

Adult School of Ministry
Summer 2025
Lesson 11 – August 10, 2025
Prepare for Christ's Return

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

Scriptures: (1) 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; (2) 1 Thessalonians 5:1-8; (3) 1 Thessalonians 5:9-14

The Lesson Overview: The church of Thessalonica had some questions about Christ's second coming—questions that had affected them in personal ways. Some believed that fellow Christians who had died before Christ's return would miss out on this joyous and glorious event. Paul wrote, in part, to correct this misunderstanding and to encourage the faithful in Thessalonica by informing them of what they could anticipate regarding Jesus' return. Paul provided timeless information that encourages Christians of all ages to be prepared for our soon-coming King.

Historical Background: Much of the Apostle Paul's teaching on Christ's second coming appears to be based on Jesus' teaching, which was later recorded in the Gospels—particularly Jesus' teaching in the "Olivet Discourse" (Matthew 24 and 25). For example, when Paul wrote of Jesus' return accompanied by the trumpet of God (1 Thessalonians 4:16), he likely knew Jesus had taught this (Matthew 24:31). Paul was familiar with the teachings of Jesus (1 Corinthians 11:23-24) either through revelation by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 14:6; Galatians 1:12) or from the Apostles' doctrines (Acts 2:42). It was probably a combination of both.

Lesson Outline

1. LIVE IN HOPE OF CHRIST'S RETURN - 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
 - A. Sorrow Mixed With Hope (13)
 - B. Encouraging Words (14–18)
2. LIVE IN THE LIGHT - 1 Thessalonians 5:1-8
 - A. Unprepared for Christ's Coming (1–3)
 - B. Being Prepared for Christ's Coming (4–8)
3. ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER - 1 Thessalonians 5:9-14
 - A. Appointed to Receive Salvation (9-11)
 - B. Extend Brotherly Love (12-14)

Discussing The Lesson

1. LIVE IN HOPE OF CHRIST'S RETURN (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

A. Sorrow Mixed With Hope - 1 Thessalonians 4:13

- 1) Beginning in verse 13, Paul intended to dispel misunderstandings about what would happen to Christians who died before Christ's return.
- 2) Some in the church may have believed that those who died prior to Christ's coming would miss out on everlasting life.
- 3) Paul began his instruction with the assurance that Christ's followers need not mourn the loss of deceased Christians as non-Christians might mourn the passing of a loved one.
- 4) For most pagans, death was not believed to be something one came back from, so there was no reason for hope.
- 5) However, for the Christian, there is hope amid the sorrow.
- 6) The Thessalonian Christians were not without hope because God revealed what would transpire when His Son came again.

B. Encouraging Words - 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18

- 1) Beginning in verse 14, Paul launched into teaching concerning Christ's second coming and what will happen to those who "*sleep in Jesus*" at His coming.
- 2) Simply put, Paul taught that the saints who died with their faith in Christ intact would be raised to everlasting life with Christ and fellow believers.
- 3) The foundation for this teaching was that Christ had already died and rose to life again, never to die again.
- 4) As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:20, Jesus' resurrection was the "*firstfruits*" of those who died in Christ.
- 5) After the cross, Jesus' resurrection was the first but not the last resurrection from the dead to everlasting life that would take place.
- 6) Paul based his teaching of the future resurrection of deceased Christians on "*the word of the Lord*" (1 Thessalonians 4:15).
- 7) How Paul received this "*word*" is not explained.
- 8) What Paul received could have been from Jesus' earthly teaching as conveyed by His disciples.
- 9) It is also possible that Paul, on some previous occasions, directly received a revelatory word from the Lord.
- 10) Or someone close to Paul, perhaps Silas, may have received this prophetic word from the Lord.
- 11) Regardless of how he received it, what was important to Paul was for his audience to know that what he wrote to them was the sure word of the Lord.
- 12) Next, Paul described the order of events that would take place when Jesus came again.
- 13) When Christ returns to receive His bride, He will "*descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God*" (v. 16).
- 14) Then, the "*dead in Christ shall first rise,*" and together with those who are still alive at Christ's coming, rise "*to meet the Lord in the air*" (vv. 16-17).
- 15) The dead will be raised with glorified bodies, and the living saints' bodies will be made incorruptible and immortal (1 Corinthians 15:51-53).
- 16) Paul then offered a concluding word of encouragement concerning this matter, saying, "*so shall we ever be with the Lord*" (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

- 17) Christ will be with His people, and they will be with Him forever in “*a new heaven and a new earth*” (Revelation 21:1).
- 18) Even as Paul encouraged the Thessalonian Christians with these words, they were also to “*comfort one another*” (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

2. LIVE IN THE LIGHT (1 Thessalonians 5:1-8)

A. Unprepared for Christ’s Coming - 1 Thessalonians 5:1–3

- 1) In chapter 5, Paul continued to address the topic of Christ’s return.
- 2) Here, the emphasis is on the need to be prepared for His second coming.
 - a. First, Paul noted preparation for Christ’s return was a topic the Thessalonian Christians had already heard from Paul (v. 1).
 - i. They were aware that the return of Christ would be an unexpected and unwelcome event for those who were not spiritually prepared for it.
 - ii. Paul compared Christ’s return to “*a thief in the night*” (v. 2).
 - b. Next, Paul said some might have thought they were in a place of peace and security and did not need to ready themselves for the Lord’s return (v. 3).
 - i. Paul did not specify who these individuals were, but based on the context, it is apparent they were not faithful followers of Christ (vv. 4-5).
 - ii. For those who have not submitted their lives to Christ as Savior and Lord, His return will come upon them suddenly, “*as labor pains upon a pregnant woman*” (v. 3 NKJV).
- 3) At the second coming of Christ, it will be too late to “*escape*” the “*destruction*” that awaits all who fail to receive Him as their Lord and Savior.
- 4) While the coming of the Lord will be a joyous occasion for all who are in Christ, this will not be the case for those who find themselves outside of Christ’s family of faith.
- 5) There is a coming judgment for those who have denied the Lord in this life.

B. Being Prepared for Christ’s Coming - 1 Thessalonians 5:4–8

- 1) Having described the coming destruction and judgment of the Lord, which is the future of all who are not believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul turned his attention to how believers in Christ are to be prepared for that day.
- 2) Paul reminded the Thessalonian church they were “*not in darkness, that that day [Christ’s return] should overtake [them] as a thief*” (v. 4).
- 3) The reason they would not unexpectedly be overtaken by that day or experience God’s righteous judgment against sin was that they were “*children of light*” and “*of the day*” (v. 5).
- 4) Paul equated those in “*darkness,*” who “*sleep*” and are “*drunk,*” with those who are unaware and unprepared for the return of Christ (vv. 6-7).
- 5) They are unprepared for His arrival because they have not experienced salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.
- 6) Their actions prove they are not Christ’s followers.
- 7) However, Christians are described as people of the “*day*” and the “*light.*”
- 8) They are awake, waiting, and ready for Christ’s return.
- 9) The grace of God has saved them through the perfect work of Christ, and they are God’s “*children*” (v. 5).
- 10) Their lives bear evidence that they are in the light. Still, Paul encouraged the Thessalonian church to be watchful and “*sober*” regarding Christ’s return (vv. 6, 8).
- 11) How were they to prepare for Christ’s return?

- a. They were to put on “*the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation*” (v. 8).
- 12) To be ready for Christ’s coming, the Thessalonian Christians were to exhibit faith and love in God.
- 13) They were to be people with “*the hope of salvation*” (v. 8), meaning they were confident of the salvation that Christ secured for them through His sin-atonement death.
- 14) This was salvation they received through faith in the Son of God.
- 15) The fullness of their salvation would be entirely realized when He came again, and their faith would end in sight.

3. ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER (1 Thessalonians 5:9-14)

A. Appointed to Receive Salvation - 1 Thessalonians 5:9–11

- 1) Following the Apostle Paul’s instruction that the Thessalonian Christians don “*the hope of salvation as a helmet*” (v. 8 NIV), Paul expressed clearly what this meant for them.
- 2) They could be confident of their salvation because of what Christ had accomplished on their behalf. God has “*not appointed*” Christ’s disciples to be recipients of His “*wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ*” (v. 9).
- 3) In this verse, Paul summarized his earlier argument in 5:1-8.
 - a. Those who will receive God’s wrath as their reward will be people of the “*darkness*” and the “*night*,” whose thoughts and actions are consistent with worldliness.
 - b. On the other hand, those who have faith in God, love the Lord, and hope in the salvation Christ has secured on their behalf can expect to “*obtain*” the complete salvation God has promised His children (v. 9).
- 4) Paul goes on to highlight that Christ secured eternal salvation for His disciples through His death (v. 10).
- 5) His death won freedom, life, and immortality for all who trust in Christ as Savior and Lord.
- 6) This was why Paul wrote that regardless of whether one was alive or dead, the one who trusts in Christ alone will “*obtain salvation by [the] Lord Jesus Christ*” (v. 9).
- 7) The confident hope that Christ’s followers will one day experience the fullness of the salvation He has won for them through His death and resurrection was to be a source of encouragement for the church (v. 11).
- 8) Each member ought to be encouraged by this present and future hope.
- 9) This would encourage Christians suffering persecution for their commitment to Christ, as was the case for the Christians in Thessalonica and Paul himself.
- 10) Even today, the church faces hostile forces rising against the Christian faith.
- 11) Therefore, we must remember that we have the hope of a glorious destiny with Christ.

B. Extend Brotherly Love - 1 Thessalonians 5:12–14

- 1) As Paul drew near the end of this letter, in typical Pauline fashion, he closed with a flourish of exhortations.
- 2) Some of these specifically concern extending brotherly love to other Christians.
 - a. First, Paul addressed how Christians could show love toward those who lead and serve the church.
 - i. That Paul had church leaders in mind is made clear by the phrase “*in the Lord*” (v. 12).

- ii. Paul wanted the church members “*to know them.*”
- iii. Paul desired for the Thessalonian church to acknowledge or “*recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you*” (v. 12 NKJV).
- iv. In addition, Paul encouraged the church “*to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake*” (v. 13).
- v. How they were to do this may be clarified in the following sentence, namely, by being “*at peace among yourselves,*” perhaps suggesting that there may have been some tensions among them that they needed to address.
- b. Next, Paul focused on how they could demonstrate brotherly love toward fellow Christians by being “*patient*” with them (v. 14).
 - i. The word translated as *patient* emphasizes being long-suffering with others.
 - ii. It is loving and necessary for Christians to have forbearance toward brothers and sisters in Christ who may be struggling in their walk or simply being difficult.
- 3) Even committed Christians can have differences of opinion, but in Christ, we can work through our differences and maintain Christian love and unity.

Call To Discipleship

Looking ahead by faith to Christ’s return can help manage our grief. It can be a source of much joy and comfort when we must walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

Ministry In Action

Everyone eventually experiences loss and grief, so the church should be prepared to care for and minister to people in the church and community as they experience that valley.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Lesson 11

TO THE THESSALONIANS: PAUL'S FIRST LETTERS

His ministry in Thessalonica cut short by persecution, Paul, Silas, and Timothy traveled 50 miles southwest to Berea, where they had a short but very successful ministry. There, because of persecution, Paul left Silas and Timothy in Macedonia and went by ship to Athens in Greece (Acts 17:10-15). From there, Paul traveled on to Corinth in Greece, where he wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica the letters we call “First Thessalonians” (late AD 50) and “Second Thessalonians” (early AD 51). It is believed Paul also wrote his Letter to the Galatians (early AD 52) during his 18 months in Corinth (Acts 18:1, 11).

After writing to the Thessalonians and Galatians, five years passed before Paul wrote the next of his letters found in the New Testament.

The letter to the Christians in Corinth we call “First Corinthians” is believed to have been written by Paul in the spring of AD 57, at Ephesus, near the end of his three years of ministry there (Acts 19:1; 20:16-17, 31; AD 54-57). The letter we call “Second Corinthians” is believed to have been written somewhere in Macedonia, in the fall of AD 57 (Acts 20:1).

Paul's Letter to the Romans is believed to have been written at Corinth in the winter of AD 57-58 (Acts 20:3), and taken to Rome by Phoebe (Romans 16:1-2).

While in the protective custody of the Roman government for two years at Rome, living in his own rented house, ministering freely to all who came to him (Acts 28:16, 30-31), Paul wrote his letters to the Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians (summer AD 62), and to the Philippians (spring AD 63).

After being released from his detainment at Rome (summer AD 63), Paul traveled and wrote the letters we call “First Timothy” and “Titus.” Arrested and imprisoned in AD 66 in the persecution of Christians by Emperor Nero, Paul wrote his last letter, to Timothy, called “Second Timothy.” At Nero's command, it is believed Paul was beheaded at Rome by a swordsman in late AD 66 or early 67.

LIVING TO PLEASE GOD

1. How should the grieving of Christians be different than the grieving of non-Christians (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14)?
2. What is Satan called in Ephesians 2:2, and why does it make meeting Christ “in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:17) particularly significant?
3. What does Paul call Christians (5:5), and how does he instruct us to live (5:6)?
4. How did Paul commend the Thessalonians in verse 11? Could he say the same thing about us?
5. How must we support our church leaders, and why (vv. 12-13)?