

Lesson
10

Summary Lesson:
Constant Companion

Is it possible to trust until Christ returns? It certainly is. But we need help along the way. In fact, being aware of the resources God makes available to us increases the likelihood that we will be alert and waiting when He returns.

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

The Coming of the Lord

¹³But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Key Verse

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep (1 Thess. 4:14). To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 2:14).

Go Deeper

Paul wrote these two letters with glowing feelings about the progress of the Thessalonians. They had come a long way spiritually in a very short time against significant resistance. He wanted to commend their faith as well as urge it on. He wanted to acknowledge their difficulties without making them feel like victims. He wanted to assure them that they were not in the struggle alone. And he wanted to give them confidence in God that they could trust Jesus until He comes—even if He didn't come in their lifetime.

His affirming references to their faith can be found in 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 8; 3:2, 6–7 and 2 Thessalonians 1:3–4. He acknowledged their afflictions

in 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 3:4, 7 and 2 Thessalonians 1:4, 5, 6. And he strengthened their connection with God's peace in 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 5:23 and 2 Thessalonians 1:2; 3:16. Paul knew his brethren in Thessalonica faced many obstacles, including the difficulty of waiting, but he also knew there was great help from God available for the journey.

That's why Paul could say, after describing how Christ will handle those who are alive and those who have died when he comes for the Church, "Therefore encourage one another with these words" (1 Thess. 4:18). His words apply to us too. Be encouraged and trust Him until He returns. He will. He promised.

These two letters from Paul tell us a lot about his audience, but they also tell us a lot about him. He continued to care deeply about people after he had passed along the message Christ entrusted to him. He sought to find out how they were doing. In this case, when he had to leave the young church long before he wanted to, he sent Timothy back to get an eyewitness report on its spiritual welfare. He perked up every time he heard news about how they were doing. And he was thrilled with their progress and let them know it! Even though he was far from them most of the time, they must have felt that Paul was a constant, although distant, companion.

In all, Paul visited this church three times and wrote them at least these two letters. His visits were always short. The apostle mentions frequently the afflictions (1 Thess. 1:6; 3:3; 2 Thess. 1:4, 7) faced by those young believers and his delight over their endurance. He may well have been torn over the effects of his visits, because while he got to encourage them, it is also likely that opposition and persecution increased for them when Paul was around. Acts 20:1–6 contains most of what we know about Paul's two visits after the founding one. They came within six months of each other. As usual, Paul was on his way to or from a riot. He left Ephesus after staying two years and three months building the church (Acts 19:1–20). At that point, Paul sent Timothy and Erastus ahead of him into Macedonia (Acts 19:21–22). They undoubtedly visited Thessalonica. Shortly after they left, a fierce backlash developed in Ephesus, and Paul had to leave the area. He journeyed through Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea on his way to Greece and then reversed that itinerary several months later. Each time he confirmed the message he had recorded in his letters.

Paul was an urgent man. He had an urgent message and there was a large world to which he planned to deliver it. He was applying literally the Great Commission and traveling to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth. As far as he knew, the events leading to the end of the world might well happen in his own lifetime. No wonder he was so intense! No wonder he had to follow up his spread of the Gospel with teaching that emphasized that discipleship and trust in Christ weren't short-term responses; they had to be long-term resolves.

“It turns out that Jesus is our present companion along the way until He returns. He promised to be with us until the very moment that we are with Him in glory! Now, that’s good news.”



The Holy Spirit gave Paul two huge markers in God’s plan to pass on to others: (1) Christ’s removal of the believers from the world, the Rapture—“And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:16–17); and (2) the day of the Lord—“For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night” (1 Thess. 5:2). The day of the Lord (see Go Deeper in Lesson 8) would arrive by surprise, and the effects would be devastating. It would involve a general rebellion against the teachings of God’s Word (called the “falling away” in the NKJV) and the rise of the Antichrist (2 Thess. 2:3). This then would lead to the second coming of Jesus in glory and power (2 Thess. 2:8).

Paul’s letters served as a constant reminder that, though the end was determined, getting to it might take a while. Yes, believers would die before Christ’s return, but that wouldn’t be a problem. The biggest problem would be living as faithful disciples during the waiting time before Christ returns. The letters were like a travel guide for the journey to be consulted for directions along the way. In that way, they were and are a constant companion (as is all of God’s Word).

In Matthew’s account, Jesus’ final words stress the reality of another constant companion: “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). Paul closed both these letters to the Thessalonians with the same statement: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you” (1 Thess. 5:28; 2 Thess. 3:18). He added

“all” to the sign-off of the second letter. How do we know Christ is with us? One way we know is by the presence of His grace. Not only are we saved by His grace through faith (Eph. 2:8), but we also need His gracious presence every step of the way until He comes. Paul understood and helps us understand that we can count on that help. He encouraged his readers in each letter: “He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it” (1 Thess. 5:24); “But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one” (2 Thess. 3:3). It turns out that Jesus is our present companion along the way until He returns. He promised to be with us until the very moment that we are with Him in glory! Now, that’s good news.

Express It

As you pray, consider how far you have come in your journey following Jesus. If you haven’t started, trust Him today. If you have been following Jesus for a little while or for decades, thank Him for His faithfulness. Put into words your desire to trust Him for every step along the way until He comes.

Consider It

As you review 1 & 2 Thessalonians, consider these questions:

1) What people in your life have had a Paul-like impact on you? Whose visits and letters have always made a significant difference? How have they done that?

2) What have you learned in this study about perseverance?

3) When you think about your own journey with Christ, how would you describe your level of long-term trust?

4) In what ways did you feel companionship with Paul as you studied these letters?

5) How and when do you sense Christ being “with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20)?

6) We know the *who*, *what*, *where*, and *how* of God’s plan for the end times. Why do you suppose He hasn’t told us the *when*?

7) What question(s) has been answered for you by this study of 1 & 2 Thessalonians?
