

1 THESSALONIANS

Main Theme: Eschatology (The Lord Comes For His Church - The Rapture)

Primary Reference Source: The McArthur Study Bible

Background: Both 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians have eschatology as the main theme. Eschatology is the branch of theological study which addresses the end of this world order and the establishment of the Kingdom of God as taught through scripture.

Paul's epistles, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, were written to the church in Thessalonica. "Thessalonica (modern Salonica) is near the ancient site of Therma on the Thermaic Gulf at the northern reaches of the Aegean Sea. This city became the capital of Macedonia (ca. 168 B.C.) and enjoyed the status of a free city which ruled its own citizenry (Acts 17:6) under the Roman Empire. Because it was located on the main east-west highway, Via Egnatia, Thessalonica served as the hub of political and commercial activity in Macedonia, and became known as 'the mother of all Macedonia.'"

Paul came to Thessalonica on his second missionary journey (A.D. 50; Acts 16:1-18 & 22). "As his custom was upon arrival, he sought out the synagogue in which to teach the local Jews the gospel (Acts 17:1-2). On that occasion, he dialogued with them from the Old Testament concerning Christ's death and resurrection in order to prove that Jesus of Nazareth was truly the promised Messiah (Acts 17:2-3). Some Jews believed and soon after, Hellenistic proselytes and some wealthy women of the community were converted (Acts 17:4). Mentioned among these new believers were Jason (Acts 17:5), Gaius (Acts 19:29), Aristarchus (Acts 20:4), and Secundus (Acts 20:4)."

Due to the effective witness of Paul's ministry team (Paul, Silas & Timothy), the unbelieving Jews had them evicted from the city (Acts 17:5-9). Eventually, Paul came back to Corinth, and was later joined by Timothy and Silas. It was in response to Timothy's good report of the Thessalonian church that Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians in 51 A.D (Paul had dispatched Timothy back to Thessalonica from Athens, Greece after their eviction).

Overview of the Text: Paul's epistle of 1 Thessalonians addresses the eschatological theme along the lines of the coming wrath of God (1 Thessalonians 1:10, 5:9), Christ's return (1 Thessalonians 2:19, 3:13, 4:15, and 5:23), the rapture of the church (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18), and the Day of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11). Aside from the eschatological theme, there are teachings which compliment this main theme. These teachings include defining a healthy church as illustrated by Paul's encouragement of the Thessalonian church (1 Thessalonians 1:2-10), defining effective shepherding as illustrated by Paul's pastoral concern for the Thessalonian church (1 Thessalonians 3:1-13), the importance of moral purity (1 Thessalonians 4:1-8), correcting wrong understanding of prophetic events (1 Thessalonians 4:13 – 5:3), and reviewing the basics in Christian living (1 Thessalonians 5:4-11).

SCRIPTURE VERSES AND SCRIPTURE TEXT FROM THE NEW KING JAMES VERSION BIBLE IN BOLD

1 Thessalonians Chapter 1

1. Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 1:1 Paul greets the Thessalonian church with his companions Silvanus and Timothy. Silvanus, also called Silas, accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 15-18), and later functioned as a writer for Peter (1 Peter 5:12). Timothy was Paul's most notable disciple, accompanying him on his second and third missionary journeys, and remaining close to Paul during his first Roman imprisonment (Philippians 1:1, Colossians 1:1, and Philemon 1). Paul refers to the Thessalonian church as being in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This statement emphasizes the equality between God the Father and the Lord Jesus.

2. We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers,

1 Thessalonians 1:2 Paul opens his letter by expressing his gratitude to God for the Thessalonian believers. This gratitude energizes his prayers to God for these saints.

3. remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father,

1 Thessalonians 1:3 Paul is thankful for the Thessalonian believers due to the evidence of their faith, hope, and love. These are the three critical elements which Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians chapter 13.

4. knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.

1 Thessalonians 1:4 "In salvation, the initiating will is God's not man's (John 1:13, Acts 13:46-48, Romans 9:15-16, Colossians 1:13, 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 1 Peter 1:1-2)" "Man's will participates in response to God's promptings as Paul makes clear when he says the Thessalonians received the Word (Verse 6) and they turned to God from idols (Verse 9)."

5. For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.

1 Thessalonians 1:5

Our gospel – The gospel was not just Paul’s gospel, but it was the gospel of the apostles. In 1 Thessalonians 2:2 and 2:9 Paul refers to the gospel as the gospel of God. Romans 1:1 also refers to the gospel as the gospel of God. In 1 Thessalonians 3:2 Paul refers to the gospel as the gospel of Christ.

As you know what kind of men we are – The gospel did not come in word only but also in the power of the Holy Spirit and in confidence. This is confirmed by the character of the lives of those who proclaim the gospel. “Paul’s exemplary life served as an open book for all men to read, establishing the credibility of the power and grace of God essential to making the message of redemption believable to sinners.”

6. And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit,

1 Thessalonians 1:6 The Thessalonians saw the exemplary life of Paul, Timothy, and Silas, and became their followers. By following their lead, the Thessalonians came to know the Lord. Through being established in Christ, the Thessalonians experienced joy even in the midst of suffering. Joy evidences the presence of the Spirit of Christ or the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. (1 Corinthians 3:16, 1 Corinthians 6:19).

7. so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe.

1 Thessalonians 1:7 The Thessalonians became examples to others in all Macedonia and Achaia concerning the faith and the hope of the gospel. These two Roman provinces comprised Greece, Macedonia to the north and Achaia to the south.

8. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out so that we do not need to say anything.

1 Thessalonians 1:8 The giving of the gospel resulted in a local outreach to Thessalonica, a national outreach to Macedonia and Achaia, and an international outreach beyond.

9. For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,

1 Thessalonians 1:9 “Salvation involves a person’s turning from sin and trusting in false gods to Christ. Those converted to Christ abandoned the worship of dead idols to become willing slaves to the living God.”

10. and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

1 Thessalonians 1:10

To wait – Paul believed that the coming of the Lord and His deliverance was imminent. He believed that it was something that would happen in his lifetime or the lifetime of the Thessalonian believers.

deliver us from the wrath to come – The wrath can refer either to God’s temporal wrath or His eternal wrath. Since the overriding theme of this chapter is Christ’s work of salvation that saves sinners from hell (the wages of sin), the deliverance is best understood as deliverance from the eternal wrath of God.

1 Thessalonians Chapter 2

1. For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain.

1 Thessalonians 2:1 Paul’s ministry to the Thessalonians resulted in people being saved and the establishment of an effective church which carried on the ministry.

2. But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict.

1 Thessalonians 2:2 “Paul and Silas had been brutalized in Philippi before coming to Thessalonica (Acts 16:19-24, 37).” In Thessalonica, Paul’s team was falsely accused of civil treason (Acts 17:7) and suffered physical intimidation (Acts 17:5-6). Paul does not mention here, specifically, the Thessalonian abuse, but such abuse did not hinder him or his team from their boldness in the gospel.

3. For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit.

1 Thessalonians 2:3 “Paul used three distinctively different words to affirm the truthfulness of his ministry, each expressing a contrast with what was characteristic of false teachers.” Paul states that his message is true but the message of the false teachers is not true. Paul states that his manner of life is pure and not sexually impure like the false teachers, and that his ministry is authentic not deceptive like the false teachers.

4. But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.

1 Thessalonians 2:4 Paul states that he was appointed by God personally as an apostle for the ministry of the gospel. Those who were trained by Paul and or worked with him were defacto members of this ministry. Unlike Paul, the false teachers were not appointed by God.

5. For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness – God is witness.

6. Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.

1 Thessalonians 2:5-6

use flattering words – Paul stated that he and his team were not smooth talking preachers who tried to make favorable impressions in order to gain influence for selfish advantage.

cloak for covetousness – Paul and his ministry team did not pretend to be poor and work night and day as a pretense to get rich in the ministry at the Thessalonians expense.

Nor did we seek glory from men – Paul and his ministry team did not use their honored position as apostles to seek personal glory, only God’s glory.

apostles of Christ – Paul and the twelve were apostles of Jesus Christ. Silas and Timothy, who were part of Paul’s missionary team to the Thessalonians, were apostles of the church.

7. But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.

8. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.

1 Thessalonians 2:7-8 Paul and his team taught the gospel to the Thessalonians, and they sacrificially invested their lives into the Thessalonian people. “Paul may have had in mind Moses portrayal of himself as a nursing mother to Israel (Numbers 11:12).”

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.

1 Thessalonians 2:9 Paul and his team did not ask for any money from the Thessalonians, but they earned their money from their productive labor. Paul and his team also received support from the Philippians (Philippians 4:16). Since the Thessalonians did not support Paul and his team, they could not question their motives. The false teachers on the other hand always sought money.

10. You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe;

1 Thessalonians 2:10 “Under Old Testament law it took two or more witnesses to verify truth (Numbers 35:30, Deuteronomy 17:6, Deuteronomy 19:15, and 2 Corinthians 13:1). Paul called on both the Thessalonians and God as witnesses to affirm his holy conduct in the ministry.”

11. as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children,

1 Thessalonians 2:11 In addition to comparing his team to a nursing mother in verse 7, Paul compares his team to a loving father in verse 11. Fathers and mothers do not violate their own children. In the same way Paul, Timothy, and Silas would never violate the Thessalonians.

12. that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

1 Thessalonians 2:12 The purpose of Paul's ministry with Timothy and Silas was to enable the Thessalonians to walk in a manner worthy of God. This is the fruit of salvation which culminates in the splendor of heaven.

13. For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 Paul states that his gospel message is the word of God, and the Thessalonians recognized that Paul spoke the word of God. The word of God works effectively in the believer's life because it is empowered by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21, Hebrews 4:12).

14. For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans,

1 Thessalonians 2:14 When people turn to Jesus Christ for salvation and walk by faith, persecution is sure to follow. This is true whether believers live in Thessalonica or Judea. Jesus said, "a servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." (John 15:20)

15. who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men,

16. forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.

1 Thessalonians 2:15-16 Although the Romans carried out Jesus' execution, it was the Jews who brought the case against Him and demanded His death, just as they had killed the prophets. It was the will of the Jews that no one find salvation in Christ. It is God's will, however, that all men be saved (1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9).

17. But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire.

1 Thessalonians 2:17 The Thessalonians were true believers and Paul longed to be with them. But even while he was separated from them they were in his heart. This statement demonstrates that Paul had a pastor's heart.

18. Therefore we wanted to come to you – even I, Paul, time and again - but Satan hindered us.

1 Thessalonians 2:18 Before the church was established and Christ entered His public ministry, Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness to thwart or derail His mission of salvation. Satan failed in this attempt, but he has not stopped trying to thwart every advance made for the kingdom of God through the work of the church. Satan knew that Paul was a good teacher, capable of advancing the gospel and building up believers in the faith, therefore, he wanted to stop him.

19. 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?

20. For you are our glory and joy.

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 Paul desired to present every man perfect in Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:28). Paul considered this his crowning achievement. Paul did not want to gain the crown of salvation alone. He wanted to be surrounded with all the Thessalonians and other believers predestined by God for salvation. Paul desired to do his part to make that happen.

1 Thessalonians Chapter 3

1. Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone,

2. and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith,

1 Thessalonians 3:1-2 Although Paul and Silas could not get back to Thessalonica, but remained in Athens, Greece, they did send Timothy to establish them in the faith. “Faith includes the foundation of the body of doctrine (Jude 3) and their believing response to God in living out that truth (Hebrews 11:6).”

3. that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.

1 Thessalonians 3:3 Paul reminds the Thessalonians that sufferings and setbacks are a part of the Christian faith experience. Even the Lord Jesus Himself did not escape sufferings during His life and ministry. Paul did not want the Thessalonians to think that God’s plan was not working out because of his troubles, or that his troubles meant that God was displeased with him.

4. For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know.

1 Thessalonians 3:4 Paul had already communicated to the Thessalonians the reality that suffering is a fact of life for the believer.

5. For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain.

1 Thessalonians 3:5 Paul desired to remind the Thessalonians of the reality of suffering so they would not be manipulated by the false teachers and Satan.

6. But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you --

1 Thessalonians 3:6 Timothy reported back to Paul that the Thessalonians were progressing well in the Christian faith.

7. therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith.

1 Thessalonians 3:7 The faith of the Thessalonian community provided Paul and his team great encouragement in the midst of their affliction.

8. For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.

1 Thessalonians 3:8 Paul states that he draws life from the Thessalonians who stand firm in the faith.

9. For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God,

1 Thessalonians 3:9 “Paul, like John (3 John 4) found the highest sense of ministry joy in knowing that his children in the faith were growing and walking in the truth. This reality led him to worship God in thanksgiving and rejoicing.”

10. night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?

1 Thessalonians 3:10 Paul prayed often for the Thessalonian believers. Paul loved these people and he prayed that he would be able to see them again, and assist them in reaching their full potential in the faith.

11. Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you.

1 Thessalonians 3:11 Paul entreats the Lord God to direct his way back to the Thessalonians.

12. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you,

1 Thessalonians 3:12 Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to show the same love for one another that he showed for them. Paul also encouraged the Thessalonians to love all people. This is also characteristic of Paul. “In light of the fact that God loved the world and sent His Son to die for

human sin (John 3:16), believers who were loved when they were unlovely (Romans 5:8) are to love unbelievers.”

13. so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

1 Thessalonians 3:13 By showing love for one another and for unbelievers, God is able to establish the believer’s heart in holiness. This sanctification will be brought to full completion when we are changed through glorification at death or at the appearing of the Lord.

1 Thessalonians Chapter 4

1. 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;

1 Thessalonians 4:1 Paul and his partners in ministry as examples of how the Thessalonians were to conduct themselves. The example of Paul, Silas, and Timothy was taught to the Thessalonian church based on the authority of the word of God.

2. for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 4:2 Paul states that he gave the Thessalonians commandments through the Lord Jesus. This came through teaching and preaching the word of God, and living it out by example.

3. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality;

1 Thessalonians 4:3 Paul explains that the sanctification of the Thessalonian believers is the will of God. Sanctification latterly means to be set apart from sin and set apart to holiness. In the immediate context of this verse, it means being set apart from sexual impurity in particular.

4. that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,

1 Thessalonians 4:4 The vessel which Paul addresses refers to the body. In reference to the previous verse, which encourages abstaining from sexual sin, Paul continues his thought by stating that each believer must possess his body with honor and sanctification.

5. not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God;

1 Thessalonians 4:5 Paul says that we are not to possess our bodies in passion and lust like the gentiles.

6. 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.

1 Thessalonians 4:6 The context remains unchanged. All illegitimate sexual activity, with all its social and spiritual implications must be rejected.

7. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.

1 Thessalonians 4:7 For God who is holy calls believers to holiness not uncleanness.

8. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.

1 Thessalonians 4:8 God gives us His own Holy Spirit who empowers us to holy living. He who rejects holy living rejects God's Holy Spirit who calls us to holy living. God's Holy Spirit is a free gift to all who believe in the Lord Jesus for salvation.

9. But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another;

1 Thessalonians 4:9 Paul did not have to review the basics of the Christian faith with the Thessalonians by teaching them to love one another. Paul realized that the Thessalonians had already been instructed from the word of God on this important matter.

10. and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more;

1 Thessalonians 4:10 The conduct of the Thessalonian believers manifests and demonstrates that they had been taught to love the brethren.

11. that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you,

1 Thessalonians 4:11 Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to live a quiet and peaceable life, characterized by minding one's own business and making a productive contribution to society. This behavior is characteristic of a people who do not present social problems or generate conflict.

12. that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.

1 Thessalonians 4:12 Through this sort of conduct, believers will have a good witness to those who are outside the faith (Unbelievers).

13. 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.

1 Thessalonians 4:13 Sleep is a familiar indirect expression in the New Testament for death. “It describes the dead body, not the soul.” “Sleep is used of Jairus’ daughter (Matthew 9:24) whom Jesus raised from the dead and Stephen who was stoned to death (Acts 7:60).” “Those who sleep are identified in verse 16 as the dead in Christ.” The question had come up that the people who died in Christ would miss the Lord’s return. Paul begins to deal with that question in verse 14.

14. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 4:14 In this verse Paul begins to describe the Rapture of the church. In reference to those who are already dead, Christ will raise the dead body of the redeemed into a glorified and immortal state. The Lord will unite this glorified and immortal body with the spirit of the redeemed person when He comes to take His church.

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 will by no means precede those who are asleep.

1 Thessalonians 4:15 In this verse Paul addresses the subject of those who are still alive at the coming of the Lord. Paul states that those who are alive at the time of the Rapture will not receive their glorified and immortal bodies before those who are dead in Christ. “Since Paul did not know God’s timing, he lived and spoke as if it could happen in his lifetime.” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)

16. 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.

1 Thessalonians 4:16 To Rapture His church, the Lord will descend from heaven with the shout of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God. This could be the archangel Michael whose voice is heard as he is identified with Israel’s resurrection (Daniel 12:1-3). The trumpet in this verse is not one of the judgment trumpets of Revelation chapters 8 through 11, but is illustrated by the trumpet of Exodus 19:16-19, which called the people out of the camp to meet God. At Rapture those who are dead in Christ will receive their glorified and immortal bodies first, then those who are alive on the earth will be caught up and receive their immortal and glorified bodies.

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.

1 Thessalonians 4:17 “After the dead come forth, their spirits, already with the Lord, now being joined to resurrected new bodies, the living Christians will be Raptured, literally snatched away. “It is best to understand that the rapture occurs at a time different from the coming of Christ in judgment.” “Thus, the Rapture has been described as pretribulational (before the wrath of God unfolded in the judgments of Revelation chapters 6 through 19).” At the time of Rapture, the

Lord returns for His church, bringing those who are alive on the earth into His presence in the clouds.

18. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

1 Thessalonians 4:18 “The primary purpose of this passage is not to teach a scheme of prophecy, but rather to provide encouragement to those Christians whose loved ones have died.” “The comfort here is based on the following: (1) the dead will be resurrected and will participate in the Lord’s coming for His own; (2) when Christ comes the living will be reunited forever with their loved ones; and (3) they all will be with the Lord eternally.”

1 Thessalonians Chapter 5

1. But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you.

1 Thessalonians 5:1 Paul’s use of the conjunctive word “But” indicates a shift in the eschatological discussion. Here Paul begins to move from the future coming of the Lord for redemption to the future coming of the Lord for judgment of unbelievers.

times and seasons – The Thessalonians were apparently inquiring about when Christ would permanently return to judge unbelievers and set up His Kingdom. The Thessalonian believers expected the Lord to come in their lifetime and were confused and grieved when their fellow believers died before His coming. Paul’s statement makes it clear to the Thessalonians that the time of Christ’s return to judge the world and set up His Kingdom has not been revealed. In the next verse Paul refers to this coming of the Lord as a thief in the night.

2. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.

1 Thessalonians 5:2 “There are 19 indisputable uses of ‘the Day of the Lord’ in the Old Testament and 4 in the New Testament.” The Old Testament prophets used “Day of the Lord” to describe near historical judgments or far eschatological divine judgments. “The future ‘Day of the Lord’ which unleashes God’s wrath, falls into two parts: (1) the end of the seven year tribulation period (Revelation 19:11-21, and (2) the end of the Millennium.” In this context, Paul refers to that aspect of the “Day of the Lord” which concludes the tribulation period.

a thief in the night – “this phrase is never used to refer to the rapture of the church. It is used of Christ’s coming in judgment on the Day of the Lord at the end of the seven year tribulation which is distinct from the rapture of the church and is used of the judgment which concludes the Millennium (2 Peter 3:10).” “As a thief comes unexpectedly and without warning, so will the Day of the Lord come in both its final phases.”

3. For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.

1 Thessalonians 5:3 “Just as false prophets of old fraudulently forecast a bright future in spite of the imminence of God’s judgment (Jeremiah 6:14, 8:11, 14:13-14; Lamentations 2:14; Ezekiel 13:10 & 16; Micah 3:5), so they will again in future days just before the final Day of the Lord destruction.” As the contractions of a pregnant woman in labor become more intense and more frequent, so will it be when the Lord comes in judgment.

4. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.

1 Thessalonians 5:4 Since the church is raptured before the Day of the Lord judgment, believers will not be present on earth to experience its terrors and destruction. Believers have no part in this judgment because they have been delivered from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light through saving faith in Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:13). Through faith in Jesus Christ a person is justified and made righteous before God. The perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer by faith. “Jesus taught that to believe in Him would remove a person from spiritual darkness (John 8:12, 12:46). Unbelievers will experience the wrath of God because they do not have Christ’s perfect righteousness imputed to them. All they have is their own imperfect righteousness, which is totally contaminated by sin, and is in fact spiritual darkness (Jeremiah 17:9; Ephesians 4:17-18; Ephesians 5:8 & 11). “All these people are children of Satan (John 8:44) who is called ‘the power of darkness’ (Luke 22:53).”

5. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.

1 Thessalonians 5:5 The statement “sons of the light” is a Hebrew expression that characterizes believers as children of God. God is their heavenly Father, who is the one true light, in whom there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5-7).

6. Therefore, let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.

7. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.

1 Thessalonians 5:6-7 Because believers have been brought into the light of God, their conduct should reflect their spiritual condition as children of the light. They should not get drunk or remain in ignorance (sleep). Believers should be built up in the word of God so as to be alert and live balanced, godly lives under the control of the truth.

8. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.

1 Thessalonians 5:8 “The ‘breastplate’ covers the vital organs of the body.” Faith and love works like a breastplate, shielding our inner man from giving in to temptations and committing sin. It is unbelief which characterizes all sin. “When believers sin, they have believed Satan’s lie.” Love for God is essential, since it builds faith, and perfect love for Him yields perfect obedience to Him. Isaiah 59:17 and Ephesians 6:14 associate the warrior’s breastplate with righteousness. “The ‘helmet’ is always associated with salvation in its future aspects (Isaiah

59:17 & Ephesians 6:17).” Consistent with 1 Corinthians 13:13, Paul addresses the essential combinations of faith, hope, and love for the believer.

9. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

1 Thessalonians 5:9 God did not send His Son to purchase our salvation through the shedding of His own blood to condemn us to endure the wrath of God for all eternity. God’s purpose in purchasing our salvation through His Son was to save us and bring us into His own eternal kingdom.

10. who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.

1 Thessalonians 5:10 Wake refers to being physically alive, and sleep refers to being physically dead. Whether we are alive or dead we who believe in the Lord Jesus will one day live forever with the Savior who died as the substitute for our sins.

11. Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 Since our salvation is completely and totally God’s work, we are called to comfort and edify one another in this reality.

12. And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,

1 Thessalonians 5:12 Those who labor over the believers in the Thessalonian church are the pastors. Paul encourages the Thessalonian believers to know their pastors well enough to have an intimate appreciation for them and to respect them.

13. and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. Be at peace among yourselves.

1 Thessalonians 5:13 In addition to knowing their pastors, the Thessalonian believers are to think rightly and lovingly of their pastors, recognizing that they are special servants (under shepherds) of Jesus Christ (The Chief Shepherd). By submitting to pastoral leadership, peace prevails in the church.

14. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.

15. See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.

1 Thessalonians 5:14-15 In any church setting you get all kinds of people. Paul provides instruction on how to handle the spiritual condition of the various types of people.

Warn the unruly – Those who are out of line must be warned and taught to get back in line.
Comfort the fainthearted – Those in fear and doubt must be encouraged and made bold.
Uphold the weak – Those without spiritual and moral strength must be held up firmly.

16. Rejoice always,

17. pray without ceasing,

18. in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 Experiencing the joy of the Lord is reflected in persistent, regular prayer, and giving God thanks through prayer. Lack of thankfulness is a trait of unbelievers (Romans 1:21; 2 Timothy 3:1-5).

19. Do not quench the Spirit.

1 Thessalonians 5:19 Believers are instructed to be controlled by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18) and to walk by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16). The Holy Spirit wrote Scripture, so filling yourself with Scripture allows for filling with the Holy Spirit. Living a life of sin will grieve and quench the Holy Spirit.

20. Do not despise prophecies.

1 Thessalonians 5:20

Prophecies – “This word can refer to a spoken revelation from God (Acts 11:27 -28; 1 Timothy 1:18, 4:14), but most often refers to the written word of Scripture (Matthew 13:14; 2 Peter 1:19-21; Revelation 1:3, 22:7, 22:10, 22:18, 22:19).” “When God’s Word is preached or read, it is to be received with great seriousness.”

21. Test all things; hold fast what is good.

22. Abstain from every form of evil.

1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 What is found to be true through faithful exposition of God’s word is to be wholeheartedly embraced. What is evil or unbiblical is to be shunned.

23. Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 Paul’s ending benediction calls for God to sanctify the Thessalonian believers and present them faultless before God. It is not within human power to be sanctified to the point of being blameless. “Only God Himself can separate us from sin to holiness completely.”

24. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.

1 Thessalonians 5:24 “The God who calls will also bring those whom he calls to glory and none will be lost (John 6:37-44; John 10:28-29; Romans 28-39; Philippians 1:6; Jude 24).”

25. Brethren, pray for us.

1 Thessalonians 5:25 Paul recognized that his ministry and all who were partnered with him are in constant need of God's provision, deliverance, and guidance. He, therefore, places a very high priority on prayer.

26. Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss.

1 Thessalonians 5:26

Holy kiss – “This gesture of affection is commanded 5 times in the New Testament (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Peter 5:14) and refers to the cultural hug and kiss greeting of the first century which for Christians was to be done righteously in recognizing that believers are brothers and sisters in the family of God.”

27. I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren.

28. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

1 Thessalonians 5:27-28 Paul concludes his epistle by commanding them to publicly read this epistle, which in turn commends them to the grace of God. Public reading was the foundation of spiritual accountability. (1 Thessalonians 3:14)