

# The Church Is United in Hope

**SESSION IN A SENTENCE:** Christ's imminent return is the hope of the church and the motivation to live with faith and love.

**BACKGROUND PASSAGE:** 1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11

When someone incorporates exercise into their life for the first time or after a long stretch of not doing it, they experience the expected physical barriers of pain and soreness. But probably even more challenging is the mental aspect. Voices in your head mock your plans for persistence. Comparing yourself to others who are further along convinces you that your dreams are unrealistic. All the reasons why exercise is too hard tempt you to fall back into unhealthy habits. Shame assaults you with the reminder that you let yourself get this far gone when you could have prevented it.

But despite all the hindrances in their way, some refuse to give up. They continue to show up and push through the pain, the mocking voices, the comparisons, the temptations, and the shame. Their hope of getting to the other side drives them. Persevering now in light of the vision they have for themselves is more fulfilling than being overcome by indulgence and instant gratification, so they press on.



Have you ever stuck with something even though it was challenging? What did you feel when you came out on the other side?

# Group Time

## Point 1: The church hopes in the return of Christ (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

<sup>13</sup> We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, concerning those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in the same way, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. <sup>15</sup> For we say this to you by a word from the Lord: We who are still alive at the Lord's coming will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel's voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are still 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. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Death has a complex and profound effect on people because it is antithetical to who we are as image bearers of God. We were not created to know death. This explains why we are shocked, saddened, angered, perplexed, and frightened by death when it strikes. We all mourn and grieve over death because it is unnatural.

**?** How can the common tendency to grieve over death open doors for sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ?

We find healing in missing, honoring, and reminiscing about a loved one who has died, but our hope cannot rely on these memories. Our hope in the midst of grief should look to the future, to the second coming of Christ, when we and those who have died in Christ will be raised and restored in the likeness of Jesus' resurrection for all eternity.

When considering the second coming, who receives most of your attention?



None *Loved Ones Who Have Died* All



None *Jesus, Who Died and Was Raised* All

## Point 2: The church prepares for the return of Christ (1 Thess. 5:1-3).

<sup>1</sup> About the times and the seasons: Brothers and sisters, you do not need anything to be written to you. <sup>2</sup> For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup> When they say, “Peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

Like the Thessalonian believers, we don’t know when Christ will return. But we do know that when He comes again, it will be sudden and swift. Therefore, we must prepare for His return by maintaining an acute awareness of it. If you wait to prepare for a thief once he is already robbing you, it’s too late. Similarly, we must maintain a state of preparedness for Christ’s return, not because He is going to steal our stuff but so we are ready to meet Him with joy and in peace.



What are some ways believers can prepare for Christ’s return?

Talking about the reality of hell might seem harsh, extreme, and even unloving, but hell does exist, so we must speak humbly and truthfully about it. The gospel is good news because it tells us of the only way we can escape an eternity of experiencing God’s wrath in hell for our sin and instead have true and eternal peace, security, and fellowship with God. Therefore, we cannot ignore the reality of hell if we would have people understand their dreadful estate as sinners and the beautiful promise of salvation through faith in Jesus.

**Nature of Hell:** For those who are not found in Christ at the time of their death, the Scriptures say that God’s \_\_\_\_\_ remains upon them and that they will be judged according to their deeds done on earth. The punishment that awaits unbelievers in hell is an eternal, never-ending \_\_\_\_\_ that comes from sins committed against an infinite God. In hell, sinners are forever \_\_\_\_\_ from God.

### Voices from the Church

“We dwell among people who dangle above the flames of hell by a spider web. We have among us in our churches and our homes people who are clinging to the driftwood of sin who will find out that that wood does not float when the flood of God’s judgment comes.”<sup>1</sup>

–Thabiti Anyabwile

### Point 3: The church lives in light of the return of Christ (1 Thess. 5:4-11).

<sup>4</sup> But you, brothers and sisters, are not in the dark, for this day to surprise you like a thief. <sup>5</sup> For you are all children of light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or the darkness. <sup>6</sup> So then, let us not sleep, like the rest, but let us stay awake and be self-controlled. <sup>7</sup> For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. <sup>8</sup> But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled and put on the armor of faith and love, and a helmet of the hope of salvation. <sup>9</sup> For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup> who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. <sup>11</sup> Therefore encourage one another and build each other up as you are already doing.

Hoping in, preparing for, and living in light of Christ's return are all by-products of our new identity in Christ. Through faith, we no longer belong to the darkness as we once did. Having been made alive in Christ, we are now "children of the day" (v. 5). If we are living every moment for our Savior, then whenever Christ comes back, we won't be surprised because we will be expecting Him. The lights will be on in the homes of our souls and we will be awake, anticipating His arrival with joy. This is what it means to walk in the light (1 John 1:5-7).

**Second Coming of Christ:** The Bible is clear that one day Christ will return in \_\_\_\_\_ form to rule and reign over all creation. Scripture gives no timeline as to when it will occur, only assuring that it will be \_\_\_\_\_ and glorious. The \_\_\_\_\_ return of Christ is the hope of every Christian, knowing that when Christ returns, all things will be made \_\_\_\_\_.

It is important that we as believers remain focused on our Father's work, but not for the sake of busyness. If a fire is not tended, it will die out. As humans, it is in our nature to forget and to grow bored and weary. This is why we must be diligent to walk in the light. But the benefits are not just for ourselves; our own spiritual health reinforces and encourages the spiritual health of our brothers and sisters in the Lord.



How have you been encouraged by other believers to live in the light and be self-controlled?



# Daily Study

## Day 1: Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1–3:13

As the family of God, we don't just live unto God for the benefit of ourselves but also for the benefit of each other. Paul was overwhelmed with thankfulness for the work of God being done in the lives of the Thessalonian believers. We can learn a lot from him by how mindful he was about his conduct and words and how both affected the spiritual walk of others (1:5-7). Although he was bold in sharing the truth with them, he was also gentle and affectionate, which communicated his genuine care for them (2:5-8). He did everything he could, went above and beyond, not to be a hindrance to them and take any attention off of the gospel he was preaching (2:9).

This resulted in Thessalonian citizens, both Jews and Gentiles, turning to Christ and enduring persecution for His name's sake (see Acts 17:1-9). It was clear how much Paul loved the Thessalonian believers and how proud he was of them for their faithfulness (1 Thess. 2:19-20; 3:7-9).

Although nothing we can do or say can guarantee someone turning to the Lord, our conduct and intentions are just as important as our words.



Does your heart for evangelism match up to Paul's? Why or why not?

## Day 2: Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

The social media all-access pass into the lives of people we do and don't know often allows us to have more information about others than we need to. It's up to each individual person to determine how much or how little they put out there, and there isn't a one-size-fits-all formula that everyone should follow. But in navigating this technological age, it is important to devote time to think through some personal best practices that align with our values. Our social media presences are very much part of our lives and therefore are a representation of Christ if we are in Him.

First Thessalonians 4:10-12 encourages us to love one another more and more, to seek to lead a quiet life, to mind our own business, and to work with our own hands so that we may behave properly in the presence of outsiders and not be dependent on anyone. These verses are helpful as we consider how we want to spend our time and energy on these apps.



What are some ways you can evaluate your motives and actions on social media?

## Day 3: Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

It is rare to meet a person who does not know the pain of abandonment. Parents abandon sweet children who were entrusted to them. Spouses make promises they don't keep. Friends can be fickle and disappear in times of trouble. People who never intended to leave you die unexpectedly. Sometimes it can take an entire lifetime to heal from the pain abandonment brings.

Christ, our infinite God, is the only One who can quench that infinite longing in us to be known completely, be safe, and be made whole. His promise that He will come back for His people and we will be with Him always is not meant to function as a bandage but as a balm to provide deep healing. Verses such as these should not be used as a rebuke or to stifle the grief journey. They are meant to be clung to in the valleys of deep pain as emotions and issues are addressed and worked through. Christ is with us now as we do the hard work of healing from abandonment in this life. And when He returns for us, we will no longer have to endure the sting of loneliness.



How have you experienced the balm of Christ as you struggle with abandonment issues or loneliness?

## Day 4: Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3

It is never too late to trust in Christ. No one knows for certain who has or who hasn't, except the Lord. Although we can judge someone's actions, we are not capable of judging a person's heart. Nor is that our job. It is God's. Our job is to be faithful and obedient to the command Jesus gave us to share the gospel.

A right understanding of the times and the seasons doesn't produce a naive laziness, permitting the Christian to console themselves with the thought, "Well, as long as they repent and believe right before they die, they'll be ok; so it's not that serious." Rather, recognizing the coming Day of the Lord should produce an urgency within us. For how can they believe in a gospel they've never heard (Rom. 10:14). And just as death can strike at any moment without warning, so too the return of Christ will be sudden and inescapable.



How will you act on the urgency that comes with recognizing God's coming judgment against sin?

## Day 5: Read 1 Thessalonians 5:4-28

We can be so quick to anger and to speak. Our natural bent often seems to be criticizing others rather than being understanding and patient. Maybe we think showing too much gentleness makes us weak or that we may not be taken seriously if we are not blunt and harsh. Rebuke and admonishment have their proper place amongst believers, but it is crucial that we are always careful to check our hearts for self-righteousness and pride. We are instructed to be at peace amongst ourselves, to admonish the idle, to encourage the fainthearted, to help the weak, and to be patient with them all (1 Thess. 5:13-14). Christ is our greatest example of how to relate to one another as He is ever so patient with us as we stumble through life.

As Paul continues, we are given even more practical application on how to live: don't repay evil for evil, seek to do good to everyone, rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, don't quench the Spirit, don't despise prophecy but test everything, hold fast to what is good, abstain from every form of evil (5:15-22). In applying these instructions to our lives, we equip ourselves to glorify and live faithfully unto God.



Which instructions from Paul in this passage hit closest to your struggles? How will you begin to obey the Lord in these matters?



## UNIT 31

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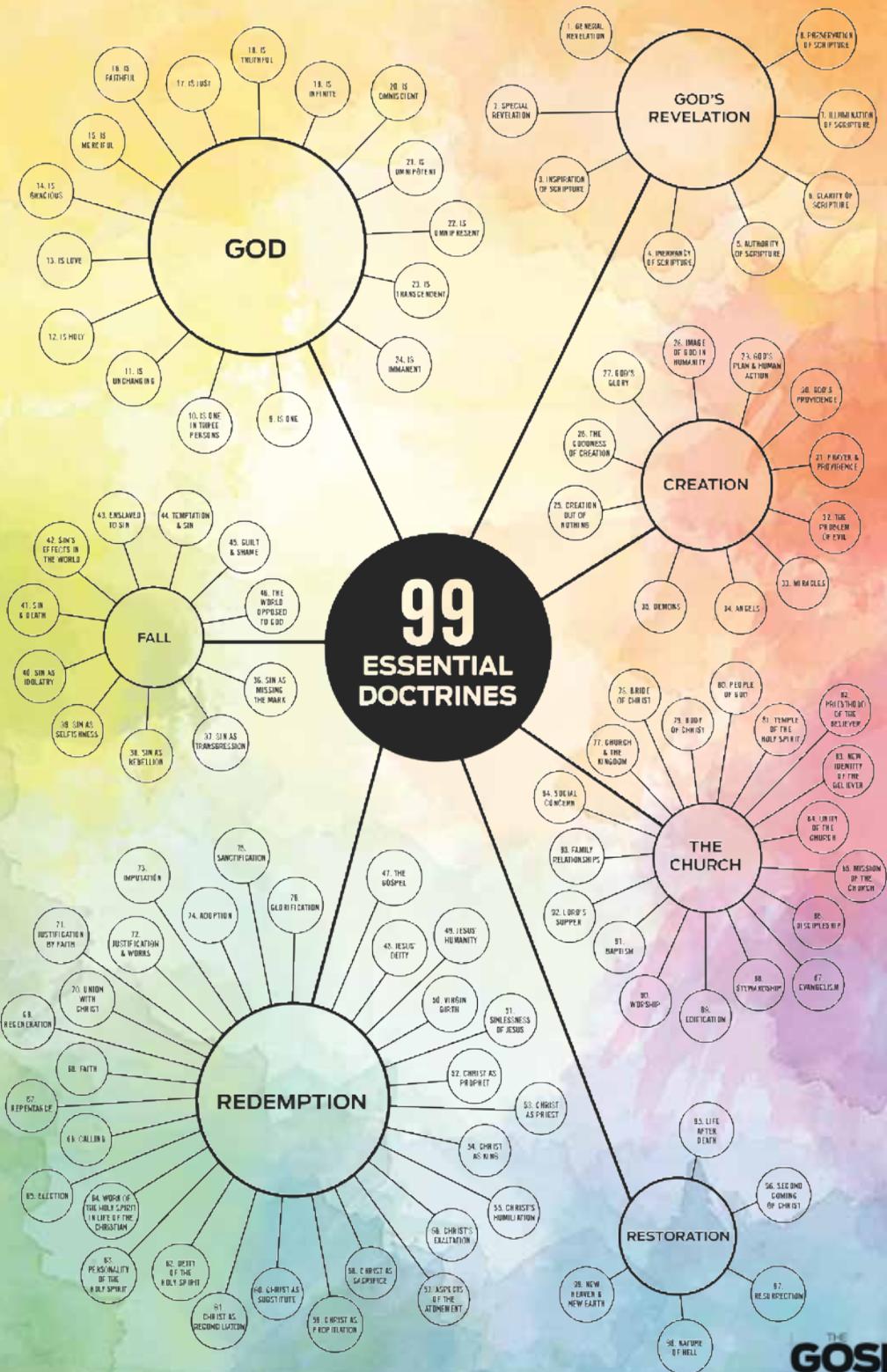
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## The Church United

After the Lord's ascension into heaven and the Spirit's descent upon the followers of Jesus, Christ's church began to grow. More disciples were made and churches were planted, and the gospel began to go to the Gentiles. For the Jewish believers, it took some time to grasp the Lord's plan in this work, but God made it plain through His Spirit that Jesus is better than the law and the singular focus for our faith, for both Jews and Gentiles.

The planted church in Antioch, comprised of both Jews and Gentiles, received the call of God to set aside two of her leaders for the work of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. So as Jesus was sent, the Holy Spirit was sent, and the apostles were sent, so too were missionaries sent, and wherever they went, they proclaimed the gospel that unites people together in Christ.

Unity in the church was an important issue early on, as it continues to be today. Some made a point of division by adding to the gospel. Through the Holy Spirit, the church resoundly affirmed that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

### What's Next?

#### SUMMER 2021

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*Paul in Prison (Acts; Epistles)*

*Facing Adversity (Acts; Epistles)*

*Jesus Will Come Again (Revelation)*

#### SOME OF OUR UPCOMING WRITERS

D. A. Horton

Jonathan Hayashi

Cas Monaco

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