

## ***The Church of the Servant King***

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### ***Survey of the Bible Series – Paul’s First Letter to the Thessalonians***

(SB\_1Thess\_Lsn7\_Chap5B)

At the conclusion of chapter 4, Paul provided some information to address the questions that were evidently being asked by the Thessalonian believers. Evidently, they were concerned about whether believers who had died would miss the resurrection or miss out in any way at the Lord’s coming (see 4:13-18 especially v. 15). Paul answers their question and explains that the believers who have already died will be joined with those who are still alive.

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. **14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.** 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thess 4:13-18)

There seem to be two viable interpretations of verse 14 compared to verses 15-17 if one accepts the argument that verses 15-17 refer to the Rapture event. Either of the two interpretations of verse 14 relative to verses 15-17 is not only allowed, but consistent with what we know about these events.

- *2<sup>nd</sup> Advent and Rapture* – Verse 14 could be a reference to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent (“...even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus”) while verses 15-17 refer to the Rapture.
- *Rapture only in view* – Verse 14 could be a reference to the Rapture, thus referencing the same event as verses 15-17.

*2<sup>nd</sup> Advent and Rapture* – If two distinct events (i.e. the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent and the Rapture) are in view in this passage, then we would be led to the conclusion that Paul is saying that believers of the present age return with Christ at His 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent in verse 14 while, at the same time, Paul provides specifics in 15-17 regarding how those who are alive on earth at the Rapture will join those believers who had preceded them in death.

It is also instructive to observe that Paul references “the day of the Lord” in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 and the phrase “the day of the Lord” is a reference to the period encompassing the Tribulation, 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent and Millennium. Paul’s argument in these verses is that believers should not be surprised by the “day” whereas unbelievers will be surprised by the “day.” The fact that Paul references the period preceding the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent in the opening verses of chapter 5 supports the interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 4:14 to be a reference to circumstances attending the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent.

*Rapture only in view* – When we compare 1 Thessalonians 4:14 to the verses immediately following, the context argues for an interpretation of verse 14 in a manner that is consistent with verses 15-17, i.e. both are references to the Rapture event.

The *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* supports the view that verse 14 is a reference to the Rapture. Consider the following helpful insight.

“Though we might expect Paul to write ‘God will raise’ instead of ‘God will bring with Jesus,’ he used the latter because of an unexpressed connection in his mind between the two ideas. To be brought with Jesus presupposes rising from the dead as part of the process (v. 16). **The words ‘God will bring’ point to a continuing movement heavenward after the meeting in the air** (v. 17), until the arrival in the Father’s presence .... A more detailed analysis of the process follows (*gar*, v. 15).”<sup>1</sup> [*Bold is mine for emphasis*].

I think that the former interpretation (i.e. the dual reference) is most appropriate when we consider the perspective of a 1<sup>st</sup> Century A.D. believer. Believer’s (including Paul) of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century A.D. did not know that two millennia or more would elapse before the “day” would dawn. Until Paul taught that the Rapture was a distinct event, a distinct “coming,” separate from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent by a period equal to the Tribulation, believers would have wondered if the “day of the Lord” was already underway, especially given the persecution for their faith that they experienced.<sup>2</sup>

In chapter 5, Paul continues addressing the events surrounding the Lord’s coming as they relate to the believer who is still alive. In 5:1-11, Paul addresses the “day of the Lord.” Paul explains that for unbelievers, “the day of the Lord” will come suddenly and “like a thief in the night.” However, believers (like the Thessalonians), should not be overtaken or surprised by the “day.”

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 are saying, “Peace and safety!” then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. 4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that **the day** should 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, that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him. 11 Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing. (1 Thess 5:1-11)

Paul explains that because unbelievers reject the light of the Truth regarding the coming “**day of the Lord**,” it will take them by surprise. They will not be anticipating Jesus’ coming in any sense so when “the day” suddenly dawns upon them immediately after the Rapture of the Body of Christ, they are surprised. If they continue to walk in darkness, they will experience the judgments associated with that “**day**” or period leading up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent of Christ (cf. Matt 24:5-28; Rev 6-19).

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<sup>1</sup> Frank E. Gaebelin, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989-1998), electronic version.

<sup>2</sup> While not directly stated in Scripture, Paul certainly implies that believers of the present age will return with Christ at His 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent in passages other than 1 Thessalonians 4:14. Consider Romans 8:16-21 (we are fellow heirs with Christ); 1 Corinthians 6:1-3 (we will judge the world and angels); 2 Thessalonians 1:4-5 (suffering allows us to demonstrate worthiness of the kingdom of God); and 1 Peter 1:3-7 (we have an inheritance reserved in heaven ready to be revealed in the last time) – just a few of the several passages that allude to some type of association between the resurrected believer of the present age and coming with Christ at His 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent.

### Various Exhortations (1 Thess 5:12-22)

But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. 14 And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men. 15 See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men. 16 Rejoice always. 17 Pray without ceasing; 18 in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 19 Do not quench the Spirit; 20 do not despise prophetic utterances. 21 But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; 22 abstain from every form of evil.

Verse	Phrase	Notes
12-13	“...appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work.”	<p>An attitude of appreciation for others and their labor on one's behalf should be the norm for the believer. This passage has more than just the leaders of the local church in mind. Romans 12:14-21, a passage very similar to 1 Thessalonians 5:13-15 is directed to the whole Roman church, not just its leaders.</p> <p>There are two very important Greek words used in verses 1 Thess 5:12-13:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The Greek word translated “very highly” is <i>hupereuperissou</i> (Gr. ὑπερεκεπερισσοῦ). A more appropriate translation of this word might be “superabundantly.”</li> <li>➤ The Greek word for “love” is the familiar noun <i>agape</i> (Gr. ἀγάπη) – a word for love that is frequently associated with the integrity of the subject (vs. object) of love.</li> </ul> <p>This is very similar to the exhortation or command we see in other passages. For example, consider the following:</p> <p>Hebrews 13:7 – “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.”</p> <p>Hebrews 13:17 – “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for would be unprofitable for you.”</p> <p>1 Thessalonians 2:9 – “For you remember brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.”</p> <p>1 Corinthians 3:9 – “For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.”</p> <p>1 Timothy 5:17 – “Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.”</p> <p>Principles and Points of Application:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The foundation of the believer's <i>agape</i> love for others is that believer's personal love for God.</li> <li>➤ It takes character to appreciate character.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The character of the Christian, spiritual leader is manifest in his labor on behalf of others.</li> <li>➤ Only the believer who possesses genuine humility can fulfill these exhortations.</li> <li>➤ When the Christian leader has no true Christian character, yet has many followers, then “religion” and a cycle of mutual approbation and affirmation are sure to be found.</li> <li>➤ When the Christian leader has true Christian character and is demonstrating it in his labors, he can anticipate little appreciation from others – especially in a reversionistic society.</li> <li>➤ In the fully-functional local church (the “norm” per God’s standard), we will observe a repeated cycle of love and esteem for others as the spiritual gifts of believers are exercised by believers possessing Christian integrity and character.</li> <li>➤ The presence of competing power systems, desire for public approbation, criticism of leadership outside of established channels, a lack of believers exercising the spiritual gifts for the benefit of others, etc. is evidence of a local church that is dysfunctional and “abnormal” – even though it may represent the “statistical norm.”</li> </ul>
14	<p>“And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men.”</p>	<p>“<i>Admonish the unruly</i>” – In the context of Paul’s ministry to the Thessalonians and other Gentile communities, the “unruly” would have likely been those who were spreading false doctrine, thus introducing fear and uncertainty. The underlying basis for Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians is the confusion that resulted subsequent to his initial visit – confusion introduced by the attacks from his opponents. The equation of “unruliness” and false doctrine is found in other Pauline passages, e.g. 2 Thessalonians 3:11-13 and Titus 1:10.</p> <p>“<i>Encourage the fainthearted</i>” – believers of the local church are to actively identify those who are wavering in their faith as a result of pressure and persecution and to the extent that the person is receptive, believers have a responsibility to encourage (<i>parakaleo</i> – Gr. παρακαλεω – to “call alongside” or to “exhort”).</p> <p>“<i>Help the weak</i>” – This is a parallel command to encouraging the fainthearted. The “weak” could encompass anything from shrinking from persecution (1 Thess 3:3-5); yielding to temptation toward immorality (1 Thess 4:3-8); succumbing to legalism in the area of Christian liberty (Rom 14:1-15:6; 1 Cor 8-10).</p> <p>“<i>Be patient with all men</i>” – Dealing with the unruly, the fainthearted, and the weak requires extreme patience. There is often a refusal to respond immediately to the offer of sound counsel and even when sound counsel is presented, there is often a refusal to accept it and internalize it into one’s soul. Without patience (one characteristic of the fruit of the Spirit), the believer is likely to demonstrate anger and even self-righteousness.</p>
15	<p>See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men.</p>	<p>Paul elaborates more fully on this principle in Romans 12:14-21. He is also building on the idea of patience with all men that needs to be demonstrated as believers deal with other believers’ weaknesses, frailties, influences from false doctrine, etc.</p>

		<p>Principle and Point of Application:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Believers who become involved in ministering to other believers should expect (not be surprised by) misunderstanding and inappropriate response from others on occasion.</li> <li>➤ The believer who is surprised by this when first engaging in service toward others will quickly wilt and disengage entirely from any ministry at all.</li> <li>➤ Believers in ministry are responsible for planting the seed of relevant truth; it is God's responsibility to till the soil (cf. 1 Cor 3:9).</li> <li>➤ Believers are to do so with a love that pursues appropriately – not self-righteousness.</li> </ul>
16-18	Rejoice always. 17 Pray without ceasing; 18 in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus	<p>In these verses, Paul shifts from discussing responsibilities within a corporate setting to a focus upon individual responsibilities. Where the things mentioned in these verses do not characterize the believer, then it is a given that the believer will at best be inconsistent in demonstrating the responsibilities previously discussed (verses 12-15).</p> <p><i>"Rejoice always"</i> – Obedience to this exhortation is not a derivative of sheer force of will. In fact, it is a paradox sometimes since quite often, the believer finds himself in unjust circumstances – either as a matter of living in a fallen world and suffering in common with all men or specifically related to his faith. Paul expresses this paradox in 2 Corinthians 6:10 – "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."</p> <p>Believers should be capable of joy amidst circumstances of adversity and injustice. We don't rejoice because of the adversity and injustice, but in the midst of it. Believers should have an understanding that transcends the details of the cosmos and their "joy" is found in the "hope" that is within them. The Christian who remains in a state of constant sadness and depression is really manifesting a fundamental distrust of God's power, forgiveness, and faithfulness to the believer.</p> <p><i>"Pray without ceasing"</i> – This is prayer that is constantly recurring and constantly recurring prayer reflects an attitude of dependence upon God. The phrase "without ceasing" is derived from the Greek word <i>adialeiptos</i> (Gr. <i>αδιαλειπτως</i>) which alludes to the consistency of a hacking cough. We find similar exhortation in Romans 12:12 – "rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer."</p> <p><i>"In everything, give thanks"</i> – Giving thanks to God in the midst of everything (not for everything) is a reflection of the faith-rest concept found in such passages as Romans 8:28 – "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Failure to do so is tantamount to unbelief (cf. Rom 1:21 – "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.")</p> <p><i>"For this is God's will"</i> – one of the few passages that directly identifies and associates specific instruction with God's will.</p>

19-22	19 Do not quench the Spirit; 20 do not despise prophetic utterances. 21 But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; 22 abstain from every form of evil.	<p>In these verses, Paul addresses the believer's responsibilities in public worship. Believers are commanded to "not quench the Spirit." This is a reference to our responsibility to not hinder or to discourage the appropriate function of spiritual gifts in the assembly of believers. Example: How will the spiritual gift of exhortation function within an assembly of believers unless someone with that gift is identified and a process or mechanism is in place to allow it to function? What about other spiritual gifts?</p> <p>Evidently, the Thessalonians were guilty of not allowing a then legitimate spiritual gift to function, i.e. the gift of prophecy. It is possible that they had reached this position due to people who did not possess this gift rising up and teaching their own views of "the day of the Lord," thus introducing the very confusion that Paul had to address in this letter. It was important for Paul to have corrected the false doctrine, but equally important for the believers of Thessalonica to allow spiritual gifts to function properly in the future, thus the exhortation of verses 21-22.</p>
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### **Blessing and Admonition (1 Thess 5:23-28)**

23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass. 25 Brethren, pray for us. 26 Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss. 27 I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren. 28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Paul concludes his letter with a note of encouragement that emphasizes God as the source of all peace among men – believers in particular. God does not call us to salvation and leave us to fend for ourselves in determining how we are to live (v. 24). God not only calls us through grace, He sanctifies us through His grace at work in our lives as we apply His word.

Paul refers to these Gentiles as "brethren." This would have been extremely poignant to the recipients of this letter in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. For a Jew to call a Gentile a "brother" was an astounding thing. On top of that, Paul asks these Gentiles to pray for him. This is a complete reversal of the self-righteous Jewish mindset that had evolved over the centuries and that is manifest in opposition to Jesus and Paul in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century.