

1 Thessalonians 5:4-11

September 25, 2022



SCRIPTURE

⁴ But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. ⁵ You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. ⁶ So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. ⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. ⁹ For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰ He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

COMMENTARY

1 Thessalonians 5:4. Paul then began to discuss the implications of Christ's return for the believer before His great coming. To the unbeliever, Jesus will come like a thief in the night, but for the believer, His return will come as no surprise, nor will He come like a robber who destroys the owner's possessions. Those who believe are not in darkness. In the Bible, darkness typically refers to moral or spiritual blindness, disobedience, or separation. This sphere of darkness is where the unbelieving world lives. Paul's contrast is sharp: you (the Thessalonians and all believers) are not living in unbelief, spiritual darkness, moral confusion: "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves" (Col. 1:13). For believers, Christ's coming is nothing to fear.

5:5. Christians are all sons of the light ... sons of the day. Having just said what Christians are not, Paul asserted what they are. The contrast is bold and unmistakable. Unlike an unbeliever, a Christian is in relationship with the light, with God and Christ. Not only that, but the Christian lives in moral and spiritual enlightenment. His life and understanding are affected by his faith in Christ. To draw the contrast with bold strokes, Paul again stated, we do not belong to the night or to the darkness. There can be no confusion. The Christian is different in life and destiny from the unbeliever.

5:6. Now the reasonable conclusion: Being in the light, having been rescued from the darkness, looking to a future with God, not being subject to his wrath—these should make a difference in how we live. Paul urged them to not be like others, who are asleep. The comparison is most likely to the unbeliever. Falling asleep is a picture of what can happen to us spiritually, ethically, or morally if we are not watchful. We simply drift off. Drowsiness begins, we become comfortable, our hearts become insensitive. Spiritual



drowsiness slowly paralyzes the spirit. The person who was once vibrant and wide awake in following Christ can become lethargic and lazy about issues of the spirit. As you drive down the road and your eyelids become heavy, it is best to open a window, turn up the radio, or pull over for a rest. Spiritually, at the first sign of sleepiness, when church becomes a bit boring, or prayer drops off a bit and you do not seem to care as much—make some corrections. At the very least, ask God to renew your heart, open your spirit to His renewing work, and find accountability with another believer. Falling asleep at the wheel can have disastrous results; so can falling asleep spiritually. We are to be alert and self-controlled. To be alert is the opposite of being asleep. An alert person is aware, sensitive to life around him, and morally and spiritually awake.

5:7. Paul reflected back to his analogy of night and day. He had already defined those outside of Christ as being of the night, and those whose faith is in Christ as being of the day (v. 5). Remembering that Christians are of the day, he emphasized the need for readiness and alertness by reminding the readers that sleepiness and drunkenness belong to habits of the night. These behaviors should not characterize those of us who are of the day.

5:8. Paul then turned to one of his favorite metaphors—armor (Eph. 6:13-17)—to describe the readiness, seriousness, and combatant qualities of a Christian. We are to have on the breastplate of faith and love. These two virtues, like the breastplate, protect the heart. Faith guards it within, keeping us in close relationship with Christ. Love guards our hearts in our outward behavior toward others, keeping us pure and expressive of the spiritual vitality within. Along with this, we are to keep on the helmet of the hope of salvation. Our head is the control center of our life; it processes our thoughts and emotions; it analyzes life. The certainty of our salvation, when Christ comes for us (as described by Paul in 1 Thess. 4:14–17), protects our thinking from being overwhelmed by the evil around us. Hope is certainty, not wishful thinking. Christ will come and we shall live with him forever. This reality guards us in times of persecution, temptation, weariness, and all other dangers that come from living in a hostile environment.

5:9. God has appointed us to salvation, not wrath. This is a continuation in thought from verse 8. Our salvation is certain; there can be no wavering on the issue. God appointed, or destined, us to gain salvation. He has offered us the means to grace, and we must exercise determined and persevering faith to see salvation realized in fullness when Christ appears. In the same way, God did not appoint, or destined, us to suffer His wrath. Wrath is the judgment of God upon unbelief. For the Christian, there is no fear of Christ's appearing: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

5:10. According to Paul, the life of the believer is secure, determined, safe in the hands of God. Christ died so that whether "awake or asleep, we may live together with Him." Paul's use of the "asleep" metaphor goes back to its usage in 1 Thessalonians 4:15, referring to death, not moral failure as in 5:6–7. Christians who die, "sleep" in the sense



that it is not the end. One day the trumpet of God will arouse the dead to bodily transformation.

5:11. This assurance of salvation, of transformation into the image of Christ, should encourage us. As we are encouraged, we must continually talk about it and remind one another of our future, so that we do not grow weary or lose heart in the spiritual battles that rage. Every Christian has a responsibility to encourage others in the faith. In an age that is prone to criticism and fault-finding, the same fault-finding attitude can creep into the church. It can become natural to talk about others or critique their performance instead of examining our own hearts or encouraging others toward godliness. While encouragement inspires us to keep on track spiritually, building each other up deals with investing in others. We should add to other people in such a way that they will be spiritually stronger. In this way, we encourage maturity and fortification of character. We need to look upon all persons as those for whom Christ died. They are eternal souls just as valuable as we are. We have a responsibility to encourage them to remain faithful and growing until the end.

MAIN POINT

As we await Christ's return, individual body members must work together for the good of the whole.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.
Introduction

What is a motion you do repeatedly for your job?

How many different muscles are involved?

Like the muscles of the body, groups of believers must work together for the good of the whole. What contribution does each member make to this group? What would we be missing if we didn't have each other? We might take our muscle systems for granted until one group is not working properly. If you have ever thrown out your back, you know the woes of not having use of those muscles. Your back and abdominal muscles are collectively referred to as your "core," because they are the body's foundational muscle groups. You engage these muscles in some way with every meaningful movement you make. This muscle group is comprised of many major and minor muscles. They all must work together for the health of your body, just as the individual members of the body of Christ must work together for the health of the whole.



UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

- ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 THESSALONIANS 5:4-7.

To encourage the Thessalonians, Paul reassured them that they are not like those in the darkness. Believers stand in contrast to people in verse 3 who will be swept away in judgment at Jesus's return. For Christ-followers, Jesus's coming will not be like the arrival of a thief who destroys the owner's possessions (even though the time of His coming may surprise us).

In these verses, how did Paul use imagery of light and darkness?

What marks the day and night activities seen in these verses?

What does sleep represent?

How has the resurrection made us children of the light (v. 5)?

How does being children of the day affect the way we live?

What might a Christian do to ensure he or she is "awake"?

Christians should never be surprised that the rest of humanity indulges in immorality. The desired course is to stay awake, asking the Lord to keep us vibrant and alert to steer clear of spiritual and moral temptations surrounding us. In our moral and spiritual behavior, Christ's followers are already as different from others as daylight is from dark. Being ready for Christ's return means realizing we belong to the daytime and that our behavior is to reflect spiritual alertness, not spiritual laziness.

- ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 THESSALONIANS 5:8-11.

In Paul's day, a Roman soldier was instantly recognized by his breastplate and helmet.

What traits make a follower of Christ instantly recognizable?

Who do you know whose faith in Christ is instantly recognizable to you? Why?

How do people like that encourage you?

How do soldiers prepare for physical battle? How do Christians prepare for spiritual battle?



One of the primary reasons it is important that believers be part of a group is because we need to encourage one another in our faith.

What is one of the goals of encouragement, based on 1 Thessalonians 5:11?

What does the opposite of that look like?

Why is encouragement an essential element of relationships among brothers and sisters in Christ?

One of the privileges we have as Christ's followers is to invest in the lives of others, adding to them, rather than tearing them down. Instead of engaging in criticism and fault-finding, we are to act toward others in a way that will encourage them to be godly. Paul noted that the Thessalonians were already doing this; they simply were not to give up.

What does encouragement look like daily in your close relationships?

How do you generally prefer to receive encouragement—through words or actions?

How do you tend to give encouragement?

Encouragement doesn't come naturally for us, although it does come easier for some than for others. Because we all tend to be selfish—consumed with our own needs and problems rather than the needs of others—we must remind ourselves of the value of encouragement, and we have to work at it.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What are some practical ways we encourage each other to live for Christ as we wait for His return?

Why should we treat participation in this group as a vital part of our spiritual health?

How can we strengthen the bonds we have?

Accountability is one way Christians “stay awake” and progress in godly character.

What might this look like in your own life?



PRAYER

As you close your small group time, thank God for the support and encouragement of other believers as we await His return. Pray that our group would be united and committed to one another for the purpose of building up, keeping from sin, and motivating to pursue good.

LOOKING AHEAD

Encourage your group to look ahead to next week's scripture passage as we continue our study of 1 Thessalonians.

October 2, 2022 --- 1 Thessalonians 5:12-15

