

**ALLIANCE UNIVERSITY**  
**1 THESSALONIANS 5: 1–11**

**A PAPER SUBMITTED TO PROFESSOR JULIANE M. COX IN PARTIAL  
FULFILMENTS  
OF BIBLICAL EXEGESIS NT 615**

**ALLIANCE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**  
**BY**

**PETER BROWN**

TUESDAY, April 18, 2023

## **EPISTLE (1THESSALONIANS 1:1-11)**

The main idea of 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 is that the Lord's Return is imminent; therefore, believers should be in a state of urgency, as they prepare for His return.

### **OUTLINE**

- |  |            |
|--|------------|
| 1. The time of the Lord's return                                 | verse 1    |
| 2. A thief in the night  | verse 2    |
| 3. The secret and sudden return of the Lord                      | verse 3-4  |
| 4. Know who you are, and who you are not                         | verse 5    |
| 5. Be awake and be aware of your surroundings.                   | verses 6-7 |
| 6. Be fully clothed with faith, love, and the hope of salvation. | verse 8    |
| 7. Appointed to obtain salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ        | verse. 9.  |
| 8. Christ died for his people.                                   | verse 10   |
| 9. Death does not separate Christ from his people.               | verse 10   |
| 10. Comfort and encourage one another in the faith.              | Verse 11   |

### **INTRODUCTION**

The main idea of 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 is that believers should remain vigilant as they await the coming of the Lord. No one knows when the Lord shall come and appear in his glorious majesty. Therefore, Paul outlines to the believers in Thessalonians how they ought to live, as they await the Lord's coming. They should live with faith, love, and hope as their guiding principles. Paul wrote this letter after he had received from Timothy who had recently visited the church, a report that the Thessalonians were standing strong in their faith in spite of

the persecution they were experiencing. However, the Thessalonians were concerned about the Return of the Lord and the believers who has passed away.

## **HISTORICAL / CULTURAL CONTEXT**

First Thessalonians was written by the apostle Paul while he was in Philippi where he had gone, after he had to leave Thessalonica, suddenly. Paul had travelled previously to Thessalonica from Philippi on his second missionary journey. When he arrived in Thessalonica the city was flourishing and had great autonomy. Thessalonica was a leading city, “Two geographical factors resulted in Thessalonica becoming ... ‘the mother of all Macedonia’ access to the sea was a great geographical advantage...”<sup>1</sup> by the time Paul arrived in Thessalonica, it was a provincial capital. “Rome’s choice of Thessalonica as a provincial capital was based not solely on the city’s size and wealth but also on its loyalty to the Roman Empire rather than to local leaders heading up the rebellions.”<sup>2</sup>

Thessalonica had a sufficiently large Jewish population, and among them were many Greek and pagan converts. Thessalonica, was a city with synagogues, there Paul preached for three consecutive Sabbaths. He sought to convince the Jews, by using the scripture to show that Jesus was the long-awaited messiah. (Acts 17:1-4).

Scholars have varied as to the length of time Paul was in Thessalonica and as to how long he was in the city before he had to leave suddenly. There is no information from the scripture to determine the length of time he was in the city “Giving the distance between the two cities, the sending of gifts would probably have taken weeks if not months. This would allow time for the bearers of the aid to travel from Philippi to Thessalonica, deliver the aid, return to Philippi, and

<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey A.D. Weima, *1-2 Thessalonians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2014), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey A.D. Weima, *1-2 Thessalonians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2014), 3.

repeat the process (Haenchen 511)...his sojourn there would have extended into at least two or three months (von Dobschutz 1909:17, suggest six weeks.<sup>3</sup>

Paul was born and lived a Jew in Tarsus (Acts 21:39, 22:3). He was educated in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel, a teacher, known for his spirit of tolerance. Paul was a member of the Pharisaic Party (Phil. 1:3). He learned a trade of tent making and other leather work (Acts 18:3) probably from his father. Paul's trade provided him with a means to support missionary activities. Paul persecuted the Christians in order to stamp out this new threat to Judaism. Acts reported that Paul made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and hauling men and women off to prison. Paul's conversion revealed to him that the God of the Old Testament was the very God he had been resisting. He received the revelation of the Son of God, and the commission to preach to the Gentiles, while on the Damascus road; after that Paul became an active missionary which led to his arrival in Thessalonica.

The church in Thessalonica was comprised of young believers who came to faith during the time of Paul's presence in the city. Paul had developed a relationship with the believers like that of a father and his children, or like that of a gentle nurse who with tender care cherishes her children. The Thessalonians were concerned about believers who had passed away. "The Thessalonians were in danger of being deceived by false teaching which had reached them through a communication which claimed to come from Paul but was a forgery (2Thes 2:1-3a) in particular they were being told that the day of the Lord had already come."<sup>4</sup> Paul was addressing some issues that were of concern, and was attempting to correct the false teachings concerning

---

<sup>3</sup> Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 60-61.

<sup>4</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 1991), 5.

the return of the Lord. Paul was concerned about these believers and the status of those believers who had passed away.

## **THE LITERARY CONTEXT**

Paul did not remain very long in areas where he had established churches, when left these churches, he was very concerned about their progress. He used letters to communicate with the churches, depending on the problems that existed, Paul would use strong and forceful language exercising his apostolic authority, or his letter would have a friendly overtone. Paul's letter to the believers in Thessalonica was a gentle one, encouraging the believers to endure. "When there is tension between Paul and the members of the church to which he wrote, special attention was focused on the letters as adequate or true surrogates for his presence. This was so in the relationship with the Corinthians, some of whom detected sharp differences between Paul's demeanor in person and his letters (2Cor.10:10)."<sup>5</sup> Having received a report from Timothy of the love and steadfastness of the Thessalonians, Paul's letter to them was like that of a loving father who rejoiced to hear the progress of his children, in spite of the persecutions they were experiencing.

## **CONTENT**

Paul had informed the Thessalonians previously that on the Lord's return those who are alive will be caught up in the air and will ever be with the Lord. This speaks of the rapture of the church. After describing the rapture of believers, Paul tells the Thessalonians that there is no

---

<sup>5</sup> Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 95.

need for him to repeat it, since they had already heard that his coming will be like a thief in the night; just as a thief makes no announcement when he is coming to take our precious items, so the coming of the Lord will be.

When men are relaxed, feel safe and comfortable, feel safe and secure, when they say ‘peace and safety’, sudden destruction comes upon them as a woman with child. “These birth pangs are not the initial or age- long one of Matthew 24:8, but the final pangs of destruction of the Lord (cf. Is. 13:8). Birth pangs were a common image of agony and destruction.”<sup>6</sup> Paul used a situation to which they could relate “But they shall not escape” there may be feelings, or hints of birth pangs, but the fact is, it will not stop and it cannot be avoided. Likewise, it will be the same when the Lord returns, it will sudden and sure.

The Thessalonians are children of God, they are not in darkness. Light and darkness cannot be in the same place at the same time. Therefore, when light appears, darkness flees. Because believers have come out of darkness, they are walking in the light. Again, Paul stresses that thieves are people of the night. People are unprepared for the thieves because of darkness, sleep, and drunkenness.

It is important that believers know who they are and Paul reminds the Thessalonians that they are sons of light. Sons of the day shall not suffer lost because they are not sleeping, but are watching and waiting for when the thief comes, their homes will not be burglarized. So it is with children of God, who will watch and will be alert, as they ready themselves for the sudden and unannounced return of the Lord.

---

<sup>6</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2014), 519.

Paul reiterates to the Thessalonians that they should be of a sober mind, and be alert at all times; they are to live with open eyes. The unsaved, who are not sturdy, will be easily moved because they are drunk. A drunkard does not know where he is, and does not see the danger around him. Children of God must be sober minded.

The night represents the darkness of those who are drunk and do not believe; as a result, they are doomed to destruction. They are exposed to danger and have no covering or protection from the destruction. However, those who are of the day, and are walking in the light, are sober and fully clothed with the breastplate of faith, love, and a helmet of salvation. “We have met faith, hope and love before (1Thes 1: 3), Here they are described as armor to protect us in this evil world. Faith and love are like a breastplate that covers the heart. Hope is a sturdy helmet and protects the mind. The unsaved fix their minds on the things of this world, while dedicated believers set their attention on things above (Col. 3:1-3).<sup>7</sup>

“For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” God does not want his people to experience the awful consequences of sin. Cain cried “My punishment is greater than I can bear.” (Gen. 4:1). Sin is deceptive, it is deadly, and it destroys. God has provided salvation from the consequences of sin. Believers do not have any fear of a future judgment because God has appointed us to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Believers will not experience the wrath of God, only those who have rejected his offer of salvation will experience his wrath when Jesus returns for his people.

“Christ died for us,” that was God’s plan of salvation that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Those who place their trust in Christ as their Lord and Savior shall

---

<sup>7</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: The New Testament, Vol. 2, Ephesians-Revelation* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 1989), 184.

escape hell's damnation. Therefore, the Thessalonians have nothing to fear whether dead or alive since when the Lord comes believers will be together with him.

“Wherefore comfort yourselves together” some of the brethren in Thessalonica had passed away and the church was concerned about their salvation. Paul wrote encouraging them, letting them know that the return of the Lord had not come, but when he comes, those who had passed away and those who are alive would live together with him on his return for his church.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, in 1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11, Paul instructs believers as to how they should live as they await the return of Christ. He exhorts them to live in a state of holiness even though they have no knowledge of the time or the season of the Lord's return. He encourages them to remain faithful, and watchful as they face the challenges with the hope of the Lord's return.

Believers should have “A clearer understanding of what God was saying through the apostle Paul to the Christ – followers who lived in Thessalonica in the first century AD and how these ancient letters continue to communicate God's will for Christ – followers today.”<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey A.D. Weima, *1-2 Thessalonians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2014), xi- xii.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Keener, Craig S. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary, New Testament*. Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2014.
- Malherbe, Abraham J. *The Letters to the Thessalonians*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000.
- Stott, John R. W. *The Message of 1 & 2 Thessalonians*. Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 1991.
- Weima, Jeffrey A.D. *1-2 Thessalonians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2014.
- Weirsbe, Warren W. *The Bible Exposition Commentary: The New Testament, Vol. 2, Ephesians-Revelation*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook.