

1 Thessalonians: Chapter 5

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1 Thessalonians, chapter 5. It's Wayne Dalrymple again. And so I'm glad to be able to continue our study of 1 Thessalonians. Let's look at chapter five. At the end of chapter four, we noticed that Paul is dealing with misunderstanding about the way that the Lord would return. And now in chapter five, in the first 11 verses, he's going to deal with the timing of this coming. So let's read verses 1 through 11, together.

“Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 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. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. 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. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”

And so Paul here writes that he didn't need to write to them about the time of Christ's coming. This implies that they had already been taught by Paul, about that timing. And, they certainly knew that they could not know the exact time when the Lord would return. Paul certainly alludes to that here. And so, he says that the day of the Lord would come like a thief in the night. And so, it definitely tells them that they could not know. But, it is possible that the Thessalonians were not satisfied with not knowing an exact time and had asked Paul if he could pinpoint it for them.

And so Paul says, “You already know the answer to that,” is basically the impression that I get. And so, here he refers to the day of the Lord. Now, in the Bible, we see the phrase, “the day of the Lord,” used in a few different ways.

The “day of the Lord” can refer to the Lord coming in judgment on the earth, as it's used sometimes in the Old Testament. But here, specifically refers to the second coming. That's the context of what Paul is talking about. And it's very obvious that that's what he means here. And so, they should be ready when the day comes, he says. He says, “It should not come upon you completely unaware.” Though we don't know when it's going to take place. He's not implying that they should know, at least, have an idea of when it's coming, but rather that it should not take them unexpectedly because they will be ready no matter when it comes. No matter when the Lord returns. And so, he says, “Those who are in darkness, those who are in sin, it will come upon them completely unaware and unprepared.” For example, the Bible says, in the days of Noah, that when people were marrying and giving in marriage, and they were living their lives as if nothing was going to happen to them. And then the flood came and killed all of them because of their sin. And so, they were living in darkness, and that day completely caught them unprepared. While Noah and his family were prepared for it. They may not have known exactly when it was coming, but they were ready for it. In

any case, very similar parallel for us, is found here, that even though we don't know when the Lord will return, if we are living faithful lives, it doesn't matter when he returns, whenever it is, we will be ready, we will be prepared and be able to go to heaven. And so that's what Paul is encouraging them here, to, no matter when it comes, no matter when the Lord returns, they need to be ready, be children of the day.

And so, we do know that no one knows when that day will come. There are those who have said, in history, who have tried to predict when Jesus would return. There are many documented times when that has taken place. But in every case, their predictions have failed. Jesus Himself said, "No one knows the day or the hour, not even the Son, but only the father" (Mark 13, in verse 32). And so, if the Son himself didn't know, how could we expect to know when he will return. So therefore, we should work to stay awake, or wake up if we have fallen asleep, in order to be ready, when the Lord returns. That doesn't mean we can't physically sleep. But it's used as a metaphor here, to say that we need to be prepared, we need to be living righteously, all the time, so that we're never caught unprepared.

He also says we should stay sober. That is the opposite of being drunk, as he described here. And so when someone is sober [correction: "drunk"], their senses are diminished, they're not able to think clearly, unable to understand properly. And so we need to be sober, not acting in a way that is like being drunk. Rather, we need to be sober, we need to be alert, watching for the Lord's return. Never take our eyes off of that goal, off of that reality. So that we will be prepared and ready when the Lord comes.

There's an interesting passage here that Paul talks about in the last part of this section, when he says, and begins to describe this breastplate, in verse eight. He says, "But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith, in love, and for a helmet, the hope of salvation." And so he uses the idea of armor, to describe our Christian characteristics. This is obviously not the only place where Paul does something like this. Of course, in Ephesians chapter 6, verses 10 through 18, probably the best known passage where Paul describes at length, what would be the Roman armor for a Roman soldier, and compares it to characteristics of Christianity. And so, he does much the same thing here. While in Ephesians, Paul mentions a breastplate of righteousness, here he describes that breastplate of faith and love. The importance is not in the specific piece of armor, but it's rather in the fact of having these characteristics that are a part of us, and so that we can be protected against sin, against evil, and be able to live for God.

Notice then, he describes the hope of salvation, which is our helmet. This is the same as how he described in Ephesians chapter 6. But this is the idea of keeping our minds focused on our goal, a helmet protects our head keeps it keeps us focused. And so we are to have that hope of salvation. Always in our minds, to keep us focused upon living for him, so that we're not turned one way or the other. It's almost like blinders for a horse to keep focused on going straight ahead. In similar way the helmet provides blinders for us to keep us focused on our goal of heaven. And also protects our mind from being diluted and being poisoned by false teaching.

Now there's an interesting parallel that Paul uses also in Romans chapter 13, and verses 11 through 14. I want to read that passage for us: Romans chapter 13, verses 11 through 14. For Paul says, "Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the

daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”

And so, this passage, Paul also uses the idea of day and night, of being children of the day versus children of the night. And of putting off sin and putting on the Lord Jesus in a similar way that we might put on armor. And so, certainly he encourages his readers both in Rome, and here in Thessalonica, to put that armor on, so that they might be protected and we might be protected today.

And then he concludes the section again by saying, “Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.” He concluded, the last section at the end of chapter 4, with “encourage or comfort one another.” And he does so once again here. Paul wants to build people up, he wants to do help them to grow, to help them to stay faithful to the Lord. And he knew that this would help them here. And if they would encourage each other, it will continue to help.

Let's move on then to verses 12 through 28. In verses 12 through 28, we have the final closing remarks. First, in verses 12 through 22, Paul gives some practical exhortations for them. So let's read verses 12 through 22, together.

“We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.”

So notice, in the beginning of this passage, Paul says, “We ask you brothers.” He doesn't say, “We command you,” or anything like that. But rather he says, “We ask you.” He, perhaps, used this word because he wanted to emphasize their connection as brethren, and not so much his apostolic authority on this occasion. But certainly, even though he does not say, “We command you” here, it certainly was something that they must follow to be right with God.

Notice he first asked them to respect their leaders. Now the leaders that he's talking about here are not the political leaders, not Emperor or governor or those kinds. Though, Paul and other places would certainly tell us to, to respect them and to follow them as long as they do not cause us or try to get us to disobey God. But here, Paul is referring to spiritual leaders. He specifically says, “Those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you.” That seems to imply, and goes on to talk about their work in the next verse, that makes me think of elders. Now, some may say, “Well, Paul had only been gone for six months to a year from Thessalonica when he had written this letter to them.” And they say, “Well, maybe it would have been very unlikely that they had been established long enough to have elders.” And while I certainly appreciate that possibility, it is also possible that there were Jews who had converted to Christianity who had been very mature in Judaism, and therefore, just needed to be convinced that Jesus was the Christ. And then could very quickly and easily be appointed as elders in the church there. And so it seems that this description definitely fits the work of elders. And so I see no discrepancy or no inconsistency here with that. But, so Paul encourages them to respect them, to esteem them highly, he says in verse 13.

They esteem them very highly, in love, because of their work. Elders are people who should be working as leaders of the church. Elders are not to be people who just sit back and make decisions and let everybody else do the work. Elders have a work to do. And certainly, we need to encourage our elders and express our appreciation to them for the work that they do.

Also, this idea here of respect, or to esteem here, the idea the word for “respect,” here is the Greek word, “oída,” which means, “to know,” “to have an intimate knowledge of.” You say, “Well, how can that mean respect?” Well, it's the idea of, if we know them that closely, we know the work that they're doing. And that naturally then brings about our respect for them. And so that seems to be what Paul is getting at here. Notice also that they give instruction, he says here. And so, they admonish you. And so that certainly involved in instruction.

And then he says to esteem them very highly. Esteeming could take the form of obedience, that is, a following what they are admonishing, what they are giving instruction for, as well as giving them honor for the things that they are doing. Certainly, both of those would be necessary in following the Lord. And so this passage reveals some responsibilities of elders. It also reveals responsibilities of the members who are serving under those elders and how they should treat them.

Then he goes on to say, to talk about, he says, “Be at peace among yourselves,” the last part of verse 13. Now, they are to be at peace, that is to live peaceably. Paul said in Romans chapter 12, “As much as is within you, be at peace with everyone.” And certainly, this is the same idea here. But he says, “Be at peace among yourselves.” And specifically here, I think, in this context of what he's just been talking about with the elders, it certainly makes the elders' job a lot easier when the members are at peace with one another. And so I believe that certainly at least is part of what Paul has in mind here.

Also, then, beginning in verse 14, Paul turns his attention to those who are idle. He says, “Admonish the idle and encourage the faint hearted, help the weak. Be patient with them all.” And so, the term that's translated “idle” here, and this translation is used for a soldier who did not keep up with his fellow soldiers, as they were marching. It was often used those who did not work.

And, there were several in Thessalonica, who had quit their jobs. And they certainly were not working as they ought to have been doing, and depended upon others, while they were waiting for Christ. And so, Paul urges them to admonish these people to encourage them to work as they ought to be doing. In Ephesians, chapter 4, verse 28, in a different context, Paul says, “Let those who steal, or who stole, steal no more, but rather let them work with their hands, so that they may have to give to those who are in need.” And so, here Paul also encourages them to work, to labor, so that they do not have to rely upon others. So that they can support themselves. And so, in this sense, when Paul says, “Admonish the idle,” this shows us that we are our brother's keeper.

Remember when Cain asked that question of God, “Am I my brother's keeper?”, when God asked Cain, “Where's Abel, your brother?”? And the answer to that question was yes. And that answer is still yes, for us. We are our brothers' and our sisters' keepers, in the sense that we need to be helping each other. And if someone goes astray, we need to go after them, and try to bring them back to the Lord. And so, that's what Paul is telling them to do here. And so he says, “Admonish the idle, encourage the faint hearted,” those who are struggling, maybe because of the persecution that they were facing. They were becoming faint hearted. They were maybe not sure if they wanted to continue in this lifestyle, because it was hard. Christianity is not the easiest lifestyle in that way. It's the most rewarding, and it's the best, but it's not always the easiest. And certainly, it's not for the faint hearted.

And so, Paul says, “Encourage them, to grow stronger, and to help the weak.” It is our responsibility, those of us who are stronger, to help those who are weak. Paul talks about this in Romans chapters 14 and 15.

And he says, “Be patient with them all.” We need to be patient with our brothers and sisters who are struggling. Change usually doesn't happen in one day. And so we need to be patient with people, we need to encourage them. Don't give up. Continue to encourage. Continue to admonish. But, be patient. And so, let us definitely not shirk that responsibility, but rather, let's continue to work and to help others.

And then notice, he says, in verse 15, “See that no one repays anyone evil for evil.” This is very similar to the words that Paul used, and again, Romans chapter 12, this time, verse 17. And so, we must not be people who seek vengeance. God, as we already noticed in a previous passage, is the avenger. And he will take vengeance on all those who do not obey Him. But it's not our responsibility to do that. And so let us not repay evil for evil, but rather, he says, “Always seek to do good to one another, and to everyone.”

Paul said in Galatians, chapter 6 and verse 10, “As we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” And so he kind of reverses the order of the way he says it there compared to here. Where here, he says, “Seek to do good to one another,” referring to those in the church, the household of faith. And then he says, “And to everyone.” But, the idea is basically the same.

And then he goes on to say, “Rejoice always.” Now that doesn't mean that everything that happens to us, we're happy about it. We're not happy when someone hurts us. We're not happy when someone commits sin against us, or against anyone. But we have a joy that is not based upon the things of this world. We have a joy that's not based upon our earthly circumstances, whether it be material possessions, or whether our relationships are good and happy, or whether they are struggling. But our joy is based upon our relationship with God, and that we are right with Him, and that we have a hope of heaven one day. And so he says, “Rejoice always.” And when people see that we have that joy, it often will cause them to do one of two things: either to have a desire then, to have some of that same joy. And they will seek us out to find out how to get that joy. Or, sometimes it may cause them to completely reject, and to persecute us further. But either case, we can continue to have joy because of our relationship with God.

But then he goes on to say, “Pray without ceasing.” This does not mean that we are to, 24 hours a day, seven days a week that we're to be on our knees and saying a prayer. But this is the idea of never stop praying on a daily basis. Never stop having the custom of prayer. We read about Daniel in Daniel chapter 6, how that after he knew that the preset, the law, had been written by King Darius, had been signed by him. The Bible says that he went in to his room, his window was opened toward Jerusalem. And as his custom was, he prayed three times a day. And so, just as Daniel prayed three times a day, he didn't pray 24 hours a day, he prayed three different times a day. But he did that every day. It was something that was his custom, it was something that was his practice. We need to be the same way when it comes to prayer. We need to pray to God every day. We need to lay our cares at his feet. And we need to let him know our hearts, open our hearts to him. And so, Paul says to pray without ceasing.

And then he says, “Give thanks in all circumstances.” This is very similar to the idea of rejoicing always, in that we don't give thanks because of all the circumstances that we are facing. But even in

the face of some of the circumstances that we are in, we still give thanks. And so, he says, “For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” It is God's will that we do these things. And so, let us continue to live this life. The Christian life is the best life. It is a life full of joy. And we certainly should be thankful to God for all his blessings and mercy.

Notice he goes on to say, we are not to “quench the Spirit.” We're not to “quench the Spirit.” Now, this does refer to the Holy Spirit, here. We're not to quench the Holy Spirit. Someone will say, “The Holy Spirit is God. How can we quench him?” Well, in the sense we can quench his effect in our lives. Whether that refers to, as could have been the case in the first century, miraculous gifts of the Spirit, or today, the way the Holy Spirit lives in us, but not in a miraculous way. And either way, if we are not living as we ought to live, we are quenching the Spirit.

The Spirit is certainly compared to a fire. The Spirit appear to them, like tongues as a fire (Acts chapter 2, verse 3), on the day of Pentecost. In 2 Timothy chapter 1, and verse 6, also the reference to the Spirit and fire. But so, then the idea of “quenching,” that word is always used to refer to putting out a fire. And so, that's the idea of just we don't need to quell, we don't need to stop the Holy Spirit's effect in our lives.

And this tells us that they could control how the Spirit worked in them, in that sense, not in any other sense. But in the sense of, for example, in 1 Corinthians 14, when they were to, they had the spiritual gifts that they were to exercise, and Paul gives them instruction on how to control them. The Holy Spirit did not just take them over and just decide to force them to do things. They were given revelations about things. They were given a song, or they were given prophecy, or whatever it was, but then they had control as to when they would express those things. And so, here they are told, don't quench the Spirit.

But then he says, “Test everything,” or first of all, he says, “Do not despise prophecies” (verse 20), “do not despise prophecies.” Prophecies here, may have been again, the miraculous gift of prophecy. But either way, do not despise prophecies would certainly be the idea of, do not despise true teaching. There were those who were trying to teach false doctrine there. And they were not to listen to that, but rather they were to “hold to that which was good,” as he says on the next verse. And so he says, “Test everything,” which is very similar to what John said in 1 John, chapter 4, verse 1, “Test the spirits, whether they are from God.” And so maybe that's the idea that Paul has here: test these prophets, to see if they are true. If they are true, don't despise them.

Maybe they had been fooled before and now they're saying, “Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.” And they're saying, “Well, I'm just not going to listen to any of them.” Paul said, “Don't do that. Test them. If their false, dismiss them. But if they're true, then you listen to them. Hold to what is good.”

And then he says, “Abstain from every form of evil,” verse 22. That is every kind of evil, they were to abstain from. Sometimes we categorize or classify sin, if you will. There's some little sin and there's some big sin. Well, the Bible really doesn't make that distinction, not fully, not the way that we do. And so, all sin is an abomination to God. And so, we should abstain from every kind of evil. And so in these, in this passage, Paul has given a lot of different practical exhortations. And so he certainly encourages them here.

Now, very quickly, I want to conclude with with chapter 5, verses 23 through 28, these are some concluding remarks that Paul makes. He says, “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our

Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it. Brothers, pray for us. Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”

He says here, “May the God of peace, sanctify you, the God of peace.” He is the God of peace. He brings peace through Jesus (Ephesians chapter 2, verses 13 through 17). And then we have the peace of God (Philippians 4, verse 7).

Notice here that Paul prays for their ultimate salvation. That is, that they would be brought wholly and completely, be sanctified. Be made whole in the spirit, in soul and body. And so, only God can accomplish this. They could not do it themselves. Certainly they played a part in their obedience, their faithfulness, but only God could truly accomplish this.

Paul asked them to pray for himself and his co-workers. He says, “Pray for us.” We need to pray for those who are laboring in the Lord. And then he says, “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” Romans 16, verse 16, is another passage where he says the same thing. It's not the kiss that's important here. It's the “holy” part, the sincere and in love.

And then notice he says, “I put you under oath.” That is, they were to read this letter to all the brethren. That is probably a public reading of the letter, very similar to what is described in 1 Timothy chapter 4, verse 13. And so this is very strong language. He puts them under this oath.

And so, Paul, in this letter, has given them a lot to think about. He's encouraged them. He's pushed them on to greater heights, and he's cleared up some misunderstandings along the way. I hope that you also have been encouraged and that you will continue to study. Thank you, as we have gone through this letter. I appreciate your attention! And may God bless you!