



PAUL'S LETTERS TO THE  
THESSALONIANS

Lesson 6 • 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

October 10, 2021



# LESSON PLAN



Lesson	Date	Passage
1	9/5/2021	Introduction
2	9/12/2021	1 Thessalonians 1:1-10
3	9/19/2021	1 Thessalonians 2:1-16
4	9/26/2021	1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13
5	10/3/2021	1 Thessalonians 4:1-12
6	10/10/2021	1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11
7	10/17/2021	1 Thessalonians 5:12-28
8	10/24/2021	2 Thessalonians 1:1-12
9	10/31/2021	2 Thessalonians 2:1-12
10	11/7/2021	2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5
11	11/14/2021	2 Thessalonians 3:6-18
12	11/21/2021	Review
13	11/28/2021	Reading and Reflection

## Passage Outline

- An Encouraging Clarification (4:13-18)
- An Answered Question (5:1-11)



5 minutes – 11:10 to 11:15

- **Review** – In the last lesson, Paul begins the second half of his letter to the Thessalonian believers. This part of the letter provides specific instructions and clarifications that likely had been noted by Timothy and relayed to Paul. In this passage, Paul continues to encourage them to hold fast to what Paul had taught them and not give in to fear and doubt.
- In this next section of the letter Paul is responding to a question from the Thessalonians. Their question essentially is what will happen to those believers who die before Christ's coming. The reply we have here implies while Paul and Timothy were absent, some member or members of the church had died. This may have occurred in the normal course of life. Or perhaps it was a result of the persecution they faced.
- Regardless, it is likely that the death of brothers and sisters not only caused much sorrow among them but had also caused them to question where those who died would spend eternity. Keep in mind that with Paul's premature departure, it is possible that he had not completely taught them on this topic. Or having taught them to look for Christ's return they were concerned about dying before the Lord's return. Or there were false teachers trying to confuse and disrupt their faith.

Whatever the cause, Paul assures and encourages them to comfort one another with this teaching on the coming of the Lord and the resurrection of the dead in Christ.

- Have someone read 1 Thes. 4:13-5:11.

## An Encouraging Clarification (v. 4:13-18)

- A shepherd's concern (v. 13)
- A hope-giving clarification (v. 14)
- An authoritative declaration (v. 15)
- A glorious coming (v. 16-17)
- A command to comfort (v. 18)



10 minutes – 11:15 to 11:35

- As Paul begins these words of consolation in verse 13, we see the heart and concern of a shepherd. **What are the two parts of Paul's concern?**
  - He does not want them to be uniformed. Paul wants to be sure they understand what is true about those believers who died in order to strengthen their faith.
  - He does not want them to grieve as those without hope. Paul wants to be sure they understand what is true to reduce the sorrow they feel and give them hope.
- In verse 14, Paul proclaims the truth for them and clarifies the error of their thinking. Notice how Paul makes his point here. The basis for our hope is found the fact that Jesus died and rose again. It is a fundamental core of our faith. The structure of Paul's argument here is that since the first statement is true, what follows is implicitly true. For example, if I said "since it was raining hard when I went to get the mail, I got soaking wet." Because of the pouring rain it is natural to assume that I would get very wet going to get the mail. Similarly, the sense here is that since we know that Jesus died and rose again, we can be confident that through Jesus, God will bring with him (or take with him) those who have

died before he comes (fallen asleep). The resurrection of those who have died in Christ is intrinsically tied to Christ's resurrection.

- **What do you think the Thessalonians were concerned about?**
  - That if they died before Christ returned, they would not join him for eternity. In essence, they were afraid that death would separate them from being united with Christ. Paul assures them with this truth that death cannot separate us from the life we have been given in Christ. In fact, the opposite is true. It is in death that means or passage by which we enter into eternal life with Christ.
- In verse 15, Paul seems to expect a follow up question. **What else does he seem to think the Thessalonians would be concerned about?** If death is the path to resurrection into an eternity with Christ, how those who are alive at Christ's coming get to heaven.
- Having clarified for them the reason believers have hope even in death. Paul extends his argument by making a related declaration given by the Lord himself. His intention here is not merely to reaffirm the importance of the resurrection, but more importantly to show the relationship between resurrection and the eternal destiny of Christians who are found alive at the moment Christ's return.
- The thought is introduced with a strong authoritative opening of "For this we declare by a word from the Lord". What Paul is declaring to them is the Lord's own decree. Paul is stating emphatically and with the authority of an apostle of Christ that those who are alive at Christ's second coming will be also be resurrected. But they will not rise until after those believers who have died are resurrected first. Paul's point here is that both living and dead believers will be risen to life eternal and united with Christ at his coming. Paul assures them that no believer, dead or alive, will be left out or excluded from the triumphant and magnificent return of the risen King.
- As if spurred on by this thought, Paul describes the glorious coming of the Lord in verses 16 and 17. **How does Paul describe this day?**
  - The Lord Jesus Christ will himself descend from Heaven
  - It's going to be loud. A loud command of authority from the King for believers to rise up. The voice of an archangel who leads the armies of the Lord. The sound of the trumpet of God announcing His victorious return.
  - The dead **in Christ** will rise to meet Jesus first.
  - Followed by those who are alive at that time will join them to meet the Lord in the clouds.
- **What does the imagery here remind us of?** A royal procession of a victorious return of a King. This is not a secret or clandestine homecoming. This is a grand celebration. This evokes images of a king returning home with his warriors after a great victory. And all the people of the city go out to meet them celebrating with music and honoring them by throwing flowers and garlands at their feet.

The picture presented here is of the royal coming of Jesus Christ. The church, as the official delegation, goes out to meet him, with the dead heading up the procession as those most honored. Christ's coming is envisioned, with a procession of believers that will unite the coming King with those who have been saved. What a marvelous description! What a marvelous hope!

- In verse 18 we end as we began with a shepherd's command to comfort and encourage. The word encourage here means "to console" or "to comfort". As the Thessalonians had grieved over the death of some of their community, Paul calls them to find hope in knowing that the dead would not be excluded from being resurrected with Christ. It is a truth that opens the door to true comfort.
- **Who is it that is to provide the ongoing encouragement?**
  - Note that Paul does not put himself forward as the one who comforts the grieving.
  - Instead, he urges the Thessalonians to use these words to comfort each other. **Why?** As a pattern for mutual comfort, knowing that he (Paul) would not always be with them.

## An Answered Question (v. 5:1-11)

- A troubling question (v. 1)
- An unexpected coming (v. 2-3)
- An instructive contrast (v. 4-8)
- A comforting conclusion (v. 9-10)
- A repeated command (v. 11)



10 minutes – 11:35 to 11:55

- In second part of this section of the letter, Paul is responding to another question the Thessalonians had relayed to him through Timothy. The question is related to the topic that Paul had just addressed. Not only did they want to know what happened to those who died before Christ's coming, they wanted to know when would the Lord arrive.
- Paul indicates the shift to a new thought with the first two words of verse 1 of Chapter 5 with the words "Now concerning..." Paul begins to address the troubling question they have about when the Lord would return. Paul refers to this as "the times and seasons". But even as he brings up the question, he reminds them that there is really no reason for him to have to write an answer.
- **Why do you think the Thessalonians would be concerned about the timing of the Lord's return?**
  - They were looking for an end to their persecution.
  - They had been taught to wait for Lord's coming and thought it would happen soon.
- **What does Paul tell them about the time and date of the Lord's return in verses 2 and 3?**
  - They are already fully aware of the answer.
  - It will come unexpectedly; like a thief in the night who does not announce their



- arrival
  - While the world thinks they have safety and peace, destruction will be just around the corner
  - The world will not be ready or able to escape judgement
- In verses 4 through 8 Paul provides a helpful contrast between the nature of the church and the nature of unbelievers. There are two pairs of themes or images Paul uses to make illustrate his point. **What are they?**
  - Darkness and night, sleep and being drunk – unbelievers
  - Light and day, awake and being sober – the church; children of light
- **What do these two themes have to do with the coming of the Lord?**
  - It is harder to be surprised by a thief in the light of day
  - We are awake during the day
  - We sleep at night
  - The world is drunk and less aware at night
- **What are Paul’s instructions to the church; there are two prohibitions (“not”) and two commands (“let us”)?**
  - We are not of the darkness/night
  - We are not to “sleep” with respect to Christ’s return (as the world does)
  - We are to be awake
  - We are to stay sober
- At the end of his thought in verse 8, Paul calls on believers to be ready for the coming day of the Lord. Paul makes use of military metaphors here to describe Christians and their conduct. He notes that since they belong to the day, they are to be ready. They must also be armed the defensive armor of three fundamental Christian virtues. **What virtues does he tell them to put on?**
  - Faith; ready with a foundation of enduring trust in in God
  - And love; ready through a mutual care for others
  - Hope of salvation; ready with an expectation of eternal life with Christ
- After a contrasting the readiness of unbelievers and believers, Paul shifts to explain their differing destiny. In verse 9 and 10, Paul provides a comforting conclusion while tying back to their original question. **What is the ultimate destiny for believers and unbelievers?**
  - Unbelievers – God’s wrath
  - Believers – Salvation from the judgement of God’s wrath; so that whether alive or dead, he died so that we may live with Him; to be saved, we must be saved from something – in this case Christ has taken on the judgement and wrath of God for us
- Paul ends the answer to the question with a repetition of verse 18 of Chapter 4. This repeated command provides both an instruction to the Thessalonians as well as a marker to the end of each thought. Paul’s desire here is for them to use this truths to encourage and comfort each other. They were facing grief and confusion because they did not understand the truths of Christ’s coming.

- **How does their anxiousness compare to our waiting for the Lord's coming?**
  - Perhaps we do not long for Christ's return enough.
  - Perhaps we are not looking for His return as faithfully – are not thinking about it enough.
- Paul's words here remind us that the purpose of eschatological teaching is not to fuel speculation about the dates and times of Christ's coming. We are to live with an awareness and eye toward his coming so that we are not surprised by that day. But the time of the end is solely God's sovereign concern. The when is a secret he has decided not to share even with the angels or His Son (Mark 13:32). The point here is that the future should not bring dread or fear to the church. Paul makes a clear call for the believer to be prepared, whenever the day of the Lord may come. As believers, we live in the hope and light of his coming. And as we wait, we continue to live a life of faith and obedience, with love for others, and with a hope for the day of His coming. And whether we die waiting for that day or are found alive at His return, we have the confident assurance of heaven and an eternity with Christ.



5 minutes – 11:55 to 12:00

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