

What Day Are You Looking For?

"...And so much the more as you see the Day approaching."
- Heb.10:25

1 Thessalonians The Day of Christ

Introduction

To what "Day" was the author of Hebrews 10:25 referring? Many commentators point to v.37 as proof that the author (Paul, in my opinion) was speaking of the return of Christ for His church. However, as pointed out by Narborough, in his excellent commentary on Hebrews, the quotes combine Isa.26:20 and Hab.2:3 to reveal that "It is the eleventh hour for Israel". It is obvious that the author of Hebrews, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, knew that the recipients of this letter would "*see the day approaching*" (Heb.10:25). My point is that if we are looking for the wrong day, our preparation and response will inevitably be wrong also.

Both First and Second Thessalonians, possibly the first of Paul's epistles, deal with the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, the two epistles focus on two distinct aspects of His coming. First Thessalonians focuses on the rapture of the church, "the day of Christ". But Second Thessalonians is concerned with the tribulation and second advent, "the day of the Lord". Here is a comparison of the two epistles, taken from Dr. Warren Wiersbe's Expository Outlines of the New Testament.

1 Thessalonians

1. The Coming of Christ in the air for the church, 4:13-18
2. The present age of grace.
3. The Spirit's working in the Church.
4. Reminded them of what he had taught. (1Th 5:1-2; 2Th.2:5).

2 Thessalonians

1. The coming of Christ to the earth with His church, 1:10
2. The future day of the Lord(tribulation)
3. Satan's working in the world (the "mystery of iniquity"), 2:7.
4. Corrected false teachings they had heard (2Th 2:1-2).

It is critical that believers be able to distinguish these two days, and the scriptures that speak of them, to avoid confusion regarding end times events. We are already seeing many false teachers proclaiming that we are in the tribulation period. As part of this study, I will give numerous reasons, from Scripture, why this is not possible.

Chapter One - Looking and Living for the Day of Deliverance (1Co.15:50-58)

A worthwhile quote, from Dr. Wiersbe, is that "The teaching of the rapture is not so much a doctrine to be debated, as it is a truth to be lived". While I appreciate his point, I believe that it is critical for us to get the doctrine of the rapture right. Otherwise, we will be looking, and living, for the wrong day.

Paul begins, in chapter one, by reminding them how we ought to live in light of the promised return of the Lord Jesus at the rapture. He ends with the assurance that the rapture will precede the “wrath”, or tribulation.

1. We must remember who we are, v.1-2

We are 1) in the Church (Mat.16:18; Eph.1:22), 2) which is in God through Christ, 3) which abides in the realm of grace and peace (Rom.5:1). The phrase “*in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*” is unique to First and Second Thessalonians. It reveals not only our spiritual union with the Father and the Son, but also the unity and diversity within the Godhead. While the Father, Son, and Spirit are one in essence (Joh.10:30), yet distinct in person and work.

2. We must develop Christian character, v.3-5 (2Pe.1:5-11)

The essence of Christian character is found in three spiritual virtues (Rom.5:1-5; 1Co.13:13; Col.1:4-5; 1Th.5:8; Heb.6:10-12; 10:22-24; 1Pe.1:3, 5, 8). In v.4-5 we see that **faith, hope, love** come by means of 1) hearing the word, 2) the power of the Holy Spirit, 3) much assurance (conviction of truth).

3. We must keep in mind our commission, v.6-8 (Mat.28:18-20)

The inward working of faith, hope, and love produce the outward effects of combining God’s word, affliction, and joy in the Spirit. By consistent growth we become followers (imitators, 1Co.11:1), examples (leaders), and finally true ambassadors of Christ (2Co.5:14-21).

4. We must point others to our blessed hope, v.9-10 (Tit.2:11-15)

In v.9-10 we have the definition of the qualities in v.3. The “*work of faith*” is to “*turn to God from idols*”. The “*labor of love*” is “*to serve the living and true God*”. And the “*patience of hope*” is “*to wait for His Son from heaven*”. Such a lifestyle will attract the attention of those around us, leading some to Christ, while bringing persecution from others (2Ti.3:12).

5. We must develop a sense of urgency to win others to faith in Christ.

In the phrase from Hebrews 10:25, *...and so much the more as you see the day approaching...*, Paul is most likely referring to the coming fall of Jerusalem (70A.D.), which Jesus had foretold (Luk.21:20-24). This approaching disaster ought to motivate them to hold fast to the local church. How much more we should be motivated to win others to Christ, when we know the time of tribulation is drawing near?

Conclusion

The “*wrath to come*” is a reference to the coming Tribulation. This will become clear in the notes on chapter five. Paul makes this same point in Rom.5:9-10, and again in 1Th.5:8-11, and possibly Rev.3:10-11. This promise also has implications to the

Bema judgment. While works of human good will be burned, this will be done in love, not in wrath (1Co.3:11-15; Heb.12:5-6).

Chapter Two – Looking and Living for the Day of Rejoicing (Tit.2:11-15)

This chapter ends with the reminder that when Christ returns for the church, it will include a time of reward and rejoicing in the presence of our Lord. The “crown of rejoicing” is mentioned, as Paul anticipates his reward from his suffering and ministry to the Thessalonians.

1. The elements of faithful ministry, v.1-12

- A. There is boldness of witness in the face of trials, v.1-2.
Boldness is easy to talk about, but very difficult in the face of severe persecution and suffering. Paul and his team set the standard for boldness in Philippi (Act.16:16-40). They were falsely accused, then beaten, and thrown into the inner prison – where they sang and prayed that ultimately led to the jailer, his family, and possibly some of the other prisoners, coming to faith in Jesus Christ. How we need in these times to be bold!
- B. There is purity of motive in the sight of God, v.3-6.
The world is full of pastors and Christian workers for hire. Here Paul says that his motives were not from 1) error (false doctrine), 2) uncleanness (desire for self gratification), or 3) deceit (the word here means to set a trap so as to catch followers or supporters).
- C. There is the tender care of a mother, v.7-9. The word “*cherishes*” is *trophos* (used only here in the N.T.), and spoke of a “wet-nurse”, a trusted “nanny”, whose love and influence lasted a lifetime. For example, in his dedication to the volume, “Go Down, Moses”, William Faulkner wrote: “To Mammy, Caroline Barr, Mississippi (1840-1940). Who was born in slavery and who gave to my family a fidelity without stint or calculation of recompense and to my childhood an immeasurable devotion and love”.
- D. There is the example and instruction of a father, v.10-12. Here we see that strong character (v.10), leads to instruction (v.11), all aimed at a goal (v.12). Teaching without example is generally ineffective.

2. The evidence of faithful discipleship, v.13-16

Paul likes things in triplicate in this epistle. Here we have 1) hearing the word of God, 2) receiving it as originating from God, 3) the effective working of God’s word through faith. This is summarized in Rom.10:17. Their suffering is evidence of their effectiveness. The unbelieving Jews, the source of their sufferings, will suffer “*wrath...to the uttermost*”. God’s wrath is the outpouring of His holy indignation in this life first, then in the next.

3. The anticipation of eternal rewards, v.17-20 (1Co.3:11-15; 2Co.5:10-11)

It is interesting, in light of the mother and father figures used above, that the phrase “*taken away from you*”, actually means “to be orphaned”, as children whose parents have died might be scattered in different directions.

Paul’s desire to return to these new believers was hindered by Satan. How he does not say. However, he has the great joy of anticipating the shared reward they will have at the Bema of Jesus Christ (Rom.14:10-12; 1Co.3:11-15; 2Co.5:9-11; Rev.3:11; 22:12). A foretaste of these kingdom rewards, that we can enjoy in this present life, is seen in Rom.14:17.

Conclusion

Jesus had much to say about gaining eternal rewards. In the sermon on the Mount (Mat.5-7) He mentions the potential of gaining eternal rewards often. He makes clear that even the smallest act of faith will be rewarded (Mat.10:41-42; Mar.9:41). The promise of eternal rewards is intended to be a strong motivator for spiritual growth and service. In the end, our rewards will be cast at Jesus’ feet, as the evidence of our gratitude for His sacrifice and our salvation (Rev.4:10-11).

Chapter Three – Looking and Living for the Day of Holiness (1Jo.2:28-3:3)

At the end of this chapter Paul focuses on the Thessalonians in regard to the rapture, and anticipates their faithfulness in growth and ministry resulting in being blameless at the return of Christ. The idea here is that of standing unashamed before Him at His coming (1Jo.2:28-3:3).

1. We are appointed to afflictions, v.1-5 (Act.14:21-22; 2Ti.3:12)

Paul uses the word “*establish*” to begin and end this chapter (v.2, 13). Both times it is used in the infinitive to show purpose or result. This is the “goal” that we saw in 2:12, to “*have a walk worthy of God*”.

The opposite of being established is to “*be shaken by these afflictions*” (v.3). in v.3-4 Paul reminds us that suffering in the Christian life is a valuable part of the plan of God. The word “*appointed*” in v.3 reminds us of Paul’s words to the Ephesian elders in Act.14:22, and to Timothy in 2Ti.2:3-13 and 3:12.

2. God is faithful to encourage and comfort, v.6-10 (2Co.1:1-11)

How interesting that Paul sent Timothy to “*establish*” these new believers, and yet the report brought back to him by Timothy gave to all the mission team a strength to carry on. The mutual five-and-take ministry of the body of Christ is amazing (see 2Co.1:1-11).

As Dr. Wiersbe points out, Paul’s concern was not for their safety, or comfort, or happiness – it was for the stability of their faith. Five times he mentions faith in this chapter, and it is this that our enemy hates (2:18; 3:5). The true pastoral heart of Paul is seen in v.8. Nothing invigorates the heart of the pastor more than seeing God’s word come alive and effective in the lives of

disciples. As long as we live there is need for God to “*perfect what is lacking in (our) faith*” (v.10). The race is not won until all the race is run!

3. Our goal is to stand unashamed in His presence, v.11-13

One day we will all stand in the presence of our Lord and Savior. One day our lives will be seen in the pure light of His holiness. Paul’s desire, whether he can see them again or not, is that they “*increase and abound in love to one another and to all*”. This is the fulfillment of Jesus’ command in John 13:34-35. Living in the light of that day when we enter into His presence can do much to help us keep our attitudes, priorities, decisions and actions right.

Conclusion

True spiritual growth is not in Bible knowledge alone, it is only fully realized as we are more and more conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (Rom.12:1-2; 2Co.3:18; Phi.3:9-14). If our desire is to be more like our Savior, then the day of our ultimate sanctification will be a prize worth looking and living for.

Chapter Four – Looking and Living for the Day of Reunion (Gen.25:8; 2Sam.12:22-23)

Paul concludes this chapter with a graphic portrayal of what will happen at the rapture of the Church. At the rapture believers will meet the Lord in the air, but at the second coming He will return to earth to execute judgment on all who have rejected the gift of eternal life in Christ. The “Day of Christ” is a day of rejoicing, but the “Day of the Lord” is a day of judgment.

1. Walking worthy of our calling, v.1-8 (2Co.5:7; Eph.2:20; 4:1; 5:2, 8, 15, Gal.5:16)

The above verses are a good guide as to how we can walk “*worthy*”. This idea was introduced in 2:12 and is amplified throughout the book. A one-word summary for this is “*sanctification*” (v.3), a one-word summary for the plan of God for our lives. We know that sanctification develops in three phases.

- A. Phase One – Justification (Rom.4:3). This is positional sanctification.
- B. Phase Two – Sanctification (Sp. growth), practical sanctification.
- C. Phase Three – Glorification (1Th.3:13), this is final sanctification.

The words “saint, sanctified, holy” all come from the same root word (*hagios*), and illustrate the three phases of the Christian life indicated above. Note that in Heb.10:10 believers are said to be “*sanctified...once for all*”. At the same time, Heb.10:14 says that we are in the process of “*being sanctified*”. The main focus of this section is sexual purity, the possession of our “*vessel*” (v.4) referring to our body (2Tim.2:20-22).

2. Walking in love and productive labor, v.9-12 (1Co.13:4-8)

The solution to lust is the love of the Spirit. The love of Christ transforms lives (2Co.5:14-21). All who are led by the Spirit are taught to love as Christ

has loved us (Eph.5:2). As in all areas of spiritual development, we must always *“increase more and more”* (v.1, 10). Genuine love begins with self-reliance, minding our own business, being an example to those outside.

3. Walking in expectation of His coming, v.13-18 (Tit.2:11-15)

Here we have the most explicit passage on the rapture of the Church in the Bible. Paul does not tell us, in this passage, when it will occur. He writes to comfort those who were concerned about loved ones who had died. It may be some false teaching had suggested that only living saints would be raised (1Co.15:12, 16), or that the resurrection was already past (2Ti.2:18), or that believers who were not living obediently might be left behind (1Th.5:4-10).

Here Paul affirms that all church age saints will be raised together at the rapture. The word *“sleep”* here is used only of the body, sleeping in the tomb. At death the spirit of the believer goes directly into the presence of the Lord (2Co.5:7-8; Phi.1:23). A different word is used for *“sleep”* in chapter five, which speaks of the carnal believer, not those who have died. As to the timing of the rapture, chapter five, and Second Thessalonians will clarify this.

Conclusion

Who among us can even imagine the joy and comfort we will experience on this glorious day of triumph and reunion? It is a truth we ought to meditate on often, for it has a power for motivation to *“run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus...”* (Heb.12:1-2).

Chapter Five – Looking and Living for the Right Day (2Th.2:3)

Chapter five is a bridge between First and Second Thessalonians. Here Paul makes a distinction between the Day of Christ (Rapture) and the Day of the Lord (Tribulation).

1. The two days, and two peoples, contrasted, v.1-11 (Eph.2:1-10)

The introduction of *“times and seasons”* shows us that Paul is now dealing with dispensations. While the early disciples were ignorant of the mystery of the church age (Act.1:7), the truth about the *“dispensation of the grace of God”* (Eph.3:2) was made known by revelation to the apostle Paul.

The *“day of the Lord”* (v.2) refers to the Tribulation period, whereas the *“day of Christ”* designates the rapture of the church (1Co.1:8; 3:13; 5:5; 2Co.1:14; Eph.4:30; Phi.1:6; 2:16). The distinction of the two days is given below.

In this section Paul contrasts believers and unbelievers. *“They”* (unbelievers) will be overtaken as by a thief and shall not escape. But *“we”* (believers) are *“sons of light...and day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.”* (v.5). As children of light, we are to put on the armor of God (v.8) The breastplate and helmet protect the vitals, and we are protected by...wait for it! ***“faith...love...hope”*** (see note on 1:5).

We see that in v.9-11 believers are not appointed to “wrath”, i.e. “the day of the Lord” (v.2), which is a reference to the Tribulation. Again, the word “sleep” (v.7, 10) is a different word than used in 4:13-15, which refers to believers who have died. Here the word speaks of those who are spiritually “out of it”, not living by faith or in fellowship. The good news is that “*whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him*” (v.10). Salvation is of grace, and all who believe in Jesus Christ, spiritual or carnal, will be taken up together at the rapture of the church.

2. Working out what God has worked in, v.12-22 (Phi.2:12-13)

Following the commands in v.11 to “comfort” and to “edify” one another, we find sixteen more commands in v.12-23. It is worth pointing out that the keys to fulfilling these commands are found in v.19-20, in the Spirit and the Word of God. Whereas sins of commission in our life grieve the indwelling Spirit (Eph.4:30), it is failure to be obedient (sins of omission) that quenches the Spirit (v.19). The simplest way to put out a fire is to fail to give it fuel. Our good works, done in faith, are fuel for the Spiritual life. It is impossible to “*be filled with the Spirit*” (Eph.5:18), or to “*walk in the Spirit*” (Gal.5:16) apart from obedience to the word of God (1Jo.1:7). This list of commands is a good starting point for the execution of the Christian way of life.

3. A Benediction in light of the rapture, v.23-28 (Jude v.24-25)

The complete sanctification Paul speaks of here brings us to the final phase of our salvation. The “*God of Peace*” is He who supplies all the grace we need to enjoy inner joy and contentment, even in the midst of all of our trials and sufferings (1Th.1:1b; Gal.6:16; Eph.6:23-24; Phi.4:19). This sanctification comes from the inside outward: “*your whole spirit, soul, and body*” (v.23). The influence of the world is the opposite, working from the periphery to the center. God begins in the newly created spirit (Rom.6:4, 11; 2Co.4:16; 5:17). From the new man the Spirit renews the mind/ soul (Rom.12:1-2), with the result the body is brought under control (1Co.9:24-27). While every believer will be blameless at our final glorification, not all will have lived lives worthy of Christ, and all of us will have “*spots and blemishes*” that must be wiped away.

Conclusion

Thank God, “*He who calls (us) is faithful, who also will do it*” (v.24). The principle at work in Paul’s benediction here is the same as we see in Phi.2:12-13. God is at work in the life of every believer, for the bearing of fruit in time, resulting in our eternal reward, according to what we allow Him to do in our lives (Rom.2:6, 11). The epistle ends with a request for prayer, and a challenge to love the brethren, and to live in the grace and truth God has supplied to us (v.26-28).

2 Thessalonians The Day of the Lord

Chapter One – The Day of Tribulation (Mat.24:9, 16, 21, 23)

The “Day of the Lord”, introduced in 1Th.5:2, 4, is the main topic of the Second Thessalonian letter. The main sections dealing with the tribulation are 1:6-10 and 2:1-12. Here we see that the tribulation is a time of judgment on those who reject Jesus Christ, and that this judgment will coincide with the revelation of the “*man of sin...the son of perdition*” (2:3), whom we call antichrist. As Paul will make clear, we have no need to fear these things, for the coming of the Lord and “*our gathering together to Him*” will come first (2:1).

1. Faithful believers in suffering, v.1-5

Paul’s greeting is the same as in the first epistle, however, the cause of his thanksgiving has shifted from their growth and service to their faith and love to one another in the midst of increasing persecution. Three important things stand out.

- A. Their spiritual growth had accelerated under suffering, v.3. They had experienced an increase in faith and love, all due to their hope (v.6-7).
- B. They met their growing persecutions with patience and endurance, v.4. “*Patience*” is *hupomeno* and means “to abide under” pressure. The word “*endure*” is *anecho* and suggests “holding up under trial”. It is only by abiding in Christ (Joh.15:1-10) that we can endure affliction. In Rom.5:3 Paul tells us that faith plus trials equals perseverance.
- C. God’s righteousness will be demonstrated by declaring all who endure sufferings for Christ “*worthy of the kingdom of God*”. This has to do with the expectation of eternal reward (1Co.3:14; 2Tim.4:6-8). Believers who do not “*walk worthy of the calling*” in Christ (Eph.4:1), will forfeit the reward they could have gained (1Co.3:15; Rev.3:11), but their salvation remains secure (1Co.3:15b; 5:5).

2. The tribulation a righteous judgment, v.6-9

- A. The tribulation period is God’s judgment on a Christ rejecting world. The seven-year tribulation will end with the second coming of Christ to earth, with His mighty angels and the church age saints. Every unbeliever will be slaughtered in the battle of Armageddon (Rev.16:12-16). Their souls, along with the living beast (antichrist) and false prophet, will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev.19:11-20).
- B. Two critical truths stand out here. First, the judgment of God on this world will be in accord with His perfect righteousness (v.6). Second, it is directed toward those “*who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (v.8). The word “obey” has the same sense as used by Paul in Rom.1:5 and 16:26 and is the obedience of faith in Jesus Christ.
- C. Note that while the world is being judged, those who believe in Jesus Christ are given “*rest*” (v.7). The word pictures the unstringing of a bow, the removal of all tension. The church age saints will be resting

in the presence of our Lord while the world is experiencing the tribulation period.

3. Glorified together with the Lord, v.10-12

- A. *“That Day”* (v.10) is a reference to the *“Day of the Lord”* (1Th.5:2, 4; 2Th.2:3). The second coming of Christ at the end of the tribulation is in view. His saints (Church Age believers) will come with Him to share in His glory (Rev.19:11-16).
- B. On that day Jesus Christ will be glorified and admired by all who have believed in Jesus Christ (v.10). That some will be counted worthy (v.5, 11) implies that they walked worthy of their calling (Eph.4:1). This speaks of a life worthy of reward, not of in any way earning salvation. *“Worthiness”* is the result of living by faith, and the power of the Holy Spirit.
- C. All our sufferings in this present life are designed to prepare us for greater glory in the presence of our Lord (v.11-12; Rom.8:17-18; 2Co.4:16-18; 2Ti.2:12).

Conclusion

We often become angry when we see the injustice of the powerful against the weak and helpless. We wish we could see true justice executed in this world. But justice is coming and will be executed by Him who is righteousness personified. And as the saying goes, when that justice comes, it will be Biblical!

Chapter Two – The Day of Deception (Mat.22:8-14)

Paul continues to develop the theme of the day of the Lord, but always keeping in mind that it does not relate to members of the church (review 1Th.5:3-11).

1. The comfort of the rapture, v.1-2

The *“coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him”* (v.1) is a reference back to 1Th.4:13-18 and speaks of the rapture of the church. It is this doctrine that will bring stability to believers going through trials. The phrase *“soon shaken in mind or troubled”* (v.2) speaks of the condition of those who deny the rapture. The words imply an instability of life resulting from inner agitation or anxiety. This is the very condition of those who claim we are now in the tribulation period. Trials and afflictions are a normal part of history and of life. The tribulation is an entirely different matter.

Note: It is *“the day of the Lord”* that is in view here. This is proved by the fact that the most ancient manuscripts have *“day of the Lord”* not *“day of Christ”*. That this is the most accurate translation is proved also by the context. Paul does not need to go into great detail here, as he had already instructed them with regard to *“the times and the seasons”* (1Th.5:1), a reference to different dispensations in God’s plan. The *“day of Christ”* is a reference to the rapture of the church. The *“day of the Lord”* begins with the tribulation period

(Isa.13:6-13) and ends with the creation of a new heaven and earth (2Pe.3:10; Rev.20:7-21:1-5).

2. The coming of antichrist, v.3-5

There are two forms of deception in view in these verses. The first speaks of the danger of Christians being deceived into thinking that they are in the tribulation period (v.3). The second refers to those who will be deceived by antichrist (v.4-12). Two major events must precede the coming of “that Day”.

- A. There must come a “falling away”. The basic meaning of the word used here simply means “to depart”, and of fifteen uses in the N.T., 11 times this is how it is translated. Since Paul uses the definite article with the word, it should be translated “the departure”, referring back to “*our gathering together to Him*” (v.1, 1Th.4:13-18). It may come as a surprise to many that this is how it was translated by William Tyndale (1526), Coverdale (1539), the Geneva Bible (1557) and Beza (1565).
- B. After “the departure”, will come the revelation of antichrist, the man of sin and the son of perdition. This order is the only interpretation that matches Daniels prophecy (Dan.9:24-27), the historical outline given by Jesus (Mat.24:4-31), the revelation of the mystery as given by Paul (Eph.1:9-14; 3:1-12) and the divinely inspired outline of the book of Revelation (Rev.1:19; Ch.2-6).
- C. Since antichrist will fulfill the prophecy of “*the abomination of desolation*” (v.4; Dan.9:27; 11:36-39; 12:11; Mat.24:15), and take his stand in the temple of God, it requires that the temple in Jerusalem be rebuilt, and Jewish sacrifices reinstated, before this can take place. This event will occur in the middle of the tribulation period (Rev.13:6-8).

3. The work of the Restrainer, v.6-7

The words “*now you know*” ought to arrest our attention. Why would they now know what is restraining the coming of antichrist unless it refers to “*our gathering together to Him*” (v.1) and “the departure” (v.3)? Nothing else would make sense of these words. In v.6 he speaks of the restraining power, but in v.7 he speaks of the Person behind the restraint. The antichrist cannot appear on the world scene until “*He is taken out of the way*” (literally, out of the midst)

4. The strong delusion of antichrist, v.8-12

- A. The certain destiny of antichrist is declared in v.8, and this will occur at the second coming of Christ to earth (Rev.19:11-21). Satan will orchestrate the coming of antichrist with the most miraculous lying signs and wonders so as to deceive all who have rejected the love of the truth (v.9-10).
- B. However, multitudes will come to faith in Christ during the tribulation (Rev.7:9-17). There will actually be four great waves of evangelism during this seven-year period.

- 1) The evangelism of the 144,000 (Rev.7:1-8).
- 2) The witness of their converts (Rev.7:9-17).
- 3) The testimony of the two witnesses (Rev.11:3-12).
- 4) The testimony of angels (Rev.14:6-13).

5. The saints deliverance, glory, and everlasting consolation, v.13-17

Paul rejoices over the past salvation of these Thessalonian believers, their present faith and sanctification, and their future glory and “*everlasting consolation*” (v.16), which we will all share together. Until that time, we are to stand fast and hold firm to sound doctrine (v.15), and continue in “*every good word and work*” (v.17).

Conclusion

This chapter is one of the clearest declarations that the rapture takes place before the tribulation begins. Of course, it is backed up by many other passages, which taken together ought to give us great comfort. This is especially true in our day, when so many pastors and self-proclaimed “prophets” are declaring that we are in this or that phase of the tribulation. To them all I say, “You ain’t seen nothing yet!”

Chapter Three – Living in Light of the Two Days (Tit.2:11-15)

The doctrine of the rapture of the church is a “*blessed hope*” which ought to motivate us to pursue purity, love, and good deeds (Tit.2:11-13; 1Jo.2:28-3:3). However, since the beginning of the church age there have been those who abuse this hope, as an excuse for laziness and sloth. So it was in the Thessalonian church, a problem which Paul addresses in closing.

1. Prayer, productivity, and patience, v.1-5

Paul requests their prayers for his continued effective ministry in the face of persecutions. He also expresses his confidence in the Lord’s preservation of these new believers, based on the faithfulness of God and the obedience of these believers (v.3-5).

2. Correction for those who are disorderly, v.6-15

The specific disobedience mentioned here involved those who used the hope of the rapture as an excuse for idleness. Paul and his team had set a standard of hard work and self-reliance (v.7-9; 1Th.2:1-12). By contrast some in Thessalonica were worthless busybodies, relying on the hardworking for their support. Tragically, there are many in the church like this today! For these people Paul lays down the principle, “*If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat*” (v.10). There is no place in the church, or in the plan of God, for a welfare mentality. Lazy and unproductive believers need to be exhorted, admonished, and if necessary isolated (v.14-15).

3. Obedience and peace, v.16-18

Faith and obedience always results in a sense of the Lord’s presence, and brings inner peace, as well as peace among members of the church. Too often

those who have not learned to evaluate their own lives and mind their own business disrupt the peace in a local assembly.

Conclusion

An accurate understanding of the doctrine of the rapture should be a strong motivator for us to live faithful and effective lives of service to God. The idea of going up on a mountain and wearing white sheets as we wait for Jesus to come is as far as possible from a right comprehension of this wonderful doctrine. Knowing the time is short should motivate us all the more to live and labor for the saving of the lost and the encouragement and edification of our fellow believers. The time is short!

Appendix A - Two Days in the Plan of God

1. The Day of Christ

- A. A day of blamelessness – 1Co.1:8; 1Th.3:13; Jud.24
- B. The day of final salvation for all who believe – 1Co.5:5; 1Th.5:8-10
- C. A day of glory and rejoicing – 2Co.1:14; Col.3:4
- D. A day of redemption – Eph.4:30
- E. The day of our completion – Phi.1:6
- F. The day of our deliverance – 1Th.1:10
- G. The day of resurrection/reunion for Church age believers – 1Th.4:13-17; Jud.14
- H. The day of eternal reward – 1Th.2:19; 2Ti.4:8; Rev.22:12

2. The Day of the Lord

- A. Comes as a thief in the night – 1Th.5:3-4; 2Pe.3:10 (It is worth noting that the first reference speaks of the beginning of the Tribulation, while the second refers to the end of the Millennium. The “Day of the Lord” covers a time of 1,007 years). See Rev.20:11 and 21:1.
- B. It is the day of reckoning and judgment on Israel, the time of Jacob’s trial (Tribulation), (Jer.30:7; Joe.1:15; 2:1-2, 11, 31; Amo.5:18-20; Ob.15; Mic.3:6; 4:6; Zep.1:7-15; Zec.14:1-15; Mal.4:1-6).
- C. In the O.T. prophets, the Day of the Lord (Tribulation) is repeatedly designated as a day of Wrath (Psa.2:5, 12; Eze.7:5-19; Zeph.1:15, 18).
- D. This is the “wrath” Paul speaks of in Rom.5:9-10; 1Th.1:10; 5:9 from which we as believers will be delivered.

Appendix B - The Most Critical Day of All

- 1. The most critical day for each of us to be concerned with, is the one we all too often take for granted.
- 2. Believe it or not, there is a day that is far more important for us to focus on than either of the others.
- 3. That day is “Today” (Psa.95:7; Heb.3:7, 15; 4:7). This is the only day that we can affect our standing before Christ when He comes.
- 4. However, keeping the day of the Lord’s return in mind is a strong means of motivation to make today count (Tit.2:11-13).

5. The parable of the faithful and wise steward in Luke 12:42-44 is a good illustration of the value to believing in and looking for the rapture.
6. On “that day” we will either stand confident (bold) in His presence, or we will stand naked and ashamed (1Jo.2:28; Rev.3:18).
7. This is what Paul meant when he said, “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” (2Co.6:2). Remember that in the Bible “salvation” means “deliverance”, and the kind of deliverance is determined in the context. “Delivered from what?”
8. Remember what Jesus said to the dying thief: *“Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”* (Luk.23:43). How important is today?

Appendix C - Evidence the Rapture Must Precede the Tribulation

1. Daniel’s Seventy Weeks in Dan.9:24-27

Because the church age is a mystery, not revealed in the O.T., there is no break between the crucifixion of Christ and the coming of antichrist (v.26-27). Think of the church age as a paragraph of history, inserted between v.26a and 26b-27.

2. Jesus’ Outline in Matthew 24

This chapter gives one of the clearest historical outlines of future events, related to Israel. Remember that the church was not yet in existence, and was unknown to the disciples at this point. The disciples asked Jesus two questions: When and What. The “when” relates to history, and the “what” relates to revelation. Let’s consider them in the context.

A. “When will these things be”, v.3a.

If we simply take Jesus’ outline as given the order of events is clear.

- 1) First there will be a time of birth pangs (v.4-8). Again, remember that these relate to Israel specifically.
- 2) “Then” (v.9) is a key word in this chapter and refers to the sequential order of events taking place. This verse introduces the time of “tribulation” and the “you” relates to Jewish believers living at that time. It will be a time of hatred, betrayal, and deception, but accompanied by great evangelism (v.9-14, Dan.11:32-35). The “end” in view here is “the end of the age” of Israel (v.3b).
- 3) With the “abomination of desolation” (v.15, 2Th.2:4-9), we enter the second half of the tribulation, known as the “great tribulation” (v.21).
- 4) This terrible time will be cut short by the return of Christ (v.30).

B. “What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age, v.3b.

The second coming of Jesus Christ (v.29-31) will end the tribulation period, the 70th week of Daniel (Dan.7:27; Rev.19:11-21).

3. The Format of the Book of Revelation

Based on the inspired outline of the book (Rev.1:19), we see...

- A. John’s vision on Patmos, Ch.1.
- B. The church age, Ch.2-3.

The church is mentioned 19 times in these first three chapters.

- C. The church in heaven, Ch.4-5.
We know these are church age believers because they are referred to as *"kings and priests"* (5:10), a designation only used of church age believers.
- D. The tribulation period, Ch.6-18.
- E. The second coming of Christ, the great white throne judgment, and the new heavens and earth, Ch.19-22.

4. Paul's Distinction Between Two Days

The day of Christ (rapture) and the day of the Lord (tribulation) are clearly distinguished in 1 and 2 Thessalonians, in keeping with both Old and New Testament prophecies.

5. Paul's Comfort to the Thessalonians

In 2Th.2:1-3 Paul gives comfort concerning the coming of antichrist, that our *"gathering together"* and *"the departure"* will precede the coming of the man of sin. Antichrist will not be revealed to the world until after the rapture of the church. Verse 3 should be translated, *"Let no one deceive you by any means, because (that day can not come) unless the departure comes first, and the man of sin, the son of perdition, is revealed."* These two events precede the tribulation.

6. The Church as a Mystery

The church is referred to in theology as an "intercalation." Webster defines intercalation as *"inserting something (as a day) into the calendar"*. It is like a paragraph inserted into human history, between Christ's first and second coming. Paul calls the church age *"the dispensation of the grace of God"* (Eph.3:2), which was never before revealed to men (Eph.3:5). From the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Act.2) to the rapture of the church (1Th.4:13-17), the mystery of the church age unfolds. At the rapture, Jewish history will pick up where it left off following the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because the Jews would not accept Jesus as the Messiah, they will receive the one who comes in his own name, that is, antichrist (Joh.5:43).

7. Paul's Prophecy of Israel's Restoration

In Romans 11:25 Paul speaks of the "mystery", that *"hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in"*. Paul uses a harvest analogy here to picture the rapture of the church, after which the judicial blindness of Israel will be removed (Rev.7:1-8). In v.26, the phrase, *"and so all Israel will be saved"*, the little word *so* is *houtos*, the same as in Joh.3:16, and should be taken to mean, "In this manner". The removal of the church from the earth is crucial to God's plan to restore and deliver Israel, and to *"graft them in again."* (Rom.11:23).

8. Jesus' Quote of Isa.61 in Luk.4:18-19

The question is why did Jesus end His quote in mid-sentence? From Isa.61:1-2b we have prophecy relating to the earthly ministry of the Lord. In the second half of v.2 we have the prophecy of *"the day of vengeance of our God"* a reference to the

tribulation period. In between Isa.61:2a and 2b we have the “intercalation”, or the “mystery” of the church age.

9. Jesus' Promise in John 14:3

The promise of Jesus that *“If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself”* is a promise of the rapture of the church. This is wedding terminology, from the Bridegroom to the Bride, and has nothing to do with the tribulation. The Bridegroom and Bride figures relate to the “mystery” of the church age (Eph.5:22-32). This promise agrees with the words of the angels in Act.1:11.

10. The mystery of the resurrection of church age saints (1Co.15:22-23, 50-58).

Because this doctrine is a “mystery” it relates to church age believers. Jesus Christ is the *“firstfruits”*, the promise of the future resurrection of *“those who are Christ’s at His coming”*. While it could be implied that O.T. and tribulation saints will be resurrected at His second coming, this is not Paul’s main point. He is dealing here with the church (v.1-15).

Appendix D - Biblical Names for the Rapture (Dr. Ken Johnson)

Dr. Johnson has documented that many of the apostolic fathers used these terms to speak of and teach the rapture of the church.

1. The Appearing – Heb.9:28
2. The Blessed Hope of His Appearing – Tit.2:13
3. Caught Up to Meet the Lord – 1Th.4:17
4. The Changing – 1Co.15:52
5. The Gathering – 2Th.2:1
6. The Manifestation of the Sons of God – Rom.8:18-25
7. The Mercy – Jud.21
8. The Receiving – Joh.14:3
9. The Redemption of Our Bodies – Rom.8:18-25
10. The Rescue/Deliverance – 1Th.1:10; 5:9-10
11. The Revelation of Jesus Christ – 1Co.1:7; 1Pe.1:13
12. The Transformation – Phi.3:20-21
13. The Day of Christ
14. The Presence/Coming of Jesus Christ – 1Th.2:19; 3:13
15. The Removal of the Restraint – 2Th.2:7
16. The Second Appearance to the Saints – Heb.9:28
17. His Coming in Like Manner – Act.1:11

Appendix E - Previous Examples of the Rapture

1. Enoch – Gen.5:23-24; Heb.11:5
2. Elijah – 2Ki.2:11-12
3. Jesus – Act.1:9-11; Rev.12:5

In Rev.12:5 the phrase *“caught up”* uses the same word (*harpazo*) used in 1Th.4:17.

4. Philip – Act.8:39-40

Again, in v.39 Philip is “*caught away*”, the word used is *harpazo*.

5. The two witnesses – Rev.11:12. Note that the command, “*Come up here*” is the same one John heard in Rev.4:1.