

# 1<sup>st</sup> THESSALONIANS BIBLE STUDY

## 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

### Lesson #10

#### Introduction

As you know, we've just completed chapter 4, verses 13 to 18, and now we're moving into chapter 5. While we've moved on to another chapter, the subject Paul is discussing hasn't changed. From chapter 4, verse 13, through chapter 5, verse 11, is a single thought on a single subject, so even though we've incremented into a new chapter, we haven't changed our thought or our subject. And that subject is the resurrection of the dead to be forever with the Lord.

In verse 13 Paul began by assuring the Thessalonians that their deceased loved ones, who were in Christ, had not, and would not miss the resurrection and gathering together to be with the Lord. In verses 16 and 17 he gave some specifics regarding the sequence of events. We studied this sequence of events and laid some of the foundations of eschatology that were necessary to put these specific events into their proper place in the overall picture.

We looked at the prophecy given to Daniel regarding the 70 weeks, and how this prophecy forms a larger picture of prophetic events. We looked at the verses regarding the dead in Christ rising first, and then those who are alive being caught up into the clouds to be with the Lord. We discussed the verses in first Corinthians chapter 15 regarding the transformation of our mortal bodies into immortal bodies, the transformation of perishable bodies into imperishable bodies, because flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Then we discussed the reason that it was necessary for the catching away event to precede the second coming event by a specific time period. And this time period corresponds to that time which is typified in the Jewish wedding ceremony where the bride and groom are locked in a room together for seven days of intimate relationship before the groom brings out his bride and presents her to the world.

It is during this time period that the verses in first Corinthians chapter 3, and second Corinthians chapter 5 take place. The bride is evaluated and rewarded based on her deeds performed while she was still in her mortal body. We discussed that the nature of these rewards are not given, but we're told that they exceed the capability of our human comprehension. (1Cor 2:9)

As we closed out that last lesson we acknowledged that there were some questions that still weren't answered. The two most obvious of these are, when is all this going to happen, and, how will we recognize that it's coming? I wish I could tell you that these next verses give the answers to those questions, but I'm afraid that isn't exactly the case. Nevertheless, they do provide us with further insights. In the verses we're about to read, Paul speaks of the Day of the Lord as regarding its affects on various groups more so than its timing. His use of that term in these passages isn't referring so much to a single event, but to a sequence of events that culminates in His bodily return, and the things that accompany that return. So, let's continue on now with our study and see what kind of answers the scriptures provide.

#### The Day of The Lord

**1 About the times and the seasons: brothers, you do not need anything to be written to you. 2 For you yourselves know very well that the Day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. 3 When they say, "Peace and security," then sudden destruction comes on them, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. 4 But you, brothers, are not in the dark, so that this day would overtake you like a thief. 5 For you are all sons of light and sons of the day. We're not of the night or of darkness. 6 So then, we must not sleep, like the rest, but we must stay awake and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. 8 But since we are of the day, we must be sober and put the armor of faith and love on our chests, and put on a helmet of the hope of salvation. 9 For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain 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 each other up as you are already doing.** 1 Thess 5:1-11 (HCSB)

Paul starts this group of verses concerning the times and seasons with the statement “brothers, you don’t need anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.” Paul had already spoken to them while he was there with them initially about these things. He had not only told them the gospel, but also the things to expect as a result of the gospel. We know this for certain by his statement to them in second Thessalonians chapter 2 verse five, where he says *“do you not remember that while I was still with you I was telling you these things?”*

So, Paul isn’t telling them something new for the first time here, but rather he’s clarifying and reaffirming teachings that he’s already presented to them before. The problem was that certain false teachers were twisting those teachings and perverting the truth, which was upsetting the faith of some of the believers. The spin doctors were working in the church right from day one, and they’re still having a field day in it now. The only way to counter these deceivers is to actually know and understand the truth, there’s no other defense. If all one has is his own opinions, or his gut feelings, then he’s bound to be carried away by every clever deceiver who comes down the road. There’s only one defense against, and only one cure for error, and that’s truth. Nothing else will do.

And that’s why Paul builds a contrast in his next two sentences, verses three and four. He makes the contrast between a “they group” and a “you group.” The “they group” that he speaks about in verse three are the unbelievers. He says *“when they say peace and security, then sudden destruction comes on them like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.”* In other words right up to the point of their destruction they’ll actually think they’re living in peace and security. But right in the midst of this delusion, sudden destruction falls upon them, and he says *“they will not escape.”*

Paul uses the example of labor pains on a pregnant woman to describe the nature of the destruction that falls on the unbelievers. Which is to say that it starts out seemingly mild, but then continues to build exponentially to an ever increasing, and unavoidable crescendo. And their final result is inescapable wrath and destruction. This happens because they did not believe the truth, but rather took pleasure in wickedness. (2 Thess 2:12) What this verse makes clear is that the wrath being discussed isn’t so much for simply not knowing something, but rather intentionally rejecting that which is knowable for the sake of indulging wicked pleasures.

We see this clearly today, where otherwise intelligent people claim to believe that creation happened all by itself through some kind of absurd evolutionary process. Both we and they know full well that this is absolutely ridiculous, but they stubbornly and childishly claim to really believe it, because in doing so it allows them to continue indulging their wicked pleasures. They are knowingly rejecting the truth to accommodate their sin. But as Paul has said, they will not escape. Certain wrath and destruction awaits them. This is the condition of that group labeled “they” in verse three.

But then the contrast comes in verse four, where Paul begins with *“but you, brothers”* and goes on to describe a whole other condition and a whole other conclusion. The condition is that the brothers are not in the dark, so the day of the Lord’s wrath will not overtake them like a thief. They are described as sons of light rather than of darkness, people of the day rather than people of the night, people who are sober minded rather than ones who are drunk. In verse six Paul says we must not sleep like the rest, but we must stay awake and be sober.

By this phrase we know full well that Paul isn’t telling Christians that they can’t go to sleep at night. What Paul is telling Christians is that we can’t go through life like people who are asleep. Like people living in a dream world, who deny the obvious for the sake of wickedness. The majority of people in the world go about their whole life completely ignoring the word of God, or worse, following a fictitious God, with little concern for the inevitable consequences. They are asleep to the truth, asleep to reality, and for most this is intentional. Their sleepy, casual, approach to God and His commands, as recorded in the holy Scriptures, affords them the luxury of a life of pleasure and indulgence.

The sad thing is that this sleepiness exists both outside, and inside the professing church. A sleepy casual approach to the Scriptures has become all too common in professing Christianity. An easy believeism, with no demands, has replaced the call of the scriptures to surrender all to the Lordship of Christ, in most of Christianity. And this is why Paul said that the church must not adopt this posture. The church must be sober, awake and alert to the Scriptures.

The church must love the truth and abhor wickedness. The church must love Jesus Christ, and his sanctity, holiness, godliness, and purity, and treasure these in their hearts and minds. This is the truth that the church must love. This is the truth that a Christian must love. Anyone who says they love Jesus, and yet still loves the world and all its vices is lying to themselves, and the truth isn't in them. (1Jn 2:15) The innate desire for repentance and holiness is an indispensable characteristic of genuine regeneration. Do you remember what the response of the Jews was when Peter recounted his vision and the experience he had with the gentile Cornelius and his family. When he told them what had happened their response was: *18 When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life."* Acts 11:18 (NASB)

Contrary to what many will false teachers will tell you, the scriptures present no form of salvation that's absent of repentance. It is a critical component of the compound product. Both repentance of disbelief, and repentance of behavior are essential characteristics of that divine work of the Holy Spirit called "regeneration." And this is what Paul means by staying awake. He means staying awake to godliness and sanctity by loving obedience to the Word of God, and resisting the temptations of the flesh. He means living every day in a manner that is worthy of our calling.

We do this by putting on the armor of faith and love, and donning the helmet of the hope of our salvation on our heads. In simpler words, this means we arm ourselves against temptations by the faith that we have in our Savior, and the love that we have for Him. And we do this because of the sure and certain hope of our eternal salvation, which we eagerly await with joyful exuberance. This is the mindset of the true believer, who has been regenerated, and it's diametrically opposed to the mindset of the world.

The world's reward is found in this world, but the believer's reward is not in this world, nor of this realm, hence Paul's contrast between the thinking, and behaviors, and the final outcome of the two groups that he describes. The style of life that the two groups live is as stark and contrasting as is the final dispositions of those groups. There is little chance of confusing the two, unless one intentionally desires to do so. And intentional self-deception is pandemic, not only in the world, but also in the church. But those who love the truth are not self deceived, and the Spirit of Christ bears witness in their hearts by that love of truth. Because there is a clear and undeniable desire for repentance, obedience, purity and sanctity in the hearts of those who believe and love the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the assurance of an unshakable faith, and the sure and certain hope of eternal salvation. Now, having firmly established this contrast between these two groups, and their final dispositions, Paul speaks some more concerning the believers:

### **Verses 9-10**

***9 For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain 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.***

This is another one of those verses that's frequently discussed and debated. The debate usually revolves around the interpretation of the word "wrath" as it's used in this sentence. By that I mean, not so much the interpretation of what the word wrath means, but rather what is the full scope of that wrath that's intended in this verse? So, our first priority will be to see if we can establish what this verse is talking about when it says wrath.

There are several words in the Bible that are often used synonymously. Wrath, judgment, condemnation, and destruction are all common words used in the Bible. While these words are very similar, and their meanings often overlap, each one does maintain a singular specific meaning of its own. For instance, wrath is a word that is generally associated with anger. And judgment is a word that is usually associated with justice. Condemnation, and destruction are specific consequences that are generally associated with the execution of wrath or judgment. While they are often used together, they nonetheless do each maintain their individual distinctiveness.

The word wrath, as it's used in the Bible, and elsewhere I suppose, might or might not include acts of judgment and condemnation and destruction. Wrath might be expressed with as little as a strong verbal rebuke, or as much as complete annihilation, or anything in between. So, what is the logical boundaries of the word "wrath" as it's being used here by Paul in this specific teaching? Just what exactly is the full scope of this wrath that God did not appoint us to?

Well, firstly it's the wrath of God's eternal judgement of condemnation for the sins of disobedience committed by fallen mankind. This is clear from the words of the sentence "but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." The chosen weren't appointed to the wrath of final condemnation, but to salvation from it, through the substitutionary death of Jesus. But the question is, is that the full scope of the meaning being conveyed here?

To answer that question we should ask ourselves, is that the full scope of the wrath of God on unbelieving mankind? Is the full extent of God's wrath his condemnation at the great white throne?

The answer to this question is obviously, no it's not. The book of Revelation reveals seven years of intense unprecedented acts of wrath by God on an unbelieving, and God hating humanity. These acts are in addition to the final act of condemnation in the lake of fire. So, it's undeniable that the wrath of God, as described in the Bible, includes both final condemnation, and many and diverse preceding acts of wrathful judgments before that final condemnation. Therefore, we conclude that the word "wrath," when used in the Bible, might in some cases be referring to a single specific event, and in other cases be referring to the entire gamut of God's wrath. So our question remains, what does the Scripture mean by this specific verse in first Thessalonians chapter 5 verse nine?

We do not have specific verses that clearly define the full scope for us, therefore we must do so by rational exegesis. We must ask the right questions if we wish to get meaningful answers. So our first question is, what is the context of the preceding verses, and what have they been telling us? The preceding verses have established two groups as we previously discussed. The first group which Paul called "they" are defined as a group of darkness. A group drunk with sin and indulgence. A group that denies God. A group that will be caught completely off guard, and who's end is the wrath of God, culminating in their ultimate destruction.

This destruction which is called the Wrath of God, is described in vivid detail in the book of Revelation, chapters 6 through 18. It isn't a singular event but a series of ever escalating events, stretched out over seven years, but especially intense during the last three and a half. This is the wrath of God being poured out on a humanity that has shaken their fist in His face and chosen to worship a deceiver who claims to be God. This wrath involves the most basic elements of the earth and the heavens. There are judgements on the vegetation, judgements on the waters, judgements by diseases and by famines, and judgements by wars and conflicts, as well as supernatural phenomenon. The book of revelation makes it clear that the final wrath of God involves much more than just a single day of judgement, even though it does also include that final day. This is what awaits that group that lives in darkness through wilful ignorance, and will fall upon them suddenly and unexpectedly when they believe they're safe and secure.

The other group Paul discussed was the group he called "you," which meant the church, the believers. Paul defined this group as one who is not of the night, or of darkness, but rather of the day, and in the light. This group was sober minded, and sanctified, being always on the alert. This group would not be caught unprepared as the time of the Lord's return grew near, but rather they were "appointed" to salvation from this wrath. And Paul repeatedly said "therefore comfort one another with these words." This is not a statement that Paul would make if he was telling them that they also would suffer the preliminary acts of God's wrath on the unbelieving humanity before His return. Paul's whole point is that they **would not** suffer this wrath, because they had not been **appointed** to this by God's own decision and decree.

Now it's at this point that we hear many rise up with the objection that the church isn't worthy to miss this wrath. That the church deserves to suffer at least a little bit for her pitiful condition. To this I say Amen. In fact, she deserves to go directly into the lake of burning hell just like everybody else, because she's anything but perfect. So, if we say that she deserves a little bit of God's wrath, then I say, doesn't she also deserve God's full condemnation as well?

This is a statement that's made by those who somehow seem to forget that God's kingdom isn't based one iota on human merit, but rather on God's mercy and grace. Not on human righteousness, but Christ's imputed righteousness. To interject an argument based on what seems to be fair is the last thing any Christian should ever want to do. No Christian who rightly comprehends their own condition ever wants God to be fair, God forbid He treats us fairly. Our one and only hope is that he won't treat us fairly but mercifully.

Just for the record, no condemned person will ever have been treated unfairly. The wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23) so anyone who has sinned, fairly and righteously deserves death. There is nothing here but fairness and righteousness. There is no valid argument by any of these that they're being treated unfairly. In fact, it's only the redeemed that would have an argument that they're being treated unfairly. They also deserve death, but instead they're receiving mercy. This isn't fair treatment. This is something else that's applied to a select few at God's own discretion. And it doesn't intrude on His fairness to any who are justly condemned for their sins. It only intrudes on the forgiven, who aren't treated fairly, and don't get what they deserve. They are free to object I suppose if they wish. But no one else.

If we don't understand this, we don't understand the gospel. This is the good news, that God, by His mercy and grace, has determined to treat some of his children mercifully rather than fairly, so as not to apply the wrath and condemnation that they rightly deserve. This is Paul's whole point, and it's the reason that they could be encouraged. To twist it, or limit it in its scope is neither sensible nor biblical, and only serves to contradict the Word of God.

The church, the glorious bride of Jesus Christ, has indeed been predestined to suffer many persecutions at the hands of evil unbelieving men, as did our Savior, and this is intentionally part of her maturity and preparation. But, she has not been appointed to the wrath of God, but rather salvation from it. Failure to see the distinction between persecutions at the hands of men, and the judgmental wrath of God poured out on disobedient mankind is often a cause of confusion.

Now admittedly, the Jews, suffered many of God's judgments on earth for their flagrant disobedience. This is the heart of the old covenant. A covenant of blessings for obedience, and God's wrath for disobedience. This was a pre-incarnation covenant to a pre-incarnation people. These people are called God's elect. But the new covenant is to a post incarnation people who are called Christ's friends and Christ's bride. These were elected by the Father from before creation to be the eternal mate for His beloved Son. This bride is taken from a very specific time period. This time began with Christ's incarnation and ministry on earth, and concludes when He calls them to be with Himself up into the clouds. (1Co 15:51-53; 1The 4:16-17)

The precise details and allocations within the eternal kingdom of God are not revealed to us as yet. But the Bible clearly makes distinctions. It does not appear that everyone that resides in the kingdom of God holds the position as the bride. The Bible speaks of many wedding guests present at the eternal union who are residents in the kingdom but are not the bride. There were many who were saved by faith, as was Abraham, during the old covenant. And they will all be residents of the eternal kingdom. And there are multitudes who will also be saved by faith during the tribulation, under the horrific rule of the antichrist. Many of these will be martyred for their faith. And they also are said to be eternal residents of the kingdom. But only one group is called the bride of Christ, and that's the church. The true church that is, which has had all of the tares weeded out.

Revelation chapter 20, verses 4 through 6 describe what the scriptures call The First Resurrection. It isn't the snatching away event described in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, nor the catching away of 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians. It occurs immediately following the tribulation at the bodily return of Christ to the earth. Many confuse the resurrection bodies of the church, which are provided at the snatching away (rapture) with what the bible calls the first resurrection. But these are not the same event. The catching away does provide resurrected bodies, but only to the church, the bride, the rest are resurrected at the end of the tribulation period seven years later. They aren't in the chambers of the groom for that seven years because they aren't the bride, they're the wedding party awaiting the presentation of the bride at the second coming. And they will be resurrected in time to witness and celebrate that event.

Now some believe and teach that there are no such distinctions in the kingdom of God. That everyone there is part of the bride of Christ. They have their arguments to substantiate this belief, so I have no quarrel with those who believe this. But, I myself do find these biblical distinctions to be compelling, and so this is what I teach, as do many of my contemporaries of eschatology. But to stay on point regarding our not being appointed unto wrath, let's continue with the verses:

## Verses 10-11

*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 each other up as you are already doing.*

Paul goes on with his declaration that the believers weren't intended for wrath by declaring why. He says it's because of Christ who died for us. In other words, a death was required by our behaviors, but our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ suffered that death vicariously on our behalf, thereby fulfilling the righteous requirement of God. Therefore, why in the world would we conclude that any wrath is still due? Was his death only partially efficacious? Do we have to complete it now by some amount of earthly sufferings of residual wrath before God is satisfied completely? Such thoughts are absurd, and an open insult to the efficacy and sufferings of Christ Jesus our Lord on our behalf.

And furthermore, just how much suffering do we suppose is necessary to complete the partial work of Christ? How much suffering counters sin and balances the scales? You see the obvious absurdity of this whole thought? There's no amount of fleshly works or sufferings that cancel sin and balance the scales. Only death and eternal destruction pays the price for sin. So, if there's even the smallest minuscule amount of sin left charged to our account, that hasn't been atoned by the death of Jesus, then what's our situation? The whole idea of some kind of purgatory, to finish off our purification, is based on a wholly flawed concept of human works and human capabilities. It's Christ **alone** who justifies, we have nothing whatsoever within us with which we may contribute to that work.

The vast majority of the objections that I have heard to the catching away of the church, as taught in the Scriptures, has been based entirely on this mindset. That the church isn't worthy to be caught away before the tribulation. But, without realizing it, those who make this objection cast dispersion on the character of Christ by such an insinuation. Of course they're not worthy; no one suggests that they are, but they have been chosen by God to be vessels of mercy, and so it was decreed by God, by His own intention, to demonstrate His glory, that they have been spared from all His acts of wrath. It is God's will to display His glory through the demonstration of His mercy to the undeserving. To resist this is to resist the predetermined will of God and the open display of His glory. (Rom 9:14-16)

And to argue against it based on merit, is to either knowingly or unknowingly imply that the righteousness of Christ isn't sufficient to wholly and thoroughly indemnify His elect from wrath. If that's the case then all are lost. It isn't about our worthiness, it's about Christ's substitutionary imputed worthiness. How can so many people lose sight of this I wonder?

We haven't been spared from God's wrath by our merit, or for our righteousness, but entirely by His conscious decision to display His glory through the demonstration of His mercy. A thorough understanding of Romans chapter 9 will keep us from falling into the error of making interpretations based on our opinions or feelings. If God chooses to withhold His wrath on a few of the undeserving then He does so fully intentionally, and for His own purposes.

Another objection that I've often heard is based on the question – what about those who are alive during the tribulation and are martyred? Aren't these people alive on earth during the tribulation and experiencing God's wrath? How can we say that these people haven't been appointed unto wrath? Here again the question itself reveals a fundamental lack of understanding. The whole point Paul was making to the church is that wrath is coming on the inhabitants of the earth, but the church, the bride of Christ, was not appointed unto this, so she is snatched away up into the clouds to be with the Lord off of this earth. There will be believers afterwards, but they are not the church, she's gone. (Ch.4, vv.16-17)

This is that glorious event, that blessed hope, that closes the church age and defines the bride of Christ. This is the fulfillment of Christ's promise in John 14, verses 1 through 3, where He said He was going away to prepare a place for them but He would be back to receive them to Himself so that where He was they would be there also. That's Paul's whole point. That wrath certainly is coming, but the bride is not appointed to it, so she's snatched away before it starts. Then very shortly thereafter it does start, but the bride is gone, the restrainer is gone, and everyone alive will experience life on an earth that is suffering the wrath of God's judgment.

This promise of Scripture is to the church alone, the bride of Christ, not to the inhabitants that remain after she is taken. This event doesn't signify the end of salvation, but it does signify the closing of the church age and the bride of Christ, and the fulfillment of the time of the Gentiles. (Rom 11:25) God's outpouring of wrath doesn't start until she leaves. (2Ths) There will be tribulation saints, many of whom will be martyred as described in Revelation 6:9-11, and 7:14, but these are not to be confused with that select group that is designated as the bride of Christ. It is the failure to understand the various distinctions between the Old Testament saints, the New Testament saints (the bride), the tribulation saints, and the Jews, and how each of these uniquely fits into the eternal kingdom plan of God that causes so much confusion.

This was Paul's teaching to the Thessalonians when he was first there. And it's the point of confusion that had arisen, because the intense and escalating persecutions had some believing that the wrath of God was already started. And if that was the case, then why hadn't they been caught up to be with the Lord as Paul had told them? This was the problem. If the Day of the Lord, that is the seven years of His wrath, had truly started, then everything they thought they understood from Paul's teaching was wrong. And this is what Paul is clearing up with these two epistles to the Thessalonians.

When the trumpet sounds, and the archangels' voice beckons, and the deceased in Christ receive their resurrection bodies, and the living believers still on the earth are instantaneously, and miraculously caught up off the earth, in the twinkling of an eye, this is the end of an age. It is the end of that time described by Paul in Romans chapters 9 through 11 regarding a time allocated to the Gentiles for their salvation, and the emphasis shifts back to the Jews to complete the 70<sup>th</sup> week prophesied by Daniel.

The prophetic clock for the Jews, that had temporarily stopped at the rejection and crucifixion of their Messiah, is immediately restarted, and the final seven years of Daniel chapter 9 begin to tick off. All that has been prophesied must be fulfilled, and in these remaining seven years that's what will happen. We'll cover this in detail when we get to second Thessalonians.

Verse 10 goes on to say *"so that whether we are awake or asleep (that means whether we're still alive or have passed away), we will live together with Him."* When Paul was writing his epistle to the Romans he made this statement:

*38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Romans 8:38-39 (NASB)

### **Conclusion:**

I think these words that Paul wrote to the Romans also capture the theme of his meaning here to the Thessalonians. It's the comfort of an assurance that there is absolutely nothing, neither death nor life, neither principalities nor powers, that can separate us from our inevitable union with our Savior. He resides above all earthly powers, and He controls with absolute sovereignty, every created thing, therefore, we may encourage one another, and build each other up with this knowledge and with these words.

While many of us we were appointed unto persecutions by man, we were absolutely not appointed unto wrath from our loving God, who has redeemed us by His grace alone, through the blood of his Son Jesus, alone. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

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