

1 Thessalonians 5:4–11

A Ministry in the Word

Scripture Reading

But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

The Day of the Lord — Condition of Soul, Not Only Calendar

The argument that the day of the Lord begins immediately after the rapture has been offered as a way of reading verse 4 — since, it is reasoned, if brethren will not be in that day, they must have been removed before it. That kind of doctrinal arrangement may have a certain logical appearance, but the force of what Paul is actually saying here runs along different lines. It is not primarily a question of when the day of the Lord begins on a prophetic calendar. It is a question of a condition of soul. There is a state that Christians have which means they will not be participants in the day of the Lord — and that state is what is described in verses 4 through 8.

Furthermore, the apostle returns to this in the second epistle. In 2 Thessalonians 2:1, he beseeches them by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and their

gathering together unto Him — that is, by the rapture — not to be soon shaken in mind as though the day of the Lord had already set in. The rapture is the reason they would not be in those subsequent events. The doctrine is there in Scripture without needing to relocate the day of the Lord on the prophetic calendar to create a proof text.

Sons of Light — Sons of Day

Verse 4 addresses the brethren directly: *ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief*. There is a contrast between those who are in the world's darkness and those who have been constituted in an entirely different sphere. Verse 5 then presses the positive side: *ye are all sons of light and sons of day*. Darby preserves this rendering, and it is significant — sons rather than children gives the thought of dignity and position. We have a standing as those who belong to the light, as those who belong to the coming day of Christ's glory.

There is a distinction between light and day, though they are closely related. Light speaks of what we dwell in now — we are light in the Lord, as Ephesians 5 says. Day looks ahead to the day of Christ, the day when the saints will be displayed in glory with Him, which is distinct from the day of the Lord in its governmental judgment aspect. We are already morally constituted of both. That is our character, our nature as those who belong to Him. When Judas went out, John records simply: *and it was night*. That was not merely a note about the hour — it was a moral statement about the character of what he was going into. And here: *we are not of night, nor of darkness*. It is a statement about character and nature, not just circumstance.

Let Us Not Sleep — Let Us Watch and Be Sober

The exhortations of verses 6 through 8 are founded on this positional truth. Because we are sons of light and sons of day, because we are not of night or darkness, certain conduct follows from that by necessity. Let us not sleep as the rest do. Let us watch and be sober.

A sleeping person is not thinking about the Lord. Indifferent to what is due to Christ, the soul is shut down — morally unresponsive to the things that matter. This corresponds to the sad state of Laodicea in Revelation 3: lukewarmness, indifference, the soul not engaged with Christ. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus are a helpful illustration. They were physically awake, walking, learning from the scriptures as He spoke. Their hearts burned within them. And yet they were asleep to the most important thing they could have been awake to — the presence of the risen Lord walking with them. The eyes are opened not by more information but by the soul being genuinely alive to Him.

The drunken person offers a parallel to the sleeping one: both are creatures of the night in verse 7, both are incapable of sober thoughts about the Lord. The drinking person is awake but disqualified from clear thought about the things of Christ by the unchecked, unjudged emotions that have taken over. Sobriety is the capacity to think clearly about what is real and what is due to God.

Faith, Love, and Hope — The Armour

Verse 8 returns to the three great things of 1 Thessalonians 1:3 — the work of faith, the labour of love, the patience of hope — now presented as armour. The breastplate is faith and love together, guarding the heart where affections and will reside. The helmet is the hope of salvation, guarding the mind and the thoughts. What we hope for shapes how we think. A proper Christian hope — looking for the Son from heaven at any moment — cuts off the drift into earthly preoccupations, into politics and fads and the enthusiasms of this world. If one is genuinely expecting the Lord at any moment, one cannot at heart be an

earth-dweller.

The hope of salvation here speaks not of uncertainty about being saved but of the completion of our salvation — when not only our spirits and souls but our bodies are caught up to be with the Lord Jesus. The resurrection of the body is in view. As Paul writes in Philippians 3, we await the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour — to transform the body of humiliation into conformity with the body of His glory. That is the hope set before us.

Appointed Not to Wrath — But to Salvation

Verse 9 is plain: *God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ*. There is no corresponding verse in Scripture that appoints any person to eternal wrath — reprobation is always subsequent to light refused and sin persisted in, never the prior determining cause. The sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, and because of that the hearts of men are fully set on them to do evil; but God's judgment follows, it does not originate, the moral state that brought it on. What is appointed to the saints is here: salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. Here, sleeping returns to its earlier sense — the body lying in death as in chapter 4. Whether still alive when He comes or already departed to be with Him, both classes of saints will live together with Him. Not one of His will be missing. God's thought for us is fellowship — *live together with him*. That expression is deliberately chosen: it is not merely that we shall be near Him, but that we shall live together with Him. And that is what we were gathered together here for — learning to be together with one another while we wait for the One with whom we shall live together forever.

— *Study ends* —