

## **“Ye Are Not In Darkness ...”**

“... that that day should overtake you as a thief: for ye are all sons of light and sons of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness: so then let us not sleep as do the rest, but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep, sleep in the night: and they that are drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, since we are of the day, be sober putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet, the hope of salvation. For God appointed us not unto wrath, but unto the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us that, whether we wake or sleep, we shall live together with him. Wherefore exhort one another, and build each other up, even as ye do” (1 Thess. 5:4-10).

Paul tells these brethren that because they are not of darkness that day should not overtake them as a thief. Being of day and not of darkness would help these brethren not to be unprepared when “that day” did come: that day would not “overtake them as a thief.” “That day” would come as a thief in the night: that is the implication of the writer here and some years later Peter will express exactly the same thought: “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night” (2 Pet. 3:10). Both Paul and Peter write of the same day: the same “day of the Lord” that is future, the day “in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2 Pet. 3:10).

Yet, although Paul and Peter wrote of the same “day of the Lord,” the day of the Lord of which Jesus spake (Lk. 21:27f) was different from that of Paul’s and Peter’s “day of the Lord.” Jesus made clear that the day of which He spoke was the day which concerned the temple of Jerusalem, in which “not one stone would be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (Mt. 24:2): all this is to occur when Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70. Those of Thessalonica would scarcely be affected by Jerusalem’s fall: the day they would be affected by would be the day when Jesus returns, resurrects all the dead, destroys the world, and judges all men. To connect “that day” of 1 Thess. 5:2 with the second coming of Christ, all one needs do is to follow the references back. The “day” of 1 Thess. 5:4 is the same “day of the Lord” of 1 Thess. 5:2 and the “day of the Lord” (1 Thess. 5:2) is the same “coming of the Lord” of 1 Thess. 4:16. And while Paul’s “day of the Lord” is the same as Peter’s: Paul comforts the Thessalonian Christians with assurance that Christ will raise all those fallen asleep in Jesus and Peter tells that on that same day of the Lord Christ will destroy our universe (2 Pet. 3:10f).

Paul writes of sleep in this passage in two different ways (1 Thess. 5:6; 5:10); yet in neither instance does he have reference to physical sleep! In 1 Thess. 5:6 he said, “Let us not sleep as do the rest, but let us watch and be sober.” The “rest that sleep” are those who are seemingly oblivious to the spiritual dangers surrounding them; those who fail to put on the “breastplate of faith and love and for a helmet, the hope of salvation” (1 Thess. 5:8). In verse 10 he says Christ “died for us that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him” a reaffirmation of his assurance from

chapter 4 that when Christ comes again, those who have fallen asleep in Him (died physically), He will bring with Him when He returns (1 Thess. 4:14).

In verse 8 Paul writes of the spiritual armor that protects the Christian: the breastplate of faith and love and for a helmet, the hope of salvation. In Ephesians 6:13-17 the same writer uses the same figure but there speaks of the "helmet of salvation" rather than the "hope of salvation" (as found here); he speaks of the "breastplate of righteousness" where here he identifies the breastplate as that of hope and love. Yet, such reference to God's armor is not original with Paul. Isaiah, 700 years earlier, had written, "And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his own arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it upheld him. And he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head ..." (Isa. 59:16f).

The three things which abide (faith, hope, and love) when other things pass away are familiar to us from Paul's writings on love (1 Cor. 13:13). Here they are also found together, yet earlier than the reference in 1 Corinthians: 1 Thessalonians was written 6-7 years earlier than 1 Corinthians. For other passages in which the three are found together, refer to Galatians 5:6; 1 Thess. 1:3 and 1 Peter 1:21f.

The apostle concludes his appeal to these brethren to be watchful by saying, "Wherefore exhort one another, and build each other up, even as ye do." Many, many who become discouraged and fall away would not do so if all Christians would heed and practice this exhortation toward our brethren. Christians need each other and the exhortation and encouragement of us all. Such will go a long way in assuring us that we are not asleep but watching and being sober.

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