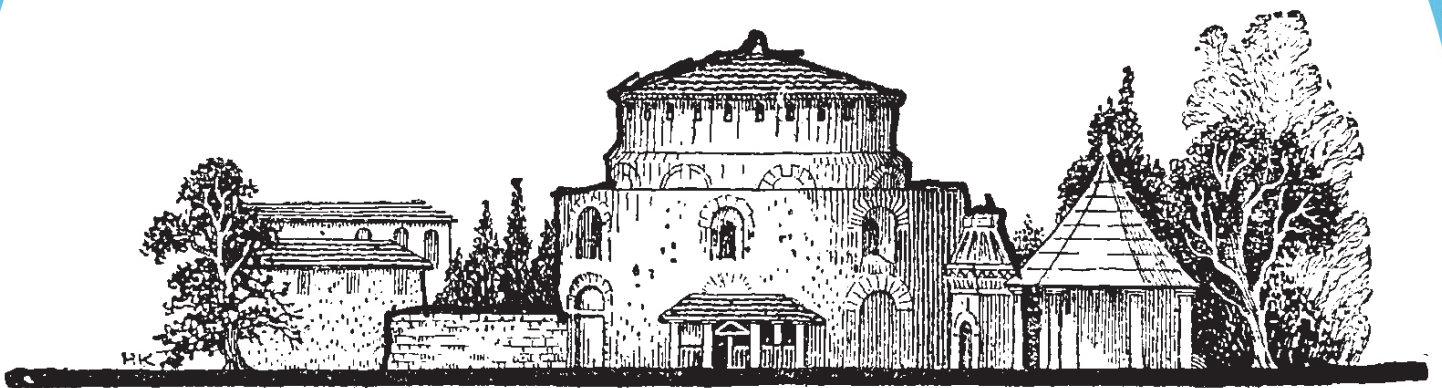


A STUDY ON



I & II THESSALONIANS

# INTRODUCTION

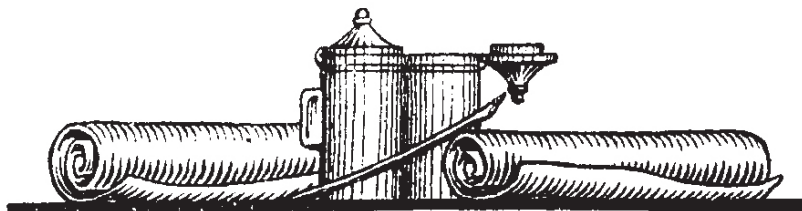
Apostle Paul's letter to the Thessalonians is one of the first letters among all of Paul's writings. In Paul's time, Thessalonica was the capital city of Macedonia, located in northern Greece. Today it's known as Thessaloniki and is still a major socio-economic and cultural centre. During Paul's days the city was an ally of Rome and had erected a temple dedicated to the worship of Caesar.

The planting of the church in Thessalonica is recorded by Luke in Acts 17:1–9. A vibrant church was established, which included many Gentiles. However, the success of the mission aroused the hostility of some Jews. Paul and his companions were accused of being anti-Caesar. Fortunately, they escaped to a nearby city. Paul was unable to return to Thessalonica despite relentless attempts to do so. From Athens, a deeply anxious Paul sent his trusted worker, Timothy, to check on the faith and progress of the church. Upon Timothy's return with good news, Paul wrote to them from Corinth and encouraged them to stand firm in their faith for the Lord and expect the return of the Lord soon. His letter reveals the heart of a pastor who writes to a young church under severe pressure.



# THE BIG IDEA OF 1 & 2 THESSALONIANS

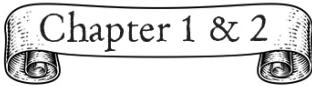
1 **Thessalonians** was written to encourage the believers to stand firm in the Lord in the face of opposition and pressure. The good news was that the church in Thessalonica was standing strong. They held Paul in high esteem and love. The bad news was that the church was experiencing some doctrinal divisions and strong temptations from the surrounding sensual culture. There were also some real problems that stemmed from the expectation of Christ's return. Some expected it to happen too quickly and others were discouraged by the death of loved ones as they felt they'd missed the great event.



2 **Thessalonians** is also written by Paul. He penned this letter when he realized that the believers were enduring persecution and were confused about the timing of the Lord's return. He assured them that God's judgement will come on evil doers but insisted that the day of the Lord is still in the future and that when it comes, they will share in the glory of Jesus. In the meantime, believers are told not to disturb the peace of the community or refuse to work on the pretext of waiting for the day of the Lord.

# CHAPTER SUMMARY

## 1 THESSALONIANS

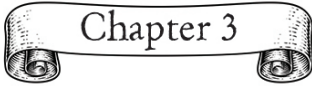


### Chapter 1 & 2

#### Work of Faith

1 Thessalonians  
1:3,

*“remembering  
without ceasing  
your work of  
faith, labour of  
love, and  
patience of hope  
in our Lord Jesus  
Christ in the  
sight of our God  
and Father*



### Chapter 3

#### Labour of Love

1 Thessalonians 3:2-2,

*“and sent Timothy,  
our brother and  
minister of God, and  
our fellow labourer in  
the gospel of Christ, to  
establish you and  
encourage you  
concerning your faith,  
that no one should be  
shaken by these  
afflictions; for you  
yourselves know that  
we are appointed to  
this”*



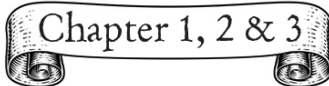
### Chapter 4 & 5

#### Patience of Hope

1 Thessalonians 4:16,

*17“For the Lord  
Himself will descend  
from heaven with a  
shout, with the voice of  
an archangel, and with  
the trumpet of God.  
And the dead in Christ  
will rise first. <sup>17</sup> 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.”*

## 2 THESSALONIANS



### Chapter 1, 2 & 3

#### Stand Firm on the Day of the Lord

2 Thessalonians 1:6-7

*“God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you <sup>7</sup> and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels*



# I THESSALONIANS -1

## The Three Greatest Things in This World – Faith, Hope and Love!

**1 Thessalonians 1:3,**  
*“remembering without ceasing  
your work of faith, labour of love,  
and patience of hope in our Lord  
Jesus Christ in the sight of our God  
and Father,”*



This is the first time that Paul uses what was to become one of his favourite trilogies—faith, love, and hope. These three are found together in Romans 5:1–5, where Paul shows how they sustain us in times of trouble. In Galatians 5:5–6 and in Colossians 1:3–5, faith is tied to hope and to love in special ways. In Ephesians 4:1–6, faith, love, and hope are set forth as the basis for a mature Christian life. The best-known use of the trilogy by Paul is in 1 Corinthians 13:13 in the midst of his lengthy discussion of spiritual gifts: “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

In Chapter 1, Paul is addressing thanks to God for the work of the Holy Spirit in Thessalonica, where a community of believers exhibited faith, hope and love in Jesus. One can only proclaim the gospel truth, and wait upon God to transform the lives of people into a counter cultural community of faith, hope and love.

# I THESSALONIANS -2

## Church – The Glory and The Crown of Rejoicing!

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20, <sup>19</sup> *For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?* <sup>20</sup> *For you are our glory and joy.*”

Paul is saying here that the church i.e., the changed lives of the saints in church, is his crown of rejoicing. He finds joy and blessedness in knowing that lives are dedicated to the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul is boasting about the church like proud parents would boast about their children’s accomplishments. He finds meaning and joy exclusively in the life of the church. Even though Paul feels like an orphaned parent who is unable to be in the church of Thessalonica, he expresses his future joy, pointing to the day when they shall hug one another *“in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, at His coming.”* The word used here for Jesus’ coming is ‘*parousia*’. This is the first reference in Christian writing to the Second Coming of Christ. We will learn more about this in Chapter 5 of 1 Thessalonians.

Again, there is the profound witness to the power of Christian relationships in his words. Their joy is his joy. When they are strong, he celebrates. Their lives in Christ are inseparably intertwined.



# I THESSALONIANS -3

## The Labour of Love

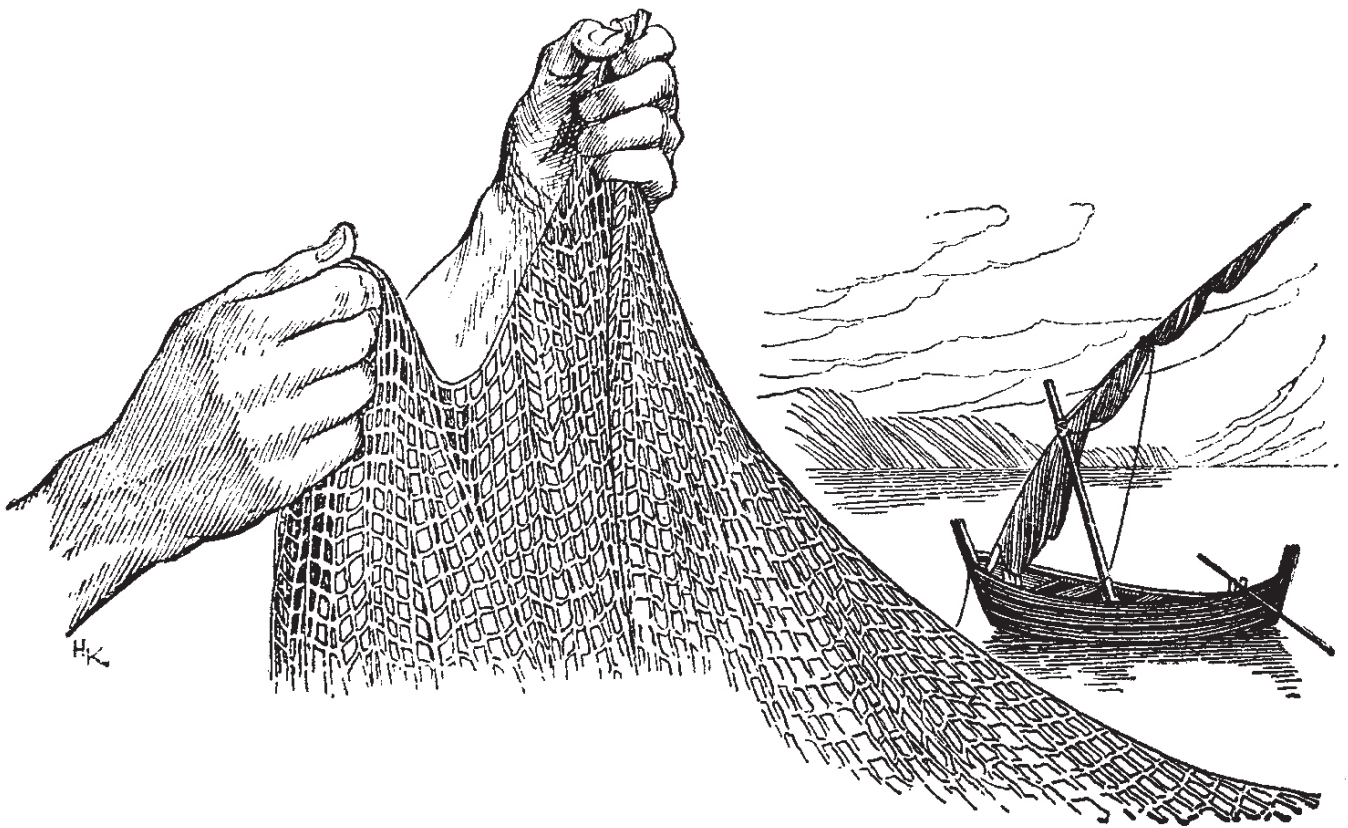
*1 Thessalonians 3:1-4, “Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, <sup>2</sup> and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow labourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, <sup>3</sup> that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. <sup>4</sup> For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know.”*

In one sense, Paul had every reason to be proud of the good work he had accomplished in Thessalonica. To have introduced the gospel there in the course of a few days and to have planted a church that was now growing under persecution, was no small achievement. Yet, for Paul, there could only be thanks to God. For Paul really believed and lived what he preached, that God alone was the source and sustainer of life in the Christian community.

Paul’s need to communicate with them was a result of his deep love for them. He was well aware that they were under intense pressure. But the need for constant strengthening and support is an integral part of the Christian community. There’s a tendency to portray the ideal individual as one who stands alone with no need for help. However, the Christian ideal is that of needing support. The recognition of need is the beginning of health.

The acceptance of weakness is the beginning of faith. This need for support was not just something that Paul preached for others. He made it clear that he needed it himself (1 Thessalonians 3:5-6).

He urges the believers to labour in love. Paul intentionally uses agape, for it defines a quality of love and life that is more a matter of action than feeling. And the action must always be what one thinks is in the best interests of the other person. So, Paul encourages us in chapter 4 and verse 9 to make love for one another an ambition in our lives. He also calls for us to work hard and earn the respect of outsiders. This will prevent any member of the community from exploiting the generosity of others (4:12).





# I THESSALONIANS - 4

## A Life that Pleases God

1 *Thessalonians 4:1-8*, “Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how **you ought to walk and to please God**; for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. <sup>3</sup>“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; <sup>4</sup> that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honour, <sup>5</sup> not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; <sup>6</sup> that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. <sup>7</sup> For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. <sup>8</sup> Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.”

The life of Christian discipleship is described as two things: “to walk and to please God.” Walking was the most common means of moving about in the ancient world. The Hebrews were fond of referring to one’s entire life as a walk. “*Enoch walked with God*” (Gen. 5:24) is the highest affirmation of the quality of his life. The same tribute was paid to Noah (Gen. 6:9). The people of God are commanded, “*Ye shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God has commanded you, that ye may live and that it may be well with you, and that ye may prolong your days in the land which you shall possess*” (Deut. 5:33).

In the best known of all Psalms, the Psalmist portrays suffering and sorrow as a “*walk through the valley of the shadow*” (Ps. 23:4) but our God is walking with us.

To walk with God is to please God. The walk that pleases God is now viewed in two basic areas of relationships: sexuality (vv. 3–8) and community (vv. 9–12). God wills many different things for each of us in different times, places, and situations. But one of the things He wills for all of us is our sanctification.

The root word for sanctification is *hagios*, the word for holy. To be sanctified is to be holy. The root meaning of the Hebrew word for holy was that of being “set apart.” An object used in the temple’s worship service was said to be holy because it had been set apart for special use. People are said to be holy in the same sense of being set apart for the service of God. The call to sanctification is a call to usefulness, to availability, and to fidelity. It is a call to an adventure of discovering what life is really intended to be by God.

Paul’s first specific appeal with regard to holiness is in the realm of sexual behaviour. He begins here, not because sexual sins are necessarily the worst of all, but because they were among the most common. The Greco-Roman world had no boundaries when it came to sexuality. In that culture, Paul’s message was counter cultural - Paul’s counsel to “*abstain from sexual immorality,*” “*to possess [one’s] own vessel [either one’s body or one’s wife] in sanctification and honour,*” and “*that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter.*”





Paul's final word in this section makes it clear that the bottom line is obedience to God. To reject Paul's appeals is not to reject mere human opinion but God Himself (vv. 7–8). Paul urges the people to maintain sexual boundaries and reminds them that the Holy Spirit is a witness to every action - "*God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness*" (v. 7).

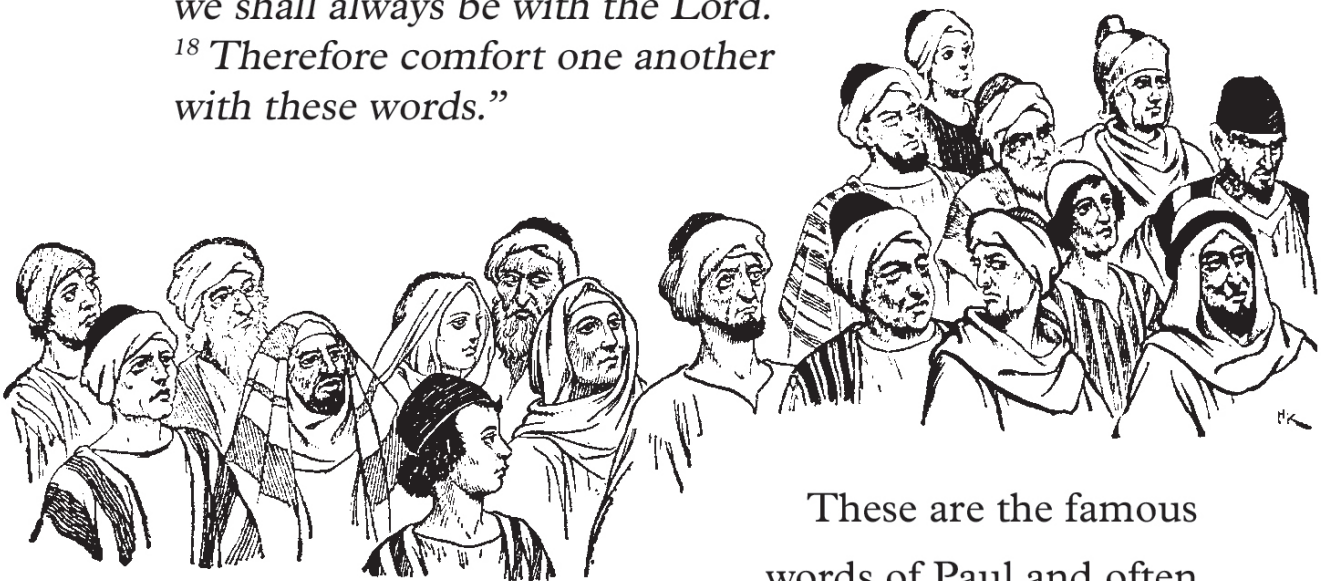
Because of the nature of the sexually "liberated" world in which we live, we dare not conclude this section without remembering that the gospel is ultimately redemptive. Jesus has come not to put us in bondage to rules and regulations, but to set us free. Much that is offered in the name of sexual freedom only traps us in greater bondage. The Christian standard of confining sexual love exclusively to marriage may appear like bondage, but in reality, it is a way to freedom—the freedom to enjoy one's sexuality in the way intended by God.

## Hope in the Second Coming of Christ

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

<sup>15</sup> 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 will by no means precede those who are asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> Therefore comfort one another with these words.”



These are the famous words of Paul and often

read during funeral services or when preaching about the second coming of Jesus. It seems that although Paul had taught the Thessalonians that the Lord would return (5:2), but did not discuss the status of Christians who had already passed away. Would their fellow believers miss out because they had died? So, Paul writes to offer hope in their grief (4:13).

Paul's message can be summed up in four crucial elements: resurrection, return, rapture and reunion.

- **Resurrection:** At the heart of Christian faith is the conviction that Christ died and rose again and that, through faith in Him, believers too will experience bodily resurrection (4:14).
- **Return:** Jesus clearly taught that He would come again, and the apostles preached this message. Christians are right to expect Him to return in person, in the sight of all (4:16). In speaking of this return, Paul uses vivid images of an archangel's voice, God's trumpet, clouds and so forth. All of these images are derived from Jewish apocalyptic literature, which uses very dramatic images to represent future events. Not all images are meant to be interpreted literally.
- **Rapture:** The word "rapture" comes from a Latin root meaning "caught up". Paul is referring to the phenomenon when those who are still alive at Christ's return will be caught up to be with Him (4:17).
- **Reunion:** Both the living and the dead will unite together at Christ's coming. All of them will meet the Lord and be with Him forever (4:17b). The Thessalonians could take comfort in the certainty that the "sleeping believers" who are with Jesus will accompany Him when He returns (4:14), will experience the awakening of the resurrection and will enjoy everlasting fellowship with the Lord (4:18).



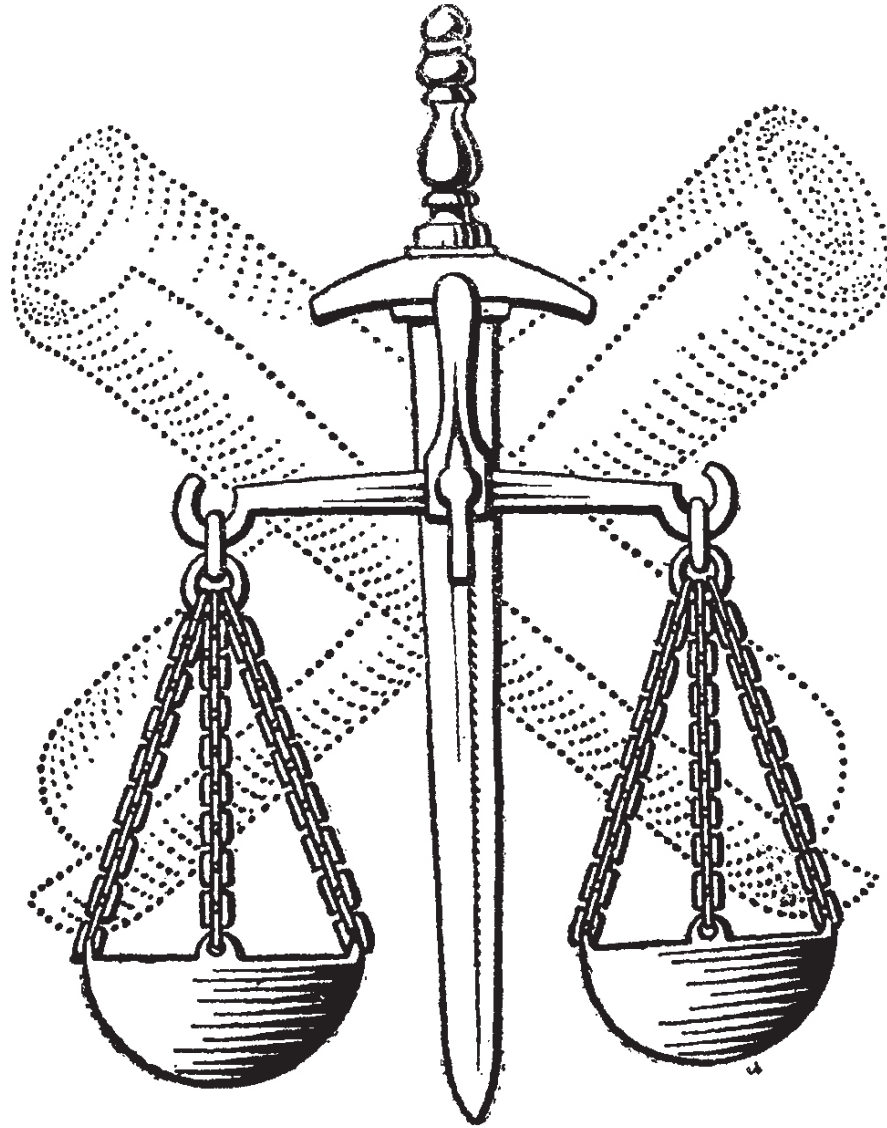
# I THESSALONIANS - 5

## Be ready for the Day of the Lord

**1 Thessalonians 5:1-2**, *“But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. <sup>2</sup> For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.”*

Paul continues his instructions concerning the nature and certainty of Christ’s return on the day of the Lord (5:2). No one can calculate exactly when the Lord will return; He will come as suddenly and unexpectedly as a thief who breaks in at night. The Lord’s coming will bring inescapable judgement for unbelievers, who have an illusory sense of safety. However, the believers should not be taken by surprise. The thief comes in the night, but they are not in darkness (5:4). As children of the light and children of the day (5:5), they should not be asleep but awake and sober (5:6), alert and walking in the light of God.

There are many people who claim to be able to tell us when the Lord will return or exactly what will happen at that time. We should be very cautious about accepting any such claims. They may be popular, but they are often based on unbalanced interpretation of biblical texts. All that we can be sure of is that the Lord will return. Lord Jesus himself mentioned in **Mark 13:32**, *“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”*



This belief is what the early church proclaimed in the Apostle' Creed: "He (Lord Jesus Christ) shall come again to judge the living and the dead." Christians can thus await a cosmic event that will include the personal, visible appearance of the Lord Jesus and the gathering up of all His people, whether dead or alive. Beyond this, we would be wise to admit that we cannot be sure about the full realities behind the imagery used in passages like this one.

## II THESSALONIANS

Why a second letter? Probably because the first letter did not accomplish everything Paul had hoped. No new subjects are introduced in this letter. The central issue is that of errors with regard to their views of the second coming of Jesus. Some things had gotten worse since he had written the first letter. Now, some were teaching that the second coming of Jesus had already happened, and even claimed that such teaching had come from Paul himself. Some others were refusing to work and expected the Lord to return at any moment. They saw no point in working. Paul is addressing these matters in 2 Thessalonians.

### Stand Firm on the Day of the Lord

*2 Thessalonians 1:6-10, “God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you <sup>7</sup> and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. <sup>8</sup> He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. <sup>9</sup> They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might <sup>10</sup> on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marvelled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.”*



**2 Thessalonians 2:1-3**, “Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters,<sup>2</sup> not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter—asserting that the day of the Lord has already come.<sup>3</sup> Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction.”

In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul dealt with some confusion relating to Christ’s second coming and explained that all believers (whether they had died or were still alive) would be gathered to Him. Thereafter, a new problem had arisen. Rumours were spreading that the day of the Lord had already come (2:2). Some others were setting dates for the Lord’s return and refusing to work until the Lord returns (3:6).

In this letter, Paul is bringing clarity to the second coming of Christ as well as issuing a warning to believers who live an idle and destructive lifestyle.

The teaching here points beyond the return of Christ to the full establishment of the kingdom of God. On the day of the Lord, at least three things will happen in light of the context:

- The evil, shall receive tribulation or eternal punishment
- The Lord’s return will be marked with a period of rebellion as the rise of ‘man of lawlessness’
- The righteous, those in Christ, shall be rewarded with rest and glory by the righteous judge. We will be glorified and share in His light – a joyous reunion of all saints

The thought of God returning evil for evil in a realm beyond this life is not our idea of good news, but it was the Lord Jesus who taught this quite early in Matthew 25:31-46. Our lives do matter, and our behaviour does have lasting consequences. So, hell is a matter of choice. One can only get there by pushing God's love aside. Paul's phrase in Verse 8 - *those who do not know God* - does not imply passive ignorance. It refers to those who have neglected and refused the knowledge of God that has been given to them. So, separation from the Lord's presence is the ultimate punishment. And one chooses in this life to be present with God or to be separated.

The thought of the glory of Jesus being seen in His saints suggests that we shall be reflectors of His brightness. What a future for each of us! To be with Him and each other on that day when His very glory will be seen shining in us! Paul concluded his greatest chapter on the resurrection and the ultimate triumph of Christ with words that should set the tone for every discussion of the last days: "*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, inasmuch as you know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord*" (1 Cor. 15:58).

Paul's primary purpose in this section is to assure the believers of their glorious future in spite of their present persecutions. While no one knows when the Lord will come (Mark 13:32), Christians through the ages have been encouraged to persevere with certainty about the day when God's truth will triumph.

# CONCLUSION

Paul's concluding remarks in 1 Thessalonians are clearly focussed on living a holy life so as to be "*blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Thessalonians 5:23). However, in his second letter he prays that the Lord of peace will grant them peace at all times and in every way, especially with regard to confusion surrounding the Lord's coming (2 Thessalonians 3:16). "Grace and Peace" is a characteristic greeting of Paul to all the churches. "Grace" to be transformed and "Peace" in the midst of all confusion and turmoil.



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