



**THE DAY OF THE LORD  
and the Believer, Pt 1**

**1 Thessalonians 5:4–8**

- Many Christians feel apprehension about *eschatology* (the study of the Bible's teaching on future things).
  - “The Bible's teaching on future things is ambiguous.”
  - “Eschatology is a matter of secondary or tertiary importance.”
  - “Eschatology is divisive—and therefore a distraction.”
  - “Studying the future does little to help Christians in the present.”

- In response to this general malaise, Christians must consider that . . .
  - The Bible is clearer on matters of the future than is often claimed.
  - The future is just as important to the story of God's redemption as is the past.
  - A proper eschatology is needed to keep us from falling for a false narrative.
  - Understanding God's plan for the future has direct implications for life today.

“But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. But since we are of *the* day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.”

—1 Thessalonians 5:4–8

# I. Remember Your Identity (5:4–5)

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“**But you, brethren,** are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you” (v. 4).

- “**But you**” – signals a fundamental distinction Paul makes between unbelievers (vv. 2–3) and believers (vv. 4ff) and their relationship to the day of the Lord.
- “**Brethren**” – addresses what Paul is about to assert to the entire church—to all his spiritual kinsmen in Christ.

- There are only two ways to relate to the day of the Lord: as an unbeliever, or as a believer.

“These writers know of no twilight zone or condition.”

—R. C. H. Lenski



- Paul now makes a series of assertions (indicatives—statements of fact) about the believers in Thessalonica, to help them understand their relation to the day of the Lord.
  - He uses both negative and positive assertions (“you are not . . .” and “you are . . .”).
  - He uses two powerful biblical motifs (darkness vs. light; night vs. day).

# 1) Who You Are Not

- “You . . . are not in darkness” and “We are not of night nor of darkness” (5:4–5).
- “Darkness” – the sphere of spiritual deadness, sin, and corruption.
- “Are not” – categorical denials.

Who

Am

I?

- **John 3:19** – “This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.”
- **John 12:46** – “I have come *as* Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness.”
- **Acts 26:18** – “to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.”

## 2) Who You Are

- “You all are sons of light and sons of day” (5:5).
- “You all are” – all without distinction.
- “Sons” – a Hebrew idiom expressing identity.
- “Light” – the sphere of enlightenment, righteousness

Who

Am

I?

- **John 8:12** – “Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.’”
- **2 Corinthians 4:6** – “For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”
- **Ephesians 5:8** – “for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord;

## Why It Matters

- “that the day would overtake you like a thief in the night” (5:4).
- Paul emphasizes the *implication* of this identity.
- “The day” refers back to “the day of the Lord” in v. 2.
- “Overtake” = “to come upon one with surprise.”

Who

Am

I?

- **1 Thessalonians 1:9–10** – “. . . and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.”
- **1 Thessalonians 5:9** – “For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

# Implications of the Day of the Lord

- That the DOL will not strike believers reminds you that it is not accomplishments that will rescue you, but only a particular identity.
- The reality of the DOL gives you a prime opportunity to reflect upon your part in that saving identity.
- At a most fundamental level, who are you?



## II. Recognize Your Responsibility (5:6–8)

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**“So then let us** not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober” (v. 6).

- **“So then”** – a compound conjunction introducing an emphatic conclusion (not just “so” or “then,” but “so then!”).
- **“Let us”** – shows that these commands apply to all Christians, including Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy.

# 1) Renounce Indifference

- “Let us not sleep as others do” (5:6a).
- The verb “sleep” is a different one than in 4:13–15.
- This verb used here can refer to physical sleep or even death, but in vv. 6, 7, and 10 it refers to *spiritual laxity or indifference*.
- The security of the believer’s identity and the guarantee of his rescue does not provide a license to live like the world.

## 2) Activate Vigilance

- “But let us be alert” (5:6b).



- “Alert” refers to a constant level of readiness.
- It implies a military vigilance in response to the threat of attack.
- **1 Corinthians 16:13** – “Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.”



### 3) Develop Discipline

- “But let us be . . . sober” (5:6b).
- This word for “sober” can mean physical sobriety, but in the NT it always refers to *clear-headed restraint* and *self-control*.
- It describes a wise and upright moral conduct in a foolish and fallen world.
- **2 Timothy 4:5** – “But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

- **“Let us be sober” (5:8a).**
- In v. 8 Paul explains how this self-restraint will be realized.
  - **“having put on” = “to put any kind of clothing on oneself.”**
  - The grammar of the original implies that this act of “putting on” is *prior to* the on-going practice of “being sober.”
  - Something must be put on—and stay on.

# 1) “The breastplate of faith and love” (5:8b)



- “A piece of armor that covered the soldier’s body from neck to waste and protected his heart, the very center of his life and the spring of his vital forces” (Hiebert, *Thessalonians*, 237).
- “Faith” – the believer’s relationship to the Lord.
- “Love” – the believer’s relationship to others.

## 2) “A helmet, the hope of salvation” (5:8b)



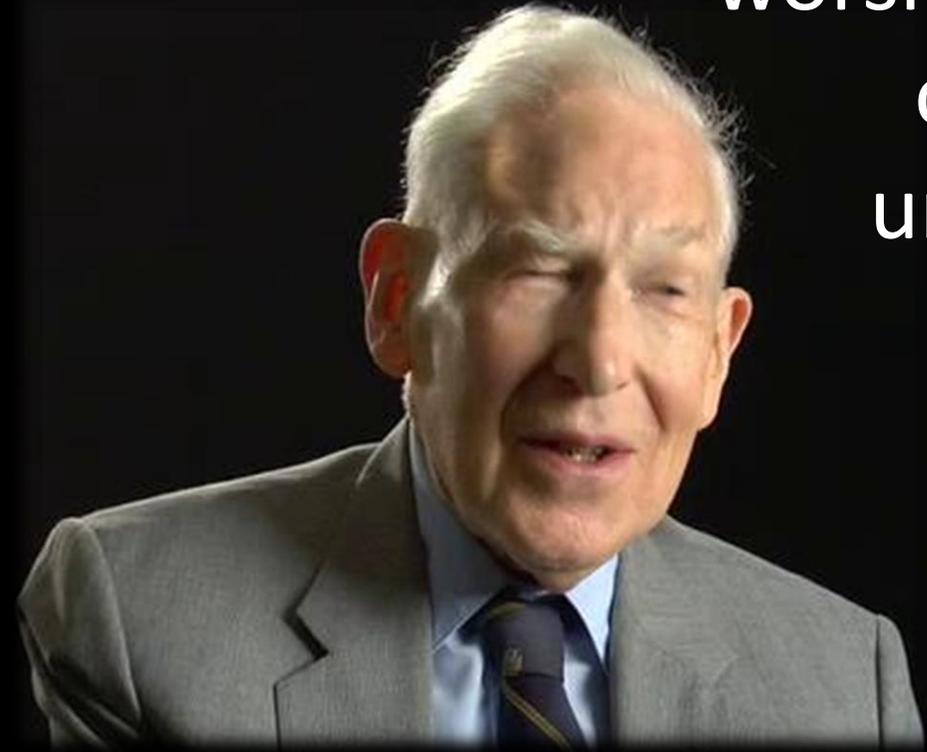
- “Helmet” (*lit.* “around the head”)—the piece of armor that protected the front, back, and sides of a soldier’s head.
- “Hope” – not wishful thinking or optimism, but the believer’s conviction in promises made about the future.
- “faith . . . love . . . hope” (see 1:3).

## Why It Matters

- “For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. But since we are of *the* day . . .” (5:7–8a).
- In the middle of these exhortations, Paul again reminds the Thessalonians about their real identity.
- It is not that thinking too much of your identity in Christ leads to license, but thinking too little.

“If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God’s child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all.”

—J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 182



# Implications of the Day of the Lord

- Are you drowsy on “enchanted ground”?  
*Wake up!*
- Are you ambivalent to the dangers of this world? *Look out!*
- Are you vulnerable against the temptations and doubts? *Get dressed!*



“The Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. . . . It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.”

—C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 134