

The Return of the King: Lesson 2

1 Thessalonians 5:1-28

When Paul was with the Thessalonians he had told them about both the rapture and the day of the Lord. It would appear that they still had questions about these two events.

Timothy made a trip to Thessalonica (3:2-6) and brought the Thessalonians' questions back to Paul. Paul answered the question about the rapture, now he will deal with the **day of the Lord**.

Verses 1-2

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. 2For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

Now concerning- Paul uses this phrase to change the subject from the **rapture** to the day of the Lord.

Times and seasons- These words refer to the end times but they look at the day of the Lord in two different ways.

- a) *Times-* **chronological** time (like a clock or a calendar) of the day of the Lord.
- b) *Seasons-* measures time by **events** or the order of the events of the day of the Lord.

The day of the Lord- This phrase is used often in the Old Testament and the New Testament. **Sometimes** in the Old Testament it refers to when God brings **judgment** on other nations who have contact with the Jewish people. Other times, in the Old Testament and the New Testament it refers to two future **judgments** which are the Tribulation and putting down the rebellion at the end of the millennium.

We need to remember that there is a difference between the day of the Lord and the day of Christ (Philippians 1:10, 2:16; 1 Corinthians 1:8, 5:5). The day of Christ or the day of our Lord Jesus Christ refers to when **believers** will receive their rewards from Jesus Christ (Romans 14:10; 1 Corinthians 3:11-14; 2 Corinthians 5:9-10).

Another one we need to be aware of is the day of God (2 Peter 3:12) which is speaking of **eternity**.

A thief in the night- Comes from the **teaching** of Jesus (Matthew 24:42-44; Luke 12:35-40; 2 Peter 3:10).

Verse 3

While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

What Paul is describing is the **start** of the Tribulation. Everyone will be saying there is peace and safety when the Tribulation starts with the Anti-Christ signing the treaty with Israel. This treaty is spoken of in Daniel 9:27.

"And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator."

Daniel 9:27

Paul compares the coming of the Tribulation to labor pains- when it **starts** it will not stop until Christ's second coming.

We will look more at this when we get into the second book of Thessalonians.

Verses 4-5

But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. 5For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.

But you brethren- Paul switches gears and talks about believers and says they will not be caught unaware like unbelievers. Believers do not know when it will occur but they know it will **happen** and they need to live in readiness.

Paul tells them why the day of the Lord would not overtake them. They have a different nature. Unbelievers live in a spiritual night that **includes** intellectual and moral darkness.

*And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. **John 3:19-20***

*Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. 18They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. **Ephesians 4:17-18***

Believers used to be there but now live in the light (Ephesians 5:8; John 8:12: 1 John 1:7).

In other words, we walk in **newness** of life (Romans 6:4) new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Verse 6

So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.

The word for sleep here is different than the word used in 4:13-14 which described death of believers. This word used in this verse refers to **moral** lethargy. What Paul is saying is for believers to be morally **alert** in light of Christ's coming- not morally asleep.

Verses 7-8

For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. 8But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

Those who sleep- moral lethargy. They do their evil deeds at night. In other words, He is saying people like to do their sins at night because they like to **hide** their shameful sins. But believers should not live like that.

Believers, on the other hand, are to be people of the **day**, not involved in shameful sin but must be sober. Sobriety refers to moral **purity** in all areas.

Paul describes sobriety using part of a soldier's armor.

1) **Breastplate**- protects the vital organs of a soldier

- a) Breastplate of faith- this refers to trusting God in His power, promise, and plan.
- b) Breastplate of love- first this is speaking of devotion to God (Matthew 22:37).
When we love God we will not be involved in things that grieve him. Secondly, showing our love for others.
- c) When this breastplate of faith and love is put on it protects us from sin, it keeps us sober-minded.

2) **Helmet the hope of salvation**- Paul is not talking about justification (the past aspect of salvation) or sanctification (the present aspect). He is speaking of **glorification** (the future aspect).

- a) *Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. 3And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. 1 John 3:2-3*

Verse 9

For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

These next couple of verses are a strong argument for a Pretribulation rapture.

[Important Words]

Destined- This word refers to the plan God has for believers (Ephesians 1:4; 2 Timothy 1:9).

Wrath- The word for *wrath* does not mean an outburst of rage but rather the **outworking** of God's righteousness indignation at sin. This wrath is a reference to the final judgment but also must include the day of the Lord which Paul is addressing in this passage.

Also in this verse, Paul makes it clear that believers will be delivered from this wrath of God by salvation through Jesus Christ now and in the future (Matthew 3:12; Romans 5:1-9, 8:1).

Verse 10

who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.

Who died for us- Jesus was not killed, he laid down his life no man took it from Him.

"No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." John 10:18

He did this for us, he was our substitute (1 Peter 2:24).

but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8

This is the message of the gospel. That Christ's substitutionary death paid, in full, the penalty for believers' sins and **believers** will not face God's judgment (John 5:24; Romans 8:1).

We are awake or asleep- If you remember, in 5:6 Paul used the words *sleep* and *awake* to speak about believers who were either spiritually alert or spiritually lethargic. However, in 4:13 Paul used the word *asleep* to talk about believers alive and those who have fallen asleep (death). In English, these appear to be the same word but the Greek words Paul uses in this verse (5:10) are the same as 5:6, not the ones he uses in chapter 4. Paul's point is that all Christians will be together with Christ whether they are watchful or not. He is not talking about believers who have died and those alive.

Verse 11

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

Paul tells his readers to encourage each other with this **information**, that all believers will be with the Lord and those who have died are already with him. And of course, encourage each other with what Jesus did for them on the cross.

Verses 12-13

We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.

The believers in Thessalonica are asked to **respect** and esteem their elders. Two words are used:

- 1) **Respect**- This word means “to know”. Church people should get to **know** their elders. Paul is probably saying to get to know them but also to pay attention to them.
- 2) **Esteem**- means to show honor and respect. Why? Their **work**. Their work is to prepare the flock under their care to be ready for the judgment seat of Christ.

There is something else Paul says and that is peace in a church starts with people **respecting** their leaders. Everyone cannot lead in a church. Some need to lead and the rest must follow.

Verse 14

And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.

Paul again is telling the whole church- this is what you must do:

- Must warn men in the church who had stopped working because they thought Christ was coming back very soon and they were living off other people.
- **Be patient**- although different approaches must be taken with different people, Christians need to be **patient** with all. True Christianity is shown by its ability to help and love difficult people.

Verse 15

See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

Christians should never seek **revenge**, but let God work in the situation. Instead of revenge, we should seek what is **best** for both us and them. That is to have a **forgiving heart** toward others, which is good for them and us. It is important and Jesus told us before we worship God we need to be **right** with others (Matthew 5:23-24).

Paul then gives three personal commands to all believers. These commands that Paul gives are tough to maintain.

Verse 16

Rejoice always,

- 1) Rejoice always- This does not mean rejoicing in happy things only but also in **sorrow**. We as Christians can rejoice always because our joy isn't based on **circumstances** but on God. Circumstances change but **God** does not.

Verse 17

pray without ceasing,

- 2) Pray without ceasing- the word translated *without ceasing* means "**regularly**" or "**throughout** your day". What Paul is saying is believers should not limit their communication with the Lord only to particular times but **throughout** the day. This command reminds us of a couple of things:
 - a) The use of our **voice** is not an essential element in prayer.
 - b) The **posture** of prayer is not important.
 - c) The **place** of prayer can be anywhere.
 - d) The **time** of prayer is not important.
 - e) Christians should never be in a place where they could not pray.

Verse 18

give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

- 3) In everything give thanks- We don't give thanks for everything **but in everything**. We understand God's sovereign's hand is in charge and he knows what he is doing.
 - a) The great preacher Spurgeon said "When joy and prayer are married, their first born child is **gratitude**."

In this next section, Paul talks to them, and us, about our public worship (verses 19-22).

What Paul talks about mainly is the Spirit and His gifts. Paul went into great detail about this subject in 1 Corinthians 12-14. Here in 1 Thessalonians he talks about the **problems** they were having with the use of some gifts.

Verse 19

Do not quench the Spirit.

In this verse, Paul tells us not to **quench** the Holy Spirit. Paul is not talking about quenching the Holy Spirit himself but rather quenching the **work** of the Holy Spirit. Paul then tells us what he means in the following verses.

Verse 20

Do not despise prophecies,

To understand what was going on we need to look at the words Paul uses:

Despise means “to **consider** as absolutely nothing, to treat with **contempt** or look down on”.

Prophecy in the Bible means “a spiritual gift of either publicly proclaiming God’s Word” which is its **primary** meaning or “prediction of future events”.

It would appear that the members of the church did not know which prophecy was a word from God or false teaching (1 John 4:1-4).

Verse 21

but test everything; hold fast what is good.

Paul tells these believers how to tell which are true prophecies and which are **false**. They are to test the prophecies. The test is to see how they **measure up** to the Word of God (1 Corinthians 14:29).

Once they have tested they are to hold onto what is **good**, which means “inherently genuine, **true**, noble, right” **not** just what might be **beautiful** in appearance.

Verse 22

Abstain from every form of evil.

Paul then tells them to **abstain** from every form of evil. The word *abstain* is a strong word and in this context means “**get away**” or “avoid any evil teaching or behavior”. The word *evil* means “something that is actively harmful or malignant”. This would include lies, distortion of truth, and moral perversion.

Nowhere does scripture permit believers to expose themselves to what is false or evil, instead believers are told to **get out** of dodge.

A couple of things we see in the conclusion of this letter:

Verse 23

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- 1) The God of peace- Paul describes God as the God of peace and Paul calls God this at the end of several of his letters. Jesus told his disciples this before his crucifixion (John 14:27, 16:33). The world describes peace not as the absence of conflict, but the peace Jesus gives us **through** the Holy Spirit. It is a deep and lasting peace in any circumstance in which the believer finds themselves.
- 2) Sanctify- When a person accepts Christ as their Savior God takes up **residence** within the believer with the goal to make the believer more and more like Jesus. This is called sanctification (being set apart). In order for us to be more and more like Christ God will have to work in all areas of our life (spirit, soul, body). The **conclusion** of this process will happen when Christ comes back for us.

Verse 24

He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

Paul reminds them that God is faithful, what he has **promised** he will see it through.

Verse 25

Brothers, pray for us.

Paul asked for the believers to pray for them. Leaders are to pray for the **flock** but the flock are to pray for their leaders.

Verses 26-27

Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.

27I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.

Greet one another affectionately. Paul also wants this letter read aloud in the churches.

Verse 28

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Final benediction.