

Being an Authentic Church

Session 6

May 19, 2024

Doing Life Together in Christ

The Point: Believers share and experience life in Christ together.

Session Passage: 1 Thessalonians 5:4-15

The Setting of 1 Thessalonians. After Paul left Philippi on his second missionary journey (about AD 49/50–52), he stayed briefly in Thessalonica where he preached the gospel and established a church (Acts 17:1-8). Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians within months of having established the church to answer various questions these new believers had, including those regarding the second coming of Christ (1 Thess. 4:13–5:11).

1 Thessalonians 5:4-8

Connection to The Point: We are children of light, and we are to live like it.

But you . . . are not in the dark (v. 4). Apparently, the Thessalonian believers were confused about some aspects of Jesus's second coming. Paul noted that they were *not in the dark* concerning this event. The apostle had already informed them about how they should live as they waited for Jesus's return (1:9-10). Paul addressed the Thessalonians' questions regarding this subject in 4:13-18. He continued in 5:1-3, reminding them that Christ's return will occur suddenly and unexpectedly for most people. However, the Thessalonians and other believers would not be surprised about what was going to happen.

Brothers and sisters (v. 4). Paul used this address (5:1,12,14) to stress his unity with the Thessalonians as believers in Jesus and his deep love and concern for them (1:2; 2:8).

For this day to surprise you like a thief (v. 4). The Thessalonian believers would not be surprised because they knew that Jesus would come as suddenly as "a thief in the night" (v. 2; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 16:15).

Children of (v. 5). To call a person "a child of" followed by a descriptive word was to say that person was characterized by that word. For example, the early disciples called Joseph "Barnabas (which is translated Son of Encouragement)" (Acts 4:36). When Paul called the Thessalonian believers "children of light" and "children of the day," he was saying that they were characterized by "light" and by "day" which were symbolic references to God the Father and Christ.

Light (v. 5). Paul used the term figuratively. Both God the Father (Jas. 1:17) and Jesus, God the Son (John 8:12), are light. The light of Christ leads a person to life and is itself life (1:3-4). Jesus is "the light of the world" (8:12) who reveals God and the way of salvation to the world. The gospel of salvation in Christ is itself called light (2 Cor. 4:4). In the focal verse Paul was affirming that the Thessalonian believers had chosen to put their faith in Jesus and to enter into the spiritual light and life that Jesus brings (John 12:44-46). Living in God's kind of light had also enabled the believers to know and understand the truth about eternal realities such as Jesus's second coming (1 Thess. 5:2). Christians walk in the light as they live in fellowship with and obedience to God through Christ (see John 12:35-36; 1 John 1:7).

Day (v. 5). In this context, *day* is parallel to "light" and is contrasted with "the night" and "the darkness."

We (v. 5). In order to remind the Thessalonians of his deep connection to them Paul changed the pronoun he used from "you" to "we."

Belong (v. 5). The Greek term has the meaning of “to be” or “to exist.” As is true with all disciples of Christ, the Thessalonian believers’ existence centered on and was defined by their relationship with Christ; they were “children of light.”

The night . . . the darkness (v. 5). Paul used *night* and *darkness* in a figurative sense to stress the contrast between those in Christ and those without and opposed to Him. *Darkness* symbolizes the absence of God and unbelief. To reject Jesus is to reject the light and choose to live (walk, John 8:12) in the darkness of evil and unbelief (John 3:14-21). The New Testament often associates spiritual darkness with the inability to see reality clearly (Matt. 6:22-23) and with the environment in which evil deeds are done (John 3:19; Eph. 5:11).

Sleep (v. 6). This term figuratively refers to living a life oblivious or indifferent to the reality that humanity is living in the last days of the evil age and facing the immanence of Jesus’s return (Rom. 13:11; Eph. 5:6-21).

The rest (v. 6). This term refers to those without Christ and the light He gives to believers to enable us to see spiritual realities clearly. Even though Paul knew the Thessalonian believers were connected to Christ, he also knew that Christians can still be tempted and misled by sin, the world, and Satan (Rom. 7:21; 1 Cor. 10:13; see Jas. 3:2; 1 John 1:8).

Stay awake . . . be self-controlled (v. 6). Since they had access to the light of God in Christ the Thessalonian believers understood the realities of living in a fallen world and of the second coming of Christ. Therefore Paul urged them to remain sober and alert by living lives in obedience to God (1 Pet. 5:8-9). Those who live in the light of Christ are to remain awake and not fall back into spiritual apathy or slumber (Matt. 24:36–25:46).

Sleep at night . . . get drunk at night (v. 7). As most people sleep at night, Paul used *sleep* symbolically to depict failing to remain spiritually alert. Those who get drunk typically do so at night, a reference both to the time of day and symbolically to spiritual darkness. To *get drunk* literally demonstrates and symbolically represents a lack of self-control and self-discipline.

The day (v. 8). The term *day* here refers to that associated with being in relationship with God through Christ. Those in Christ, who “belong to the day,” are in union with Christ (the light), see the true nature of the spiritual realities of life, and walk in the light (live in obedience to God).

Self-controlled (v. 8). The same Greek term used in verse 6 (also translated “self-controlled”), it literally means to abstain from wine, to remain sober. Obviously, believers who dwell in God’s light should not get drunk, but they also need self-control in every situation. Paul was reinforcing his words from verses 2-5.

Put on the armor (v. 8). As Christians in the first century would have been familiar with the armor worn by Roman soldiers, Paul often used such imagery to help believers understand aspects of the Christian life (Rom. 13:12-13; Eph. 6:11-18). The Greek word translated as *armor* also specifically refers to the breastplate which protected the soldier’s vital organs.

Faith (v. 8). At this point Paul clarified what kind of spiritual armor he meant. In this context, *faith* most likely refers to the believer’s constant trust and dependence on God.

Love (v. 8). Jesus commanded His disciples to “love one another” (John 13:34). From the context of the following verses, Paul’s main focus seems to be this love believers are to express toward one another.

A helmet of the hope of salvation (v. 8). The *helmet* was one of the most essential pieces of armor since it protected the soldier’s head. Perhaps that is why Paul related *salvation* to the helmet. Note that unlike his use of similar language in Ephesians 6:17 where he wrote of “the helmet of salvation,” here he added *the hope of*. The reason is perhaps that in

this context he was encouraging believers to remain faithful as they awaited Jesus's return. Earlier he had stressed the reality of the believers' hope that Jesus will return to take them to be with Him (1 Thess. 4:13-18). The believers' confidence in the consummation of their salvation at Christ's return would provide encouragement for them to remain faithful to the Lord in their present circumstances.

1 Thessalonians 5:9-11

Connection to The Point: We are to build up and encourage one another.

Wrath (v. 9). Many today talk only about God's love and grace and confine the subject of God's wrath to the Old Testament. Paul stressed that *wrath* (God's just judgment and punishment for sin) is not what God desires ("did not appoint us to") for the people He created. However, the New Testament is clear that God's judgment will come upon all those who reject the salvation that He offers through Jesus Christ (Rom. 1-2; John 3:16-18,36). The good news of the gospel is that our faith in Jesus delivers us from God's wrath (Rom. 5:6-11).

Salvation (v. 9). Rather than His wrath, God wants everyone to experience His salvation (John 3:16; 2 Pet. 3:9). The Greek term for *salvation* can refer both to the initial act of a person repenting of his sins and placing his faith in Christ (conversion) or to the entire process of salvation with all its various aspects (such as conversion, justification, reconciliation, sanctification, glorification).

Through our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 9). God's free gift of salvation has nothing to do with our own actions (Rom. 3:23). We "obtain" God's salvation only by grace through faith alone in what Jesus did when He "died for us" on a cross as the once-for-all atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 Thess. 5:10; see Matt. 26:28; Rom. 5:8; Eph. 2:8-9). Furthermore, salvation is available through *Jesus Christ* alone; He is the only way to reconciliation and relationship with God (John 14:6).

Awake or asleep (v. 10). Apparently, the Thessalonians had questions about what will happen to believers who are alive and those who are deceased when Jesus returns (4:15). Though he had just used "awake" and "sleep" in the sense of being (or failing to be) alert and faithful while awaiting Jesus's return (5:6), here Paul used these words to refer to being alive (*awake*) or dead (*asleep*).

Live together with him (v. 10). At the second coming of Christ, both believers who are living at that time ("awake") and those who have died ("asleep") will *live together with* the Lord for all eternity. Paul discussed a similar issue with the Corinthian believers (2 Cor. 5:1-10).

Therefore encourage one another (v. 11). Paul had already encouraged the Thessalonian believers to remain alert as they looked forward to Jesus's return (vv. 6-7). Now he challenged them to encourage one another with the sure hope they all had of living together with the Lord for all eternity after Jesus returns. The Greek translated *encourage one another* literally means to call someone alongside for help. The New Testament writers used this language to urge and exhort believers to holy living (Rom. 12:1; 2 Tim. 4:2; Heb. 13:22). Paul included this activity of encouragement as a spiritual gift ("exhorting," Rom 12:8). While some believers have spiritual gifts for certain abilities given by the Holy Spirit (such as exhortation, evangelism, service, giving, showing mercy, and so forth), every believer can express these same abilities to a lesser degree.

Build each other up (v. 11). The literal use of the Greek verb could refer to building or repairing a physical structure. It was also used figuratively as when Jesus said that He would "build" His church (Matt. 16:18) or when Paul wrote that "love builds up" (1 Cor. 8:1). In this context, to *build up* another person means to edify, strengthen, or establish that individual in the faith and is well matched with the word "encourage."

As you are already doing (v. 11). A good teacher knows that providing positive reinforcement is a great teaching method. Paul did this throughout his first letter to the Thessalonians (1:7-10; 2:13-14; 3:6-7; 4:1,10).

1 Thessalonians 5:12-15

Connection to The Point: We are to pursue what is good.

Ask (v. 12). The Greek word implies a simple but earnest request, as when the lame man asked Peter and John for money (Acts 3:3).

To give recognition (v. 12). The Greek term implies giving respect or honor. Paul went on to list three functions of the spiritual leaders in the local church for which believers' should give them recognition.

Labor among you (v. 12). The Greek term for *labor* refers to exerting one's self to the point of exhaustion. Leaders of local churches should work hard and consistently for the benefit of those they lead (Rom. 16:6; 1 Tim. 5:17).

Lead you in the Lord (v. 12). To *lead* is to preside over, to direct, to manage. *In the Lord* identifies the sphere of leadership (the body of believers) as well as the source and direction of the leaders' guidance—Jesus and the Holy Spirit (John 16:13-15).

Admonish (v. 12). Synonyms for the Greek term include “warn” (1 Cor. 4:14) and “instruct” (Rom. 15:14). Spiritual leaders warn believers to be careful not to stray from the truth in their doctrine and conduct, as well as admonishing those who have already strayed with the goal of turning them back to the right way of thinking and acting.

Regard them very highly in love (v. 13). To *regard* is “to esteem” or “to consider someone,” in this case *very highly in love*. Paul challenged the Thessalonian believers to recognize their leaders who put forth such effort on their behalf as being worthy of their love, respect, and gratitude (v. 12). The Greek adverb translated *very highly* implies the utmost form of comparison—beyond all measure. Paul also used the term in 3:10 (“very earnestly”) and in Ephesian 3:20 (“above and beyond”).

Because of their work (v. 13). Paul referred to the laboring, leading, and admonishing performed by the spiritual leaders of the Thessalonian church (v. 12). The congregation was to view and treat their leaders with great respect and gratitude for all they did.

Be at peace (v. 13). The Greek term for *peace* refers to both a state of being and a lifestyle. Paul knew that the Hebrew word for *peace* (*shalom*) means much more than an absence of conflict. When a Jew wished another Jew *shalom*, he was in effect offering a prayer for the total well-being of that person. True peace with God and others has its source in the believer's faith relationship with Jesus (John 14:27; Rom. 5:1; 2 Thess. 3:16) and is the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22).

Among yourselves (v. 13). Though peace should be normal within the church, we can choose to act in ways that limit its presence. In his letter to the Ephesians Paul urged the believers to take certain steps to maintain peace within the body of Christ (Eph. 4:1-3). Notice that he was challenging not only the church's leaders but the entire congregation to do all these things.

Exhort (v. 14). Paul used this same Greek word in verse 11 (“encourage”) to challenge the Thessalonian believers to help one another to continue to grow spiritually.

Warn (v. 14). Earlier Paul used the Greek word for *warn* to describe one of the roles of the spiritual leaders (“admonish,” v. 12). Here he used it to challenge all the believers to care for one another (see Phil. 2:4).

Idle (v. 14). The Greek word for *idle* originally referred to a soldier who was undisciplined or neglectful of his duties. By implication the term can mean “insubordinate” or “unruly.” However, in this context (and the term’s use in 2 Thess. 3:6-8) it seems to be referring to those who are lazy.

Comfort (v. 14). To *comfort* is to encourage or console someone.

The discouraged (v. 14). The Greek term for *discouraged* literally means “little spirited” which suggests a lack of spiritual drive or will. Paul urged the believers to be sensitive to such an individual’s unhealthy spiritual condition and to respond with helpful words and actions.

Help (v. 14). The Greek word for *help* has the meaning of clinging or adhering to, holding firmly in the sense of being devoted to someone.

The weak (v. 14). Paul often used the Greek term for *weak* in the sense of being weak in faith (Rom. 14:1) or conscience (1 Cor. 8:7). Here Paul was urging the believers to look out for, aid, and encourage those in their church who were struggling in such areas and help them to grow in those areas as well.

Be patient with everyone (v. 14). To *be patient* is more than a passive response. It requires consistent endurance in the face of a fellow Christian’s selfish or unkind actions and allowing the Spirit to do His work of renewal in that individual. This patience is to be exhibited toward everyone.

No one repays (v. 15). Rather than being patient, the temptation is to lash out and give back to our offenders what they have done to us. Yielding to such temptations clearly violates Jesus’s commands to turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:38-39) and love one’s enemies (vv. 43-48; see also Rom. 12:17-21).

Evil for evil (v. 15). The Greek term for *evil* refers to what is worthless, corrupt, harmful, depraved, and/or destructive. All evil is rebellion against God.

Always (v. 15). The pursuit of good is to characterize the attitude and actions of all Christians at all times.

Pursue (v. 15). The Greek term means to run swiftly after someone or something to catch it. Paul urged all the Thessalonian believers to strive to build a consistent atmosphere filled with both love and holiness (3:11-13).

Good (v. 15). What is *good* is that which is upright, honorable, virtuous, and acceptable to God.

For one another and for all (v. 15). A consistent atmosphere filled with both love and holiness (3:11-13) will produce “what is good” for each individual believer and as well as for the entire church body.