

Those Who Are Asleep

June 11 – 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

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Day 162 – 203 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul described an event that we call the Rapture, which means “to be caught up or snatched away.” Evidently, during Paul’s brief stay in Thessalonica, he had time to discuss the return of Jesus. In fact, the Thessalonians were convinced that the Second Coming was so imminent that many of them stopped working to wait for Him (*2 Thess. 3:7-11*). Also, there was confusion regarding those who died before Jesus returned. The Thessalonians were concerned that they might miss getting to participate in that glorious event. Thus, Paul included in his letter some clarification for their comfort (*v.18*).

Notice that Paul referred to Christians who have died as “those who are asleep” (*v.13*). That is why Christians have historically buried their loved ones in a cemetery, which is the Greek word for “sleeping place.” **However, though we often view death as final, God views death as temporary, as one taking a nap** (*Matt. 9:24*). The Creator of life will simply recreate life with a spoken word as someone would speak to awaken another from his slumber. God will resurrect all deceased Christians as if they were simply asleep.

Therefore, we have hope. We do not need to grieve as the rest of the world (non-Christians) who have no hope (*v.13*). Though the body is “asleep,” the soul is with the Lord (*2 Cor. 5:8; Lk. 23:43*). Paul wrote to the Philippians that “to die is gain,” because he would get to be with Jesus, which is far better than living here on earth. Unfortunately, the world’s view of death is the other way around. Death is viewed in a negative light, but Christians view death in a positive light. **Death is simply the door through which we must pass to be with God in heaven.**

So then, what will happen to the bodies of those who are in Christ but who have gone before us in death? Their bodies will be resurrected when Jesus returns (*v.14, 15*). Now this information was new, previously hidden, or untold. Paul said

that he received it “by the word of the Lord” (*v.14*). When Jesus returns for His followers, “the dead (asleep) in Christ will rise first” (*v.16*). After those who have died (asleep) are resurrected, then “we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds” (*v.17*). Here, then, is the beginning of the fulfillment of our eternal life. “We shall always be with the Lord” (*v.17*).

There are several details to note here. First, Jesus will descend from heaven (*v.16*), which concurs with what the angels told His followers at His ascension, that He would return in the same way as He left (*Acts 1:9-11*). Second, Jesus will return with a shout, with a voice of an archangel, and with a trumpet, very much like a king or bridegroom would arrive (*Matt. 25:6*). These announcements will be loud and public.

Third, what happens to those unbelievers who are left behind? They will remain and endure God’s wrath which will be poured out upon the earth (*2 Thess. 1:10; 5:9; Rev. 6*). In the end, all unbelievers will be resurrected for judgment and final sentencing (*Rev. 20:5*).

Daily Reflection

The timing of the Rapture is a hotly debated topic. Since the future is a mystery, no one can claim to know the exact timing of these events, but that is okay. Christians must agree to disagree. Our differing views of the end times are not worth dividing the church. Our focus should be on the fact that Jesus will return for His followers. We should hold loosely to the exact sequence of when or how it will happen.

While no man knows the timing, we must not miss the point. It will take place! The fact that it will happen should encourage our hearts. While it is acceptable to be sad when we lose a loved one, because Christ defeated death, we can have hope that we will too (*1 Cor. 15:22*). **Whether we are dead or alive, Jesus will return for us, and we will forever be with Him!**

The Day of the Lord

June 12 – 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

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Day 163 – 202 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

As Paul finished addressing the Rapture of the Church (4:13-18), he transitioned to what would take place next — the Day of the Lord (v.2). What exactly is the Day of the Lord? **The Day of the Lord includes multiple events that take place in the end times**, such as the pouring out of God's wrath on the earth and unbelievers, the end of the Tribulation, the return of Christ, and more.

In connection with Paul's description of the Rapture (4:13-18), the Day of the Lord seems to summarize all that will happen after the Church is gone. Thus, Paul wrote, "As to the [end] times and epochs (seasons), you have no need of anything to be written to you" (v.1). Though the subject of the end times is intriguing, Paul did not view it as necessary to include it in his letter, since Christ-followers would not endure it. However, the absence of it in Paul's first letter sparked such an interest the Thessalonian Christians requested that he provide more details in his second letter.

Evidently, the Day of the Lord will come like "a thief in the night" (v.2). Though the leaders of that day will attempt to comfort the people of the earth with "peace and safety," they will be rattled with sudden destruction, like a pregnant mother is caught off guard by labor pains (v.3). Though many people will attempt to avoid this peril, no one will escape. God's judgment of the earth for the sins of men will be all-inclusive and thorough (1 Pet. 3:10).

Despite the terrible thought of that day's events, Paul assured the Thessalonians that they had no need to worry. "But you, brethren, are not in darkness that *the day* would overtake you..." (v.4). "The day" refers to the Day of the Lord (v.2). **Christians do not need to fear the Day of the Lord because it will not apply to them.** It will only apply to those who are walking in darkness, godless unbelievers. God's people do not walk in darkness, but rather they

are "sons of light" and "sons of day" (v.5). At the point of salvation, the Lord rescued us from Satan's domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son (Col. 1:13). We are now sons of light (Jn. 12:36; Phil. 2:15).

Daily Reflection

Since the followers of Christ are "not of the night, nor of darkness" (v.5), we should stand out or be different or set apart from them. In Paul's words, "Let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober" (v.6). The words *alert* and *sober* are the opposite of being asleep and drunk (v.7). Those who are asleep or drunk (the unconverted) are prone to fall for temptation, deception, and enslavement; but we who are the sons of light are awake, aware of the dangers of this fallen world. In fact, Paul wrote, that we protect ourselves with spiritual armor, like the "breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of salvation," to battle the flaming arrows of our enemy (v.8; Eph. 6:10-18).

Because we are children of light and not sons of darkness, Paul wrote that "God has not destined us for wrath but for obtaining salvation through Christ..." (v.9). To what wrath was Paul referring? Certainly, because of Christ, we will escape eternal wrath or separation from God in the lake of fire. However, given the context of the passage, it is more likely that Paul was referring to the Day of the Lord, His outpouring of wrath on the unbelievers of the earth. **The wrath of that day is reserved for those who walk in darkness. Therefore, it will not apply to those who are children of light.**

Thus, the Day of the Lord will not affect those who are called the "sons of day." We have no need to fear. "Whether we are awake (alive) or asleep (passed away), we will live together with Him" (v.10). These words were meant to be an encouragement to the believers of that day (v.11). May they also encourage us.

Live in Peace with One Another

June 13 – 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

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Day 164 – 201 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul addressed a problem in the church. His commands seem disjointed and confusing until they are viewed in the context of his second letter (*2 Thess. 3:6-13*). Evidently, there were people who stopped working to wait for Christ to return. Without a job, they couldn't provide for themselves and, therefore, depended on others. In their idleness, they became unruly. They acted like busybodies and caused trouble. This disruption is the context for our passage.

To start, Paul affirmed the authority and efforts of the elders or church's leaders (*v.12, 13*). Elders were given the role of church oversight, to ensure that the congregation was protected from internal and external dangers. Paul exhorted the Thessalonians to appreciate and esteem those who "diligently labor." To the idle, Paul was hinting that work was valuable. **But unity does not fall to the elders alone. It's the responsibility of all believers.**

Paul provided eight ways to promote peace. First, "admonish the unruly" (*v.14*), speaking of idle troublemakers. We should confront ungodly behavior in a gentle, loving manner. Second, Paul wrote to "encourage the fainthearted" and "help the weak" (*v.14*), which may refer to the same people. The fainthearted and weak could also be anyone struggling. To build a bridge of peace and unity in a church, we must strengthen all its member parts.

Third, "be patient with everyone" (*v.14*). People are at different levels of spiritual maturity. Therefore, since we can't expect all members to speak or act in mature ways, we must tolerate each other's shortcomings.

Fourth, Paul wrote, "See that no one repays evil for evil..." (*v.15*). Nothing upsets the peace more quickly than retaliation for an offense. The Lord expects us to practice forgiveness, not to overlook offenses but to endure them without escalation. When we seek revenge, hold a

grudge, or harbor anger, we promote disunity. We must take steps to heal, not hurt, relationships with believers.

Fifth, Paul wrote to "rejoice always" (*v.16*). We must not allow anything to steal our joy, not even people. Our joy is found in Christ, not in people or circumstances. Sixth, "pray without ceasing" (*v.17*). Paul was not suggesting that we pray in place of work; rather we should be prayerful about everything. Next, "in everything give thanks" (*v.18*). We tend to dwell only on the negative things. Gratitude (for God's blessings) nurtures a positive, peaceful attitude.

Then, Paul said, "Do not quench the Spirit" (*v.19*). In context, don't allow anything to be said or done that would be a roadblock to His presence or power. When believers are not at peace with one another, they are rarely at peace with God. Therefore, the Spirit is not free to work or move in the lives of people.

Finally, Paul warned the Thessalonians to protect the truth. "Do not despise prophetic utterances" (*v.20*), which means that we should be respectful and patient with people who claim to have a word from God or claim that He is working in their life. However, we must not take everything we hear or see as from God; rather we must "examine everything carefully" through Scripture (*v.21*). The Bible is our filter (*v.22*).

Daily Reflection

God is a God of peace, and He expects His people to be peacemakers. He equips us with His Spirit to promote peace (*v.22, 24*). Rate yourself from 0-10 on Paul's suggestions to maintain peace. **Are you a peacemaker or troublemaker?**

Divine Justice

June 14 – 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 165 – 200 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We transitioned to Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, in which he expanded and clarified topics from his first letter. The first topic he addressed was the persecution that the church was facing (v.4, 5). In the rest of the chapter (v.6-12), Paul assured them that God would deal with those who afflicted them, in His timing. Before we look at how He would do it, let's first consider why He would do it.

Paul wrote, "It is only just for God to repay" them (v.6). **God is just. He gives everyone his due, whether reward or punishment** (*Deut. 32:4; Ps. 7:11*). Because God is holy and righteous, all sin is offensive to Him and, therefore, all sinners must be punished. Those who do not conform to His standards of righteousness must be condemned. However, because of His great love, God sent His Son Jesus to pay the penalty for those who believe in Him. His wrath towards our sinfulness has been abated by His grace and mercy. Still, those who reject Christ's sacrifice will be held accountable for their sin. They will not escape, but the Lord will repay them for their offenses.

So then, how will God repay them? God sometimes chooses to repay the wicked while they live. He strikes with "affliction those who afflict" others (v.6). However, it often appears that the wicked get away with their wickedness, and God does nothing about it. **Be assured, they will not escape. They will be judged when Jesus returns** (v.7, 8). At that time, He will "deal out retribution" (repayment) to all, giving them what they deserve (v.8).

What is it that the wicked deserve? What will be their punishment? "They will pay the penalty of eternal destruction," Paul wrote (v.9). What does that mean, and what does that include? They will spend eternity "away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (v.9). This passage presents a quandary. If God is omnipresent (everywhere),

then how can hell be a "separation from God"? We know that God is the architect of hell, and He is the judge who sentences people to hell. **God will be there, not to bless people but to punish them.** When Paul wrote that the wicked will spend eternity "away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power," he meant that the wicked will be cut off from God's grace and mercy. The Lord will have turned His back and left them to their punishment. **Justice will be served** (*Rom. 2:6; Matt. 16:27; Rev. 22:12*).

Notice that persecution will end someday, when "Jesus will be revealed with his mighty angels in flaming fire" (v.7). Also, when He returns, "He will be glorified in His saints and marveled at among all who have believed," which will include the Thessalonians. The Lord will be glorified "in His saints" and His saints "will be glorified in Him" (v.12). When Jesus returns, all will proclaim that He is Lord. He will be glorified as He deserves. Also, Christ's followers will be glorified or sanctified in body, soul, and spirit as He promised (*1 Thess. 5:23; Phil. 1:6; Rom. 8:30*). What a day that will be!

Daily Reflection

Finally, Paul wrote that he prayed for two things for the Thessalonians, that the Lord would count them "worthy of their calling and fulfill every desire for goodness..." (v.11). The Lord has called us to Himself, saved us from our sin, given us His Spirit, and equipped us with gifts for His purposes.

Are you doing what God has called you to do? Or are you wasting your time, talents, and treasures on yourself? What acts of goodness do you desire? May God fulfill every desire you have for goodness, to glorify Him, every work of faith to bless others in His name, despite any persecution you may encounter. May you be found worthy of your calling, even while you endure difficult people and circumstances. **God will reward your faithfulness in the end.**

The Man of Lawlessness

June 15 – 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 166 – 199 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul dispelled the rumors regarding the timing of the Day of the Lord. When he mentioned this event in his first letter (*1 Thess. 5:1-10*), he described it as a time of wrath and destruction. Because the Thessalonian believers were experiencing so much persecution, rumors were circulating that they were living in the Day of the Lord. But Paul cautioned his readers against perpetrating this lie (*v.1, 2*). He then informed them of events or signs that must take place before the Day of the Lord would occur.

Paul's first clue was that "the apostasy," a general rebellion or turning away from God, will precede the Day of the Lord (*v.3*). Paul's second clue was that **the person behind this apostasy, the man of lawlessness or son of destruction, will be revealed** (*v.3*). The Bible describes this individual with many names, the most well-known, of course, being the Anti-Christ.

Paul described this arrogant leader as one "who exalts himself above all gods, who takes his seat in the temple of God, and who displays himself as God" (*v.4*). After the Jewish Temple is rebuilt in Jerusalem (it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD), the Anti-Christ will exalt himself by sitting on the throne of God (Ark of the Covenant) and persecute God's people mercilessly (*Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:15*).

While these events are already in motion (*v.7*), there is something or someone restraining them from happening (*v.6, 7*). Though Paul told the Thessalonians the identity of this restraining force, he does not reveal that information in his letter. Thus, we don't know for sure the identity of the restrainer. The most likely candidate is the Holy Spirit. He indwells believers and empowers His Church to be salt and light in this fallen world. When the Church is removed by the Rapture, then that enlightened preservative agent will be no more, and spiritual darkness will prevail.

The man of lawlessness will employ many strategies to enthrone himself. He will assume all political power. He will use signs, wonders, and deception unlike anything seen before, all driven by the activity of Satan (*v.9, 10*). Those who are left behind after the Rapture will be vulnerable to believe any lies (*v.11, 12*).

Though the man of lawlessness is not Satan, he will be empowered and motivated by Satan's influence. For a brief time, no one will contest him. Those who try will be destroyed. However, when Christ returns, the reign of the lawless one will cease (*v.8; Rev. 19:15*). **Though we live in a wicked world, it is nothing like what it will be in the day when the man of lawlessness is revealed.** His reign of terror will unleash unprecedented evil. Thank God for His sovereignty. In His power, He will destroy this wickedness and restore peace on the earth.

Daily Reflection

Following these heavy words, Paul encouraged his readers with several reminders (*v.13-17*). What are they?

Which reminder do you find most encouraging? Explain why.

The Gift of Work

June 16 – 2 Thessalonians 3:1-18

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 167 – 198 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We read the end of Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians. He began with encouragement (v.1-5), even asking that they pray for his team. Then, he ended with a command regarding the undisciplined members (v.6-15). Evidently, some of them were convinced that Jesus' return was so imminent that they quit their jobs to wait for Him. However, when Jesus did not return, these people had no income and could not sustain themselves. They needed money, food, and shelter. Since they no longer had a job, they did nothing during the day but waste time acting like busybodies (v.11). Thus, they became unruly or undisciplined.

These people became a nuisance to others, to the community, and to the church. They were not acting in a way that glorified God. Paul demanded the Thessalonians to put a stop to it. "Keep away from every brother," he wrote, "who leads an unruly life..." (v.6). What does it mean to keep away from these people? He meant not to associate with them. Hanging around them would be a negative influence on their walk with God and associating with them might appear to condone their behavior.

While Paul was in Thessalonica, he worked night and day to earn a living, so that he would not be a burden to anyone, having to ask for food. He paid his own way and was not dependent on anyone's charity (v.8). As an Apostle, Paul could've used his authority and demanded payment or sustenance, but he didn't (v.9). Instead, he wanted to be an example for people to follow (v.7).

Therefore, Paul laid down an important principle. "If anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat..." (v.10). Notice that he connected working with eating and labor with survival. He advocated for independence, not dependence. In other words, Paul condemned laziness (v.14).

God created us to work, just like Him. He worked to create the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1; 2:2). Since we are made in His image, we are wired to work. When we work, we reflect God's image, God's character, and bring Him glory. God put Adam and Eve in the garden to work (Gen. 2:15). The garden had everything in it for their survival, but they had to work to sustain themselves. There were no freebies or handouts.

Work is a blessing to us, a gift from God. It is not a curse of sin. Work is a way to glorify the Lord and meet our needs. We were created to work, to produce, to prosper, and therefore to resist work is to rebel against God's established order. Laziness is a sin. It is to refuse to do what God has created us to do. God's people should be producers, not consumers, independent, not dependent, providing for others rather than being provided for (v.12).

Daily Reflection

What has been your view of work? Does it align with the biblical view of work? Explain.

What are other unbiblical views of work? Have you ever struggled with one of these? Explain.

In This City

June 17 – Acts 18:1-22

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 168 – 197 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We continued and completed Paul’s second missionary journey. He ended his time in Greece in the city of Corinth, then traveled across to Ephesus (Asia Minor), and returned to his home base at Antioch (v.22). Of course, while Paul was in Corinth and Ephesus, he planted churches. Later, when he wrote letters to the Christians there, we got our New Testament books of *Corinthians* and *Ephesians*.

While Luke did not provide many details about the end of Paul’s second journey, the details that he did provide are important. For example, Luke mentioned Emperor Claudius (Caesar), which is a time marker, helping us place this account between 45-46 AD (v.2; Acts 11:28). He also mentioned that Claudius removed Jews from Rome, signs of an anti-Semitic (Jewish) movement occurring at the time.

Another detail to note is that Paul met Priscilla and Aquilla, Jews from Italy, who became dear friends (v.2). Luke also mentioned that Paul was a tentmaker by trade (v.3). Making tents allowed Paul to support himself financially, so that he would not be a burden to anyone (2 Thess. 3:7, 8). On the weekends, Paul would go to the synagogues and share the gospel (Acts 18:4). We would call him a bi-vocational or part-time pastor today. However, after Silas and Timothy arrived, perhaps with money (offering) from the Thessalonians, Paul “devoted himself completely to the word,” meaning he became a full-time evangelist (v.5).

Luke also made a point to tell us about another vision that Paul had regarding the people of Corinth (v.9, 10). The vision came after Paul “shook out his garments” with the Jews (v.8). They had resisted the gospel, even claiming that Paul was blaspheming. Shaking out his garments was Paul’s way of saying, “I am done with you. I tried, but now you are on your own.” But the Lord didn’t want Paul to be discouraged, for He had many Gentiles to be saved (v.10).

Finally, after spending a long time in Corinth and even facing angry Jews (v.11-17), Paul left for Ephesus (v.18). While he didn’t stay long, he promised to return if the Lord willed (v.21). In the meantime, Priscilla and Aquilla stayed in Ephesus and helped disciple the church there.

Daily Reflection

Amid all the details in this chapter, I was most struck by the Lord’s words to Paul in his vision, “I am with you, and no one will harm you..., for **I have many people in this city**” (v.10). The Lord knew beforehand who in Corinth would respond to the gospel, and He had Paul there to reach them with the good news of Jesus. **Paul just had to be faithful to tell them.** Some people resisted him, but many people responded.

Imagine the people in your city, in your family, at your job, in your school, in your church, or in your neighborhood. **If we believe the Bible, then the Lord has elected some to be saved. He knows who will respond to the gospel.** He wants to use us to reach them, so we only need to be faithful to share with them. True, some will resist, but many will believe.

Why should this vision be an encouragement?

How should we deal with people who resist?
