

August 10, 2025 (Lesson 11)

PREPARE FOR CHRIST'S RETURN

1. **Live in Hope of Christ's Return** (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)
2. **Live in the Light** (1 Thessalonians 5:1-8)
3. **Encourage One Another** (1 Thessalonians 5:9-14)

Central Truth: Every Christian should be actively watching for Christ's return.

Focus: Contemplate and prepare for Christ's return.

Evangelism Emphasis: The return of Christ should motivate believers to fervently share the Gospel with the world.

Golden Text: "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

The anticipation of the return of Christ has been a fundamental tenet of Christian faith, invoking a sense of hope, responsibility, and spiritual readiness among believers. It carries profound significance, urging believers to prepare in the realm of faith and in their actions and attitudes. As the world continues to change, the call to readiness gains renewed relevance, inviting us to reflect on our choices and align our lives with the teachings of Christ in eager anticipation of His return.

1. LIVE IN HOPE OF CHRIST'S RETURN

A. Don't Lose Hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13-15)

¹³ But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. ¹⁵ For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, had been instrumental in planting the church in Thessalonica, and he continued to instruct them in the letter. Even though he could not visit them physically, his letter addressed their concern about the second coming of Jesus Christ. They wanted to know what would happen to those who had died before the Lord returned. Paul did not leave these infant Christians baffled. Instead, he encouraged their tender hearts to hold on to their faith and not give up on God, even though the persecution was fierce and Jesus' return seemed delayed. In today's

lesson, Paul answered their questions and encouraged them to continue to live in hope of Christ's return.

In the midst of this young congregation's persecution, Paul encouraged them further. They wondered not only what would happen to their fellow believers who died before Jesus returned, but why they had died in the first place. When they became followers of Christ, they probably thought His second coming would happen immediately before any of them died. Paul desired to help them understand death is not the end of the believer's story and explained when Christ returns, all believers—dead and alive—will be reunited. They would never suffer or die again. Therefore, believers should not be full of sorrow like people who “have no hope” (v. 13). The fact that Jesus was resurrected gives the reason Christians should not grieve as unbelievers do. This assures us God will take back to Himself those who have died believing in Him.

Crucial Issue

If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that He said; if He didn't rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what He said? The issue on which everything hangs is not whether or not you like His teaching but whether or not He rose from the dead.—Timothy Keller

B. Trust God's Promise (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18)

¹⁶ For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: ¹⁷ Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

Jesus Christ will come down from Heaven and meet His followers “in the clouds” (v. 17). There is likely an echo of Micah 1:3: “For behold, the Lord is coming out of his place, and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth” (ESV). Clouds regularly accompanied a *theophany*, that is, when God came down to the human level (Ex. 20:21; 1 Kings 8:10-11).

Paul explained Christ will return visibly with a commanding shout, with the call of the archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet (1 Thess. 4:16). Paul adds, as the ultimate reassurance about the dead in Christ, they will “rise first,” after which living Christians will be caught up bodily (vv. 16-17). Verse 18 is an exhortation to comfort and encourage one another “with these words” about Christ’s return and the coming resurrection. Believers can expect a grand and permanent reunion with all fellow believers and with Jesus.

—*What is Satan called in Ephesians 2:2, and why does this make meeting Christ “in the air” (2 Thess. 4:17) particularly significant?*

2. LIVE IN THE LIGHT

A. The Day of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:1-4)

¹ But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. ² For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. ³ For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. ⁴ But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

In the previous verses (4:13-18), Paul spoke of the second coming of Christ from the angle of the rescue of believers. Now he speaks of the same event from the perspective of the judgment of unbelievers. The Lord Jesus Christ will return to judge the living and the dead, but no one knows the date or time. The “now . . . about times and dates” (5:1 NIV) suggests Paul is answering a question posed to him by the Thessalonians. Paul did not need to write to the Thessalonians about “times and dates” because the missionaries had already instructed them about this. They knew “the day of the Lord [would come] as a thief in the night” (v. 2). However, Paul is not about to provide a user-friendly guide about the time of Jesus’ return. Instead of *when*, Paul addresses the *how*.

Christ’s coming will be sudden and unexpected. It will be a sudden intrusion by God into human history, catching many unaware and unprepared. This implies the unknown timing of the event.

There is an echo of Jesus' words in Matthew 24:44: "So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him" (NIV). As Ian Howard Marshall wrote, "It is worth observing that many people today crave detailed information about both the time and the course of the last events, and there are writers who are prepared to answer the question in minute detail and with not a little imagination. . . . Not so Paul. . . . Christian teachers today would do well to follow his example and so avoid 'going beyond what is written' (1 Cor. 4:6, literal rendering)." Instead of speculating about dates, our responsibility as Christians is to serve the Lord with all our strength. In that way, we will be prepared for Christ's return when He comes.

"The day of the Lord" (1 Thess. 5:2) is a common Old Testament expression for the future occasion when God will establish His righteousness on the earth, including judgment of the wicked (see Isa. 13:6-16; Joel 1:15; Amos 5:18-20) and full deliverance for His people (see Joel 2:31-32; Obad. 1:15-21). The same expression conveying the same two aspects is carried over into the New Testament, with some variations of terminology: for example, "that day" (Luke 10:12); "the day when the Son of man is revealed" (17:30); "the coming of the Son of man" (Matt. 24:27, 37, 39). In Paul's letters, the Day of the Lord is associated with the coming of Jesus and is referred to in several ways: "that day" (2 Thess. 1:10); "the day of our Lord Jesus" (2 Cor. 1:14); "the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6); "the day of Christ" (Phil. 1:10; 2:16). The Day of the Lord will take unbelievers by complete surprise. While they are speaking to one another about "peace and safety . . . sudden destruction" will come on them (1 Thess. 5:3). As they go about their daily lives, sunk in a deadly spiritual apathy, the wrath of God will unexpectedly sweep them away. Verse 3 reflects the descriptions of the false prophets in the Old Testament who predicted peace and safety when the judgment of God was looming (Jer. 6:13-15; 8:11; Ezek. 13:10-16; Mic. 3:5).

Since unbelievers cannot see the judgment of God approaching, they dismiss it as fantasy or scaremongering. They encourage each other with false hopes when they talk optimistically about the future, unaware that eternal damnation is on the horizon and about to engulf them. They are not realistic about what is going to happen. They are deaf to the warnings of God, absorbed in their selfishness, and utterly blind to the judgment hanging over them. In every sense, they are unprepared for that fast-approaching day.

The “destruction” Paul mentions (1 Thess. 5:3) is the “everlasting destruction” of 2 Thessalonians 1:9-10: “They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed” (NIV). It is the utter hopelessness of a godless existence and eternal ruin. This destruction is as inevitable “as labor pains on a pregnant woman” (1 Thess. 5:3 NIV) and there will be no escape. When Christ returns, it will be too late to repent and believe. All who have rejected Christ will be summoned to the bar of God to receive their condemnation.

—*In 1 Thessalonians 5:4, what does Paul call Christians, and how does he instruct them to live?*

B. Children of Light (1 Thessalonians 5:5-8)

⁵ Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. ⁶ Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. ⁷ For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. ⁸ But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

In these verses, Paul contrasts believers, who are the people of the light, with those who belong to the darkness (v. 5). The people of the night are described as asleep (v. 6). Here, *sleep* indicates carelessness or indifference. It means being unaware, unconscious of what is happening, especially in

the realm of spiritual realities. It is like the householder who did not protect his house from the thief (Luke 12:39) or the servant unprepared for the returning master (Mark 13:36; see Eph. 5:14).

Paul is encouraging the Thessalonians to know who they are and live in light of their identity as “the children of light” (1 Thess. 5:5). The Thessalonians need not fear this day will surprise them because they are “not of the night, nor of darkness.” This darkness refers to those who are spiritually blind and ignorant, wicked and careless, and alienated from God. All who are trapped in the darkness of sin and unbelief will be caught unprepared for that day, for they cannot see it approaching, nor do they care about its coming.

The Thessalonian believers, however, will not be terrified by the day of the Lord, for they are “children of the day” (v. 5). Since they live in the light, they will see the day coming and welcome it as the final triumph. The “light” and “day” point to the knowledge of Christ in salvation they have already experienced. The light of redemption shines in their hearts, so they are destined for everlasting light.

As Christians, we are “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that [we] may declare the praises of him who called [us] out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9 NIV). We must not hold a vain curiosity concerning the day and hour of Christ’s return. Instead, we must wait for it with holy anticipation and prepare ourselves for its arrival. We must live in the light and behave as children of the light, for “we do not belong to the night or to the darkness” (1 Thess. 5:5 NIV).

In Romans 13:12-14, Paul wrote, “The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and

jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh” (NIV).

The people of the light are to be alert and self-controlled. To be *alert* means being watchful, sober, and spiritually awake. As we wait for our Savior from Heaven, we must be morally alert and live a holy life in view of the Day of the Lord. We must live on earth in a way that pleases the Lord as we wait for Him to take us to Heaven. To be *self-controlled* demands we be characterized by moral and spiritual earnestness, calm and steady in faith and actions, and faithfully serving the Lord as we look forward to that day. A. L. Moore says *self-control* “denotes serious, responsible moral behavior, as drunkenness denotes abandonment of self-control and responsibility.” Jesus gave His disciples this warning: “Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:34-36 NIV).

As the Thessalonians were “children of the day,” they must behave accordingly by putting on faith, love, and hope (5:5, 8). Paul exhorted them to put on the whole spiritual armor of God. Faith and love act as a breastplate that protects the heart and other vital organs, and the hope of salvation as a helmet protecting the head. Hope is indispensable and in the expectation of Christ’s second coming.

Be Alert

Let us be alert to the season in which we are living. It is the season of the *blessed hope*, calling for us to cut our ties with the world and build ourselves on this One who will soon appear. He is our hope—a *blessed hope* enabling us to rise above our times and fix our gaze on Him.—A. W. Tozer

3. ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER

A. Appointed for Salvation (1 Thessalonians 5:9-11)

⁹ For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. ¹¹ Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

Paul's emphasis here is on what God has done for our salvation; that is the basis of our confidence rather than the constancy we can muster. Our salvation is "through our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 9 NKJV), a phrase Paul also uses elsewhere to direct his readers' attention to the basis of salvation.

"Who died for us" (v. 10) points to the basis of our salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ—His atoning death for us and our union with Him by faith. This little phrase expresses the truth of Christ taking our place, which is basic in Paul's teachings (Rom. 3:21-26; 5:6, 8; 2 Cor. 5:14-15). The way Paul mentions it here, almost in passing, indicates he had made this truth a basic element in his teaching in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 1:10; 2:15; 4:14); therefore, he did not need to elaborate now.

In 5:10, Paul says "whether we wake [*living*] or sleep [*deceased*]," God will take us to be with Him forever. Thus, nearing the close of the section on the return of Christ, Paul reassures both those concerned about deceased loved ones and those apprehensive about their own destiny that Christ has conquered sin and death. We can hold fast to our hope of salvation (v. 8) because Christ has a fast hold on all who are His own.

This is no excuse for coasting along in our Christian lives. Rather, the conclusion Paul draws is this: "Therefore encourage one another" (v. 11 NIV). The emphasis is on mutual encouraging more than comforting. This is clear from the context and is supported by the next phrase—"edify one another." This is a favorite theme of Paul (1 Cor. 8:1; 10:23; Eph. 4:12). Both phrases denote

continuous action. Thus, J. B. Phillips translates 1 Thessalonians 5:11, “So go on cheering and strengthening each other.”

The commands to “encourage one another” and “edify one another” teach us every believer has something to contribute to the other members of the body of Christ. Later Paul elaborated on this (1 Cor. 12). But already, in what may be his earliest letter, he emphasized the importance of body life. We may think of Paul as the fearless pioneer missionary, but he was no “lone ranger.”

“Even as also ye do” (1 Thess. 5:11) illustrates once more Paul’s tactfulness and his use of positive reinforcement—marks of a good pastor. So, Paul closed this section by calling for mutual ministry within the body. What form should that ministry take? He provides some direction in the next section.

Two Truths

Although my memory is fading, I remember two things very clearly: I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior.—John Newton

B. Honoring Leaders; Pursuing Peace (1 Thessalonians 5:12-14)

¹² And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; ¹³ And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves. ¹⁴ Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.

As Acts 14:23 demonstrates, Paul and his co-missionaries worked to ensure young congregations had recognized leaders. Frequently they were called *elders*, a term borrowed from the Jewish synagogue. Usually there were several elders, rather than the one-pastor-per-congregation pattern common today. In the predominantly Gentile Thessalonian church, the pattern may have been a little different, perhaps modeled after their trade guilds or social organizations. Still, they were described as performing three functions: they “*labor* among you, . . . *over* you in the Lord, and

admonish you” (1 Thess. 5:12). The first term indicates the strenuous nature of their labors. Paul used another form of the same word to point to the missionaries’ physical labor to maintain themselves there in Thessalonica (2:9). He also used it to describe his ministerial labors (see 1 Cor. 15:10; Col. 1:29). Paul indicated how much energy pastoral ministering may require: “So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well” (2 Cor. 12:15 NIV).

The term “are over you” means “exercising leadership” or “presiding” (“have charge of you,” NRSV), and it can mean “caring for,” “protecting,” or “sharing with.” Here it “combines the ideas of leading, protecting, and caring for,” said F. F. Bruce. The attachment of the qualifying phrase “in the Lord” is significant. On the one hand, it indicates the basis of the elders’ authority—they are there by His appointment. On the other hand, their authority is to be exercised in the style taught and exemplified by Jesus (see Mark 10:42-45). Only in this way are they to be “over” their brothers and sisters. They do not own the flock, but are under-shepherds who eventually will have to give account to the “Chief Shepherd” (see 1 Peter 5:1-4).

The third aspect of the leaders’ ministry is to “admonish.” With the exception of Acts 20:31, also a speech by Paul, the word appears only in the letters of Paul. The word calls for instructing with a view to changing behavior. It involves correcting people in a manner that does not alienate but rather maintains rapport, and keeps the door open for further guidance. A chief means of guidance is to lead by example (1 Peter 5:3). Like the Apostle Paul, elders and pastors need to be able to say to the congregation, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1 NIV).

Paul sets forth the responsibility of the Thessalonians to the leaders who work, preside, and admonish. They are, in the first place, to “know” (1 Thess. 5:12) or “acknowledge” them—to recognize their leaders’ proper role. Beyond that, the congregation is to hold their leaders in the

highest regard—“esteem them very highly” (v. 13). And they are to do so in love and grateful appreciation for their work. Leon Morris wrote, “It is a matter of fact that to this day we are often slow to realize that effective leadership in the church of Christ demands effective following. If we are continually critical of those who are set over us in the Lord, it is a small wonder they are unable to perform the miracles we demand of them.”

As leaders carry out their responsibility to lead “in the Lord,” the congregation is to reciprocate with respect, affection, and appreciation. Thus, the community may experience peace. However, things do not happen automatically; it requires the congregation to be vigilant and mutually committed to one another. Therefore, Paul’s instruction comes in the form of a command: “Be at peace among yourselves” (v. 13). Paul’s exhortation to be at peace is important today. It is a “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22), but it requires cultivating.

We not only have a responsibility to love our leaders, but to love one another as well. Every individual in the church should be loved and respected, and, when necessary, warned. The following general instructions are for all the members of the church, not just the leaders: “Warn them that are unruly” (v. 14), which means being “disorderly.” Such individuals are out of step with others, like soldiers who do not keep ranks. They do not carry out their duties, and they must not be supported in their laziness. Believers are to “encourage the disheartened, help the weak” (v. 14b NIV). These may be the spiritually immature who are easily tempted to lapse into immorality. They are not to be abandoned but given all the necessary spiritual and moral assistance to help them stand firm for Christ. Finally, Paul urged them to be patient with everyone. He wants the Thessalonians to be longsuffering toward those in the church and outsiders, even if they were mistreated by them. They must not reject anyone.

—How should church members relate to their pastor and to one another (1 Thess. 5:12-13)?

LIVE IN EXPECTATION

As we anticipate Christ's return, we must strive to live a life that reflects the teachings and example of Jesus Christ. This includes demonstrating love, compassion, humility, and generosity in our actions and interactions. While no one knows the exact timing of Christ's return, the Bible emphasizes the importance of being watchful and prepared. We must stay spiritually vigilant and ready for the event, maintaining a sense of hope and encouragement, knowing Christ's return signifies the fulfillment of God's promises. May this hope inspire us to live to honor Him.

Daily Devotions

- M. The Coming Kingdom (Isaiah 35:1-10)
- T. Christ's Second Coming (Zechariah 14:1-9)
- W. Rewards of the Coming Christ (Malachi 3:16—4:3)
- T. Watch for Christ's Return (Matthew 25:1-13)
- F. Signs of Christ's Coming (Luke 21:25-28)
- S. Behold, Christ Comes (Revelation 1:4-8)