

Session 6

May 19, 2024

## DOING LIFE TOGETHER IN CHRIST

1 Thessalonians 5:4-15

Everybody needs some encouragement, and Christians are no exception. New believers especially, who are filled with questions and sometimes doubts, often need a quick word to encourage them in their new-found faith. The apostle Paul wrote the letter of 1 Thessalonians for just this purpose. After preaching there for several weeks, Paul and his team were forced to leave. After arriving in Athens, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to check on them. When Paul heard how well the new congregation was doing, he penned 1 Thessalonians to answer a few of their questions and to encourage them in their spiritual walk. In the focal text, three exhortations stand out.

**Stay conscious (vv. 4-7).** This portion of chapter 5 follows the context of the rapture of the church Paul mentioned in 4:13-18. Even that passage, while *eschatological* in its content, was meant primarily as an encouragement to the church (see 4:18). Here, he reminded them that they should not be alarmed at Christ's coming as though it would consume them. Notice the contrasts Paul used to differentiate between the lost people of that city and the saved. In relation to the lost (who *would* be ultimately consumed by God's judgment), Paul floated terms like *dark* and *darkness* (vv. 4, 5); *thief* (v. 4); *night* (vv. 5, 6, 7); *sleep* (vv. 6, 7); and *drunk* (v. 7). All are used negatively, and all carry a negative connotation. In contrast, Paul reminded them that they were different. For the saved, he used words like *light* (v. 5); *day* (vv. 4, 5); *awake* (v. 6); and *serious* (v. 6), all of which are positive. His purpose? To encourage them that while they knew people like that, and were at one time people like that, they weren't anymore. They had been changed! The old was gone, and they were new creations (see 2 Cor. 5:17). And since they were different...they should conduct themselves that way. For reflection: *When you hear the word "drunk," what comes to mind? What about the word "sober?" Why do you think Paul used the contrast between the two so frequently? How does this apply in our culture today?*

**Stay committed (vv. 8-11).** In this section, Paul strung verses together like pearls. Each one flows into the next, but each one has a beauty of its own. Verse 8 is logical. As children of the day, believers are to be serious. Again, the literal word is *sober*. How are we to demonstrate our seriousness? By putting on the armor of God. While not as comprehensive as the list given in Ephesians 6, the principle here remains the same: as disciplined soldiers in the Kingdom army, we are to be appropriately and intentionally equipped for our calling. Here, it is interesting that the "helmet of salvation" (Eph. 6:17) is adjusted to the "helmet of the *hope* of salvation" (v. 8). This isn't meant to cast doubt on one's salvation (as something "hoped" for). Rather it looks to the future and the product of salvation, which is the return of our Lord mentioned in the previous chapter. Verse 9 tells us that God's salvation is meant to save us from His wrath, not to face it! Verse 10 is all about our fellowship. Christ's death paid the penalty for our sin. So whether we are vigilant (as we should be), or not so vigilant (as we often are), our destiny is to be together with one another, and together with Him. The inference is for both the here-and-now, and for eternity. The final pearl in verse 11 is all about encouragement. Just as Paul was encouraging them, they were to encourage one another. For reflection: *By the way, verse 9 is one of the primary arguments for a pre-tribulation rapture of the church. In both content and context, it*

*seems to teach that believers will be taken out of the world before God's wrath is poured down upon it.*

**Stay consistent (vv. 12-15).** As a final encouragement to the church, the text actually stretches all the way down to verse 22. Once again, it sounds like Paul was running out of time...so he jotted down a bunch of one-liners! The result is another strand of pearls. Here, the encouragement is for consistency. For reflection: *Notice that each verse can apply to the individual, but the emphasis is on the body as a whole. Why do you think this is? What word clues indicate this?*