

10. 1 Thessalonians 5

What will happen when Jesus comes? A review from chapter 4:13-18 outlines the first principles of the coming of the Lord:

God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

We who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God.

The dead in Christ will rise first.

We who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

We will be with the Lord forever.

Anyone advancing contrary positions to these is a false teacher. Paul now turns to the suddenness of the coming of the Lord.

The Day of the Lord Will Come Suddenly

1 Thess 5:1-3

5 Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, 2 for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

The Thessalonians understood clearly that the Lord "will come like a thief in the night." This understanding stands in stark contrast to moderns and latter day prophets who try to forecast the exact time of the Lord's coming. Most notable of these are the predictions of the Jehovah Witnesses:

Charles Taze Russell was the first president of the Watch Tower Society:

Christ invisibly present and ruling from the heavens since 1974

The resurrection of the saints in 1875

The end of the "harvest" and the Rapture of the saints to heaven for 1878

The final end of "the day of wrath" in 1914

Watch Tower Society publication predicted that in 1918, God would begin to destroy churches and millions of their members. J.F. Rutherford, who succeeded Russell as president of the Watch Tower Society predicted that the Millennium would begin in 1925 with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David would be resurrected as "princes".

From 1966, witness publications raised strong expectations that Armageddon would arrive in 1975.

In 1974, witnesses commended for selling their homes and property to "finish out the rest of their days in this old system" in full time preaching

In 1976, the Watchtower advised those who had been "disappointed" by the failure of the predictions for 1975 to adjust their viewpoint

Four years later the Watch Tower Society admitted its responsibility in building up hope regarding 1975.

[Adapted "Jehovah's Witnesses". *Unfulfilled predictions of Jehovah's Witnesses*. Wikipedia,]

The most notable 2011 end times prediction was made by American Christian radio host Harold Camping:

The Rapture and Judgment Day would take place on May 21, 2011,

The end of the world would take place five months later on October 21, 2011.

On May 23, Camping stated that May 21 had been a "spiritual" day of judgment, and that the physical Rapture would occur on October 21, 2011, simultaneously with the destruction of the universe by God. However, on October 16 Camping admitted to an interviewer that he did not know when the end would come, and October 21 passed without Camping's predicted apocalypse. (*2011 end times prediction*, Wikipedia). On Wednesday, before the Camping date, the same day that national TV blanketed the news with his prediction to come on the following Saturday, Gospel Lessons download 33,423 lessons, titled *The Completion of the Revelation of God* taken from Rev 21.

The Lord and Peter Agreed with Paul

The Lord taught the suddenness of his coming, compatible with this statement by Paul in Matt 24:36, "36 No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." In Matt 24:42, the Lord emphasized again that no man knows when he would come: "42 Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."

Peter wrote in 2 Peter 3:10: "

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

Sons of the Light and of the Day

1 Thess 5:4-

4 But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. 5 You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. 6 So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night.

Light and darkness are common metaphors for good and evil. Here Paul adds night as a time when evil takes place. John uses this light metaphor in 1 John 1:5-7 as the path to purification of sins by the blood of Christ:

5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

In Eph 5:8-12, Paul spells out how to live as children of light:

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord. 11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.

Paul gives Christians a three-fold test of what is the fruit of light: goodness, righteousness, and truth. The deeds of darkness bear no fruit.

1 Thess 5:8-11

8 But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. 9 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. 10 He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Those that belong to the day (light) put on self-control, faith, love, and love. The breastplate and helmet metaphors are used by Paul in Eph 6:11-17 to describe the Christian armor which equips us to contend with the devil and his evil forces of darkness:

11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this **dark** world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the **breastplate** of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the **helmet of salvation** and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Support the Elders

1 Thess 5:12-13

12 Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. 13 Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.

Those who are over us in the Lord are elders, called overseers and pastors as outlined by Peter in 1 Peter 5:1-3:

5 To the **elders** among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be **shepherds [pastors]** of God's flock that is under your care, serving as **overseers [bishops]** – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

The work of elders is difficult and challenging and often without thanks or even encouragement. The Hebrew writer gave this same admonition to support the elders in Heb 13:17:

17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Paul would count the elders that rule well as worthy of double honor in 1 Tim 5:17-20:

17 The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching . . . 19 Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses.

Final Admonitions

1 Thess 5: 14-15

14 And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. 15 Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.

The idleness of some members will come back as a topic 2 Thess 3:10-12:

10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat."

11 We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. 12 Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat.

This series of admonitions spell out how we are to act toward all men: warn the idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient toward everyone, and be kind to everyone. Embedded in these admonitions is an allusion to the golden—"make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong"—which reads in Matt 7:12: "12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."

1 Thess 5:16-17

16 Be joyful always; 17 pray continually; 18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Once again, these admonitions bring to memory others who taught the same thing. For example we are taught in Eph 6:18:

18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."

Continually means all the time where continuously is constant but sporadic. No matter how hard our times are, "give thanks."

1 Thess 5:19-22

19 Do not put out the Spirit's fire; 20 do not treat prophecies with contempt. 21 Test everything. Hold on to the good. 22 Avoid every kind of evil.

The balance between treating prophecies with contempt and testing everything is demonstrated by the Bereans in Acts 17:11:

11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

We have the obligation to test teachings and teachers, false prophets and false teachers, and ourselves. Consider 1 John 4:1-3 which brings up a topic that Paul will deal with in 2 Thess 2:

4 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

Finally, we are told to test ourselves in Gal 6:4-5: "4 Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else."

Avoid every kind of evil covers the map of human experience where evil lurks unexpectedly:

1 Thess 4:3: 3 It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality.

2 Tim 2:16: 6 Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly.

Titus 3:9: 9 But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless.

1 Cor 15:33: 33 Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."

Benediction

1 Thess 5:23-28

23 *May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.*

25 *Brothers, pray for us. 26 Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. 27 I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.*

28 *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.*