

THE LORD'S RETURN AND THE BELIEVER'S BEHAVIOUR

1 THESSALONIANS 05:04–11

Introduction

The return of Jesus Christ is to be the most phenomenal event in all of human history. It will be the most amazing and spectacular event ever to be witnessed by the eyes of man. Its importance cannot be overstressed, for when Christ returns, both the blessing and the judgment of God will fall upon the earth. Genuine believers will be blessed and unbelievers will suffer the wrath of God. Because of this, how a believer behaves while he is on earth matters greatly to God. This passage deals with the all important subject of the *Lord's return and the believer's behaviour*.

- I. He is not to be surprised by the Lord's return (vv. 4-5).
- II. He is not to be spiritually asleep or unwatchful (vv. 6-7).
- III. He is to be sober and to protect himself (vv. 8-10).
- IV. He is to minister (v. 11).

I. 1 Thessalonians 05:04–05 Day of the Lord

The believer is not in darkness; therefore, *that day* should not surprise him. *That day* refers back to the Day of the Lord — that great and terrible day of God's wrath, the awful judgment of God which is to fall upon the earth and unbelievers. Note the word "surprised" (*katalambano*). It means to come upon or take hold of by surprise. The day of the Lord is not to take the believer by surprise, not to come upon him like a thief, unexpectedly. There are three strong reasons why the believer is not to be caught off guard by the Day of the Lord.

1. The believer is not in darkness.
 - a. The believer is not in the darkness of ignorance. He knows that the terrible day of God's judgment is coming. He has studied and been taught the Word of God. Both the preachers and teachers of God's Word have been faithful in warning the world: the Day of the Lord is coming upon the world. All must give an account of their rebellion against God and their selfish hoarding against the desperate of the world. No true believer is ignorant of the truth; no true believer dwells in the darkness of ignorance. If he is a true believer, he knows that God's judgment is to fall upon men; he knows that the Day of the Lord is coming. Therefore, he is to be anticipating it. He is not to be caught by surprise when it comes.
 - b. The believer is not in the darkness of sin. He does not roam around in the world living in sin. His mind and thoughts are not consumed with the things of this world. He is not blinded by the glitter and power of possessions nor by the passions and pleasures of the flesh (sinful nature). The believer does not walk throughout the day with his
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thoughts glued to this earth, seldom if ever thinking about God. He is not in the darkness of sin, feeling that God is way off in outer space someplace and unconcerned with what happens on this earth. The believer is not separated from God and ignorant about God and His ways. His life is centred on God and his thoughts are *always* upon God. He knows God personally and intimately. Therefore, he knows that God is holy and just as well as loving. He knows that God *must* judge the unbelievers of the world.

2. The believer is a child of light (Greek, son). This simply means that the believer is a child of God, for God is light (1 Jn. 1:5). The believer possesses the very nature of God, which is light. He knows God; therefore, he is not to be caught off guard nor surprised when the Lord comes and judges the world.
3. The believer is a child of the day. This is a wonderful truth. It means that the believer will escape the judgment of God. He is a child who is accepted by God; therefore, he will be accepted on that day of the Lord's return. He will not have to face the terrible day of the Lord and suffer the judgment of God's wrath. He is a child of the day, of God's glorious salvation and deliverance. Therefore, the believer should be looking for the Lord's return and the day of the Lord's wrath. He should not be walking in darkness with his mind and thoughts upon the world. He should be walking about, always praying and thinking about the things of God and the utter necessity to reach people for Christ, for the great and terrible day of the Lord is coming. It is right over the horizon, ever so near.

Mat 5:14 *"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden."*

John 12:36 *"Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light." When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.*

Acts 13:47 *For this is what the Lord has commanded us: "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."*

Eph 5:8 *For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.*

Phil 2:15 *So that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe.*

1 Th 5:5 *You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.*

Judg 5:31 *"So may all your enemies perish, O Lord! But may they who love you be like the sun when it rises in its strength." Then the land had peace forty years.*

II. 1 Thessalonians 05:06–07 Be Alert and Self-Controlled

The believer is not to sleep, but to be alert and self-controlled. Sleep refers to spiritual *sleep*. When a person is asleep, he is not alert nor involved in what is going on around him. When a believer is spiritually asleep, he is not alert nor involved in the things of God.

His mind and behaviour are not concerned with the things of God. He slumbers, dozes and sleeps. A person who is spiritually asleep is not alert nor aware of what God is doing. Therefore, he will be caught off guard when the Lord returns.

But note: the believer is not to sleep. He is to be alert and self-controlled.

=> To be alert means to be alert and on guard to live for Christ. Remember: Christ may rent the skies any moment and return to earth; therefore, we must be watching every moment of every day.

=> To be self-controlled means to be rigid in discipline and control for Christ; to live a strict life of righteousness and godliness, ever looking for the return of the Lord.

Note two tragic facts about some believers — facts that should never happen to genuine believers.

1. Some do sleep. The word “others” refers to the unbelievers of the world (1 Th. 4:13). But note: this exhortation is being given to believers. Therefore, some believers have a desperate need to heed this warning. They have fallen asleep spiritually. They are...
 - no longer alert to the things of God.
 - no longer alive to God, thinking and keeping their thoughts upon God.
 - no longer worshipping God, praying and fellowshiping with God and His people.
 - no longer anticipating the return of Christ.
 - No longer active for God, serving and working for God.

Tragically, they are asleep. They are not alert nor living self-controlled lives.

Discipline and control in righteousness and godliness are the furthest things from their minds.

2. Some are identified with the night and with evil behaviour. This is exactly what Scripture is saying. The person who sleeps, sleeps in the night, and the person who gets drunk gets drunk in the night. Night time is usually the time when people sleep and become involved in sin. Therefore, if a believer carouses around with those who are of the night, he is identifying himself with the sinners of the world.

=> If a believer carouses around with the sleepers of the world — those who are asleep to the things of God — then he is identified with the sleeping unbelievers of the world.

=> If a believer carouses around with the drunken of the world — those who are indulgent, lustful worldly and fleshly — then he is identified with the drunken unbelievers of the world

There is no other way to tell about a person. If he carouses around in the darkness of the night, then he shows himself to be of the night. If he walks around in the day, then he shows himself to be of the day.

Mat 25:13 “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”

Luke 12:37 *“It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.”*

Luke 21:34 *“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.”*

1 Th 5:5-6 *You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled.*

1 Pet 5:8 *Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*

Rev 3:11 *I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.*

Rev 16:15 *“Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed.”*

III. 1 Thessalonians 05 08–10 Be Sober and Well Protected

The believer is to be sober and to protect himself. The believer is to be self-controlled; that is, he must be mentally awake, alert and watchful, and he must protect himself. He must make sure that he stays spiritually controlled and well protected.

1. How can the believer stay in control and protect himself? By putting on the armour of God. What is the armour of God?
 - a. There is the breastplate of faith and love. The breastplate protected the heart of the soldier. The heart of the believer must be protected. His heart must be committed and focused upon Jesus Christ and His cause for world conquest. It is the breastplate of faith and love that will protect our heart and keep it focused upon Christ and His cause.
- ⇒ Faith protects our heart: when we really believe that Jesus Christ saves us from sin and death and delivers us from the judgment of God — when we really believe in Jesus Christ — then we focus our lives upon Jesus Christ. We stay sober: we live righteously and godly in this present world and look for the glorious appearing of the great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Our faith in Christ keeps us sober.

John 6:28-29 *Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?” Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”*

Eph 6:16 *In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.*

Heb 11:6 *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*

1 John 3:23 *And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.*

⇒ Love protects our hearts: when we really see the love of Christ for us — that He actually bore our sins and punishment on the cross — then we break before Him and bow in humble adoration and love. Love floods us, for He did so much for us. We never have to die; we never have to bear the punishment of sin — all because He loved us. Therefore, our hearts reach out to Him broken and pouring love back to Him. We stay sober: we live righteously and godly and look for His return because we love Him. Our love keeps us sober.

John 3:16 *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

Rom 5:8 *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

2 Cor 5:14-15 *For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*

Eph 2:4-5 *But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved.*

1 John 3:1 *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.*

- b. There is the helmet of the Christian soldier, the hope of salvation. There is only one way we can be prepared for the return of Christ and escape the judgment of God: we must keep our minds and lives focused upon Christ. How can we do this? By protecting our minds with the helmet of God's armour, the hope of salvation. We are to focus our minds upon the hope of salvation. We are to eat, drink and sleep salvation — the great hope God has given. If we focus our lives upon salvation — if we live and move and have our being in the great hope God has given of living forever with Him — then we will stay sober. We will live a righteous life for Christ, and we will be eagerly waiting for the return of Christ. Our hope of salvation keeps us sober.

Rom 8:24 *For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has?*

Rom 15:4 *For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

Titus 2:12-13 *It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.*

1 Pet 1:3-4 *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade — kept in heaven for you.*

1 John 3:2-3 *Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.*

2. Why is the believer to stay in control and protect himself? There are two significant reasons.
 - a. God has not appointed us to wrath, but to salvation. The only way to escape the wrath of God is to stay sober and focused upon Jesus Christ. When God saved us, he appointed us to receive salvation from sin, death and judgment to come. He did not appoint us to death and wrath. Therefore, there is no excuse for a believer to fall asleep and return to the world of darkness. A person who does not have self-control will suffer the wrath of God.

John 3:17-19 *“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.”*

John 3:36 *“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”*

Eph 5:3-6 *But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person — such a man is an idolater — has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient.*

Col 3:5-6 *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.*

- b. Christ died for us. Note the words “awake or sleep:” they mean alive or departed. When Christ returns, whether we are still alive on the earth or departed, we shall live together with Him forever and ever. This is why He died, the very reason He went to the cross: that we might have the glorious privilege of living together with Him throughout all eternity.

Rom 5:6 *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.*

Gal 1:4 *Who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.*

Titus 2:14 *Who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.*

1 Pet 2:24 *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*

1 Pet 3:18 *For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit.*

IV. 1 Thessalonians 05:11 Believers' Duty to Minister

The believer is to minister by comforting and edifying others. God has delivered us from the wrath to come and given us the glorious hope of living face to face with Him forever. Therefore, we are not to sleep, but we are to be sober, awake, alert and watchful for that glorious day.

=> We are to “encourage” (parakaleite) each other: exhort, admonish and comfort each other.

Isa 40:1 *Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.*

1 Th 4:18 *Therefore encourage each other with these words.*

1 Th 5:11 *Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.*

=> We are to “build each other up” (oikodomeite) each other: strengthen and edify each other.

Rom 14:19 *Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.*

Rom 15:2 *Each of us should please his neighbour for his good, to build him up.*

Eph 4:29 *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ■*