

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, December 28, 2011 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

CONTAGIOUS CHRISTIANS
“A Christianity That’s Catching – A Study of 1 Thessalonians”

On That Great Getting’ Up Morning
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

For centuries, thoughtless fanatics have littered the path of Christianity – especially those who have earned the label “prophecy freaks.” Most of them have been well-intentioned, highly intense souls who have found it almost impossible to retain their equilibrium with the subject of the future. As a consequence, they have left in their wake messes of tragic proportion, the worst of which has been the reactionary fallout. These fanatics have consistently turned scores of people away from the Bible’s prophetic message.

Examples: Can you think of examples of those who have perhaps given Christian prophecy and End Times subjects a black eye and damaged any credible/legitimate teaching on the subject and in the process perhaps damaged Christians and the church. List them below:

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Instead of sifting through the hype and abuse of God’s prophetic program, many people have reacted by discounting and even scoffing at the Biblical picture of the future. That’s an age old problem. Notice what Peter had to address in his day:

2 Peter 3:1-4 *“Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through you apostles. First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, ‘Where is this coming he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.’”*

Christians today need to take a sane and sober re-examination of God’s plan for the events yet to come. We are going to look at just a small portion of it in this study. And although we will uncover no dates, nor discover every future event spelled out in detail, we will learn enough to help us live more wisely in the here and now while we anxiously await the yet to come and portray to a lost world the coming Christ!

I. EXTREMES WE NEED TO GUARD AGAINST

The return of Christ is the most mentioned event in all of Scripture. In the New Testament alone, it is referred to over three hundred times. Indeed, the Lord's final recorded words in the Bible concern His imminent return. Revelation 22:20 says, "*He who testified to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*" Unfortunately, this biblical truth has been met with two extreme reactions that we need to avoid:

2 Extremes To Avoid:

1. **Fanatical Intensity** – This reaction characterizes those individuals who go off the deep end concerning prophecy. They often try to set a date when Christ will return, even though he said centuries ago that such predictions were doomed to fail:

Matthew 24:36 "*No one knows about the that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*"

Acts 1:6-7 "*So when they met together, they asked him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.'*"

These people usually see prophetic significance in every news headline and contemporary event. Their vision is so fixed on Christ's coming and related to future events that they are generally irresponsible when it comes to present, earthly matters.

2. **Theological Ignorance** – The other extreme is to be completely unaware or disinterested in the Savior's imminent return. People who react in this way do not realize or care that the events of history are occurring in accordance with God's infallible timetable. All too often, their lack of heavenly mindedness seriously hinders their evangelistic zeal, personal purity, and exercise of hope in a better life beyond their earthly one.

Comments: Christians must seek a balance in this area of prophecy. Those who are future minded in a Scriptural way are of more present good than those who go to one extreme or the other. But how do we seek and maintain that balance...

II. TRUTHS WE CAN COUNT ON

The first step to achieving balance in prophetic matters is to consult the Scriptures. Only there are we provided with the clear, trustworthy revelation of what God desires for us to know about His future plans. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 presents us with some of this material. In fact, these verses were written to bring a balanced perspective to some early Christians who had gone to extremes concerning Christ's return. The passage was also composed to settle the fears of other believers who apparently had been told that deceased Christians would not be resurrected when Christ returned. The bottom line is that this text

does not venture into fanatical speculation; rather, it sets forth prophetic truth that we can count on no matter what!

- 1. Regarding our death and resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14)** – Some Christians in Thessalonica had been misinformed “about those who fall asleep (meaning death)”... in other words, those Christians who had already died. These deceased believers were with the Lord spiritually:

2 Corinthians 5:6-8 *“Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”*

Philippians 1:23 *“I am torn between the two; I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.”*

But their bodies were physically “asleep” in the earth. The Apostle Paul wanted to give these ill-informed believers the data needed to handle their grief over deceased brethren with a sense of hope. This would be quite unlike the grief experienced by unbelievers, for many non-Christians believe that there is no life after death; therefore, they have no tomorrow to look forward to... no expectation that one day they will be reunited with the ones they deeply miss. Christians, however, need not despair through the intense pain felt because of the death of a Christian loved one. They can have hope in the midst of their sorrow and hurt. Why?

On what basis? Look at verse 14, *“We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.”*

- (1) Our hope, as Christians is grounded in the historical fact of Christ’s physical death and bodily resurrection from the dead** – When individuals put their trust in this Savior, we can rest assured that death will not close the book on their lives.
- (2) Death for a believer will eventually result in their resurrection from the grave to everlasting life with Jesus Christ** – And what effect will this resurrection event have on a Christian’s body? Plenty!
- (3) The decay, disease, and weaknesses that plague our bodies now will be stripped away** – Our perishable and mortal bodies will become imperishable and immortal. The things that tear and wear us down will no longer have a grip on us.
- (4) When Christ returns, He will upgrade all His people to the status of Christlikeness, even in their own bodies** –

1 Corinthians 15:50-55 *“I declare to you, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you*

a mystery; We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must put on the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true; “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” ‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death is your sting?’”

1 John 3:2 *“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”*

2. Regarding Christ’s coming and other’s joining (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17) –

(1) First, Christ will return to earth (v.16a) – Presently, Jesus is seated at the right hand of God the Father in heaven (Rom. 8:34, Eph. 1:20, Col. 3:1, Heb. 1:3). At the time that has been set by the Father (Acts 1:6-7), Christ will leave His position and “descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God.” The dramatic and majestic events accompanying His return will certainly be worthy of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

(2) Second, deceased Christians will rise from their graves (v.16b) – Exactly how God will reassemble and resurrect these believers is not mentioned. But that He has the power and knowledge to do so is beyond question. After all, anyone who could create the entire universe from nothing (Jn. 1:3) and sustain the whole created order in existence (Col. 1:17), much less assemble a man from dust can certainly manage some bodily resurrections.

(3) Third, living Christians will be transported with the resurrected Christians to meet Christ “in the air” (v.17a) – At this time, the bodies of all living believers will be changed to imperishable and immortal bodies – just like those of the resurrected believers (1 Cor. 15:51-52). Of course, the Rapture will occur “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,” but the point is that it will happen just as God says it will.

(4) Fourth, all the resurrected and raptured Christians will be with Christ forever (v.17b) – Never will they be able to lost their new life with the Lord. They will be secure in Him forevermore.

3. Regarding confidence and comfort (1 Thessalonians 4:18) – The conclusion of this great prophetic passage seems only natural, **“Therefore, encourage each other with these words.”** Notice that it does not say that these wonderful truths should prompt us to set dates, sell our possessions, and watch for Christ’s return from the highest mountain. Nor does it suggest that we should go our merry way without paying any further regard to these future events. Rather, God wants us to take this knowledge and use it to comfort and encourage each other. When we grieve, we need to be encouraged

with these truths so that our sorrow will be permeated with hope, not despair. We can find strength in the fact that one day our Lord will call us home to be with Him forever – strength even when we experience mistreatment, or wonder whether our best evangelistic efforts are worthwhile, or become tired of struggling against temptation.

III. OUR RESPONSE TO CHRIST’S SOON COMING

How can we prepare for the Lord’s imminent return? What is an appropriate response to this assured prophetic event? In Titus 2:11-13 we can find a simple, threefold answer:

Titus 2:11-13 *“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”*

How to live pending His return:

1. **Make certain that you have personally received the salvation God has provided for you (v.11)** – Through Jesus Christ, God has made it possible for all sinner – including you – to be pardoned from their sins. Your pardon has been secured by Christ, who willingly chose to pay for your death sentence by giving up His own life for yours. However, your pardon does not become effective until you accept Christ’s payment for your sins. When you do trust in His death, God will grant your pardon and give you everlasting life. Not until you take this step of faith will you ever be able to have a firm hope that will carry you through this life and into the life beyond.
2. **Continue to resist a corrupt lifestyle (v.12a)** – don’t let Christ’s sudden return catch you off guard. Keep on preparing for His coming by constantly fighting against *“ungodliness and worldly passions.”*
3. **Live in a sensible, godly manner (vv.12b-13)** – Don’t fall prey to prophetic fanaticism or ignorance. Instead, mature in a lifestyle that brings God glory and honor in the present, while you anxiously await *“the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”*