

# 1 Thessalonians 5:4-11

## Light vs Dark - 2

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### **Introduction**

The world is filled with all sorts of people and cultures, yet they can be divided into two distinct groups. There are believers and unbelievers; the redeemed and the unredeemed; the saved and the lost; those in God's kingdom of light and those in the kingdom of darkness. These two groups are easily recognized by the values, beliefs, and behavior. These are manifested in how they live their lives.

Three distinctive characteristics set day people (believers) apart from night people (unbelievers): their nature, behavior, and destiny.

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## 1 Thessalonians 5:4-11

But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. <sup>5</sup>You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. <sup>6</sup>Therefore let us not sleep, as others *do*, but let us watch and be sober. <sup>7</sup>For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. <sup>8</sup>But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and *as* a helmet the hope of salvation. <sup>9</sup>For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup>who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. <sup>11</sup>Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

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## The Believer's Nature

1 Thessalonians 5:4-5

But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. <sup>5</sup>You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.

Last week we contrasted the nature of the believer and the unbeliever. The believer are “sons of light and sons of the day”. The unbeliever is trapped in intellectual, moral, and spiritual darkness.

Believers are to walk as Sons of the Day!

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## The Believer's Behavior

1 Thessalonians 5:6-8

**Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.** <sup>7</sup> For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. <sup>8</sup> But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and *as* a helmet the hope of salvation.

The phrase **Therefore** emphasizes the link between Christians' nature and their behavior. What people are determines how they act; believers are day people and must act accordingly.

On that basis, Paul exhorted the Thessalonians, **let us not sleep as others do, but let us watch and be sober.** The apostle did not need to exhort them to be day people, because their nature was already transformed through salvation.

However, the new nature is incarcerated in fallen, sinful human flesh and it is possible for day people to do deeds of the darkness. Therefore, Paul exhorted the Thessalonians to live consistently with their new natures. They were to be awake and sober.

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The term **sleep** is a different word than the one used to refer metaphorically to "death" in chapter 4. The word **others** again contrasts day and night people. Night people sleep in spiritual indifference, living as if there will be no judgment. That they **sleep** further compounds their dilemma; not only is the night they exist in pitch black, but they also are in a coma. They are asleep to spiritual reality, but as night people are wide awake to the lusts of the flesh.

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**Sleep** is the natural condition of night people, but day people are to **watch**. The idea is that they are to be alert and rightly assessing what is happening in the spiritual dimension. In contrast to the drunken stupor that envelops night people, day people are to be **sober**. To be **sober** means to be free from the influence of intoxicants. A **sober** person exhibits self-control, lives a serious, balanced, calm, steady life, and maintains proper priorities. To be **sober** is to **watch**; the two terms are essentially synonyms. Just as sleep and drunkenness define night people's insensitivity to spiritual reality, so alertness and soberness describe day people's sensitivity to it.

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## The Believer's Behavior

1 Thessalonians 5:6-8

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The observation that **those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night,** further strengthens Paul's point. He also may have been alluding to a parable told by Jesus:

But if that servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, <sup>46</sup> the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. (Luke 12:45-46)

Both **sleeping** and **getting drunk** are things generally done **at night**. **Sleeping** refers metaphorically to passive indifference; **getting drunk** to active sin.

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## The Believer's Behavior

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But stand in sharp contrast to the sleeping, drunken night people. Let us who are of the day be sober. The concepts of watchfulness and sobriety suggested to Paul the image of a soldier on duty. He therefore viewed day people as putting on the "armor of light". A soldier's breastplate protected his vital organs, the area where he was most vulnerable. It was the ancient equivalent of a bulletproof vest. The obvious function of a soldier's helmet was to protect his head from blows that otherwise might crush his skull. The breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of the hope of salvation equip the Christian soldier to "stand firm against the schemes of the devil.... against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:11–12).

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Faith, love, and hope form the supreme triad of Christian virtues. They provide a defense against temptation. Faith is trust in God's power, promises, and plan. It is the unwavering belief that God is completely trustworthy in all that He says and does.

First, believers can trust God's Person. He will never deviate from His nature as revealed in Scripture, but will always act consistently with His attributes. The writer of Hebrews declared of God the Son, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8).

Second, believers can trust God's power. God rhetorically asked Abraham, "Is anything too difficult for the Lord?" (Gen. 18:14; cf. Jer. 32:17, 27).

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**Third, believers can trust God's promises.** "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent; has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" (Num. 23:19).

**Fourth, believers can trust God's sovereign plan,** which can neither be halted nor hindered. Through Isaiah the prophet, God declared, "I act and who can reverse it?" (Isa. 43:13).

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**Faith** provides a defense against temptation, because all sin results from a lack of trust in God. For example, worry is the failure to believe that God will act in love on behalf of His people; lying substitutes man's selfish plans for God's sovereign purposes; adultery denies God's wisdom in instituting the monogamous marriage bond. Thus, **faith is an impenetrable breastplate, providing sure protection against temptation.** But to put it on, believers must study and meditate on the rich depths of God's nature as revealed in Scripture, and then translate that knowledge into action in their lives.

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## The Believer's Behavior

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If faith forms the hard, protective outer surface of a Christian's **breastplate**, then love is its soft inner lining. **Love** toward God involves delight in and devotion to God as the supreme object of affection. It, too, provides a powerful deterrent to sin, since all sin involves a failure to love God. The greatest command, the injunction that sums up the whole law of God, is to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:37). "Love is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom. 13:10), because those who genuinely love God will not do what grieves and offends Him. So **love** and **faith** form an impregnable barrier against temptation; it is only when one or both are lacking that Christians fall victim to sin. Perfect trust in and love for God leads to perfect obedience.

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The final piece of armor is the helmet of the hope of salvation. The salvation in view here is not the past aspect of salvation (justification), or its present aspect (sanctification), but rather its future aspect (glorification). Focusing on the eternal glory that awaits protects believers against temptation. "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. <sup>3</sup> And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:2-3).

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## So What ...

1 Thessalonians 5:6-8

Therefore let us not sleep, as others *do*, but let us watch and be sober. <sup>7</sup> For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. <sup>8</sup> But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and *as* a helmet the hope of salvation.

When **faith** is weak, **love** grows cold. When love grows cold, hope is lost. When **hope** in God's promise of future glory is weak, believers are vulnerable to temptation and sin. Only those who keep the **breastplate of faith and love**, and the **helmet of the hope of salvation** firmly in place can resist effectively the onslaught of the forces of darkness and live like children of light.