
Words of Truth

I Thessalonians 5:4-7

By: Brian A. Yeager

In light of the return of our Lord and the day of sudden destruction (I Thessalonians 4:13-5:3), this was written to the saints in Thessalonica: *“But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night”* (I Thessalonians 5:4-7).

In one sense, the saints in Thessalonica were not in darkness relative to their relationship with our Lord (Acts 26:18-20 and Ephesians 5:1-11). The saints in Colosse were told: *“Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins”* (Colossians 1:12-14). In this regard, one cannot walk in darkness and claim to have a relationship with the Lord (II Corinthians 6:14-7:1 and I John 1:1-7). What is discussed here is not just about the relationship with Christ in the light. This is about darkness in the sense of ignorance or lack of proper knowledge one obtains through the Gospel (II Corinthians 4:1-6).

Let’s address the fact that knowledge and action in regard to the subjects at hand are tied together. During the first century saints were taught about a day of judgment that was coming upon Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37-24:34). They could see that day coming as the aforementioned reference shows and other Scriptures speak to (Hebrews 10:23-25, James 5:8, and I Peter 4:7; cf. Luke 21:20-24). With this in mind, this was written to the saints in Rome: *“The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof”* (Romans 13:12-14).

As the saints in Rome, the saints in Thessalonica were not in darkness. They both had the relationship in Christ and the revelation at that time necessary to prepare for a coming judgment. Awareness leaves one capable of being ready (Ephesians 1:17-18). Enlightenment comes from the word of God (Psalms 19:7-11). Let’s think more on that.

The Psalmist wrote: *“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path... The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple”* (Psalms 119:105; 119:130). So, as Christians were and are even more enlightened (Ephesians 3:1-11), they and we are not in the dark regarding spiritual matters. To the Jews Jesus said: *“Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth”* (John 12:35). Later in that context, He went on to say: *“I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness”* (John 12:46).

Now, we must also address that Christians who have the revelation of God must apply that knowledge as to not be in darkness. The enlightened saints in Ephesus were told: *“But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is”* (Ephesians 5:13-17).

Knowledge is then tied to being watchful and sober. To watch for the Lord is easy to understand when we are looking forward to His coming (Matthew 24:42). We are to watch because we do not know when He is returning (Matthew 25:13). In general, even unrelated to the coming of our Lord, Christians are to be on watch (I Corinthians 16:13 and Revelation 3:2-3). Peter used that same Greek word (γρηγορεύω; Strong's # 1127) and it is translated in the KJV as *“be vigilant”* (I Peter 5:8). To be sober is also a clear principle that faithful Christians understand our Lord expects of us (Romans 12:3, Titus 2:1-12, and I Peter 1:13). What that means is that we are: “1) to be sober, to be calm and collected in spirit; 2) to be temperate, dispassionate, circumspect” (Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon; Strong's # 3525).

Think about how the Thessalonians were then instructed regarding sobriety with the illustrations of sleep and drunkenness. In general, nighttime is historically a time of sleep (Genesis 28:10-11). When a person is asleep, they are not aware. That person is not observing their surroundings. Being asleep leaves us vulnerable. Thieves tend to break into homes in the night because of the assumption that those in that home are asleep; unaware of what is going on. Thus, this illustration is used to show that Jesus comes at an unknown time when people are not in a state of awareness (II Peter 3:10).

Drunkenness affects the ability for one to watch and be sober (Psalms 107:27 and Isaiah 19:14). A drunken man is overcome by wine (Jeremiah 23:9). Drunkards, whether literal or figurative, are not awake in the sense of awareness (Joel 1:5). The figure of the night, being a time not only of rest but also of times wherein people would and do get drunk, is not good for Christians past or present. We are disadvantaged by that which obscures our vision. Avoid all such things. Be alert and able to see clearly.