



A Study in 1 Thessalonians

Review: 1 Thessalonians 3.11-4.12

Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, ¹² and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all (cf. 4.9-12), as we do for you, ¹³ so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father (cf. 4.1-8), at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints (cf. 4.13-5.11).

4:1 Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. ² For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. ³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, ⁵ not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶ that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. ⁷ For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. ⁸ Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

⁹ Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, ¹⁰ for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, ¹¹ and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, ¹² so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

The Doctrine of Eschatology: A Summary

The communion and mission of the saints is oriented and motivated by Gospel hope. The church confesses in the Nicene Creed: “[Christ] rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures and ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father and will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and there will be no end to his kingdom ... we wait for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the coming age.” Based on the Creed, the church has traditionally articulated the doctrine of last things under four headings: (1) the second coming of Christ, (2) the last judgment, (3) the resurrection of the dead, and (4) the life of the coming age.

(1) *The Second Coming of Christ*. The same Lord Jesus Christ who was bodily resurrected on the third day and ascended to the right hand of God on the fortieth day, will come again on the last day. Christ’s second coming is bodily, visible, and glorious. He will come again to judge the living and the dead in the last judgment and to gather the saints with him in the consummated and eternal Kingdom of God in the new heavens and the new earth (cf. Matt 25.31-35; Acts 17.31; 2 Tim 4.1, 8; 1 Pet 4.5; Matt 25.31-35; Rev 7.13-17; 11.15-19; 14; 19-22). The time of Christ’s second coming is known only to God the Father (Acts 1.7).

(2) *The Last Judgment*. All men will stand before Christ the judge on the last day, both the living and the dead, who will be resurrected on that day to stand for judgment. The saints, whose names are written in the Book of Life, will enter eternal rest and peace in the glorious presence of the Triune God. The condemned, whose names are not written in the Book of Life, will be cast into outer darkness and the lake of fire forever and ever (Dan 12.1-3; John 5.28-29; 12.44-50; 2 Thess 1.7-8; Rev 20.11-15).

(3) *The Resurrection of the Dead*. The second coming, resurrection, and last judgment are coterminous events, which will happen on the last day, appointed by the Father. All men and women will be resurrected on the last day (Acts 24.15). The wicked will be resurrected for everlasting condemnation; the righteous will be raised for eternal life (Dan 12.2; John 5.28-29; Acts 24.14-15). Just as Christ was raised on the third, so the saints will be raised on the last day (John 6.39-44). The resurrection of the body is not simply a resuscitation, but transformation and glorification by the Holy Spirit (thus, even the saints who are alive when Christ returns will be transformed), for Christ “will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body” (Phil 3.21; cf. 1 John 3.2; Rom 8.11; 1 Cor 15.51). The same body that dies will be raised. The resurrected body will be spiritual, glorious, immortal, and incorruptible (1 Cor 15.42-54).

(4) *The Life of the Coming Age*. In justice and holiness, God condemns the wicked to Hell for eternity. Those who refuse to repent and turn to Christ in obedience and faith will be cast into outer darkness and fire, where there will be weeping and torment without rest for ever (Matt 25.36; 2 Thess 1.5-10; Rev 14.10-11; 20.10-15). Those who repent and turn to Christ in obedience and faith, enter the eternal rest and peace of the Triune God in the new heavens and new earth: “*they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.*”¹⁶ *They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.*”¹⁷ *For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*” (Rev 7.15-17)

1. We do not want you to be uninformed (4.13-18)¹

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

2. Let us keep awake and be sober (5.1-11)

Concerning times and seasons (5.1-3)²

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. ² For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

¹ (a) *The Old Testament speaks of resurrection and hope in various places: Isaiah 25.6-8:* On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. ⁷ And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. ⁸ He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken (cf. Isaiah 35; 43.18-19; 55; 65.17-25; Ezekiel 36-37; Daniel 12). (b) *Paul’s teaching on resurrection and hope is articulated in Romans 8 and 1 Corinthians 15.* (c) *References to the Christ’s coming as “appearing” can be found in Colossians 3.4, 1 Peter 5.4, 1 John 2.28, 3.2.* (d) *Concerning the intermediate state, see Philipians 1.20-24 and 2 Corinthians 5.1-10.* (e) *Paul also writes about our future hope in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18:* For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal (cf. Romans 8.18ff).

² *Jesus forbids eschatological prognostication in Acts 1.6-8:* So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” *The Day of the Lord is the final day of judgment and destruction of God’s enemies. Zephaniah 1.14-16* The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there. ¹⁵ A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, ¹⁶ a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements (cf. Rev 14, 19-20). *It will come like a thief in the night* (Matt 24.42-33; 2 Peter 3.10; Revelation 3.3; 16.15).

*Be Ready! (5.4-7)*³

But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. ⁵ For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. ⁶ So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. ⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night.

We belong to the day (5.8-11)

But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹ For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

³ *The Bible frequently uses the metaphors of light and darkness to describe God and God's people in midst of sin and evil, and her enemies. **John 3.19-21:** And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God. **John 12.35-36:** So Jesus said to them, "The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. ³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light." When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. **2 Corinthians 4.4-6:** In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. **Ephesians 5.8-10:** for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰ and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. **Psalms 119.105:** Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*