

A Study of 1 Thessalonians



In the later part of 1 Thessalonians 4, we learned the Thessalonian Christians were concerned about those who had died since the beginning of their congregation. It seems that they believed Jesus would come in their lifetimes, but some had already “fallen asleep.” Paul assures the young Christians that those who die before the Second Coming of Christ are in no way disadvantaged from those who are still alive.

Those who die as Christians go to be with the Lord, when he returns these saints will accompany him. They will receive their new resurrection bodies just prior to those who are still living. Together all Christians will be with the Lord forever.

Now Paul changes direction slightly to talk about the timing of the Lord’s return.

The Second Coming Will be Sudden and Unexpected (5:1-3)

The Thessalonian Christians seemed to believe that Jesus would come in their lifetime. Since the many have tried to predict the time that the Second Coming will take place. Again and again these so called prophets have failed. There is good reason for their failure; no one knows when Jesus will return except God the Father.



Paul tells these young believers that no one knows the “times and seasons.” These words are similar in meaning with time referring to a period in history and seasons referring to the timing of an event. Paul says that he doesn’t need to write about the timing of the return of Jesus. There is good reason: he doesn’t know.

1. **What does Mark 13:32 and Matthew 24:36 tell us about the timing of the return of Jesus?**
2. **Why do people sometimes predict the timing of the Lord’s return when we are taught throughout the New Testament that we do not and cannot know?**
3. **In what way is the Lord’s return like the coming of a thief in the night? (See also Matt. 24:43, Luke 12:39; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 3:3)**
4. **In what way is the Lord’s return like labour pains for an expectant mother?**

Often times we do not learn something new when we study Scripture, but we are encouraged, rebuked, strengthened or reminded by what we read. Paul was not providing new information in this passage. He told the Thessalonians concerning the timing of the return of Jesus, “you have no need to have anything written to you.” He also said, “you yourselves are fully aware...” They did not need any new instruction on this topic, they just needed reassurance and a reminder of what they already knew.

The world will believe there is “peace and security” up until the time of the Second Coming. There will be nothing to indicate to the world that Jesus return is imminent. The Lord’s return will be unexpected like a thief and sudden like labour pains on an expectant mother.

5. Describe the false sense of security felt by those in the world.

The Day of the Lord

The Day of the Lord or just the “day” refers to a time of God’s judgment.

The phrase (or word) is used in the Old Testament to identify some great activity of God meant to bless or to judge. (See Joel 1:15; Obadiah 15-21; Zechariah 14.)

When Paul uses this phrase he always refers to the Second Coming of Christ. (See 1 Cor. 1:8; 5:5; 2 Thess 2:2).

Like the Day of the Lord in the Old Testament, the return of Christ will mark a time of blessing to his people and judgment upon his enemies.

For the unprepared the Lord’s return will mean “sudden destruction” and they will not escape. Destruction is an accurate description because those outside of Christ face eternal hell.

6. How should 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3 aid us in evangelism?

Christians Are Prepared for the Second Coming of Christ (5:4-8)

1. Christians Will Not Be Surprised by the Second Coming

Christians are not in darkness; we know that Jesus is coming again and what to expect at his coming. Though we do not know the time or date of the Second Coming, we ought to live lives in constant anticipation of Christ’s return. Christians do not know the timing of the Second Coming, but they will not be surprised when that Day arrives.



2. Christians are to Live a Watchful and Self-Controlled Life

Believers are called “children of light” and “children of the day.” Paul writes, “we are not in darkness.” The “day” here refers to the Second Coming. Christians belong to that Day because on that Day we will be rewarded with a new body and a new home. It is the day that all Christians anticipate as the greatest day since the resurrection of Jesus. For the Christian it will be a day of joy beyond compare.



The Christian is not to sleep like the rest of the world, but to be awake and sober or (alert and self-controlled.) The word sleep was used earlier as a metaphor for death, but here it refers to one's moral life. Non-Christians are "asleep" to holy living and anticipation of the Second Coming, but Christians are to be awake, watchful, vigilant, and self-controlled. The word translated as sober literally means to not be under the influence of wine and "the word came to refer to a condition of moral alertness that prevents one from being morally lax."¹

Night is the usual and proper time for sleeping and it is in the night that people become intoxicated and involved in many kinds of sin. When people speak of the nightlife, they are typically referring to drinking, dancing, and immorality, not to sober, thoughtful, and moral living.

7. Why is sin more prevalent at night?

3. Christians are Clothed With Faith, Love, and Salvation

Clothing here is a spiritual description of what the Christian wears. He is to have the breastplate of faith and love. A breastplate protects the chest and heart. Faith and love protect the Christian from the attacks of Satan and allow him to be sober minded in the midst of a world caught up in the deeds of darkness.



The helmet is the hope of salvation protecting the head (referring to the mind and thoughts) from the cares of the world and the behaviour associated with the darkness. Instead of focusing on the immorality prevalent in the darkness, the Christian has his mind focused on the salvation that comes through the Lord Jesus Christ.

8. Define the word "hope" as it is used in verse 8 when it refers to the "hope of salvation."

Christians Live In Expectation of Living with the Lord (5:9-11)

The Christian's eternal destiny is different from that of the world. The world is destined for wrath. The word translated as "destined" means to appoint, or to make, or to set aside. God has appointed or destined those who will not accept the salvation he offers to experience his wrath. They will stand before him condemned.

The appointment of heaven or hell is not God's arbitrary choice, but is based on a man's acceptance or rejection of God's offer of salvation by grace.

¹ Smith, James E. *Teacher's Commentary: The Eschatological Epistles*. Lulu, 2011, p. 73-74.

The Christian is destined for salvation because Jesus died for us and we received this salvation by grace through faith at baptism. Therefore, we know that whether we are awake (still alive) or asleep (have died) when he returns we will live with him forever.

Therefore (in view of what Paul has just written) encourage one another and build one another up with this words.

9. Why is important for Christians to encourage one another?

10. How and when can Christians encourage one another with these words?

Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-12 offer no new revelation for the new Christians in Thessalonica. These were truths these Christians already knew and were already practicing. It is important to be reminded of God's love and hope in Christ.

Christians live in a world dominated by those who live in darkness and who practice deeds opposed to the teaching of Scripture. In a world that can be difficult and where persecution exists it is important to be reminded again and again that something better awaits us.



The Lord Jesus is coming again and those who are alive when he comes or who have already passed from this world have the hope of living with him forever. Though we do not know **when** he is coming we know that he **is** coming. This helps us to be faithful in the midst of an unfaithful world.

Jesus is coming again and we will live with him forever. Encourage one another with these words.