

1 Thessalonians 5 • Living in the Shadow of His Coming

Introduction

What would you do if every prophetic aspect of God's Word regarding the Last Days was made absolutely clear to you? What if you knew how everything would be fulfilled according to God's Word and you had all the answers to those questions of eschatology which have persisted for centuries? What would you do? How would you live? As with most things in a Believer's life, it is not a test of knowledge but faith. Paul's instructions to the Thessalonians provide the basis for how the "sons of light" should live, those knowing full well that they are living in the shadow of His coming.

¹Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. ²For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. ³While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. ⁴But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; ⁵for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness;

[Read v.1-5]

Q: What is the prominent contrast presented here?

A: The contrast of light versus darkness.

Q: What is the greater teaching Paul is trying to get across by contrasting the light with the darkness?

A: Although Christ's coming, as far as those living in the darkness are concerned, will be sudden and unexpected, such is not the case for believers, those living in the light because they are actively looking for His return.

Q: How does the metaphor of darkness practically reveal itself in people?

A: In Ephesians Paul explains that it is a life that has not experienced spiritual regeneration through Christ.

So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

— Ephesians 4:17–19

John further identifies them as those who do not want to change their ways and would rather continue in spiritual darkness.

"This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.

— John 3:19

Point: *Spiritual darkness is not simply being ignorant or uninformed where God's Word and ways are concerned, but pursuing a lifestyle that is directly contrary and opposite.*

Q: How does the metaphor of light practically reveal itself in people?

A: In Ephesians Paul explains that it is a life which visibly shows spiritual regeneration through Christ, who no longer live according to the old life but in pursuit of the new one in Christ.

for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.

— Ephesians 5:8–10

Application: Those living in the shadow of Christ's return are to live as visible, shining examples of new creation's in Christ. This is proven by their actions – **HOW** they put God's Word and ways into practice, what Jesus termed "salt" and "light" in the Sermon on the Mount.

But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;
— 1 Peter 2:9

⁶so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. ⁷For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. ⁸But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.

[Read v.6-8]

Q: What is the prominent contrast presented here?

A: "Alert and sober" versus "sleeping" and "drunk".

Q: What does it mean to be "drunk"?

A: To be drunk is to abuse to excess something which might be good or useful to the point that it actually results in ignorance of what is going on not just inside of them but all around them.

Q: How does this relate to the biblical definition of someone who is spiritually drunk?

A: Spiritual drunkenness in Scripture is equated with spiritual deception. It is the condition of someone who becomes ignorant not just of what is going on inside of them but the significance of events unfolding around them, usually because they will not let go of unaddressed sin.

Q: What is the biblical definition of those "of the day" – those who are "alert and sober"?

A: They are differentiated by their deeds, characterized as those who are no longer visibly living according to the old life but according to the new. They are especially distinguished by their behavior and treatment of others.

The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy.

— Romans 13:12–13

Q: How does faith and love depict a breastplate of dual protection for our heart?

A: Faith is our heart's protection where our relationship with God is concerned; love is our heart's protection where our relationship with others is concerned.

Q: What does the helmet of salvation identified as hope protect?

A: Our mind. Rather than fixing our mind on the things of the world, faithful believers set their attention on the things above.

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

— Colossians 3:1–3

⁹For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him. ¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.

Application: *The difference between light and darkness and sober and drunk is not restricted solely to knowledge, but biblically it is proven by how knowledge is applied personally. In other words, in these Last Days, those sober and in the light put God's Word into practice and are visibly different in their relationships and treatment of others, whereas those who are drunk in the darkness live only for themselves.*

[Read v.9-11]

Q: What does v.9 imply as being the difference between those who walk in the darkness vs. the light, the drunk vs. the sober, the sleeping vs. the awake?

A: Those who live for themselves (in darkness, drunk, and sleeping) are ultimately going to experience God's wrath; those who live for Christ (in the light, sober, and awake) will obtain salvation.

Point: *Salvation is not confined to that moment when a decision for Christ is made, but continually proven by a changed life going forward which lives in the light of God's Word, sober in spirit, and spiritually awake according to God's ways.*

Q: How is the reference in v.10 to those who are "asleep" different from the previous verses?

A: This is referring to believers who die in the Lord. Unlike the unsaved who are said to "die", believers who physically pass away are noted as simply "sleeping" because they will be united with Christ at their Resurrection.

Q: According to v.11, what is a chief defining characteristic of those living awake and sober and in the light?

A: They "encourage one another and build up one another".

Q: What is the distinction between "encourage" and "build up"?

A: "Build up" in many translations is rendered "edify" and associated scripturally with the three-fold activities of prayer, reinforcing the doctrines of the Gospel, and purposely abstaining from talk and conversation which could lead to spiritual corruption or stir up contention. In other words, Paul is not saying just to be empathetic in one's encouragement, but to pursue a proactive biblical relationship with others.

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

— Ephesians 4:29

Q: Given the context of Paul's teaching to this point, what are the specific ways in which we should "encourage one another and build up one another"?

1. With the doctrine of the resurrection, that "whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him". (v.10)
2. By encouraging each other to live sober, awake, and as children of the light. In other words, putting God's Word and ways into practice and living visibly changed in our behavior and relationships.
3. To employ the whole armor of God here identified with faith, love, and hope (v.8) which protects both the heart and mind.

Application: Those living in the shadow of the Last Days are characterized not only by their pursuit of personal faithfulness, but in their encouragement of it in others.

¹²But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, ¹³and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.

[Read v.12-13]

Q: What are the two key phrases in these verses where our relationship with spiritual leaders is concerned?

A: “Appreciate” (v.12) and “esteem them very highly in love” (v.13). It is the dual expression of pursuing a loving relationship with leaders in the same way we pursue such relationships with others.

Q: How is someone who has “charge over you” identified biblically as authorized to do so?

A: They “diligently labor among you” – that is, they are active participants in the ministry, and they “give you instruction” – that is, they preach how to put God’s Word into practice.

Q: According to v.13, what is one of the crucial ways by which we show appreciation and love for our leaders?

A: “Live in peace with one another”. This can be applied not just as absence of conflict between ourselves and our leaders, but even between the members of the flock so that leaders can concentrate on the ministry rather than distracted by conflict resolution.

Application: Those living in the shadow of the Last Days are to pursue biblical relationships with their leaders.

¹⁴We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. ¹⁵See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.

[Read v.14-15]

Q: What do all these actions have in common?

A: They all have to do with personal relationships.

Q: But aren’t these the things leadership is supposed to be doing?

A: Biblical leadership is never a dictatorship but a partnership. Each member has to do their share of the work, particularly where personal accountability is concerned.

Q: What does it mean to “admonish the unruly”?

A: The “unruly” by definition refuse to be ruled – that is, to follow instruction and are often characterized as being divisive, headstrong, and/or contentious. “Unruly” could also be translated as “undisciplined”. To “admonish” is to warn or teach the nature of the consequences of continuing to live in conflict with God’s Word and ways.

Q: What does it mean to “encourage the fainthearted”?

A: Whereas the “unruly” are experiencing a crisis where obedience to God’s Word is concerned, the “fainthearted” are experiencing a crisis of faith where the heart is concerned. Because they are weighed down by circumstances which challenge their faith, they do not need to be strictly admonished in the Word but provided reinforcement for their faith.

Q: What does it mean to “help the weak”?

A: The “weak” are those who are not very mature in the Lord. At times they experience **both** a crisis of obedience and a crisis of faith. They will require either admonishment or encouragement as the situation requires.

¹⁶Rejoice always; ¹⁷pray without ceasing; ¹⁸in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit; ²⁰do not despise prophetic utterances. ²¹But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; ²²abstain from every form of evil.

Q: How does v.15 relate to these three conditions?

A: As the fundamental motivation for those who “admonish”, “encourage”, and “help”; they engage others for the right purpose in pursuit of love and not for personal reasons.

Application: Those living in the shadow of the Last Days actively pursue biblical relationships with each other.

[Read v.16-18]

Q: What are the three characteristics of the End Times Believer listed here?

A: “Rejoice” (v.16), “pray” (v.17), and “give thanks” (v.18).

Q: But how do the adverbs attached to each of them present a real challenge to us?

1. We are to “rejoice **always**”. This describes a continuous state rather than an occasional feeling. It is indicative of someone who is in constant communion with Christ.
2. We are to “pray **without ceasing**”. When our heart desires what God desires we are praying all day long as the Spirit intercedes for and in us. (Rom. 8:26-27)
3. We give thanks “**in everything**”. This is the constant recognition that God is always in control, providing for every need, and preparing us for every contingency.

Application: Those living in the shadow of the Last Days prove God's will in their life by their personal attitude of joy, prayer, and thanksgiving.

[Read v.19-22]

Q: What is the common thing the believer is being asked to do for each of these things?

A: The requirement is to exercise discernment both in those things which present themselves as spiritual revelations (“prophetic utterances”) and everyday behavior (“that which is good” as opposed to “every form of evil”). **ALL** things are supposed to be measured against the standard of God's Word.

Q: What happens when someone fails to exercise biblical discernment in either of these areas?

A: It results in quenching the Spirit because in either case it is a mishandling of the Word of God. Just as “prophetic utterances” are to be confirmed/exposed based on the degree to which they can be supported by Scripture, so the difference between “good” and “evil” is defined by the truth of God's Word. A Spirit-filled environment is one which is fully obedient to God's Word on every level.

Q: Why might the term “quench” be especially appropriate in addressing the work of the Holy Spirit?

A: Scripture repeatedly assigns the image of fire to the Holy Spirit such as when He descended at Pentecost. (Acts 2:3) The quickest way to extinguish the flame is to stray from the standard of God's Word.

Application: Those living in the shadow of the Last Days measure all things by the standard of God's Word.

²³Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.

²⁵Brethren, pray for us.

²⁶Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss.

²⁷I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren.

²⁸The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

[Read v.23-28]

Q: What does Paul appear to hold as the most important work taking place in the life of the Last Days Believer?

A: Sanctification.

Q: How does v.22 contrast with v.23?

A: Paul provides a balance between the negative (“*abstain from every form of evil*”) and the positive (“*may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely*”). They are two sides of the same coin in that what we actively pursue in the course of the work of sanctification is just as important as what we actively reject.

Q: What is “positional” sanctification?

A: It is a theological expression of how we are viewed by God because of what Jesus did for us through the work of the cross, that we are once and for all set apart for God.

By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

— Hebrews 10:10

Q: What is “practical” sanctification?

A: It is the daily dealings involving our sins and our growth in holiness.

Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God

— 2 Corinthians 7:1

Q: What is “perfect” sanctification?

A: That which will ultimately take place when we see Christ and become eternally like Him.

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

— 1 John 3:2

Application: *Those living in the shadow of the Last Days are consumed by the work of sanctification in its assurance of our standing with God in Christ, in its daily pursuit of faithfulness and holiness, and in its ultimate work at Christ’s return.*

Overall Application

Jesus put forth the challenge, “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” (Lk. 18:8) He is not referring to faith as in merely believing, but proving such belief by putting His Word into practice, what He referred to in the Sermon on the Mt. as the difference between a “hearer” and a “doer”. (Mt. 7:24-29)

- *A Last Days Christian is characterized as living in the light – someone who is salt and light to the rest of the world.*
- *A Last Days Christian is characterized as sober and awake – someone visibly different in their treatment of others.*

- *A Last Days Christian is characterized as not only pursuing personal faithfulness, but encouraging the same in others.*
- *A Last Days Christian is characterized by not only pursuing biblical relationships with others, but with their leaders as well.*
- *A Last Days Christian confirms God's will by their personal attitude.*
- *A Last Days Christian measures all things by the standard of God's Word.*
- *A Last Days Christian is consumed by the work of sanctification.*

In other words, because a Last Days Christian truly understands that the return of Christ is imminent, they are even more focused on the fundamental teachings of Christ as they are applied to their life.