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Studying Prophecy in the Context of the Church



By Steven J. Hogan

~ A Saturday Morning Post #124 ~

I have grown to love these two little letters, 1st and 2nd Thessalonians. They contain so much relevant and needed truth about Christ's second coming, and the Christian life.
* **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** is about how all believers from all time will be glorified, be fully saved at Christ's coming. Those already in heaven will join up with Christians being raptured from the earth, and together they will meet Jesus Christ in the air.
* **1 Thessalonians 5:1-9** tells us that unbelievers will be totally caught off guard by the coming of the Lord and the day of the Lord. But believers on earth will not be surprised and, in fact, filled with faith, hope and love, they will be looking forward to His coming.
* **2 Thessalonians 1:3-10** says that Christians will be suffering, but be given relief and be glorified when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. This is in sharp contrast with unbelievers who will be punished, who

“will pay the penalty of eternal destruction.”
*** 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12** informs us that the apostasy, and the coming of that proud and devilish Antichrist, must take place before Christ’s coming and the rapture of the church. It is true – the church will be on earth when the Antichrist is revealed.

These are great passages, for they tell us basic end-times truths that every Christian should know. Study them, understand them, never forget them, and don’t let anyone deceive or mislead you about Christ’s coming. But there’s something else you need to understand. What I have seen over the years is that many Christians know all about prophecy and what God says about our future – they share verses and discuss topics that relate to Christ’s return and the rapture, but many of them miss the larger picture.

Here’s the point: you don’t want to focus only on what Paul says about Christ’s coming in these two epistles. You don’t want to separate what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4-5 and 2 Thessalonians 1-2 about the end-times from the rest of 1-2 Thessalonians. You don’t want to take these prophecy passages out of context. It’s not just what you know about prophecy, but it’s how you live, and the rest of these epistles give needed instructions as to how you are to live for the Lord. Now that we are in the end-times, don’t you think all the truths in 1-2 Thessalonians are specifically and especially relevant to what God wants us to be doing at this time in history? God gives us these two epistles so we can know what He wants us to know about the end-times, but also so we can learn how to live for Him in view of Christ’s coming.

Of course, God gives us all the epistles, as well as the entire Bible, so we can rightly live for Him. But we are looking at 1-2 Thessalonians, and so let me summarize what an end-time church should look like, what pastors and individual Christians need to know and do.
* First, you see Paul’s great love for these believers – *“We proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children, having so fond an affection for you”* (1 Thess. 2:7-12, 2:19,

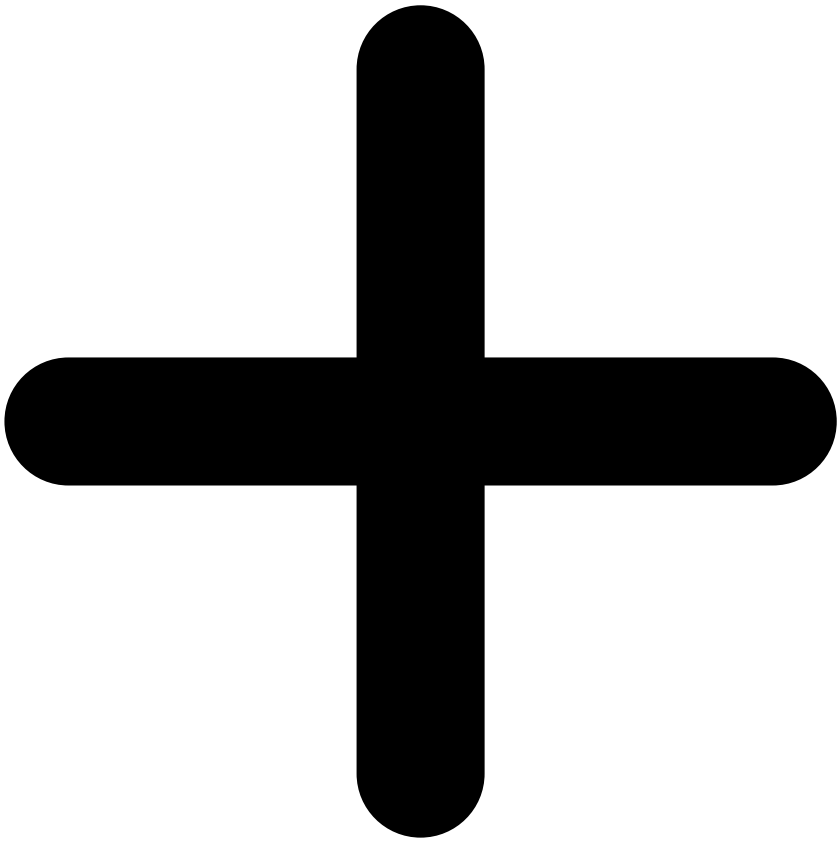
3:12). Might we all love like this!
* Second, he repeatedly talked about the importance of having faith in God, hope for the future, and love for the Lord and the Christians. 1 Thess. 1:3, 3:6-13, 5:8
* Third, he commended the Christians for believing God's word, for suffering for the Lord, for serving Him, for their perseverance in the midst of persecution, and for sharing their faith – *"in every place your faith in God has gone forth."* 1 Thess. 1:8, 2:13; 2 Thess. 1:4
* Fourth, he exhorted them to stand firm, to live holy lives, to love one another, to pray, to rejoice, to be thankful, to be discerning, and to *"walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His kingdom and glory."* 1 Thess. 1:12, 3:8, 4:1-10, 5:16-18, 5:21
* Fifth, he instructed them to not be lazy, undisciplined, or in need, but to be good workers, and eat their own bread. 1 Thess. 4:11-12, 2 Thess. 3:6-13
* Sixth, he reminded them that God had chosen them and called them, and that He would be faithful and fulfill His purposes for them. 1 Thess. 5:24, 2 Thess. 2:13-14
* Seventh, Paul prayed for them, with the primary goal that Christ would be glorified (2 Thess. 1:11-12). And there are many more end-time lessons in these epistles.

My favorite verses in these two epistles are the five benedictions. This is when Paul tells you what God will do, that He Himself will keep you blameless, will sanctify you, will enable you to know His love, will cause you to love one another, will give you peace, and will glorify you. 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13, 5:23-24; 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, 3:5, 3:16

As you know, my strong desire is for you to understand end-time's prophecy, but you need to understand it in the context of the church. Your value and usefulness to God is seen when you are a holy, loving and serving member of the church, and it's the epistles that teach you to live like this during this church age. And this Thessalonian epistle, written to instruct a church about the end-times, will instruct you how to live your life in view of Christ's coming. In these final years I pray there will be Thessalonian-type churches all over the world, ones loving the

Lord, living for the Lord, and looking forward to His soon return. *“May the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He will bring it to pass.”* 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

P.S. Here is a short read, a blog post, and a longer read, an article, about how to live for the Lord in the end-times: How Then Should We Live in the End-Times? and What Does God Want Me to Do in the End Times?



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