**1 Thessalonians 5:4-8**

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**A Call to Spiritual Alertness**

***4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; 5 for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; 6 so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. 7 For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. 8 But 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.***

* In my message last week I presented Paul’s teaching on the signs that will precede the coming of ***the day of the Lord***.
	+ As Paul says here in 1 Thessalonians 5:3, the prominent sign of the coming of ***the day of the Lord*** will be ***when they* . . . the unbelieving world . . . *are saying “Peace and safety!” then destruction will come upon them suddenly like upon a woman with child, and they will not escape***.
	+ I also explained that in his second letter to the Thessalonians, in 2:1-3, that two events will immediately precede ***the day of the Lord***. Those 2 events are ***the departure* of the church at the rapture and *the man of lawlessness* . . . the Antichrist . . . *is revealed.***

slide 2

**The condition of the world when God’s wrath comes upon them**

***1 Thessalonians 5:2-3— 2 For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. 3 While 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.***

* Here in 1 Thessalonians 5 Paul employs very vivid imagery in describing the unbelieving world as being oblivious to the **destruction** that is about to fall upon them.
	+ In v. 2 Paul first describes how ***the day of the Lord*** ***will*** ***come just like a thief in the night*** . . . how the world will be totally unprepared for what comes upon them.
	+ Then, in v. 3, Paul describes what the world’s attitude is at the moment their destruction begins . . . ***while 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.***
* The world will be totally oblivious to spiritual things and the events that ***come upon them suddenly***.
	+ And not only will the world be oblivious to spiritual things, they will be actively opposing any attempts to warn them of the destruction that is about to come upon them. They are immersed in their sin and they don’t want anyone or anything to dissuade them from the enjoyment of and exercise of their depravity.

**The condition of believers in the time leading up to “the departure”**

slide 3

***1 Thessalonians 5:4— But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief***

* But then, having stated the condition of the world in the days preceding ***the coming of the day of the Lord***, beginning in v. 4 Paul exhorts the Thessalonian church with a description of the condition of believers in the time leading up to “the departure” of the church at the rapture.
	+ Paul begins by stating in v. 4 . . . ***but you, brethren,* [unlike the unbelieving world] *are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief***.
* Here in v. 4 Paul is correlating the attitude of the unbelieving world that is saying ***peace and safety!*** to that of being ***in* spiritual *darkness*** as they are ***overtaken*** by the events of ***the day of the Lord like a thief***.
	+ The implication of the statement in v. 4 is **that is exactly what happens to the unbelieving world . . . the day of the Lord overtakes them like a thief.**
* The word Paul uses here in v. 4 to describe the coming of ***the day of the Lord*** is very appropriate. Paul uses the word ***overtake*** to describe how ***the day of the Lord*** begins.

slide 4

* + The word ***overtake*** (Gr. *katalambanō*—#2638) means “to seize or take possession of.” It is the word that is used to describe how a demon ***overtakes*** . . . **overwhelms** . . . an unbeliever to possess them and torment them.
	+ What an appropriate word! ***The day of the Lord*** will, likewise, seize the unbelieving world and not allow them to escape as God’s wrath is poured out upon them.
* Paul’s point in v. 4 is that **brethren, this will not happen to you.** Paul exhorts them that ***brethren, you are not in darkness***. **Therefore, *the day* of the Lord will not *overtake you like a thief.***

**A Common Biblical Theme**

slide 5

***1 Thessalonians 5:5— for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness***

* Then, having declared that, unlike the unsuspecting world, believers will not be ***overtaken*** by God’s wrath, in v. 5 Paul employs a metaphor that is found throughout Scripture . . . the picture of one’s spiritual condition as being either ***light or darkness***.
	+ In v. 5 Paul states, ***for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness.***
* Notice in v. 5 that Paul does not merely say that the Thessalonians were ***in the light*** and ***in the day***. Paul describes them as ***sons of light and sons of day***.
	+ Here, in describing the Thessalonians as ***sons of light and sons of day*** Paul is employing a common Hebrew idiom.
	+ The term ***son of*** was a Hebrew term of intimacy that signified “belonging to.” Just as the Jews declare that they are ***sons of Abraham***, so Paul describes how Christians are ***sons of light and sons of day*** . . . terms that are synonymous with **belonging to Him who is the light.**
	+ The terms ***sons of light and sons of day*** is a two-fold statement of our position and inheritance as children of God.
* On the other hand, in v. 5 Paul describes the unbelieving world as being ***of night*** and ***of darkness***.
	+ ***Darkness*** is emblematic of the condition of the moral and spiritual estrangement and ignorance of the unredeemed. ***Darkness*** has penetrated their hearts and minds, blinding them to spiritual realities and making them oblivious to impending judgment.
* The metaphor and theme of ***light and darkness*** appear throughout Scripture in describing those who know God and those who remain in unbelief. We see this stark contrast made in both the Old and the New Testament. For example, through the book of Job we see this contrast as Job reveals that he well-understood the significance of darkness in the hearts of men. In Job 12:25 Job describes how unbelievers live . . .

slide 6

***Job 12:25— "They grope in darkness with no light . . .”***

* + What a sad existence it is for men and women to live their lives groping in the darkness, deluded into thinking they have light, when in fact it is their eyes playing tricks on them.
	+ The self-delusion of unbelievers is seen in Isaiah statement in Isaiah 5:20 . . .

***Isaiah 5:20— Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!***

* In Proverbs 2:13 Solomon describes the ways of those who are in darkness . . .

***Proverbs 2:13— those who leave the paths of uprightness walk in the ways of darkness;***

* Notice in both of Paul’s letters to his dear friends in Thessalonica that Paul exhorts them by reminding them that they are ***sons of light and sons of day***.
	+ Paul knew these people well and knew them to be true believers. But in other letters Paul has to remind his readers of what they have been saved from, so that they will not be drawn back into their former ways of life.
	+ In Ephesians 5:8 Paul reminds the Ephesian brethren . . .

***Ephesians 5:8— 8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light.***  A few verses later Paul exhorts them . . . ***11 Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness . . .***

slide 7

* + In his letter to the Colossians . . . a congregation he probably knew very little about . . . Paul exhorts them in Colossians 1:13 . . .

***Colossians 1:13— For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,***

* Paul’s statements here in Ephesians 5:8 and Colossians 1:13 are important verses for us to keep in mind, lest we become too full of ourselves.
	+ The only difference between those poor souls that are, as yet, unsaved, is the fact that **God chose to rescue us from the domain of darkness.**
	+ Notice in Colossians 1:13 that Paul does not say that **“you rescued yourselves from the domain of darkness.” No! Paul correctly states that God rescued each of us from the domain of darkness**. And if God had not chosen to rescue each of us, we would be in darkness this very day.
* So, when Paul reminds the Thessalonians in v. 5 that ***you are all sons of light and sons of day*** and ***not of night nor of darkness***, we should fall to our knees in gratitude and worship for this infinite gift of grace. For without God’s grace, we would be in ***darkness***.

slide 8

**v. 6-8— A Two-Fold Response To Paul’s Exhortation**

***1 Thessalonians 5:6— 6 so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.***

* Then, having exhorted and reminded his readers that they were ***sons of light and sons of day***, in v. 6-8 Paul proceeds to instruct us on the proper two-fold response to what he has just said.
* **The first response** to what Paul has just said in v. 5 is **an exhortation to watchfulness**. In v. 6 Paul states . . .***so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.***
* Here in v. 6 Paul presents both **a negative and a positive**.
	+ He begins with the negative exhortation . . . ***so then let us not sleep as others do*** . . .

slide 9

* + The word ***sleep*** (Gr. *katheudō*—#2518) is used here, metaphorically, to means **“to be** **indifferent to spiritual things.”**
* And notice here in v. 6 that Paul uses the first person plural pronoun, ***us***, in this exhortation. In other words, Paul is including himself, Silas and Timothy in this instruction.
	+ This is an important statement by Paul to include himself in this instruction to ***let us not sleep as others do***.
	+ As D. Edmond Hiebert states, *“in saying* ***let us****, the writers unite themselves with the readers in warning against yielding to this danger. They, too, stood in need of the warning. Even superior spiritual attainments do not provide immunity against lethargy.”*
	+ Inclusion of themselves in such instruction is frequently found in the New Testament epistles. It demonstrates the degree to which every Christ must strive . . . every day . . . to live a life of godliness and obedience. To let your spiritual guard down only invites trouble.
* An interpretive question also emerges in v. 6. When Paul says, ***let us not sleep as others do***, who are the ***others*** that Paul is referring to?
	+ While some might see this as a warning or rebuke to those Christians who do become indifferent to spiritual things, the context of the passage seems more logically to see the ***others*** as those who are ***of night and of darkness***. In other words, this is a contrast between believers, who are exhorted to remain spiritually awake and unbelievers who are insensitive and indifferent to spiritual things.
* Then, having begun with a negative exhortation to ***not sleep as others do***, in the second part of v. 6 Paul adds the two-fold positive instruction . . . ***but let us be alert and sober.***

slide 10

* + The word ***alert*** (Gr. *grēgoreuō*—#1127) is the opposite of ***asleep***. To be ***alert*** is to be “attentive” and “to give strict attention to.” The picture is of a guard standing his post, on the alert for any sign of an enemy invader.
* And what are we to be ***alert*** to? What are we watching for?
	+ In the context of this section of instruction, Paul is instructing Christians to be ***alert*** to both to the present dangers of daily life and, from the context of this passage, **to the imminent return of the Lord**.
	+ As Paul exhorts the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 1:7, there were to be . . .

slide 11

***1 Corinthians 1:7— . . . awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ***

* + And as Paul exhorts in Titus 2:13, we are to be . . .

***Titus 2:13— looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus***

* + And as the writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews 9:28 . . .

***Hebrews 9:28— so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.***

* While we all have a daily battle against sin and darkness, we should remember to constantly be looking for ***the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.***
* And, in addition to our ***alertness*** to the return of the Lord, in the second positive exhortation in v. 6 Paul exhorts us to **be *sober***.
	+ While freedom from alcohol intoxication is desirable, that is not the meaning of ***sober*** (Gr. *nēphō*—#3525). The word ***sober*** refers to the calm and watchful spirit that is constantly clear-headed and in readiness to deal with whatever adversity may present to us.

slide 12

**Things those who are *“of darkness and of night”* do**

***1 Thessalonians 5:7— For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night.***

* Then, for the sake of emphasis and comparison, in v. 7 Paul then adds, ***for those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night.***
* Paul’s point, here in v. 7, is that **just as sleep is a natural occurrence in men, indifference to God is also a natural occurrence to unregenerate men who are perpetually in a state of spiritual sleep, regardless of the time of day.**
* And just as Christians are called **to be alert and sober**, it is the normal condition of unregenerate to be the opposite in regard to spiritual matters. **Instead of being *alert and sober*, unregenerate men, who are *of darkness and of night*, are spiritually *asleep and drunk***

slide 13

**The second response—a call to be spiritually “sober”**

***1 Thessalonians 5:8— But 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.***

* Then, after having first exhorted his readers in v. 6 to ***be alert and sober***, in v. 8 Paul elaborates on what it means to be spiritually ***sober*** . . . ***But 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.***
* Here in v. 8 Paul instructs us that ***since we are of the day*** . . . since we are children of God . . . the manner in which we are to ***be sober*** is by putting on the spiritual armor of God.
* Remember, this is the second of Paul’s 13 epistles, written around 51-52 A.D. It would be almost 10 years before Paul would write his great and classic instruction to the Ephesians regarding ***the full armor of God***.
	+ Here in 1 Thessalonians 5:8 Paul instructs us on two primary pieces of our spiritual armor . . . ***the breastplate of faith and love*** and ***the helmet of the hope of salvation***.
* In fact, here in this early letter of Paul we find what will later become **2 of his classic subjects of Christian instruction.**

slide 14

* + **The first classic subject** of the Christian triumvirate of ***faith, hope and love*** was previous introduced in 1 Thessalonians 1:3. Five years later it would become the classic passage found in 1 Corinthians 13.
	+ **The second classic passage** of Christian instruction on the subject of **spiritual warfare and the spiritual armor of God** is found in Ephesians 6:10-17.
	+ Here, in this early letter of Paul, we see these two classic Christian themes combined.
* And though Paul would expound upon these themes in greater detail in his future letters, here in 1 Thessalonians 5:8 we see the foundation of those themes. Notice how Paul combines them . . .

slide 15

* + Using the imagery of the Roman soldier’s battle attire, here in v. 8 Paul describes how just as ***the breastplate*** of a soldier protects his heart, so ***the breastplate*** of God’s armor protects the hearts of God’s children.
* As we learned back in our examination of **the three great Christian virtues** back in 1 Thessalonians 1:3, ***faith*** is **the Christian’s vertical relationship with God** as a result of God’s saving grace in the life of every believer.
	+ And it is **based upon** the ***faith*** that we have received from God that our hearts go out to fellow brethren in **horizontal acts of *love*** for their benefit.

* Paul’s point here in v. 8 is that God’s spiritual armor . . . ***the breastplate of faith and love*** . . . is what protects our hearts from spiritual attack so that our ***faith and love*** aren’t mortally wounded when we are spiritually attacked.
	+ The ***breastplate of faith and love*** are God’s gift to each of us to protect our hearts. Without this God-given piece of spiritual armor, we would easily be wounded and killed by Satan’s attacks.
* The second piece of spiritual armor described in v. 8 is ***the helmet of the hope of salvation***.
	+ Just as ***the breastplate*** protects the heart, ***the helmet of the hope of salvation*** protects the head.
	+ The implication of Paul’s statement in v. 8 is that **without the helmet of the hope of salvation, we would be in danger of losing hope without it.**
	+ Remember, **hope is the confident expectation in the thing hoped for.** In the case of Christians, our confident expectation is in God’s promise of eternal life in heaven with Him.
	+ Our Christian hope . . . our confident expectation . . . is in the knowledge and certainty that God will certainly fulfill that promise of eternal life that He has made to every person whom He has chosen to receive faith in Jesus Christ as his or her Lord and Savior.
	+ And it is ***the helmet of the hope of salvation*** that supernaturally protects our heads so that we do not waver in our ***faith*** and **lose *hope***.
* It is because we are equipped with these two important pieces of Christian armor that we are then able to ***be sober***, as Paul instructs us here in v. 8.
	+ Remember, I defined ***sober*** as the calm and watchful spirit that is constantly clear-headed and in readiness to deal with whatever adversity may present to us.
	+ And as Paul describes in v. 8, we are equipped to remain ***sober*** by our possession and use of ***the breastplate of faith and love*** and ***the helmet of the hope of salvation***.
	+ If we put on these God-given pieces of spiritual armor, we can have confidence that we will be spiritually protected from whatever attacks we may come under.
* But listen again to the statement I just made and note that it is conditional . . . **if we put on these God-given pieces of spiritual armor, we can have confidence that we will be spiritually protected from whatever attacks we may come under.**
	+ The condition upon which we receive protection by the armor of God is that **we must put it on**.
	+ In v. 8, when Paul states ***let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation***, Paul uses the middle voice verb, ***having put on***.

slide 16

* In the Greek language the **middle voice** describes action that we take for our own benefit.
	+ So, when Paul instructs to ***be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation***, we can only have confidence that we will remain clear-headed and in readiness to deal with adversity **if we put on the protective armor God has provided to each of us**.
	+ The implication of this statement is clear . . . we are protected and able to remain clear-headed and in spiritual readiness **if we put on the armor**. But, **if we don’t put it on**, we are at risk of not being ***alert and sober*** when adversity comes upon us.
* But for as beneficial as God’s protective armor is for us, we all know that we have ups and downs . . . good days and bad days . . . periods of obedience and disobedience.
	+ But because we are armed with the knowledge that God provides us with protective armor, we know that in those times when we are being wayward that God has provided the armor that strengthens and protects us.
* Here in 1 Thessalonians 5 the apostle Paul is exhorting his Thessalonian readers to be looking for **the coming of** ***the Lord*** . . . that they had not missed the Lord’s return for the church.
	+ And the reason they could know that ***the day of the Lord*** had not begun is because the Lord had not yet returned for the church and ***the man of lawlessness*** had not yet been revealed.
* But while the world lives in spiritual darkness and unbelief, Paul exhorts us with the statement that ***since we are of the day, let us be sober* . . . let us be vigilant and ready . . . *having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.***