

1 Thessalonians Pastor Lou DeVizia

1 Thessalonians 4:13 - 5:11 Fellowship Bible Church; Woodbridge, NJ

Introduction: As Paul continues to give encouragement and vital instruction to these believers, here he confronts an issue that brought discouragement. Some of the believers in this church had died, and the believers weren't quite sure how to handle that. If Christianity was such a great blessing, why do people die? Does not Christ bring eternal life? Perhaps their difficulty answering these questions gave ammunition to their opponents. So Paul writes here confronting this, bringing desperately needed instruction which would not only provide answers but also bring encouragement to their hearts. And he tells them to spread that encouragement. In this writing, we see some of the clearest instruction in the Bible concerning the "Rapture" of the church and the sudden nature of the coming of God's wrath upon the world.

1. Verses 4:13-18 - Comfort from the Knowledge of the Coming "Rapture"

- v.13 - There were those who had **fallen asleep** - that is, they had died - and Paul wanted the Thessalonian Christians to understand the truth about them. These were persecuted Christians; perhaps that persecution even led to the deaths of some, and they were possibly quite perplexed by the ill fate of their fallen friends. Paul's instruction here is to educate and encourage. There are times of sorrow in life, but we do not **sorrow as others who have no hope**.

- v.14 - The pattern: **Jesus died and rose again**, and so His followers who have died will follow Him even in that.

- vv.15-17 - This is what is known as the "Rapture". Note that this is given through Paul in this writing as a **word of the Lord**; it's not stated in previous scripture, so Paul, as an Apostle, must have received this directly from God. It is a word just for the church. Next Paul addresses the issue at hand, those Christians who have died. They will rise first. Then he explains that those Christians who are still alive at this time will be **caught up** (i.e., snatched away, raptured) along with the rest to be with the Lord forever. Note that it is the **Lord Himself** who comes for the church, His bride, with the sounds of a trumpet and heavenly shouts. *This is coming. There is nothing at all standing in the way of this happening at any time.*

- v.18 - For those who were troubled by the notion of Christians dying, this word concerning the "Rapture" that those who died would rise, and that those who remain alive here would be raptured - surely would be a useful thing to share with one another to **comfort one another**.

2. Verses 5:1-11 - Comfort and Edification from the Knowledge of Salvation in the Day of the Lord

- vv.1-2 - They already understood the nature of the **day of the Lord**, that its arrival would be sudden and without warning. The **day of the Lord** is a reference not to a single day, but to the period of time where God will be directly involved with the affairs of the entire world, mostly executing His great judgement and wrath upon all sin. The "Great Tribulation" is part of this, and *Revelation* Chapters 6-19 spell it out in detail.

- v.3 - **Peace and safety** - it has always been the nature of unbelieving man to dismiss the coming judgement of God. False teachers and unbelievers always emphasize how good everything seems and dull the senses of their hearers to the coming wrath of God. **And they shall not escape**. Christians must strive to walk in holiness and obedience to the word of God, knowing that His judgement upon the proud, sinful and disobedient world is sure.

- v.4 - Very important: Christians are **not in darkness** - that is, we know and believe the truth concerning God's coming wrath (i.e., **the day of the Lord**) and therefore have repented, trusted in Christ, and now walk in His ways. Therefore we are not overtaken by His day.

- vv.5-8 - Light and darkness, and day and night, are used here to illustrate good and evil, of knowing God and rebelling against Him. People get drunk and sleep at night. People are sober and awake during the day. Likewise, we who are of the day and not the night (figuratively speaking) should, *in their mindset and conduct and deeds*, live properly and accordingly. God is returning for the church, and His wrath is coming upon the world. Stay awake, stay sober. **...faith and love, ...the hope of salvation**. These are the things that characterize and drive the true child of God.

- vv.9-10 - Why stay awake and sober? Because **through our Lord Jesus Christ** we are *saved* from God's just and certain wrath! The world faces wrath, the Christian faces salvation from it. So *live accordingly*, in gratitude to the one who saved you! **...whether we wake or sleep** - That is, whether we are alive or dead already when all of this transpires, know that we are assured of eternal life together in the presence of Christ through faith in Him. If you have received that gift through faith, then walk in the light and not in darkness.

- v.11 - Similar to 4:18, armed with this knowledge, **comfort** and **edify** one another.

Conclusion: Two important things for Christians to keep in mind: 1) The Lord will Himself return and raise up those Christians who had passed away and also rapture out of this world remaining living Christians, and 2) This will all initiate a great "day of the Lord" - a period of tremendous trouble on the earth as Almighty God pours out His wrath upon all sin. Keeping this in mind should do basically two things for the Christian: *comfort* and *motivate*. We should be *comforted* in the notion that our Lord will raise up His followers who preceded us in death and that He will personally return for us. And we should be *motivated* to be alert and awake and sober and live lives of holiness, humility, love, faithfulness, good works and fruitfulness, for we know what is coming, and through Christ we are saved.