

1 and 2 Thessalonians

Final Events (1 Thess. 5:1-11)

Lesson #9 for September 1, 2012

Scriptures: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Genesis 3:1-24; Isaiah 13:6-9; Luke 21:34-36; Romans 1:18,24,26,28; Romans 4:25; Matthew 27:46.

1. In 1 Thessalonians 1-3, Paul discussed his history with the Thessalonians and also praised them and gave a prayer of thanks to God for their faithfulness.
2. In 1 Thessalonians 4 & 5, he turned to discuss some of the problems that had arisen in that church. Timothy had arrived with news about what was happening in Thessalonica, and Paul thought he needed to respond. Whereas in 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul primarily dealt with the beliefs of the Thessalonians; in chapter 5, he dealt with their attitudes and their behaviors. In light of the second coming which Paul expected to take place soon in his day, they needed to be constantly in readiness.
3. Two millennia later, we are reading a personal letter from Paul. How should this information affect us in our day-by-day lives? The main issue in this lesson will be God's judgment and its implications. Judgment can be thought of negatively, but also positively. In our court system, people are usually taken to court for having done something bad. Thus, they are judged and punished. But, in the heavenly courts, every human being will come up before judgment. Thus, some will be judged negatively, but others will be judged positively.
4. What can we learn about God's judgment from the Bible? The book of Job is an excellent example. In Job 1:8 and 2:3, God stated unequivocally that Job was "faithful and good" (*GNB*) or "perfect and upright" (*KJV*). At the very beginning of the story of Job, God had made a judgment about him. This was an important test of God's foreknowledge.
5. In the courts of heaven, Satan immediately claimed that Job was only good because God pampered him and put a wall around him. Many people believe the book of Job is for the purpose of explaining why bad things happen to good people. Why do bad things happen in our world? Often, it is because of the person's own bad behavior. Sometimes, it is because of someone else's bad behavior. Sometimes, it is because we live in a dangerous world. In Job 4:12-21, Satan tried to make the case that no created being of God could ever be righteous. Satan was trying to say that just as God had misjudged Job, God had also misjudged him. Then we have the proceedings of the book of Job. Speaking to Eliphaz one of Job's so-called friends near the end of Job, God said, "I am angry with you and your two friends, because you did not speak the truth about me, the way my servant Job did." (Job 42:7, *GNB*) And God repeated that message in the following verse. The book of Job proves to us that God does not make mistakes in His judgments.
6. If you grew up in a Christian home, were you terrified by the thought of God's judgment? In 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul made it clear that the second coming of Christ will be sudden, unexpected, by many, and final. He compared it to the coming of a thief in the night or to the coming of labor to a woman who is pregnant.
7. But Seventh-day Adventists believe that God's judgment is going on at the present time. We believe in a pre-advent judgment which began in 1844. Traditionally, we have called it the investigative judgment, but pre-advent judgment is a better term. God does not need to do any investigating to find out whether or not we should be saved. However, our future neighbors and friends have a lot of questions about us soon-to-be-former sinners. So, God's transparent government opens the books—or whatever other kind of recording devices God has available in His kingdom—and the records are spread out for everyone to see. When our

future neighbors and friends have looked over the records and then look to see what kind of judgment God has placed on our lives, they all agree that God has done it correctly. Would anyone dare to question God's judgment? Satan did!

8. So, how does the judgment take place? Read John 3:15-21. What does the Bible say about beings in the rest of the universe? Job 38:7; Daniel 7:9,10; Ephesians 1:9,10; 3:9,10; Colossians 1:19,20. John 3:16 is the favorite verse of millions of people. Some claim it is the most widely known verse in the Bible. But, just after John 3:16, we read about the judgment. God has already told us that He loves the whole world. Then He goes on to say that He did not send His Son to be our Judge. John 3:18 is usually translated, "Those who believe in the Son are not judged, but those who do not believe have already been judged, because they have not believed in God's only Son." However, the form of the Greek verb could mean, "Those who believe in the Son have not judged themselves, but those who do not believe have already judged themselves because they have not believed in God's only Son." It is easy to understand this verse in light of the following three verses. When the gospel, the light of God's Word, shines on us, how do we respond? Do we like what we see? Or, do we prefer to go the way of the world? Do we try to incorporate God's Word into our lives and allow it to change the way we behave? Or, do we prefer the darkness? Jesus was actually telling Nicodemus that how we respond to the truth on a day-by-day basis determines the outcome of our judgment in heaven. We actually judge ourselves by how we respond to the light every day.
9. One of the most frightening parts about God's judgment is the fact that there is no appeal. There is no higher court to reconsider our cases. But then, if God never makes a mistake in His judgments, why would we need reconsideration?
10. The Roman Catholic Church has very profitably introduced the idea of purgatory. Thus, if someone is not evil enough to go to hell, but is not good enough to go to heaven, s/he might go into an intermediate place where s/he is suffering while s/he is paying for her/his former sins. Furthermore, they appeal to people to contribute money and prayers to hasten that person's departure from purgatory. According to Catholic teaching, everyone who goes to purgatory will eventually get to heaven.
11. When asked about the judgment, some Christians will tell you that they do not fear the judgment because they have "a Friend in court." And if you ask them who that Friend is, there will be a resounding and warm, "Jesus." But, does that imply that the Father is no Friend of theirs? Well, they did not really mean to say that! So, who is our Friend in court? (Zechariah 3:1-5; Romans 8; John 16:25-27) Zechariah and Paul both state unequivocally that all three Members of the Godhead are on our side. It is Satan who is trying to accuse us.
12. Read Ecclesiastes 12:13,14 and Revelation 20:12,13. In light of these verses—and many others—we believe that God has a full and complete knowledge of everything that we have ever thought, said, or done. In light of such complete knowledge about us, do we have any chance in the judgment? Could we actually be a friend of God? Who are God's friends in the Bible? Consider the case of Abraham and his discussion with God regarding Sodom. (Genesis 18:16-33) Have you ever dared to say something like this to God?

"Surely you won't kill the innocent with the guilty. That's impossible! You can't do that. If you did, the innocent would be punished along with the guilty. That is impossible. The judge of all the earth has to act justly." (Genesis 18:25, GNB)

13. And consider the case of Moses when God told him to step aside and allow God to destroy the people and make a great nation out of Moses. (Exodus 32:9-14; compare *DA* 641.3) Moses immediately responded by saying, in effect, “God you can’t do that! Think of what the heathen would say.” Were such conversations between God and His friends recorded just for God’s benefit? Or, for the benefit of God’s friend at the time? Or, for our benefit? What do they tell us about how we should relate to God? But, it takes very mature people to think like that. Most of us think first of all about ourselves, and we are very concerned about what is going to happen to us. We would like to believe that at least something we do will help us earn our way to heaven.
14. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3. What was the “peace and safety” that Paul was talking about? We have heard about the famous *Pax Romana*. “Peace and safety” was a theme of the Roman government. What about us today? With the United Nations in place and with all the strategic arms agreements, we feel like we are safe. (*CWE* 102) If we are living very comfortably here on planet earth, before we can enter the better land, do we need to concern ourselves with the second coming of Jesus Christ and all that will happen in connection with that grand event?
15. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:4,5. Paul reassured the Thessalonians that they were not supposed to be in the dark; they were not supposed to be taken by surprise; they were supposed to be sons of light. They had been warned thoroughly by Paul to be ready every day. There were a lot of problems in the Thessalonian church. They had some crazy ideas about the second coming. There were serious issues about sexuality. Some of the Thessalonian believers apparently had quit their jobs and were freeloading off others while waiting for the second coming. They were even arguing about how to interpret prophecy.
16. So, how are we supposed to come to the Light in our day? Jesus said, “I am the light of the world.” (John 8:12) How do we come to the Light? It is by studying and comprehending the Scriptures as the inspired Word of God. Through the apostles and prophets, the Holy Spirit has told us what we need to know about God. Unfortunately, in our day, there are too many distractions. This generation probably has more distractions than all previous generations put together. The Holy Spirit as a Member of the Godhead prefers to speak to us in “the soft whisper of a voice” as He did to Elijah at the cave. (1 Kings 19:12, *GNB*) How can a soft whisper compete with the Internet, television, and the movies?
17. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:6-8. Christians need to be awake. And not only awake but also vigilant. They need to be protected by that faith, hope, and love that are the very essence of Christianity.
18. In this passage it is clear that there is something for us to do beyond what God can do for us? How do we put on faith and love as a breastplate and the hope of salvation as a helmet?
19. People have responded to the idea of a sudden, unexpected coming of Christ in two opposite ways. Some respond with anxiety and terror. Others try to place the event some distant time in the future and believe that for the present time, they can go on living their lives as they please. Of course, both of those approaches are wrong. God wants us to believe and act as if we are His friends; His return should be a glorious event for us. But, He makes it clear that we must be ready at all times because we never know when our lives might come to an end. Even if Jesus is not ready to come back, we could be killed on the highway or die unexpectedly of some disease. Thus, we should be ready at all times.
20. How do we get ready, and how do we stay ready for the second coming? We must be listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit as presented in Scripture.

21. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11. What is God's wrath? Or His anger? A careful reading of the Scriptures or the use of a concordance will point out that God's wrath is discussed all through the Bible—both in the Old and New Testaments. Jesus talked about it. Paul talked about it. John in Revelation talked about it. One of the clearest places is found in Judges 2 & 3. When the Israelites turned away from God and refused to listen to Him, God became "angry" and let them go to experience defeat in war and slavery to other nations. But, when they turned back to Him, He would bless them once again, and they would rise to victory. That happened over and over again. (For a more full explanation of God's wrath, see the Teacher's Guides on www.Theox.org for the books of Judges: https://www.theox.org/images/images_A2115/JUDGEStg1.pdf (especially question #9) and Hosea: question #13 at https://www.theox.org/images/images_A2115/HOSEAtg.pdf)
22. How did Jesus die? Did He experience God's wrath? Did He die the death of sinners? (1 Corinthians 15:3) Romans 1:18,24,26,28 describe God's wrath as His handing over those who do not want Him anyway. **It is simply His turning away in loving disappointment from those who do not want Him anyway, thus leaving them to the inevitable and awful consequences of their own rebellious choices.** So, how does that relate to the death of Christ? Read Romans 4:25 where the Greek just says, He was "handed over" or "given up." It is exactly the same word as used in Romans 1:24,26,28 to talk about how God's wrath was experienced by the pagans and heathen. Did Jesus burn on the cross? That is what many believe will be the fate of sinners. What did Jesus say when He was "given up" by God? Read Matthew 27:46. Did Jesus ask, "Why are You in anger killing Me?" No! In effect, He asked, "My God, My God, why are You giving Me up? Why are You letting Me go? Why have You forsaken Me?" Was God's role in the death of Christ only a passive one? Or, did God take an active role in that death?
23. A correct understanding of God's wrath is absolutely essential to our understanding of the great controversy between God and Satan over the character of God and the government of God and the implications of both. Do we get our definition of *wrath* from Webster's Dictionary? Or, do we allow the Bible to define God's wrath for itself?
24. God has put many people to death not only in the Old Testament (the flood, the firstborn of Egypt) but also in the New Testament (Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5). But, that was always the first death. Jesus died the "second death" which is a direct result of sin. (Romans 6:23; Genesis 2:17) That result is separation from God. If we say that God's role in the crucifixion was only passive, are we suggesting that God is weak and not capable of doing something decisive in the judgment? If we say that God had to do something to make sin more deadly, are we trivializing sin? Don't we believe God's word that sin is deadly?
25. God's judgments are completely non-arbitrary. He just allows us to reap the results we have chosen for ourselves. (Galatians 6:7)
26. Are we ready for God's judgment? Are we "judging ourselves" daily by making God's kingdom our first priority. (Matthew 6:33)

© 2012, Kenneth Hart, MD, MA, MPH. Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution is encouraged. It is our goal to see them spread as widely and freely as possible. If you would like to use them for your class or even make copies of portions of them, feel free to do so. We always enjoy hearing about how you might be using the materials, and we might even want to share good ideas with others. So, let us know. Info@theox.org

Last Modified: July 22, 2012

Z:\My Documents\WP\SS\TG-Hart\Thessalonians\SS-9-Thessalonians-2012_09_01-Fin+.wpd