

# CONTAGIOUS CHRISTIANITY

## A STUDY OF 1 THESSALONIANS

### STUDY EIGHT

## On That Great Gettin'-Up Morning

*1 Thessalonians 4:13–18*

*How many times have you thought, He's coming back? Some of you have to get ready. Some of you have just kept ready.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**F**EW topics perk up our ears and stir our curiosity as much as the return of Jesus. Opinions abound and readiness differs. Most people fall into one of three categories.

First, there are *cynics*. Quick to throw a wet blanket on others' faith, they disdainfully echo the words of the critics in Peter's day, who jeered:

*"What happened to the promise that Jesus is coming again? From before the times of our ancestors, everything has remained the same since the world was first created."*

(2 Peter 3:4)

Then, there are *carnal Christians*, who are so preoccupied with the pleasures of the present world that they think nothing of the world to come. They are unprepared for the return of Jesus. Someday, at the judgment seat of Christ, their works of "wood, hay, or straw" will burn up, and they'll receive no reward (1 Corinthians 3:12). They need to *get ready*.

In contrast are the *faithful followers of Christ*. They don't need to get ready for Christ's return because they *keep ready*. They live every day in anticipation of the imminent return of Jesus. He may come back today!

In the passage for this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, Paul addressed these faithful followers, providing counsel, correction, and comfort regarding the return of Jesus. Let's continue our study in 1 Thessalonians 4 and bask in the rays of hope emanating from Paul's teaching about our glorious future.



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SEARCHING  
THE  
SCRIPTURES  
BIBLE STUDIES

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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

As Peter wrote, “Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world” (1 Peter 1:13). We have so much to look forward to!

Open your heart in prayer to what the Holy Spirit will reveal to you through His Word about this wonderful topic.



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Interestingly, more is said about the return of Christ than almost any other topic in Scripture—more than the creation, more than the plunge of humankind into sin, more than the miraculous deliverance of the Hebrews in their march through the Red Sea, and even more than what is revealed about the first advent of Christ.

In His final words in the Bible through His revelation to John, Jesus promised, “Yes, I am coming soon!”—to which John declared, “Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20).

In response to this hope, some of the Thessalonian Christians went to extremes. Their zeal led them to quit their jobs and live irresponsibly, becoming freeloaders and busybodies. Paul corrected their extremism, urging them to “live a quiet life, minding [their] own business and working with [their own] hands” (1 Thessalonians 4:11).

Misinformation about Christ’s return sent others spiraling into fear. They were afraid that their Christian loved ones who had died would be forgotten and somehow miss the blessing of Christ’s return. So, as we’ll see in this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, Paul set their feet on solid theological ground, offering great comfort to their grieving hearts.



## Observation: Comforting Truth

Read carefully *1 Thessalonians 4:13–18* with your detective hat on, using your skills of observation.<sup>1</sup> Paul fills in the gaps in his readers’ knowledge about the return of Christ with a detailed timeline. Don’t miss a single clue regarding the events surrounding Jesus’ return. Based on your initial reading, answer the questions below to help you grasp the nuances of what Paul was saying.

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### Christian Death and Resurrection—1 Thessalonians 4:13–14

Paul addressed the Thessalonians as “brothers and sisters”—fellow Christians (1 Thessalonians 4:13). What did Paul want all believers to know with certainty? The word, *asleep*, in the NASB is a euphemism for death. Why do you think Paul used this word?

Did Paul discourage the Thessalonians from grieving?

According to 4:14, what was the foundation for the Thessalonians' hope? As a result, what future awaits “those who have fallen asleep through Jesus” (4:14 NASB)?

### Christ's Coming and Our Joining Him—1 Thessalonians 4:15–17

The hope of our resurrection is anchored in the powerful death and resurrection of Jesus. “Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was” (Romans 6:5).

In 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17, Paul described the sequence of events at Christ's imminent and dramatic appearing. He assured his grieving friends that the spirits of their deceased loved ones will not be left behind. According to 4:15, how did he receive this truth? What promise did Paul give regarding the believers “who have died”?

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Then, in 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17, like steps on a staircase, Paul laid out the step-by-step events of Jesus' coming. When "the Lord himself will come down from heaven," what three signs will accompany His return?

Who will be resurrected first? And what will happen to the believers "who remain on the earth," according to 4:17?

Finally, what promise is made to all believers at the close of 4:17?

### **Christian Confidence and Comfort—1 Thessalonians 4:18**

Paul lifted the veil of prophetic detail about Jesus' return to dispel misinformation, confusion, and fear. He concluded his mini discourse with, "Therefore, comfort one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:18 NASB). What comfort would his words provide?

*Someday there'll be a reunion, and I'm going to be caught up in the clouds with believers who have died and be forever with the Lord. Why? Because we deserve it? No, no, a thousand times no. Because "we believe that Jesus died and rose again." We are declared righteous because we have believed right. Therefore, we can grieve right. "Comfort one another with these words." How often I have.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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## Interpretation: Believing Right and Grieving with Hope

The core of Paul's brief but weighty teaching focused on right belief and hopeful grief. Those twin themes are woven into a beautiful tapestry.

In *1 Thessalonians 4:13–14*, what is the relationship between believing the gospel and grieving the death of those who have died in the Lord? How does that contrast with unbelief and grief?

At the Lord's glorious return, believers who have died will "rise from their graves" in their resurrected, immortal bodies (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Then those still alive will be "caught up" (4:17). Their "dying bodies" will be instantly "transformed into bodies that will never die" (1 Corinthians 15:53). Both groups—the resurrected and the transformed—will be taken up "in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

The Greek word Paul used for "caught up" is *harpazo*. In the Latin translation of the Bible, the word is *rapio*, from which we get the term "rapture." Review *harpazo* in Mounce's Greek dictionary at [billmounce.com](http://billmounce.com) or a *commentary* like *Constable's Notes*. What does the Greek word imply about the nature of the rapture?

Why is resurrection and transformation necessary?

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Even with missteps in our Christian journey, we enjoy comfort in the promise, “we will be with the Lord forever” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). How do Paul’s words assure us of the permanence of our salvation?

*Just as we laugh in our joy, we are to weep in our pain. God gave us that. Don't dry up the tear ducts and call that being a strong Christian. Not until you experience grief in its depth do you fully recover from it. If my dead loved one believed that Jesus died and rose again from the dead, there's hope. There's a future. There's a reason, ultimately, to smile. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## **Correlation: Digging Deeper into the Resurrection**

Sometime after Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, he wrote to the Corinthians, offering more details about the characteristics of our resurrection bodies. Read [1 Corinthians 15:50–55](#). In 15:50, Paul began with what point?

Then, in 15:51–55, Paul detailed additional truth in the form of a “mystery.” The Greek word Paul used for “mystery” is *mysterion*. Our English use of the word *mystery* often implies that which involves intrigue, complication, or confusion. The Greek refers to something unveiled or revealed. Who must unveil the mystery?

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Next, recount the details of Paul's mystery in your own words.

Paul tells us how to prepare for Jesus' coming in *Titus 2:11–13*. What two *promises* do you find, one past and one future? What two *instructions* do you find, one prohibition and one urging?

*This “mystery” is like our word secret. “Psst! I want to tell you a secret.” The secret’s very different. Once you hear the secret, you say, “Ah! Why didn’t I think of that?” It’s very clear. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## **Application: An Appropriate Response to Christ's Coming**

How can you get ready for Christ's return today? In three ways, according to Pastor Chuck Swindoll.

First, *make certain you have taken what God has given—His salvation*. Christ died on the cross to cover your sins, and He rose from the grave to grant you eternal life. He asks simply that you place your faith in Him. Have you?

Second, *continue to resist a corrupt lifestyle*. Paul instructs us “turn from godless living and sinful pleasures” (Titus 2:12), so that we won't be caught unprepared when Jesus returns. Are you?

Third, *live in a sensible, godly manner*. Give yourself to the Savior. Stay involved in Christ's program. Share Jesus' love with others. Live for His glory. Do you?

Putting our hope in Christ's return not only helps us examine our lifestyles, but it also touches our hearts. Which part of Paul's teaching—the return of Christ, the resurrection, the rapture—provides you with the most comfort, hope, or joy? Why? What practical difference is it making for you today?

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One day there will come a moment like no other. In the blink of an eye, with a thunderous shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the blast of a trumpet, Christ will return! Graves will split open, the dead will be raised, and the living will be changed. Are you gettin' ready for that "great gettin'-up morning"? Better yet, are you keepin' ready? Yes! Come, Lord Jesus, come!



## A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, thank You for the Savior, for Christ, who loved me, who loves me, and gave Himself for me. Thank You for His promise that He'll keep His word. Come quickly. I'm ready. I'm keepin' ready, because Your coming could be at any moment. Cause those who are not ready to get ready without any further delay. I pray in the Savior's name. Amen.*

## ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2026 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Marshall F. Davis in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 1984, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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