

¹ Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. ² For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

The times and seasons to which Paul is speaking is a continuation of the previous chapter, our gathering together to Christ, meeting him in the air (4:17ⁱ). The Thessalonian church had been concerned about some among them who had died. They wondered what would happen to the dead when the Lord came to take us home. Paul assured them their bodies would rise and meet their souls in the air even before the living. Throughout Paul's letters we are taught that we are united in Christ by faith. If He died and rose, we also die with him to our old nature and will be raised as He was raised (1 Corinthians 6:14ⁱⁱ; 2 Corinthians 4:14ⁱⁱⁱ). Our hope is based on Jesus' death and resurrection. Chapter five continues the same theme of Christ's coming, but the emphasis is on what to expect and how to live in preparation for that day.

Paul calls it the day of the Lord in the next verse. That connects it with numerous Old Testament passages regarding judgment of the wicked (Zephaniah 1:14-16^{iv}; Joel 2:31^v). Paul uses the Old Testament "day of YHWH" and changes it to "the day of the Lord", which refers to Christ Jesus. The *perusia* translated as "appearing" was used in the Roman world regarding a dignitary's visit to a city. The crowds would go out to welcome him. In some cases, arriving in the city, the dignitary would pronounce judgment on criminals. That seems to be the pattern he is referring to. We will meet the Lord in the air, and after the vials of wrath are poured out on the earth, return with Him to Armageddon (Jude 14^{vi}; Revelation 19:13-16^{vii}).

Putting our resurrection at the beginning of the day of the Lord means that we will rise before the judgment is poured out. The Hebrew word "day" can mean one's life, a single day, or a period of time. Those who hold to a pretribulation rapture view believe the rapture is the beginning of the last seven years of tribulation. (See MacArthur's reasons in his commentary on this passage.^{viii}) Others see this as the mid-point of the tribulation with the vials of wrath being poured out during the last three and a half years (Revelation 14:14-16^{ix}). Still others see this happening at the very end of the seven years. The best advice I have received as to how we should view this is to always live as if the Lord's return was any moment. That will give us the proper mindset of always being about the Lord's business. This does not mean to drive oneself and avoid any of life's pleasures (1 Timothy 6:17^x); God is not a hard taskmaster. Rather we should always be attentive to the Holy Spirit's direction and conviction for our good and God's glory. If the Lord returns today, I do not want to have regrets that I left things undone because I was living selfishly and ignoring God's leading and call on my life.

The day will come like a thief in the night, which means when the world is least expecting it. Thieves do not come in broad daylight. They want to enter when the homeowner is asleep to catch him unaware. We cannot foreknow the exact time, but we should be spiritually prepared and expectant. The point Paul is about to emphasize is that we are not to be spiritually sleeping. Jesus emphasized this in one of the letters in Revelation. To the church in Sardis he said, *³ Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.* Revelation 3:3 To those who are

spiritually awake his coming will be welcome. He will *come against* those who are spiritually asleep. Jesus told the disciples that it was not for them to know the times and seasons that the Father had appointed (Acts 1:7^{xi}). These words carry the same sense of his coming being somewhat of a surprise. The church has always throughout its history awaited the Lord's return. During times of war and seeing prophecies fulfilled many have predicted times that have come and gone. The point is not to figure out when Jesus will return, but rather to live awake and always expecting his return. He may come for you or me today. Not everyone dies a slow natural death. But however we pass or if we remain until Jesus coming, we should be vigilant, keeping our old nature in check, keeping in step with the Spirit, and growing in sanctification (4:3^{xii}; Galatians 5:25^{xiii}).

³ *While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.* 1 Thessalonians 5:3 Paul is giving three descriptions about that coming day. It comes like a thief in the night, when people are saying peace and safety, and similar to contractions coming to a pregnant woman. The first two seem to indicate a time that is unexpected while the last is certainly expected, though the timing is not specifically known. All three prompt us to be prepared regardless of what the conditions seem to be.

Rome often declared peace and security over regions they had conquered or made alliances with. There are numerous inscriptions of the phrase. "When people say," may be Paul referring to those Roman declarations of peace and safety. He must have thought how hollow that sounded, knowing the day of the Lord would come. The worldly counterfeit of peace and safety was first called out by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 6:14^{xiv}).

With the bombing of Iran's nuclear facilities many are saying peace and safety. The sponsor of terrorist organizations seems to be neutralized for the time being. America boasted of its military might. But should we not boast in the Lord? If we boast of our power as a nation, we have made our power an idol. I am not making an issue of right or wrong regarding the bombing, but one of where our trust is placed (Psalm 118:8^{xv}).

So many people have made predictions of when the Lord will return. Even when the date comes and goes they simply recalculate and sell another million books. Paul's point is not that we look for those signs and then prepare, but realize we cannot know our last day, so we should *always* be prepared by living in Christ and letting him live through us. That is the topic of the following verses.

⁴ *But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief.*
⁵ *For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.* 1 Thessalonians 5:4,5 4,5 "But you brothers," is contrasted with "people say" in verse 3. The unbelievers think all is well, but they are in darkness. The "brothers," a term for all believers, are in the light. We will be prepared for that thief in the night. We do so by walking in the Spirit (Ephesians 5:8^{xvi}). Jesus told his followers that they are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14^{xvii}). That is because the Light of the world is living in us. This does not mean we will know the day or the hour, but rather that we will be ready and with anticipation expecting Jesus' return. Does that describe your life? Or are you more like the Romans, just hoping for peace and safety so you can enjoy this present life and what the world offers?

The Scriptures in Old and New Testaments use the metaphor of light for goodness and darkness for evil. Paul elaborates on the meaning of light and dark by adding that we

are children of the light and children of the day. In Christ we leave the darkness of our old nature and walk in the light as He is in the light (1 John 1:7^{xviii}). We want our sins exposed so that we can forsake them. We have nothing to hide. We do not cling to pride but humbly accept the grace of God and know He alone is the author of our salvation.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he used the same metaphor with added descriptions. ⁸ *for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light* ⁹ *(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true),* ¹⁰ *and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.* ¹¹ *Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.* ¹² *For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.* ¹³ *But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible,* ¹⁴ *for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."* Ephesians 5:8-14 Jesus used the same expressions. ¹⁹ *And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.* ²⁰ *For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.* ²¹ *But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."* John 3:19-21 The shameful, unfruitful works of darkness offer transient pleasures to the flesh, but what is that compared to eternal bliss in the presence of Jesus (Hebrews 11:25^{xix})?

Several centuries before Paul, Euripides, the Greek author of many plays, wrote the phrase "Night is the time for thieves, daylight is time for truth." As the Holy Spirit resides in every believer, we will be uncomfortable when tempted to participate in the deeds of darkness. We are out of place in the night of worldliness. When the day of the Lord dawns, we will welcome it and not turn back like Lot's wife. (Philippians 1:23^{xx}; Luke 17:32^{xxi}). She turned back to look at that which her heart was set upon.

⁶ *So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.* 1 Thessalonians 5:6 "So then," because we are children of the light and children of the day, stay awake. Paul expands the metaphor. During the day we are awake. Children of the light, those in whom is the light of Christ, must stay spiritually alert. The world is sleepwalking through life, ignoring all that is before them, such as the truth of the fallen nature of man, the overwhelming evidence in nature of a Creator, the archeological, historical, and mathematical accuracy of the Bible, transformed lives, miracles, and their own propensity toward the darkness. Sleepwalking through life is ignoring the most important issues that relate to our own souls and our relationship with God.

Keep awake! We are to live with a continual awareness of Immanuel, God with us. The world can lull us to sleep if we give in to our old nature. That is why we must crucify it every day and choose to live in a way that is pleasing to God (Romans 8:13^{xxii}). We must recognize the promises of the world are only partially true. They never reveal the cost in this life or in eternity.

Be sober! To sleep spiritually is to be indifferent toward the evidence of our condition and need of God and ignoring the conviction of the Holy Spirit. To be spiritually drunken is to intentionally rebel against all that is right and reasonable. It is to be reckless in the way one lives. The word translated as sober can also be translated as "self-control," which is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23^{xxiii}).

⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night.

1 Thessalonians 5:7 Paul reiterates this metaphor to drive home the spiritual picture he is presenting. Those who ignore the gospel are in darkness and stumbling around in indifference or profligate living. Go to any major city and what you will find in the night will illustrate this. Some things never change because the heart of man is the same.

Did Paul have access to the Gospel of Mark or was the Spirit faithfully relaying the same message to Paul? Here is how Jesus said what Paul is conveying. *³³ Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴ It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. ³⁵ Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning— ³⁶ lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. ³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.*” Mark 13:33-37 Jesus was addressing being ready for the day of the Lord, which is what Paul was addressing. Paul’s emphasis is the Christian’s identity. We should stay awake to the spiritual war all around us because we are children of the day.

⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. 1 Thessalonians 5:8 We belong to the day, so be sober or self-disciplined. God has chosen us. That is implied in belonging. He called us out of darkness and into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9^{xxiv}). We are his children and so we should act like it. The Christian life is freedom from the Laws of Moses, but it is also disciplined to live in a way that glorifies God.

The Pharisees of the first century wore special robes that set them apart. People were not to touch them as they might be unclean and contaminate the holy Pharisee. At least that was the way they saw it. We are to have special clothes too, holy spiritual clothing of righteous behavior. But our breastplate invites seekers in while protecting us from the arrows of our enemies. It is a breastplate of faith and love. We saw faith, hope, and love at the beginning of the letter (1:3^{xxv}). We think of the expression in 1 Corinthians 13:13^{xxvi} where we see the same trio of words described as things that will remain. They are essentials of the Christian life.

In Ephesians 6^{xxvii} the breastplate is righteousness and the shield is faith. The breastplate, like the shield, is defensive. Words of criticism and doubts are like arrows shot at us. Our faith stops them from harming us. Love never fails (1 Corinthians 13:8^{xxviii}). Instead of responding in kind, we conquer with the love of God.

On our head is the helmet that is the hope of salvation. We have the hope of Christ’s return and the glory that will follow. **What a family reunion is promised us on that day!** No matter how dark this world or how many attacks we face, we have this unshakable hope in what is to come. We know we will not be condemned with the world because our Savior has paid our ransom and claimed us as his bride.

Beale argues that (the use of the aorist participle endysamenoi) the Greek in 5:8 “indicates not that believers make their own efforts to put on armor; but that as ‘sons of light’ they have already been clothed with the armor. That is, although Christians have been clothed with the armor of faith, love and hope in Christ (as 1:3 affirms) they need to grow in these virtues and in their identification with Christ.”^{xxix} However other Pauline passages tell us that we must put the armor on (Romans 13:13,14^{xxx}; Ephesians 4:24^{xxxi},

6:11^{xxxii}). We should see these graces as ours in Christ but also the need to increasingly apply them in the situations we face.

⁹ *For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,* ¹⁰ *who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.* 1 Thessalonians 5:9,10 Once again Paul reassures them that whether we live to the coming of Christ or die first, our salvation is secure. We will not face the wrath of God upon the wicked. We belong to Jesus. He became as human as we are yet without sin, died and rose from death, that we might be in him and He in us which makes us new creations who truly live (2 Corinthians 5:17^{xxxiii}). We live awake to the things of God, as children of the day, not falling for the world's dark seduction. Realizing our life is short and we will soon meet the Lord in the air, we are sober, self-disciplined by the power of the Holy Spirit. Our destiny is eternal life with our Savior. Whether we die before the Lord comes or are still living, the salvation that is ours in Christ assures us that we will live together with him!

¹¹ *Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.* 1 Thessalonians 5:11 Because our destiny is secure and our reward is to ever be with our Savior, we are to encourage one another and build one another up. We all need encouragement. We all need to be built up, which is to increasingly stand in faith on God's Word. We all need our minds to be continually renewed (Romans 12:2^{xxxiv}). Our motivation for helping others in this way is that it is pleasing to our Lord and what we sow we will reap (Galatians 6:7,8^{xxxv}). That will help us endure to the end.

Lloyd Ogilvie wrote that *"the most devastating word Jesus ever spoke about anyone was, "They have their reward." There was no place to grow. They were dead before their time. The reward of human acclaim and recognition is a reward that precludes the need for the only satisfying reward: relationship with God, eternal life now and forever."*^{xxxvi} May God help us to never be satisfied with anything less than Jesus!

Our passage today has encouraged us to live in a way that is worthy of God, walking in the light, to put on the breastplate of faith and love along with the helmet of the hope of salvation. We should not fear death and not grieve as others do at the death of a loved one who was in Christ. We know that family reunion in the sky is coming. The passing of our loved ones is not goodbye but "see you soon in glory." What a day of rejoicing that will be!

Questions:

- 1 What is the connection between chapters 4 and 5?
- 2 How is the day of the Lord viewed in the Old Testament?
- 3 What are the three descriptions of the coming of the day of the Lord?
- 4 How do we stay prepared for the Lord's return?
- 5 Review the two quotations about light.
- 6 Elaborate on the two commands in verse 6.
- 7 Compare Mark 13:33-37 with this passage.
- 8 What does verse 8 tell us that we wear?
- 9 Why is Jesus' return for us a family reunion?
- 10 What does verse 10 declare to be the purpose of Jesus' death?

ⁱ **1 Thessalonians 4:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

ⁱⁱ **1 Corinthians 6:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.

ⁱⁱⁱ **2 Corinthians 4:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.

^{iv} **Zephaniah 1:14-16 (ESV)**

¹⁴ The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there.

¹⁵ A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness,

¹⁶ a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements.

^v **Joel 2:31 (ESV)**

³¹ The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.

^{vi} **Jude 1:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones,

^{vii} **Revelation 19:13-16 (ESV)**

¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵ From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

^{viii} ^{viii} John F. MacArthur Jr., *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 2002), 135.

^{ix} **Revelation 14:14-16 (ESV)**

¹⁴ Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. ¹⁵ And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, “Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.” ¹⁶ So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped.

^x **1 Timothy 6:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

^{xi} **Acts 1:7 (ESV)**

⁷ He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.

^{xii} **1 Thessalonians 4:3 (ESV)**

³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality;

^{xiii} **Galatians 5:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

^{xiv} **Jeremiah 6:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace.

^{xv} **Psalms 118:8 (KJV)**

⁸ *It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man.*

^{xvi} **Ephesians 5:8 (ESV)**

⁸ for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light

^{xvii} **Matthew 5:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.

^{xviii} **1 John 1:7 (ESV)**

⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

^{xix} **Hebrews 11:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

^{xx} **Philippians 1:23 (ESV)**

²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

^{xxi} **Luke 17:32 (ESV)**

³² Remember Lot's wife.

^{xxii} **Romans 8:13 (ESV)**

¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

^{xxiii} **Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)**

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

^{xxiv} **1 Peter 2:9 (ESV)**

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

^{xxv} **1 Thessalonians 1:3 (ESV)**

³ remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

^{xxvi} **1 Corinthians 13:13 (ESV)**

¹³ So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

^{xxvii} **Ephesians 6:14-17 (ESV)**

¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,

^{xxviii} **1 Corinthians 13:8 (ESV)**

⁸ Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.

^{xxix} Ben Witherington III, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 150

^{xxx} **Romans 13:13-14 (ESV)**

¹³ Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

^{xxxi} **Ephesians 4:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

^{xxxii} **Ephesians 6:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

^{xxxiii} **2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

^{xxxiv} **Romans 12:2 (ESV)**

² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

^{xxxv} **Galatians 6:7-8 (ESV)**

⁷ Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

^{xxxvi} Lloyd Ogilvie, *The Autobiography of God*, p. 197-198