

Message #12

I Thessalonians 5:1-11

The Apostle Paul told Timothy that his job was to study to “rightly divide” the Word of truth. In other words, give careful study to the Scriptures so he could cut them straight; lay out the straight truth of God (II Timothy 2:15).

One of the main keys to “rightly dividing” God’s Word is what is called a dispensational interpretation of the Scriptures. Dispensationalists approach the Scriptures realizing that the Bible contains different time periods in which God does different kinds of things. For example, when Jesus was actually physically here on earth, He did many things that no longer may be done since He is not here on earth. For example, when it comes time to pay taxes, you won’t be able to go to a lake and catch a fish that will have the money for you to pay your taxes. You will not be able to go out on a boat and get out and walk on water. When Jesus was physically here on earth, both of those things actually did happen. So dispensationalism recognizes that there are different time periods in the Bible and depending upon what God is doing, things are done differently.

One way to illustrate this is by the illustration of a house. In a house are many rooms and you do not do the same things in the various rooms at the same time. You don’t eat dinner in the bathroom. You don’t take a shower in the living room. You don’t sleep in a closet. Each room has a specific purpose in the overall construct of the house and you use each room for different things at different times.

So it is with the massive program of God that is found in the Bible. It is one big house program but there are different rooms in which God works in different ways at different times. For example, there is a room in which the focus was Adam and Eve in Eden. There is a room in which the focus is Abraham and Israel and a Promised Land. There is a room in which the focus was the O.T. Law. There is a room in which the focus is the Age of Grace and the Church. There is a room in which the focus will be Tribulation judgment.

You will notice as you look at **I Thessalonians 5:1-2** that there are three time words that show up. Two of the words are plural and one is singular: “times” (χρονος); “epochs” (καιρος); and “day” (ημερα).

So in the program of God, there are various durations or spaces of times (χρονος); there are specific measured time periods and things that happen in those time periods (καιρος) and there is one specific time period of the Lord’s judgment known as day of the Lord (ημερας κυριου).

Now Paul just completed a section in which he gave a major description of the Rapture of the Church and apparently some of the Thessalonians were confused about how that connected to the Tribulation and confused about what they were supposed to be doing. So Paul writes here to straighten these people out. What he writes is this:

IN VIEW OF THE FACT THAT WE ARE NOT DESTINED FOR THE WRATH DAY BUT THE RAPTURE, WE HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY TO ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER AND TO BUILD UP ONE ANOTHER BY REMINDING EACH OTHER TO BE ALERT AND SOBER TO CONTINUE TO DEVELOP IN GRACE AGE ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS.

In view of the fact that the Rapture could occur at any time, we need to keep focused on carefully understanding and applying God's Word to our lives. Now the text breaks down nicely into six practical prophetic thoughts:

PRACTICAL PROPHETIC THOUGHT #1 – You have no need for me to write more. **5:1**

Now it is very clear from **verse 1** that Paul had spent a great deal of time teaching these things to the Thessalonians. In fact, they were so knowledgeable about dispensational time matters that Paul said I don't even have to write you concerning proper biblical eschatology. In other words, Paul had given them enough information and details about the Rapture that he did not need to give them any more data. They had been thoroughly indoctrinated in this truth. They knew they would be raptured and they knew about various dispensations.

Sometimes it is frustrating when you have to keep going over and over the same thing. This is one thing that apparently bothered John Calvin. How many times do we have to go over the Christmas or Easter story? I have been doing Christmas and Easter messages for nearly 30 years, which turns out to cover 60 Sundays—one for Christmas per year and one for Easter per year. Now in 60 Sundays we could have studied many other books of the Bible, but every year we must take our holiday break.

It is interesting that I was listening one time to an exposition done by Dan Duncan, who is an outstanding Bible expositor from Dallas, Texas. This was a time when S. Lewis Johnson was alive. Turns out that Mr. Duncan's exposition was being given at Christmas time and he said I am going to stay in the text we are in and let Dr. S. Lewis Johnson do a Christmas message. In other words, he did not need to do another Christmas message.

That apparently was Paul's mindset concerning prophecy. You don't need anything other than what I have already given you.

PRACTICAL PROPHETIC THOUGHT #2 – You know how the day of the Lord is going to come. **5:2**

Now Paul begins **verse 2** by saying, "you yourselves know full well." That adverb "full well" ($\alpha\kappa\rho\iota\beta\omega\varsigma$) is one that means you know with very careful exactness (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 18). These words mean that Paul had very clearly and carefully taught them the prophetic plan of God. He taught them about the Rapture and he taught them about the Tribulation and the surfacing of the Antichrist.

We are presently living in a day of grace. The time period we live in is a dispensation of grace in which grace is the predominant way in which God is dealing with the world (Ephesians 3). But that is going to change at the Rapture. When the Grace Age is over, which Age will end by Rapture of the Church, the world is going to enter into the judgmental “day of the Lord” time period or dispensation.

This “day of the Lord” is clearly predicted in the O.T. in 19 different places: Isaiah 2:12; 13:6, 9; Ezekiel 13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18 (twice); 20; Obadiah 1:5; Zephaniah 1:7, 14 (twice); Zechariah 14:1; Malachi 4:5. In analyzing all of these passages we may conclude that there are two prophetic phases to the “day of the Lord.” First, there is the judgment/wrath phase of the seven year Tribulation (i.e. Joel 1:15, 2:1-2), and then there is the blessing phase of the one thousand year millennium which follows the Tribulation (i.e. Zech. 14:1ff).

The Pauline focus of this text is on the judgment/wrath phase. **Now the day of the Lord, in this context, refers to an inescapable (5:3) day of destruction (5:3) and day of wrath (5:9) that will be poured out on the world in the Great Tribulation.** It will be a time when God will pour out His wrath on this world definitely, dramatically, decretively and directly. It will come upon this world like “a thief in the night.” The world won’t be expecting it and won’t be prepared for it.

One of the reasons why is because the world has been living in an Age of Grace for the past 2000 years. In this Age of Grace, God does not punish sin but saves sinners. So a person may live life as a heathen blasphemer and atheist and it appears as though God doesn’t do anything about it. For example, we are living in a time in which there is a new escalation of homosexual promotion and it appears as though God is silent. The reason is because this is the Age of Grace; when this world reaches the “day of the Lord” period, all of that will change. This world will go from the Grace Age to the Wrath Age in one moment, the Rapture of the Church.

In fact, in **verse 3** Paul qualifies why this will be like a thief to the world—they will be stressing how peaceful, how unified, how safe the world is. I understand this to mean that the belief and rhetoric about peace, prosperity and safety for all will reach a very unusual worldwide level.

When God moves from His grace dealing with the world to His dispensational wrath phase, the world won’t suspect it. It will come upon these God-mockers and Bible rejecters like a thief in the night and like the way sudden birth pangs hit a woman. This will happen when the general talk of the world will be peace and safety. It will hit them suddenly and they will not escape.

Now why is this called “a day” in **verse 2**? Because God’s dealing with the world will change on one day. **The day of the Rapture of the Church ends the Grace Age and the very same day begins the Tribulation Wrath Age.**

This will be a major prophetic day in the dispensational program of God.

PRACTICAL PROPHETIC THOUGHT #3 – You know positional and prophetic truth about yourself. **5:4-5**

Here are four realities these Thessalonian believers could know and so can we:

Reality #1 - Believers are not in darkness. **5:4a**

Every “brother” or believer may know that he is not living in darkness when it comes to knowing truth or experiencing wrath. God is going to target those in darkness, that is those who are unbelievers with His wrath and believers do not experience it because they have a different classification.

Reality #2 - Believers will not be overtaken by the day of wrath. **5:4b**

They will not be overtaken by wrath because they will be raptured before it hits. Wrath will hit the unbeliever like a thief. It will completely overtake unbelievers but not believers.

Reality #3 - Believers are sons of light and sons of day. **5:5a**

What this eschatologically means is that we are not destined for the things God is going to pour out on sons of darkness.

Reality #4 - Believers are not sons of night or darkness. **5:5b**

The point that Paul is really driving home by these statements is this—**the day of the Lord is a time aimed at sons of night and darkness and God’s family is not going to be hit with this wrath judgment because they are His sons of light.**

PRACTICAL PROPHETIC THOUGHT #4 – Our non-night status should cause us to be different from the rest. **6-7**

The word “others” is critical to understanding what Paul is saying here. The word “others” literally in Greek “the others” (οἱ λοιποὶ) refers to those remaining (*Ibid.*, p. 272). This has direct overtones to the Rapture.

The emphasis of Paul is that we should have a different focus from those who will remain after the Rapture. The study of biblical prophecy is not simply so we may know accurate facts, although that is part of it. The study of biblical prophecy is designed to affect the way we live our lives. We are not in a dark state and we need to live differently than those who are. He qualifies three different ways we should live our lives:

Way #1 - We should not sleep. **5:6a**

We should not go to sleep in our spiritual lives because we know we will be raptured.

By the way, this point refutes a partial-rapture theory. There will be some believers raptured who were asleep.

Way #2 - We should be alert. **5:6b** - the word means to be watching, alert and alive to things of God at all times.

Way #3 - We should be sober. **5:6c** - In control of our thoughts at all time. We should never be intoxicated by anything in this world, including alcohol, drugs, medications, worldly lures or philosophies.

The “for” of **verse 7** explains further that people, who are people of darkness, are asleep to God at night and they are drunk at night. Those who are asleep or dead in their relationship with God do their sleeping at night and they get drunk at night and they are not alert or sober and looking for the Rapture.

By the way, it is possible that we are getting a clue here that the Rapture will occur at night. We do know that when the Rapture does occur, it will be nighttime somewhere.

PRACTICAL PROPHETIC THOUGHT #5 – Our day status should affect our lifestyle.
5:8

There are four ways this should affect us:

Way #1 - We should be sober.

The emphasis of this word “sober” (νηφω) is to be sober and circumspect in mind (*Ibid.*, pp. 302-303). In fact, Paul told Timothy in his last letter before he died, “be sober in all things” (II Tim. 4:5). As we wait for the Rapture, God wants us to be very careful as to how we think about everything.

Way #2 - We should put on the breastplate of faith.

Don’t miss this point. Our emphasis as we wait for the Rapture is our faith, not our works. It is our faith that ultimately develops our works.

Way #3 - We should put on the breastplate of love.

This is the love that seeks to do what God’s Word says to do in any situation or relationship.

Way #4 - We should put on the helmet and hope of salvation.

Clearly, our minds need to be focused on the fact that our faith in Jesus Christ saves us and gives us hope.

PRACTICAL PROPHETIC THOUGHT #6 – Our future destiny should affect our lifestyle.
5:9-10

There are two key facts Paul brings out designed to strengthen our faith and hope in the salvation we have:

Fact #1 - God has not destined us for wrath . **5:9a**

The verb “destined” is an aorist, middle, indicative. Do not miss this. It is a definite fact (Indicative Mood) that God, in and of Himself (Middle Voice), has not appointed us or destined us for the point of time (Aorist Tense) known as the wrath Tribulation. Do you get this point? Do you understand this point? We are not going into the period of time known as the Tribulation. There is no grammatical way God could say this to make this point plainer.

Fact #2 - God has destined us to obtain salvation . **5:9b**

What God has done is obtain for us salvation. Paul is very clear to qualify where we get this salvation.

(Qualification #1) - Our salvation is only through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now do not miss this key wonderful point. Our hope is not in us, it is in Christ and what He has done for us.

(Qualification #2) - Our salvation is due to the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ died for us.

The preposition “for” (υπερ) means he died in our place and in our stead.

Now carefully observe what is said in **verse 10**. The finished work of Jesus Christ on our behalf guarantees you are going to heaven to live forever with Him, **whether you are awake or asleep—dead or alive or spiritual or unspiritual**.

Do you understand this point? If you are a believer in Christ, you will go to heaven regardless of even how you lived your life. You should be awake. But whether or not you are has no bearing on your eternal destiny. In fact, Dr. John Walvoord said in his lifetime he had never found the perfect Christian. Our salvation or rapture is not contingent upon how good we were or how spiritual we were; it is all due to the work of Jesus Christ.

Paul wraps this up in **verse 11** by saying in view of these things encourage one another and build up one another in the faith. In view of the fact you are guaranteed heaven, not wrath, be encouraged.

When we read a text like this, we cannot help but conclude that there are terrible events that are going to hit this world. These events are predicted multiple times in Scripture. The only prerequisite for you missing God’s wrath and going to heaven is to believe in Jesus Christ. That is it and that is enough.