

# 1 Thessalonians

## I. Introduction

A. **1 Thessalonians 5:1-11** . . . Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. [2] For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. [3] While they (*the unbelievers and unprepared*) are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. [4] But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; [5] for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; [6] so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. [7] For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. [8] But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. [9] For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, [10] who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him. [11] Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.

## B. Pray

## II. Truths surrounding the return of Christ

A. [1] Now as to the **times** and the **epochs**, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you.

1. **Times** – This word “times” is like the word seasons. For example, there are four seasons, and one follows the other so that as Fall is coming to an end you know that winter is near. So it is with “times” in relation to the return of Christ, when certain prophesied events happen, you know that Christ’s return is coming soon.

a. For example, Paul provides a glimpse of the times prior to the return of Christ.

b. We read this in **2 Timothy 3:1-5**, “But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. [2] For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, [3] unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, [4] treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather

than lovers of God, [5] holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.”

2. **Epochs** – The word “epoch” speaks of a significant event that will happen at a specific point in time. For example, in speaking of signs of His own return, Jesus said in **Matthew 24:15-16**, “Therefore when you see the **Abomination of desolation** which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), [16] then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.” This sign is considered an epoch.
  3. Interestingly, just prior to ascending into heaven, Jesus’ disciples asked Him if He was going to restore the kingdom to Israel at that time. Jesus responded by saying, “It is not for you to know **times** or **epochs** which the Father has fixed by His own authority; [8] but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (**Acts 1:4-8**).
    - a. Given the number of “epochs” mentioned in the scriptures, it is doubtful Jesus is saying we can’t know these things.
    - b. Rather, the probable meaning is that we ought not to focus our attention on the epochs preceding Christ’s return, but instead focus on being alert and prepared ourselves and evangelizing unbelievers so they aren’t left behind.
  4. Paul concludes **vs 1** with “**You have no need** of anything to be written to you.” Apparently, Paul had already taught them that it isn’t for us to know the time of Christ’s return. Our responsibility is to be ready so that when He returns we are found living as Christians ought to be living. And Paul affirms this truth in **vs 2-5**.
- B. [2] For you yourselves know full well that the **day of the Lord** will come just like a thief in the night.
1. I want to point out a shift in Paul’s choice of words in reference to the return of Christ. From the beginning of **1 Thessalonians** until now, Paul has used the Greek word “parousia” (*which means arrival or presence*), when speaking of the return of Christ.
    - a. Here, however, he uses the phrase, “**day of the Lord.**” This phrase is found 18 times in the OT and 5 times in the NT. It is used to describe a future epoch when God will come to do two things: (1) gather His people to Himself and (2) punish the wicked.

- b. Paul's focus back in **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** is on Christ returning and gathering all believers – including those who die before His return. However, here in **chapter 5:1-11**, Paul takes the traditional two fold focus – **first** of Christ returning and gathering God's people, and **second**, judging the wicked or unbelievers.
    - c. I am pointing out this change in focus because it is important for understanding what God is saying here in **vs 1-11**.
  2. Paul goes on to say that “the **day of the Lord** will come just like a thief in the night.” There are two important points here that I suspect you already know.
    - a. **First**, though we can read the signs preceding Christ's return given to us in Bible prophecy, no one but God knows the day or the hour of Christ's return.
    - b. **Second**, because there is no doubt about Christ returning, and because no one knows exactly when, we are to be vigilant and prepared so it does not catch us living contrary to how a Christian ought to live.
  3. Jesus speaks of the need to be alert and prepared for His return in **Matthew 24:42-44**, “Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. [43] But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. [44] For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.”
  4. Jesus went on to speak of the judgment that will accompany His return – *and therefore the need for alertness and being prepared* – in **Matthew 24:45-51**, “Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? [46] Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. [47] Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. [48] But if that evil slave says in his heart, ‘My master is not coming for a long time,’ [49] and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards (*behave in a manner contrary to how he ought to behave*); [50] the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, [51] and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

5. Peter talks about how we Christians are to live in expectation of Christ's return. **2 Peter 3:10-14**, "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. [11] Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, **what sort of people ought you to be** in holy conduct and godliness (*you are wise enough to figure it out*), [12] looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! [13] But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. [14] Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, **be diligent** to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless."
  6. What is important for us as Christians is not **WHEN** will Christ return, but will I be ready for His return – that is, will I be found living a life pleasing to God and in accordance with His will?
- C. [3] While they (*unbelievers and the religious who are unprepared because they love the world and the things in the world*) are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.
1. The claim of there being "Peace and safety!" just prior to a cataclysmic event may be an OT reference to Israel's false prophets and evil leaders who used it to sell the Israelites the idea that all was well.
  2. The reality was, however, God's judgment was coming soon – and it would include Israel being invaded, defeated in war, and carried off to Babylon. Obviously, the pseudo-religious and political promises of ongoing peace and safety meant those making such promises didn't know what they were talking about.
  3. However, the words "peace and safety" might also be a reference to the political atmosphere of Paul's day. Rome was in power and their rule covered much of the known world. And for whatever reason, be it noble intentions or just propaganda, their slogan was Pax Romana, or Roman Peace – which meant there was peace and safety for everyone under the rule of Rome.
    - a. The sad reality is that we are in a similar situation today. The signs of the return of Christ seem to be getting stronger. God's judgment on our nation and the wicked within it seems more

- and more appropriate and necessary. And yet, most unbelievers and some Christians are living as if the good life will never end.
- b. Jesus warned us about this foolish mindset in **Luke 17:26-30**, “And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: [27] they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. [28] It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building (*as if life would continue on like this forever*); [29] but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. [30] It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed.”
4. Paul continues **vs 3** with a similar warning: “then [sudden] destruction will come upon them...like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.”
    - a. Just as a woman with child cannot escape labor pains at the time of delivery, so those who are not alert and not prepared for Christ’s return will not escape the resulting judgment. In other words, don’t be foolish!
    - b. We see in this warning God’s love and grace in telling us in advance that Christ will return to gather His people and judge the wicked. And we see in this the foolishness of humanity in disregarding God’s warnings so as to continue living as if there is no final judgment and no eternal loss for living a self-centered, unloving, and ungodly life.
    - c. Therefore, to be unprepared for this coming judgment is just as foolish as being unprepared for labor pains.
  5. Paul ends **vs 3** with the words, “and they will not escape” – that is, escape God’s judgment and the resulting punishment for living a selfish, ungodly life.
    - a. God’s word speaks of the certainty of God’s judgment on sin in **Galatians 6:7-8**, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. [8] For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”

- D. [4] But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; [5a] for you are all sons of light and sons of day.
1. Here are some examples of what Paul means when he says we Christians are **not in darkness**:
    - a. We are not living according to the deceptions and lies of the devil.
    - b. We are not being led astray by the influences of the world, or ensnared by the deceitfulness of riches.
    - c. We are not self-ruled and self-centered.
    - d. We are not ruled by fear or by our passions.
    - e. We are not puffed up with spiritual knowledge yet living an ungodly life.
    - f. And we are not knowingly and willfully practicing any sin or acting as if continuing to practice some particular sin is of no eternal consequence because we are saved by grace.
  2. In other words, we are not living in a way that blinds us or numbs us to the truth regarding what is required to live a God-pleasing, God-honoring Christian life.
  3. And because we are living up to what we know God says about how to live, one of the outcomes is being alert and prepared for the return of Christ.
- E. The reality is, the return of Christ will be sudden and at a time no one knows, but the difference between the Christian living in the light and the unbeliever or foolish Christian is that the Christian will not be asleep, but on the alert and prepared for Christ's return. And because the Christian is on guard and prepared, he will not suffer loss.

### III. Conclusion

- A. Are you living as a son of light and a son of day? In other words, are you alert and purposefully, intentionally, and persistently preparing for the return of Christ? At His return, will He find you living the kind of life He saved you to live and commands you to live?
- B. Or are you half-asleep, believing that because you are saved by grace, God's grace will make up the difference between how you are living and how you know you ought to live?