life stood the test.

With Paul as an example, we see how the body of believers should consider others and to mirror a godly family here on earth. The relationships of a husband, wife, and child in the home all can picture God's love for the world.

SERVE YOU LIKE A MOTHER

Look at Paul all tender and kind! He said he worked day and night to nurture the Thessalonians as a little bird is nurtured by its mother. She's not a paid nurse who works by the hour or a hired babysitter. Mothers don't punch the clock and then turn away from their crying babies when their shift is over. Mothers work 24/7, but since it's motivated by love, (most days) it doesn't seem like work at all.

Paul said he served these people like a mother—night and day—because he loved them. He called them “dear,” meaning “beloved.” His love for them was genuine and comforting.

Ministers like this today may not always be great expositors, but they believe the Word of God and live it. They counsel people in need of help. You can open your heart to such a minister and let them help you. We're all to care for each other with a mother's tender care.

SERVE YOU LIKE A FATHER

Many very fine Bible teachers never preach anything but comfort. People love it, because everyone likes to be comforted. But we would never grow if we're only comforted. We also grow by learning how to discipline our lives.

Paul says he served the Thessalonians like a *father*, providing loving direction. First, Paul disciplined his own life by God's standards. He carefully discharged his duty to people and to God; he served them both. A dedicated life is a holy life, lived always in the presence of God. People are always watching, too.

Like a father, Paul walked alongside “his children” and helped them. Sometimes it was by teaching them, sometimes challenging them, spurring them on just as a dad does when he guides his children to live good lives.

He “exhorts” them, the same as the Holy Spirit does (*parakaleo* in Greek). Jesus said the Holy Spirit would “come alongside” and convict the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment (see John 16:7-11). When the gospel is presented, it should give the Holy Spirit something to work with to convict or teach or comfort.

The father-side of us should call each other higher. Paul often said, “*I beg/urge/exhort you...*,” but to do what? Answer: To live lives worthy of God—lives described by honor, courage, personal integrity—suitable for the God who saves and calls us into His kingdom and glory. Paul “charges” them to live like this—it’s a strong, masculine, firm word. It takes discipline to live a worthy life before God. God calls us to “His kingdom” (the millennial kingdom) and to His “glory” (the eternal kingdom). In other words, a life worthy of God lives in perspective of His great plan and purpose. We should live in light of eternity.

A life worthy of God not only gives out His Word, but also receives His Word. This is the other side of giving the gospel. The gospel should be presented with power, but it also should be *received* as the Word of God—not just as people’s words, but for what it truly is, the Word of God, working with supernatural power in those who believe it.

How do you receive the Word of God? Do you receive it as the Word of God? If you do, then it will work in you, and there’s blessing there for you. Otherwise, you are wasting your time in church.

SERVE YOU LIKE A BROTHER

As the church mirrors the family of God, it reveals God to their community just as a family should. The *brother*-side of the ministry within the church is represented by the child in the family.

What makes men brothers? First, we’re all in the same category: sinners. Regardless of race, we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. This is the brotherhood of sinners (but this is not a loving brotherhood).

What did Paul say drew the Thessalonians together as brothers? They were all suffering. The Thessalonian church was largely made up of Gentiles who were experiencing persecution. Paul said to them, “*Before you began suffering, the brothers over in Jerusalem were already suffering at the hands of their racial brothers. This suffering draws and holds you together.*” The early church were brothers and sisters in suffering; suffering is a cement that holds believers together.

Many in our churches pray for revival, but few would pray that we would suffer or be persecuted in order to bring in revival. If suffering came to God's church, it would draw believers together. We wouldn't pick at each other so much, and we'd honor each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. We might disagree on various points, but every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is your brother or sister. We are the family of God. When the church *really* mirrors this before the world, then revival will come.

Paul comforted the Thessalonians by comparing the suffering they were experiencing at the hands of their own countrymen to the suffering the Jerusalem church was experiencing by the Jews. *"You're following in the footsteps of the people who first followed Jesus Christ,"* he said. *"Their countrymen have made it a practice to offend God, and God has had about enough."*

How interesting what we learn about God! He permits sin to run its full course. The figure of speech "to fill up the measure of their sins" (v. 16) refers to the cup of iniquity God is permitting to be filled. God allows it so Satan will never be able to say, "I never was given a chance, because God wouldn't permit me to go all the way." The day is coming when Satan will have his fill. During the Great Tribulation, God will allow Satan full rein.

Paul was run out of Thessalonica, but his heart was still there. *"I was taken from you in person, but not in heart."* He hated to leave these young Christians and wanted to see them again. (And he did!) But even Paul knew it was Satan's strategy that kept him from going back to them at that time. Satan, whose name means *adversary*, tries to hinder any people or program from getting out the Word of God.

Paul's hope was always tied up in being with the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the things he often talked about was the day when Christ comes to take His church in the Rapture. Then he will be with these people whom he has led to the Lord. They were both a joy for him here and now, and they would be his joy in eternity.

By the way, will anyone in heaven come up to you and thank you for having a part in giving them the Word of God? Have you given your support to missions? If you have, someone you have never known, someone from the other side of the earth, may come up to you and thank you for your investment. They will thank you for being interested in getting out the Word of God because the Word reached them and enabled them to be saved. That will be part of the reward we will get in heaven. What a wonderful hope

to look forward to when Christ Jesus takes the church out of this world. It is even more joyous to know that someone who trusted Christ because of your witness will go along with you to meet the Lord. Invest your life well while you can!

**NEXT: Do you like to talk about the end times?
Remember this ...**



LESSON 3

FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. How should the expectation of the return of Jesus affect how you think?
2. How is living out the truth of the gospel the same for us today as it was in first-century Thessalonica? How is it different?
3. How would you describe what motivated the Apostle Paul in your own words?

4. How can the example of motherhood help us minister to people around us?
5. Before Paul could provide direction for others, he first needed to discipline himself. What areas of your life need more discipline to better enable you to serve others?
6. What does it tell us about ourselves that sometimes the best way for us to learn is for God to allow us to experience the natural consequences of our sins?

7. Imagine one day in heaven that someone approaches you to thank you. What are you doing to give people God's Word now so that they could thank you for it later?

A close-up, low-angle shot of a person with light-colored hair and glasses, wearing a dark t-shirt, reading an open book. The book is held in their left hand, and the pages are slightly blurred. The background is dark and out of focus.

WHEN YOU DO WHAT THE
WORD OF GOD SAYS,
*your faith is obvious
to the world.*



LESSON 4

OUR SOON REALITY



Begin with prayer



Read **1 Thessalonians 3**



Listen at TTB.org/1Thessalonians to ***1 Thessalonians 3:1-13*** and ***1 Thessalonians 3:13—4:8***

The great theme of 1 Thessalonians is the rapture of the church.

The great theme of 2 Thessalonians is the Lord Jesus Christ's second coming to earth to establish His Kingdom.

Of all the teaching you've heard about eschatology or prophecy, Paul's instruction in 1 Thessalonians is the most practical. Most teachers treat prophecy as a novelty—something fun to talk or even argue about, but not meaningful to everyday life. But Paul's teaching points us to practical living.

Setting your expectations on Jesus' soon return will purify your hope. It will change your life, impact your lifestyle, and set your priorities—especially when you consider that at any moment, Jesus Christ could snatch up His own. If that doesn't affect your life, you don't really believe it.

This soon reality is the heart of this first letter to the Thessalonians.

Paul's love for the Thessalonians is obvious. In our last study we saw how he felt like family to them. He had led them to the Lord and said they would be his glory and his joy at the coming of Christ.

He wishes he could be there with them and knew it was Satan that hindered him in returning to Thessalonica. He had left so quickly that there was much instruction he wanted to develop more fully. Paul was concerned for the Thessalonians because they faced persecution, and he wanted the truth about God to comfort them. He would have gladly risked his life for their good. Instead, he could only send Timothy to help them. He calls Timothy “our brother and minister (servant) of God.” Timothy’s area of service is sharing the Word of God. (This can be our way to serve, too.) When the gospel of Christ is given out, a whole lot of good is taking place—both short-term and eternal good. Only the gospel can help people into a right relationship with God.

Paul also hoped to *establish* them in their faith. This word paints a powerful word picture from the Old Testament book of Exodus. Remember when Moses held his arms up in prayer as Israel fought a battle? When he got tired, Aaron and Hur supported him, so his hands *stayed up*—established. People need to help establish each other’s faith like that today.

The Thessalonians were under great pressure and tension and needed Paul’s encouragement. The storms were not unexpected and they were temporary, but they also were intense. Paul wants the Thessalonians to stand for the Lord in the middle of the storm. (See also John 16:33, 2 Timothy 3:12, and 1 Peter 4:12-19.) The Lord Himself tells us to be of good cheer even when we’re in the thick of it.

If you are a believer, you’re not going to escape trouble. God’s Word makes that clear for all Christians. In fact, you’ll have trouble after you become a child of God, even if you didn’t have any trouble before. Jesus never promised we would miss the storms, but that He will go through them with us. When He was with the disciples in that small boat during the storm on the Sea of Galilee, He took them to harbor. Any boat which He was not in went to the bottom of the Sea of Galilee, but He promised they would reach the other side. Today, He’s in the process of taking us to shore.

If you are experiencing trouble down here, if the pressures and tensions of life are on you, then that is a sign you are a child of God. This is the way God teaches us to rely on Him. Such troubles take us closer to God. They promote sanctification in our lives. (The time to be concerned is when there’s no cloud in the sky and no ripple on the sea. Then you might want to make sure you are His child.) Paul comforts the Thessalonians because he was concerned that since Satan was giving him a hard time, the Thessalonians might be suffering his arrows, too.

Another purpose of these afflictions, Paul says, is to test the genuineness of what we believe. One thing that will set us apart from the many fake Christians is the ability to endure trouble through our faith in God. Paul is glad for this proof indicator in the Thessalonians. He heard their faith was holding them firm.

This firm foundation means that as believers we can enjoy life—even in trouble (see 1 Peter 4:12-13). You just can't lose as a Christian. Even if you have trouble, God will eventually work it out for your good—you can be sure of that.

So if you're in a season of sorrow, keep going. Sorrow brings more capacity for joy. *“Rejoice,”* Paul tells them (and us)—“*keep growing!*” Being a Christian is a wonderful thing!

As when he taught them about the Lord's return, he encouraged them to live like the Rapture could happen any moment. *“Keep loving each other and let it spill out and over on your neighbors,”* he said. Let your love be seen by your actions, not just in your affection but in actively seeking each other's welfare. This kind of love is not just an end in itself but is purposefully pointing people to Jesus Christ.

This labor of love also establishes their own hearts “blameless in holiness before our God” (v. 13). The side benefit of their love for one another is developing their personal character of holiness. If you were tried in court for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? We are going to appear before Him someday, and He is going to judge our works. This may terrify you, but He also is going to judge our character as believers. What kind of a life are you living today?

Someday, the Lord will judge our lives to determine what rewards He will give us. The question that naturally arises from this letter to the Thessalonians is when will He present us “blameless in holiness before our God”? Is it when He takes the church out of the world? Or will it be at the time He comes to the earth to establish His Kingdom? The answer depends on our understanding of this phrase, “at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.” To more fully understand when this could be, we need to understand the original words for “coming” or “appearing.”

The first is *epiphaneia*—from which we get our word *epiphany*, meaning “shining through.” The first coming of Christ was an epiphany. This word was used to describe Jesus' first coming as a baby in Bethlehem, His snatching His church out of the world, and also His coming to set up His Kingdom. All three describe the Lord Jesus' actual presence breaking through.

Another word, *apokalupsis*, means a “revelation” or an “unveiling.” That is actually the name of the book of Revelation. One could hardly call His first coming an unveiling, because actually His glory was veiled in human flesh when He was born in Bethlehem. This unveiling was like the shekinah glory behind the veil in the Holy of Holies of the Old Testament tabernacle, where only the high priest was allowed to enter. When the Lord Jesus was here the first time, His glory didn’t show; it was veiled in human flesh. When He comes again, His glory will shine forth. So this word could also refer to His second coming.

The final word for coming is *parousia*, literally “presence” or “being alongside.” (See Philippians 2:12 and 1 Thessalonians 2:19.) When the Lord comes, believers will be *present* with Him at the very moment we’re caught up to meet Him in the air. He will take us home to glory, to the place that He has prepared for us. This “coming” doesn’t refer to the return of the Lord with His saints to establish His Kingdom, but to our coming to heaven into the presence of the Father. We will come into the presence of the Lord Jesus and at that time will be presented “blameless in holiness before our God.”

No doubt this reminder of the Lord’s coming encouraged the Thessalonians to persevere in their trials, and it should us, too. With the Lord, we’ve got a bright future ahead of us.

NEXT: What does it mean to walk worthy?



LESSON 4

FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. How can focusing on Jesus' return help you set your priorities?
2. What does it look like to be of good cheer in the middle of pressure and tension?
3. Jesus rode through the storm with the disciples. What does this tell us about our God?

4. What are some areas of your life in which you can do a better job of letting your love be seen by your actions?
5. Blamelessness must take place in our thoughts before it shows up in our actions. How do you need to change your thinking so it evidences holiness?
6. No matter what view you take on the timing of Christ's second coming, it reinforces the idea from His first coming that God desires to be with us. What does this tell us about how God sees us?

7. The believers in the Thessalonian church lived in a world much like the one Jesus inhabited. Do you think that would have made looking for His second coming easier or harder?

LESSON 5

WHAT IT MEANS TO WALK WORTHY



Begin with prayer



Read **1 Thessalonians 4:1-13**



Listen at TTB.org/1Thessalonians to ***1 Thessalonians 3:13–4:8*** and ***1 Thessalonians 4:3-12***

We've been focused on the hope of the coming of the Lord and the motivation that gives us to live a godly life. We look forward to that day in the near future when we will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

But in the meantime, our feet are down here on the ground and we need to do some walking. Let's talk about that.

Our spiritual life is like walking; all we need to focus on is the next step. Often we become discouraged because a lifetime of battling sin and seeking victory seems so overwhelming. But to be the person God wants us to be, our focus has to be the next step. Just that and nothing else. This is the way we will please God day by day.

"As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him," Paul will tell the Colossians (Colossians 2:6). The same total dependence you expressed when you surrendered to the Lord for salvation is the same spirit you need to approach living the Christian life. To abound in the Christian life, you need a personal, growing, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. We should be growing in grace and in the knowledge of Him. You can't comfort yourself. You can't convince yourself about these promises. You've got to connect with Jesus and let Him make these things real to you.

When you do, you'll want to please the Lord and follow His commandments.

Commandments? Like the Ten Commandments? Is that what Paul is talking about? No—the Ten Commandments have no part in a sinner's salvation, nor are they standard for how a Christian should live. The purpose of the Ten Commandments is to take us by the hand, as a teacher would lead a child, and bring us to the Cross. "Little fellow, you need a Savior!" The Ten Commandments are like a mirror which lets us see that we are sinners. The Ten Commandments weren't given to save us but to show us we're sinners and need a Savior.

That said, Christians do have commandments to follow, but our new commandments set us on a much higher plane than the Ten Commandments. In 1 Thessalonians 5, we'll find 22 commandments for believers!

Now the question naturally arises: If we can't keep the Ten Commandments, how could we keep higher commandments? Read the book of Exodus and it's painfully clear how far short we fall in keeping the Ten Commandments. The apostle Peter rehearses Israel's failure (see Acts 15:7, 10-11).

Obedience to God's standards can only be attained by the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in the believer's life (v. 8). He gives us commandments to live by. Now, we need to be disciplined to obey them, but our motivation is different. We *want* to live by God's commandments—not because we fear consequences or punishment. No, we want to obey God's instructions because we love Him and His Son, Jesus Christ. Even Jesus told us this (see John 14:15).

God's will for us is that we will grow up in the Lord, ever increasing in holiness and a desire to love and obey Him. This process is called *sanctification*—a very wonderful, often misunderstood word. Used like it is here, holiness (or sanctification) means we've been set apart to God. Our lives won't be perfect as long as we walk this earth, but even here, we belong to God. He has set us aside for Himself. This happens in three different ways.

Positional sanctification means we are accepted in the Beloved. We will never be more saved than at the moment we put our trust in Christ. We are accepted because of what Christ has done (not for who we are). This positional sanctification is perfection in Christ.

Practical sanctification is the Holy Spirit working in our lives to produce a holiness in our walk. This practical sanctification will never be perfect so long as we are in these bodies with our old sinful flesh.

Total sanctification will occur in the future when we are conformed to the image of Christ Jesus. Then both the position *and* the practice of sanctification will be complete.

The moment you came to Jesus Christ as a lost sinner and accepted His gift of salvation, you have been set aside for God's use. A real down-home example of this is in the Old Testament in the tabernacle. For 40 years, that tabernacle was a busy place. With sacrifices and candles happening every day, you can imagine that the pots and pans and forks and spoons were pretty well beaten and battered, not at all attractive. But God called them *holy* vessels. Holy because they were set aside for God's use.

Just like us. When we come to Christ, we are saved. We belong to God. Paul says, "*God's will for you is your sanctification*" (v. 4). His will for you is for you to be set aside for Him for a holy purpose, for God's use. Every child of God—not just preachers or missionaries or Christian workers, but every believer—is set aside for God's use.

Therefore, we should be sexually pure, not engaged in sins of the flesh. You can't be involved in sexual sin and at the same time be used of God. We should live as pure as we can, but realize that only in Christ can we be acceptable to God. Then God gives you the ability and self-discipline to control your body in holiness and honor. People who don't know God don't know how to do this. Their lives are a mess—enslaved to all kinds of addictions. The Thessalonians just had to look around to see how sex had become a religion to the Greeks and Romans. God hasn't invited us into a disorderly life that runs rampant over others. He wants our lives to be as beautiful on the inside as the outside.

Remember that God watches our lives and God *is* an avenger. He will move in and judge us for a life out of control. Everyone sins and must confess that sin. Even Jesus told the story of the prodigal son who got in the pigpen for a time, but here's the important part—the prodigal son didn't *live* in the pigpen. He realized where he was and got out. Neither should we allow sin to become a pattern or lifestyle.

A child of God is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. He's the secret to our success. He gives us the strength and wisdom, all that we need to live a life that pleases God. We can't continue to live in sin because the Holy Spirit is the *Holy* Spirit. The time will come when every child of God will long for holiness in his own life. The Holy Spirit is the only means by which we can live for God. We can try to follow God's commandments on our own, but we'll fail.

A tender and true way that we can please God is to love our brothers and sisters in Christ. This kind of love is a supernatural love, a fruit of His Spirit living in us. This love is a practical love—the first example that comes to Paul's mind when he thinks about pleasing God. This love is not just in theory but lived out in practice and can only be produced in us by the Holy Spirit. Love is the identifying mark of a child of God.

Now saints in the first century were just as hard to love as saints today, and Paul urged the Thessalonians to keep getting better at it. They already loved each other, but there was still room for improvement.

If you want to find out if you are a genuine believer, this is the place to put it down: *Do you love your brothers and sisters in Christ?* Prove it!

Paul also encouraged the Thessalonians to invest their time wisely and mind their own business. *Keep busy*, he encouraged them. Be involved in activities that tangibly serve God. Roll up your sleeves and dig into something that God can use for His purposes.

This honest to goodness hard work will not only keep you out of trouble, it will help you walk honestly before God and man. You'll gain the respect and the confidence of the community.

On this side of glory, sometimes we will run and not grow weary, but sometimes we just walk and don't give up. If you want more strength, you'll have to endure some things. If you want to grow in maturity, you'll be learning along the way. God's will is for you to keep growing up.

If you need encouragement to keep going, think of Jesus Christ the Lord—who He is, what He's done for you and in your life. Put that on one side of the scale and live in a way that balances out the worth of who He is to you. That's the idea of walking worthy.

NEXT: What's the next thing on God's timeline?

LESSON 5

FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. Does total dependence on Christ come easy or hard to you? Why?
2. Sometimes it can be hard to grasp that God accepts us completely, but that the Holy Spirit will also never stop working to help us grow and mature. How can those truths change how we think about our circumstances?
3. If we struggle to obey God, it may be that we've lost sight of our motivation. What areas of your life serve as a reminder that obedience should come from love?

4. What does God's role as avenger for those being taken advantage of tell us about His character? What does it tell us about the impact of sin?
5. Why would sexual sins indicate a lack of love?
6. In what ways do you need the Holy Spirit to help you love brothers and sisters in Christ?

7. Our world is a lot different than that of the Thessalonian believers. Do you think it is easier or harder to have community in our world? What can you do to overcome some of the modern barriers to community in your church?

LESSON 6

YES, HE'S COMING BACK



Begin with prayer



Read **1 Thessalonians 4**



Listen at TTB.org/1Thessalonians to ***1 Thessalonians 4:13*** and ***1 Thessalonians 4:13-18***

What's the next event on God's timeline of things to come?

Paul answers that question with what many call one of the most important prophetic passages in Scripture—the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Contrary to what many think, *imminent* doesn't mean immediate or soon. The Lord's return may or may not happen in our own lifetime. Paul believed the Lord Jesus *could* come in his lifetime, not that He *would*. He longed for Jesus Christ to come back and put His hope in His appearing (see Titus 2:13). We should, too. At the end of Paul's life when he wrote the letter to the Philippians, Paul was still looking for Him to return (see Philippians 3:20).

To those who are alive when Jesus Christ calls for His church to join Him in the air, they're in for quite a ride! Just look at 1 Thessalonians 4:17:

"Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."

“Caught up” is *harpazo*, meaning “to snatch up, to lift, to transport, or to rapture.” *Rapture* is just as good a word as *caught up*. The Bible teaches that believers in Christ will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

The rapture of the church can take place at any moment; it is the next event to happen in God’s program.

Around the time of this letter, Satan had driven Paul out of Thessalonica, then out of Berea. Paul eventually went over to Athens and to Corinth before Timothy and Silas caught up with him. They came with these questions from the Thessalonians. That’s why Paul’s writing them now. He wanted to comfort them. They were worried about Christians who had died since he left. The Lord hadn’t come—had they missed the Rapture? What would happen to them?

Paul had taught them the Lord Jesus might come at any moment, or this question wouldn’t be relevant. Why was it so important to them? Paul was with them for about three weeks on his second missionary journey. In that short time, he preached the gospel, people came to salvation in Jesus Christ, and the beginnings of a church was formed. Then he taught these new believers the great truths of the Christian faith—even about the rapture of the church. In his second letter, he also teaches them (and us) about the Great Tribulation and the Antichrist who is to come. They got a great course in eschatology!

To us this question isn’t meaningful in the same way as it was to them. We’ve lived two thousand years on this side of 1 Thessalonians, and literally millions of believers have already gone down through the doorway of death. Therefore, most of the church has already gone ahead, and only a small minority remains in the world.

We still believe Jesus’ coming is imminent. We live in the tissue-thin space before His coming. It could happen any moment—even before you finish reading this page—or it could be far in the future.

Some love to set dates for when they think the Lord will return. That’s a dangerous thing to do. The Lord Himself said no one knows the hour He will come. By setting dates, we rob ourselves of the opportunity of looking for Him to come. (See Titus 2:13.)

Now back to the Thessalonians’ question. *What will happen to the saints who die before the Rapture?* Keep this in mind as we study further.

Paul says to them, "*I don't want you to feel like you're in the dark on this. About the people who 'have fallen asleep,'*" he says, referring to the death of the body (since our soul never dies). To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (see 2 Corinthians 5:8). These old bodies will be put in a grave, and there they are going to sleep. The spirit goes to be with the Lord.

What tremendous hope this gives us! We might sorrow at the separation we feel from someone who dies, but we will be reunited in glory. The pagan world has no hope; so for them death is a frightful thing. But believers can grieve the temporary loss of a loved one's relationship but look forward to the day when we are reunited in Christ. You can tell by the way the people weep whether they have that hope or not.

Since we believe Jesus died and rose again, we also believe that through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

Scripture talks about three kinds of death.

Physical death separates the spirit from the body. We call this ordinary death. Adam didn't actually die physically until 930 years after the Fall.

Spiritual death is being separated from God. This is what happened to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden when God said we would die the day we ate the fruit. We became separated from God that day. Adam ran from God when God came into the garden—they were now separated. Adam *did* die the day he ate the fruit—he died a spiritual death. And we died with him that day in our sins. (See Ephesians 2:1.)

Eternal death is that final, eternal separation from God described in Revelation 20:14.

So, those who have died before the Rapture are still going to be there, Paul says with great confidence of giving God's answer to their question. Those who are alive at the time of the Rapture will not be going ahead of them—in fact, the dead in Christ will meet Him in the air *first*.

Ready for a beautiful picture? The Rapture will go like this: First "the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God" (v. 16). (Jesus is coming Himself, He won't be sending angels. The Lord Jesus will not need anyone to help Him.) Later, when Jesus comes to the earth to establish His Kingdom, He will send His angels to the four corners of the earth to gather the elect, who will be both Israelites and Gentiles who will enter the Kingdom. But in the Rapture,

He shouts a command—it's the same voice He used when He stood at the tomb of Lazarus and said, "Lazarus, come forth" (John 11:43). His voice will be like the voice of an archangel in its quality, in its majesty, and authority.

When Jesus Christ calls His church, we will respond in a very orderly process.

The dead will rise first out of their graves. Maybe Stephen will lead the procession since he was the first martyr (see Acts 7). Then there will be the apostles and all those millions who have laid down their lives for Jesus. They will just keep coming from right down through the centuries. Finally, if we are alive at that time, we will bring up the rear of the parade. Most of the church has already gone in through the doorway of death.

What an amazing picture this is! What a glorious hope we have!

We not only should comfort each other by this reminder, but we should also instruct and challenge each other and talk about these things. Jesus is going to take His own out of this world someday! What a glorious, wonderful comfort this is!

Remember this: When Jesus calls His church out of this world, the bodies of the dead will be snatched out of their graves. Then whoever is alive at that time will be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air. And from that moment on into eternity, we will be with the Lord.

NEXT: Is Jesus the “thief in the night?”



LESSON 6

FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. What are some reasons we should be hopeful for Christ to come back?
2. Why would the deaths of fellow believers cause some in the Thessalonian church to ask questions about God's plan for the future?
3. How should the knowledge that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord impact how we think about death?

4. For the believer, death promises a reunion. For the lost, death is a separation. How should this difference show itself in how we grieve?
5. What does it tell us about God that Jesus Himself will meet the dead in Christ in the air?
6. What believers have been in your life, have died, and that you are looking forward to being reunited with one day?

7. If you had been in the Thessalonian church, do you think Paul's teaching about the death of believers would have encouraged you?



If you're in a
season of sorrow,
keep going.

Sorrow brings more
capacity for joy.



THRU the BIBLE

LESSON 7

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?



Begin with prayer



Read **1 Thessalonians 5**



Listen at TTB.org/1Thessalonians to **1 Thessalonians 5:1-11** and
1 Thessalonians 5:11-28

The rapture of the church does two things:

It ends the day of grace we live in now. Today we call out a people for Christ's name who bring "many sons to glory" (Hebrews 2:10). God is doing this marvelous work right now.

It begins the Day of the Lord. When the church leaves the earth, the Great Tribulation will get under way. The Rapture closes one day and opens another.

But Christians need not be upset by this. We won't be here. The church doesn't belong to this tragic season coming in the future; we belong to the dispensation of grace we live in today. We still need to be awake and alert in view of Christ's coming. Our job is to get the word out to whoever will turn to Christ. *Do it today!*, we need to say.

What exactly is the "Day of the Lord"?

The Rapture, described in 1 Thessalonians 4, isn't mentioned in the Old Testament. The Lord was the first to talk about it in the Upper Room with His disciples when He said, "I go to prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2-3).

What 1 Thessalonians 5 describes as “the Day of the Lord” was well known in the Old Testament. It begins with the Great Tribulation and goes through the millennial reign of Christ on the earth. (See Isaiah 12-13 and Joel 1:15, 2:2.)

We don’t know the “times and the seasons” of when this is going to happen. This knowledge is not the property of the church; these times and seasons belong to this earth and to an earthly people—both Israel and the Gentiles who will be saved in that day. The church will have nothing to do with it—believers will be gone at that time. (By the way, the church looks for a Person, never for times and seasons.) God hasn’t appointed us to the day of wrath, the Great Tribulation. This will be a time of judgment, which Christ already bore for us on the cross.

The Lord Jesus doesn’t come for the church like a thief in the night. No, the church waits for the Lord to come with joy and expectation. We are *looking* for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior. We can’t wait for Jesus, our blessed hope, to appear any time.

You don’t look for or wait for a thief—and certainly not with joy. You don’t leave a note for him on the back door when you leave your house. No, you lock the doors to keep the thief out. The Lord Jesus doesn’t come as a thief to the church, but He does come like a thief to the world *after* the church has been raptured. In that Day of the Lord, He will come suddenly to the earth, and it will be a sober, ominous day.

The Day of the Lord will come *suddenly*. When everyone on earth thinks all is well, in a moment, an unexpected destruction will hit them and they will absolutely be unable to escape the Lord’s judgment. The “big lie” they’ve believed is the promise of peace and safety. (We’ll study this in 2 Thessalonians 2.) The world expects to enter a great era of peace, the Millennium, but they will find themselves plunged into the greatest war the world has ever seen.

But as believers, who are “sons of light and sons of the day” (v. 5), we are not of the night nor of the darkness. Make sure to learn these distinctions in Scripture, or you’ll be hopelessly confused. The church isn’t in darkness.

But Paul tells the church today to watch and be soberminded (be calm and intentional) and be ready to perform our duty. Like a soldier, we are to put on the breastplate of faith that covers the heart, the vital part of the body. The helmet is our hope of salvation.

“Faith ... love ... hope”—this is now the third time these key words have shown up in this letter: The labor of love, the work of faith, the patience of hope. Faith is a saving faith that produces works. Love is what we should show others. And hope is for the time when our salvation is complete.

Whether we die first or whether we live until He calls us away, we will live together with the Lord.

FAMILY TALK

Paul wraps up his letter with a sort of family talk, with instructions for Christians to follow as we keep looking for Jesus Christ’s return. These are practical instructions, designed to impact us on the sidewalks of life—at home, in the office, in the schoolroom, wherever we are called to walk.

Earlier we were told to be sober and to put on the uniform of warfare (v. 8). Now we have our orders. Here they are from 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28:

#1 COMFORT YOURSELVES TOGETHER—encourage one another in the faith.

#2 BUILD EACH OTHER UP—work as a team, sharing the Word of God with each other.

The next three belong together:

#3 RECOGNIZE THOSE WHO TEACH THE WORD OF GOD. When we are saved, every believer receives a gift to build up the body. Certain people have been given gifts of leadership, and they should be respected and listened to.

#4 ESTEEM THEM VERY HIGHLY IN LOVE FOR THEIR WORK’S SAKE.

Overwhelm them with love and appreciation for guiding you along in your faith.

#5 BE AT PEACE AMONG YOURSELVES. You can’t have everybody running the church. Respect and love those with authority.

These next three also stick together:

#6 WARN THE UNRULY—warn those who are out of step. They like to do their own thing rather than support the work God is doing. It’s dangerous!

#7 COMFORT THE FAINTHEARTED. Some people are fearful to move out for God. They need an arm around them and encouragement, “You’re going to make it. I’m *for* you and I am praying for you.” (We all need this kind of encouragement sometimes!)

#8 SUPPORT THE WEAK. Some people can't march with the rest because they are little babies. Help them—lift them up and carry them along.

#9 BE PATIENT WITH EVERYONE. Be attentive to people's individual needs. Don't snap at each other. Look for the best in each other.

#10 DON'T FIGHT EACH OTHER ... The world says, "get the other fellow before he gets you." That's not the way we should live. The cultured, educated world says, "do good to those who do good to you." But the Christian lives under an even higher standard.

#11 ... BUT DO GOOD TO THOSE WHO DO EVIL TO YOU. That's contrary to our nature, but in Christ we have a new nature.

If you want to know what God's will is for you, note the next three commands.

#12 REJOICE EVERMORE. "Happy" is not a New Testament word; this is pure *joy* in the Lord. The child of God has no right to go around with a sour face. If you belong to God, then you are to be filled with His Spirit—producing love, joy, peace. If you cannot rejoice, then ask God to put joy in your heart and He will do it.

#13 PRAY WITHOUT CEASING. Let your attitude be prayerful all the time.

#14 GIVE THANKS IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES—not just once a year, but all the time.

#15 QUENCH NOT THE SPIRIT. One of the metaphors used for the Holy Spirit is fire. How do you quench a fire? You dampen it down and don't let it burn. To quench the Spirit means you refuse to do the will of God; that is, you won't listen to Him. You refuse to let Him be your Guide. We quench the Spirit when we take matters into our own hands and step out of God's will.

#16 DO NOT DESPISE PROPHECIES. Don't look down on Bible study as something that is beneath you. Don't be indifferent to the Word of God.

#17 PROVE ALL THINGS; HOLD FAST THAT WHICH IS GOOD. Don't be taken in and misled into supporting a project just because it pulls on your heart strings. Don't contribute to things you know nothing about. Investigate anything to which you give your support. Don't be gullible, but prove all things and hold on to that which is true and genuine.

#18 ABSTAIN FROM ANYTHING TAINTED BY EVIL. If you have any question in your mind whether something is right or wrong, then it's wrong for you.

#19 SANCTIFY YOU COMPLETELY. We are triune beings—body, soul (mind), and spirit. May God “sanctify you completely” (v. 23)—not perfectly, but we are to grow in maturity in these areas, not stuck as babies in Christ. We can depend on God to do this.

#20 BRETHREN, PRAY FOR US. Pray for those who give out the gospel. Pray for your pastor and your missionaries and those who teach you the Bible. They will appreciate it also.

#21 GREET ALL THE BRETHREN WITH A HOLY KISS. Yes, this is a commandment, too. (Just make sure it is a *holy* kiss!)

#22 READ THIS TO ALL THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST. And we've done that now as we've studied it together.

Paul finishes this first epistle with the reminder of what sustains and keeps us. “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen” (v. 28).

And we pray for you, too, that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ may be with you today.

LESSON 7

FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. What do the specifics that the Bible details about the Day of the Lord tell us about God's control of the future?
2. How can you focus on looking for the return of a Person (Jesus), rather than looking at times and seasons the Bible describes?
3. Does it surprise you to see the return of Christ compared to a thief? What do you think is meant by this comparison?

4. Two traits which characterize the life of a believer are “watchful” and “soberminded.” How can you live out those two traits in your life?
5. Do you know someone who is an encourager? What can you do to learn from their example and be an encouragement to those with whom you come in contact?
6. The command to do good to those who do evil to us is a difficult one. Is there a situation in your life right now which requires submission to this instruction?

7. We have an advantage the Thessalonian church did not have: the written Word of God in our hands. The believers in Thessalonica would have primarily heard the message of this letter read aloud in services. With that in mind, imagine you were hearing the list of commands at the end of the book. If you were to pick one to really focus on in your life, because you might not be able to remember the whole list, which one would it be and how would you go about living it out?



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