

1 Thessalonians 5:8-11

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We can anticipate Jesus's return with hope and love. We should encourage one another to live faithfully now so that we are ready for His second coming.

In contrast to the darkness and the night, Paul has described believers as “sons of the light and sons of the day” (v. 5). He continues and repeats the contrast, that rather than being those who “get drunk at night” (v. 7), believers are to be wakeful and ready:

But since we are of the day, let us be sober. Jesus is coming back, and we don't know when, but we know He will.

We are to dress ourselves up as soldiers in spiritual armor, *having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.* This is because each day we are to do battle against the world, and live faithfully as citizens of the kingdom of God.

Our identity as believers is as members of the Body of Christ, we don't have to live according to the world. But it's possible for us to fall asleep at the wheel, so to speak. Paul's antidote to spiritual sleep and drunkenness is to remember our identity as people *of the day*, and to dress each day for battle. This means we are to choose the perspective of being a soldier, fighting to accomplish a mission in order to please our general. Paul used this exact picture in admonishing his disciple and heir-apparent Timothy in 2 Timothy:

“Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.”
(2 Timothy 2:3-4)

Choosing a perspective is one of three categories of things we humans have been granted by God to control. God allows us to choose our perspective. And here Paul has chosen a perspective that we are soldiers for the Lord, fighting a spiritual battle each day against sin and evil.

Elsewhere Paul also uses armor as an analogy for how believers should resist sin and complacency (Ephesians 6:13-17). Here he describes two pieces of armor that protect the organs that keep us alive. Our *breastplate*, which protects our heart, is made of *faith and love*. *Faith* here refers to *faith* in God, that His promises are true, and His rewards will be superior to those promised by the world. Who or what we trust is another of the three things humans control. When we trust God, and His word, it is like a *breastplate* that protects our life from the destruction of sin; the consequences of choosing sin is death (Romans 6:23; James 1:15).

Love is also a part of our *breastplate*. The word translated *love* here is the Greek word “agape,” and refers to a love of choice, based on values. What we do is another of the three things we control as humans. When we choose to act in love, those choices protect us like a *breastplate*.

Agape *love* is our commitment to serve other people selflessly, without trying to extract benefit from them. Our *helmet*, which protects our brain, is the *hope of salvation*. This *salvation* is a future *salvation*, because we experience it currently as a *hope*, a trust that it will come to pass. This then likely refers to our *hope* of being delivered from the presence of sin. This is a *salvation* we will experience when Jesus returns to earth again; to be delivered from a fallen world and a fleshly body and delivered to a new earth and a resurrected spiritual body. This is the same salvation Paul speaks of where he states that “now salvation is nearer to us than when we first believed” (Romans 13:11b). The further in time from when we first believed, the closer comes the *salvation* of being delivered from this fallen world.

When Jesus returns, He will deliver/save us from this fallen earth and give us new bodies that are free from the presence of sin (Philippians 3:20-21; 1 Corinthians 15:44).

The will of God is for believers to be sanctified, which means to live in a manner that is set apart from the world. Paul has explained this in the previous chapter (1 Thessalonians 4:3). He continues this teaching, stating that *God has not destined us for wrath*, which is the consequence for choosing to sin (Romans 1:24,26, 28). Instead, Paul desires that each of us be *obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us*. Again, this *salvation* is a present and future *salvation* because it is something we are *obtaining*, which means it is an ongoing process. This is the sanctification-salvation of being delivered from the power of sin and the flesh as we learn to walk in the Spirit.

As we walk in a sanctified manner, in *love* toward others, having *faith* that God’s ways are for our best, we are *obtaining salvation* from the adverse consequences that come from choosing the sinful ways of this world.

God’s Spirit provides the power for us to walk in this sanctified manner, apart from the world’s ways. In doing so, we avoid *wrath*. As Paul explains in Romans 1, when any of us chooses sin, we choose God’s *wrath* for us, in that He gives us over to that which we desire, and the negative consequences of the cause effect world. These verses all describe how the “wrath of God” is poured out on ungodliness and unrighteousness:

“Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts” (Romans 1:24).

“For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions” (Romans 1:26).

“And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind” (Romans 1:28).

The common factor in each of these three stages is the natural consequence of God allowing us to gain that which we pursued.

When we instead choose to walk in God’s ways, following His Spirit, we are *obtaining salvation* from the adverse consequences of sin in our lives. This is consistent with what God desires for us, for He has not *destined us for wrath*. He instead desires that we walk in a manner that grants us complete fulfillment, which is only available when we pursue His ways and His kingdom.

We are also *destined* for another application of the word *salvation*, which means “something is being delivered from something.” That application is that believers will be delivered from the presence of a sinful world. We will be delivered from a fallen world to a redeemed world in which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13). God has *destined* us for, fated, declared that this will happen one day. Those who have believed (John 3:14-16) are *destined* eventually *for obtaining* or receiving this remarkable transformation.

This is only possible for one reason, and that is because of the sacrifice of *the Lord Jesus Christ who died for us*. This salvation/deliverance from the presence of sin happens when Christ returns, *whether we are awake* (alive) *or asleep* (have died physically) at His return, alive or dead, *we will live together with Him* in a redeemed earth. All believers, alive or dead, are destined to live in the presence of Jesus forever. In the New Earth, God will dwell upon the earth alongside humanity, and the Lord God and Jesus will be its temple (Revelation 21:3,22).

Believers will be delivered/saved from the presence of sin, and our fleshly bodies will change when we are resurrected and glorified together with Christ. Just as Christ received a new body when He resurrected, so will we (1 John 3:2, 1 Corinthians 15:51). Paul emphasizes that whether believers are *awake* (living) *or asleep* (physically dead), believers who have experienced physical death will join Jesus in the air when He returns. The Thessalonians were concerned that if they died, they would miss out on Jesus’s return, so Paul encourages them once more that all believers *will live together with Christ*.

As we look forward to Jesus’s return and the future *salvation* from the presence of sin that He brings, He is our example to imitate in this present life. The book of Hebrews gives a clear picture of Christ as our forerunner and our example. While we await this future salvation from the presence of sin, we can experience daily being delivered/saved from the power of sin through walking in faith by the power of the Spirit. We can overcome sin and the world by: “fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). This is being sanctified, which is the will of God (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

We see that Jesus was motivated to obey His Father by the joy that He would receive from obeying His Father and enduring the suffering of the cross and the rejection of all people. He thought it was worthwhile to be rewarded with authority by God. Indeed, Jesus “sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” because He learned obedience, even unto death on a cross (Hebrews 12:2; Philippians 2:5-10). Jesus told the disciples explicitly of the authority He had been granted after He arose from the dead, proclaiming in the first part of the Great Commission that “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18b). Jesus continually attempted to redirect His followers’ desire for greatness away from the worldly notions of greatness, and toward service to others in obedience to the Father, which is the path to true and lasting greatness in the kingdom of God (Mark 9:35).

God designed us to seek this sort of greatness. What is at stake is our fulfillment as humans. As Paul told the Romans:

“The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.”

(Romans 8:16-17)

It is clear from this Romans passage that there are two kinds of inheritance: one unconditional and one conditional. Believers in Jesus are Children of God; our inheritance is God unconditionally. We are His. No matter what we do. We are fully accepted. God will never reject those who are His people. He will never reject His children. As Paul asserted to his disciple Timothy: “If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself” (2 Timothy 2:13). Since we are in Christ, for God to reject us would be to reject Himself.

But we are only glorified as Jesus was glorified (being awarded to share Christ’s authority and reign with Him, entering into His joy) if we suffer as He suffered. Acceptance is given unconditionally, the reward of approval requires our obedience.

Having God as an unconditional inheritance comes with our new birth; it is a free gift. He is our Father forever. But joining Jesus to co-reign over the universe, which is the occupation for which we were created (Psalm 8:4-5), and the path to our truest and deepest fulfillment, that only comes if we suffer with Him through following Jesus in the obedience of faith. We were designed to reign in harmony with Christ, nature, and one another, and yet we can sleep and become drunk on the world’s indulgences, and forget what God desires for us in this life.

Again, the example to imitate is Jesus. If we suffer as He suffered then we can gain the unfathomable reward of becoming fellow heirs with Him in His kingdom.

How did Jesus suffer? He spoke the truth relentlessly, even to those who persecuted Him for it. He served faithfully, even when He was rejected because of it. He was courageous, even in the face of loss, rejection, and death. He fought evil wherever it happened, including among religious and governmental authorities (John 15:18-21).

Jesus echoes this promise articulated by Paul in Romans 8:17b in His revelation to the Apostle John:

“He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”

(Revelation 3:21)

The word translated “overcomes” in this verse is also variously translated as:

Prevailed (Revelation 5:5)

Conquering (Revelation 6:2)

Defeat (Revelation 11:7)

Overcame (Revelation 12:11)

Victory (Revelation 15:2)

Defeat (Revelation 17:14)

The message being given is that the obedience of faith, following Christ's commands as faithful witnesses, is the way to winning the championship of life.

Paul taught the Thessalonians that they needed to prepare for this eventual accounting of their deeds to Jesus Christ. They are young in the faith at the writing of this letter. They might have only believed within the last year or so. But they are already learning about this future judgment. They are being taught to expect and seek this reward that can be earned by those who are sanctified and overcome this world. The message here is to be ready when Jesus returns. This is not advanced theology, it is at the core of the motivation for how we should live life upon this earth.

In light of this *hope of salvation*, this *obtaining of salvation* which God has *destined* us for, Paul writes *Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing*. The Thessalonians were living faithful lives, showing love to one another and enduring persecution already, which is why Paul commends them to keep living *just as* they already were; the *hope* set before them is something by which believers can *encourage one another* to live faithfully (Hebrews 10:24-25).

We can *build up one another* by remembering that Jesus is coming back for us. And when Jesus returns, He will reward those who faithfully endured and suffered for His name. This is a core reason we are instructed to gather together, to remind one another that this day of reckoning is coming. As Hebrews states:

“...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”
(Hebrews 10:24-25)

“The day” spoken of in Hebrews 10 is the day of judgment, when all believers will be rewarded for what they have done in Christ's name while upon the earth (2 Corinthians 5:10). It is easy to let fall out of mind things that are unseen. But Paul desires his children in the faith to continually remind one another of life's proper priorities, that they might gain the most possible benefit from their sojourn here on earth.

Biblical Text

8 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. 9 For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, so that whether

we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.