

Living a Watchful Life 1 Thessalonians 5

1 Thessalonians 5 Introduction

We've been speaking a lot about the Rapture of the Church which ends the Church Age. We've also touched on the period of judgment to follow – a time of God's wrath.

The main question before us now is:

How should we live in light of the coming fulfillment of these prophesied end times events?

The Answer:

Our life should reveal a heart and a mind that are consistently and spiritually alert.

We'll divide the chapter into two parts:

The Coming Day of the Lord 5:1-11

The Present Life of Believers 5:12-28

The Coming Day of the Lord 5:1-11

Definition (also "Last Days" or "In that Day"):

- An OT concept brought into the NT of a future period of time when God will directly intervene in human affairs.
- In the OT the Day of the Lord can encompass the entire time from the seven-year Tribulation through the Second Coming to the end of the Millennium and the creation of the New Heavens and the New Earth.
- In this context Paul seems to be referring specifically to the coming Tribulation – a time of God's wrath.

Two Key Parallel Passages about this future time:

- **Daniel 9:24-27** helps clarify it as 7 years in length.
- **Revelation 6** shows us that although it begins peacefully, havoc breaks out shortly thereafter and continues unabated. People will even perceive it as the day of Christ's wrath. If we were to read through to Revelation 19 we would see that severe turmoil continues until the Second Coming of Christ.

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Contrasts between the Church and the Lost:

- Sudden destruction comes upon *them*, not upon *us*.
- **"Labor pains"** was a term used by ancient rabbis of the travails preceding the founding of the messianic age. (Also see Jesus in Matt. 24:8)
- *We* are of the light and the day, not of the darkness or the night.
- *We* are to watch and be sober, well-armed against spiritual attack.
- *They* have been lulled into a sense of delusional complacency, unaware that destruction is coming.
- The word translated *sleep* here is a different one from that used in 4:13 & 15 referring to "the dead in Christ." Paul changes words here only for clarity. The "sleep" is figurative in both cases.
- 5:9 *We* are not appointed to wrath, but to obtain salvation through Jesus Christ who died for us.

- 5:10 We are appointed to live together with Him whether we wake or sleep.

What does Paul mean by “whether we wake or sleep?”

- Is it “whether we are alive or dead” as in Chapter 4?
- Or is it “spiritually watchful or lazy” as here in Ch. 5?
- The word for *sleep* used here is the same one used in **5:6 & 7** rather than the one in **4:13 & 15**. Thus, “spiritually watchful or lazy” is acceptable.
- If so, this would mean **5:9-11** also points to a future, sudden, Pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Church.

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The Present Life of Believers 5:12-28

- 5:12-13 **Those who labor in ministry should be treated with respect.**
- The nature of their work requires them to do good to others and have the spiritual growth and welfare of others in mind.

When leaders take these responsibilities seriously and the people are supportive, standing with them in this work, the end result will be for the eternal benefit of each believer in each local assembly.

- 5:14 **All Christians have these four duties toward one another.**
- The **unruly (lazy or idle)** need to be warned.
- The **fainthearted (timid, lit. “little-souled”)** need to be comforted or encouraged.
- The **weak** need to be upheld. See **Romans 15:1**.

Rom 15-1 NKJV *We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.*

- **Everyone needs patience.** We can all try one another’s patience to some degree from time to time.
- 5:15 **We should always be looking out for one another’s good – regardless of how others have treated us in the past.**
- See also what Paul says in **Romans 12:17-21**.

Rom 12:17-21 NKJV ¹⁷Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. ¹⁸If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. ¹⁹Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,”^ε says the Lord.

²⁰Therefore

“If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

If he is thirsty, give him a drink;

For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.”

²¹*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

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- 5:16-18 **This is the will of God for every Christian:**
- 5:16 rejoice
- 5:17 pray
- 5:18 give thanks
- That would all be easy enough to take, but let's not forget to add the modifiers.

- 5:16-18 Once again, **This is the will of God for every Christian** given to us in an imperative or command form. We are supposed to do this:
- 5:16 rejoice **always**
- 5:17 pray **without ceasing**
- 5:18 **in everything** give thanks
- These things alone will go a long way to putting us in the very center of God's will.

- 5:19 **We shouldn't quench the Spirit.**
- In a relatively new and growing church such as that in Thessalonica, some might be trying to exercise their spiritual gifts in careless or immature ways.
- The wrong response is to quench or stifle the Holy Spirit's work in these younger believers' lives.
- The right response is to guide them into a proper exercise of their gifts, tempered by love, respect for others and self-control.

- 5:20 **We should take prophecy seriously.**
- This can be applied in various ways, such as:
- The prophetic aspect of Scripture, "Bible Prophecy"
- The preaching and teaching of God's word (Luther and Calvin saw "prophecy" in this light.)
- The special word that the Spirit may put on our hearts for the benefit of someone else. See **1 Cor. 14:3**.

1 Cor 14:3 NKJV But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.

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- 5:21 But like anything else, **the concept of prophecy can be misused and abused.**
- Just because someone claims to speak for God is no guarantee they really do.
- The wrong response is to "despise prophecy."
- The right response is to test prophecy against Scripture and what God has been doing in your life up until now.
- If it's good, **hold fast** to it. If not, feel free to ignore it.

- 5:22 **Stay away from evil in every form.**
- As followers of Jesus we should deliberately avoid evil.
- Activities or ideas initiated by other people may lead us to evil. Others may influence us to do wrong.
- Our own wrong desires and attitudes may open the door to evil. We must say no to all of these.
- We must also be careful to set a good example to others who are watching all that we do.

5:23-28 **These are Paul's closing words:**

- There is a long blessing or benediction in v.23 and a final short one in v.28.
- There is a promise of God's faithfulness in v.24
- Paul asks for their prayers in v.25. He knew he needed the prayers of these people. We should also be praying for one another and for the overall ministry of the church.
- There is an encouragement to warmly greet one another in v.26 – a kiss on the cheek being the normal greeting in those days as it still is in many places.
- Paul gives them a solemn charge to read this letter to the church. This would have been normal practice anyway, but Paul probably wanted to make sure those who needed correction heard it straight from him first.

Conclusion: Living a Watchful Life

Earlier we said we needed to answer the question:

How should we live in light of the coming fulfillment of these prophesied end times events?

The Answer:

Our life should reveal a heart and a mind that are consistently and spiritually alert.

This means we are careful not only in what we do, but also in forming the mindset that precedes our actions.

1. We should always be watching and waiting for Christ's return. (5:1-11)
2. Our lives should be characterized by sobriety, faith, love and the hope of our salvation. (5:8)
3. We should actively comfort and encourage each other and build one another up in our faith. (5:11)
4. We should truly respect those who are over us in the Lord – and value the work that they do. (5:12-13)
5. We should be at peace with one another – which means doing our part to make peace a reality. (5:13)
6. We should actively warn, encourage and help one another as needed. (5:14)
7. We should be patient with one another – and this assumes our patience will often be tried. (5:14)
8. We should vigorously pursue what is good for ourselves and for others. (5:15)
9. We should consistently and intentionally rejoice, pray and give thanks to God. (5:16-18)
10. We should be careful to let the Holy Spirit work as He desires in our lives and in and through other believers – not stifling the Spirit, but encouraging a right and balanced use of all the various gifts. (5:19-20)

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11. We should not mindlessly accept various outlooks, actions or behaviors, but actively try to discern the difference between good and evil in God's eyes.
12. We should then hold fast to the good and abstain from evil things. (5:21-22)
13. We should continually allow God to work in us to make us holier day by day. (5:23)

14. We should trust in the faithfulness of God. (5:24)
15. We should pray for one another regularly – which means saying we need prayer and saying why. (5:25)
16. We should greet one another warmly when we gather as a church. (5:26)
 - This doesn't have to involve a literal kiss here in our environment – as that is not our cultural norm.
 - **But it certainly rules out ignoring others as we show up late and scoot out quickly with as little human contact as possible.**

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17. We should desire to hear the Scriptures read and taught when we gather together as a church. (5:27)
18. And we should consistently rely on God's grace to accomplish all of these things in our lives.

The grace that brings forgiveness and salvation is incredibly good, but the grace of continuous fellowship with God which leads to sanctification is enormously better.

References

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4. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*
5. Grant Osborne, Gen. Ed.; *The Life Application New Testament Commentary*
6. J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*
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9. Warren Wiersbe, *Expository Outlines on the New Testament*

Next Week

An Overview of 2 Thessalonians