

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church

107 East Austin

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

A1114 – April 3, 2011 – 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11
Sons Of Light

I want to put all of 1 Thess 4:13-5:11 together because it is so significant for daily living. These truths are more practical and daily useable than any I know. So it is very important to know them and how they relate to one another; these two truths being the rapture of the church and the day of the Lord. These are two sides of the same coin in the sense that they both begin at the exact same moment and that's why the NT presents them both as imminent, as events that could occur at-any-moment and that's precisely why Paul discusses one and then immediately after the other. He discusses the rapture of the church in 4:13-18 and the day of the Lord in 5:1-11. John the apostle in the Revelation uses the exact same structure. He discusses the church in the seven letters to the seven churches in Rev 2-3 and then immediately after the day of the Lord in Rev 4-19. That structure is deliberate so far as showing the relationship of the rapture of the church to the day of the Lord -as one occurs the other occurs.

The question behind 1 Thess 4:13 is one of vital importance. The Thessalonians were facing persecution, a number of their members had been martyred, and they would not live to see Christ's coming. They knew that when Christ came all who were alive would be resurrected. But here they had a group of believers who were dead. What about them? Were they going to miss the resurrection from the dead? Paul never discussed this issue. It never even dawned on them that some of them would die before Christ came. And that shows us how expectantly they waited for Him. They expected His arrival at-any-moment. And they lived their lives as if He were on the very threshold of arriving. So convinced were they of this truth that they lived out their faith in the face of persecution and some were put to death as martyrs of the Christian faith.

In the light of the death of many of their loved ones and not knowing if they would be resurrected, they were grieving as do the rest, as do those who have no hope, that is, as if there was no resurrection from the dead. Who are those who have no hope? They were the Epicureans. Epicureanism was a popular Greek philosophy floating in the air of 1st century Europe. It had been founded by Zeno who taught that there was no afterlife or bodily resurrection. Because this philosophy was being taught by all the top professors at the University of Athens it found its way into popular culture. So Paul had to face false doctrines of the world system just as we do and he's saying here, you're Christians not Epicureans. Christians believe in the bodily resurrection and so we have hope. Epicureanism doesn't, so they have no hope.

But what about those dead in Christ? Paul says in verse 13, **Now we do not want you to be uninformed**, it's the Greek word for ignorant, we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren. Why not? Because it leads to an emotional grieving that is inconsistent with proper doctrine. Paul wants them to know proper doctrine because it controls your behavior. And so he begins, **Now we do not want you to be ignorant about those who are asleep. Those who are asleep** being defined for us at the end of verse 16 as "the dead in Christ." So **asleep** is being used as a metaphor for physical death. He's saying that their bodies are asleep. The body sleeps, the soul does not sleep. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. This metaphor that the dead sleep Paul got from Job and Isaiah and Daniel. They all use this metaphor of sleeping because when you see someone sleeping you expect them to wake up. So the metaphor communicates resurrection and every night you lay down to sleep and rise in the morning it's a picture of death and resurrection, death and resurrection; all human beings are confronted with the truths of death and resurrection on a daily basis. We might say every human being is confronted daily with the gospel in his own pattern of sleeping and rising. And here Paul applies it to the dead in Christ. And this brings comfort. They are merely sleeping and one day they will be woken up.

Verse 14, **For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.** Keeping with the metaphor of sleep he opens with the gospel, **that Jesus died and rose**, the gospel is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. **If we believe** the gospel, and we do, 1st class condition, you could translate it "since." "Since we

believe that Jesus died and rose, so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.” Observe that those who have fallen asleep in Jesus are going to be brought back with Jesus. And if they’re coming back with Him then where must they be now? With Jesus. They can’t come back with Him if they aren’t with Him. So where are the souls of those whose bodies sleep on earth? They are with Jesus, the One who died and rose.

Verse 15, **For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.**

First we want to ask where the Lord taught this. Paul says this is **the word of the Lord**. So if that's the case that at some point the Lord spoke this. And yet you can search the Gospels and you won't find it anywhere. You won't find anything like it. But in 1 Corinthians 15 you find the answer. Paul says this truth was a mystery that was revealed to him. A mystery being something that was not revealed in the OT. Resurrection was revealed in the OT. But the word of the Lord that came to Paul was not revealed in the OT. He tells us in 1 Cor 15 what it is, “Behold, I tell you a mystery, we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed.” Apparently it was assumed that everyone would die and then be resurrected. But Paul says, not everyone is going to die but they are all going to be resurrected. So there's going to be one generation of believers alive on the earth who will just be walking around, sleeping or something and then suddenly their mortal natural bodies will be transformed into immortal resurrection bodies. Paul says, we say this to **you by the word of the Lord**.

Then at the end of v 15 he shows us another thing, **we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep**. So here he splits the resurrection of believers in two. He said there's an order to the resurrection of believers at Christ's coming. First **those who have fallen asleep** in Jesus. Then **we who are alive and remain**. So there is an order, there is a sequence, one before the other, not at the same time.

So now think of what he's done for the Thessalonians. Thinking back to their original question; they didn't know if the dead in Christ would be raised. How does Paul answer they're question? Not only will they be resurrected but

they'll be resurrected before those that are left alive on earth. So that's a tremendous comfort.

Another observation of verse 15 has implications for the timing of the rapture. People debate, pre-trib, mid-trib, pre-wrath, a whole series of views and disagreement here. But ask yourself in verse 15, who does Paul say will not precede those who have fallen asleep? **We who are alive and remain.** Does Paul include himself in that **we** statement? Of course he does. So that implies that Paul thought he may be among those alive when the Lord comes? What does that mean for the timing of the rapture? That Paul was looking for Christ. Paul was not looking for Antichrist. Paul taught a lot about the Antichrist but Paul was not looking for him, Paul was looking for Christ. So this implies that Christ is coming before Antichrist. It can come at any moment and in verse 16 he's going to explain the order when it does come.

Verse 16, there are three actions to the order, a three-step of events will occur. Action 1: **For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven.** The Lord Jesus Christ **will descend from heaven with a shout.** The **shout** is a command, a military command. Christ gives a military command as He descends. Action 2: **with the voice of the archangel.** Who's the archangel, arch- means highest, it means rule, he's a fighting angel, and you know him as Michael, Michael the archangel. He is invoked by Christ's military command. So Christ takes action 1, He gives the command, then Michael the archangel takes action 2, he utters his voice, and this sets off action 3: the last action; **the trumpet of God.** And this is a signal to gather. Christ is gathering His army. We've been trained, at this point we're being gathered so we can be fitted with our resurrection body and rewarded, put in various ranks in Christ's army so we can deploy at the second Coming of Christ.

The rapture is about Christ's gathering His armies. So we have three steps that initiate this great gathering; Christ, Michael, the Trumpet of God, boom, boom, boom. Then it happens. What happens? The end of verse 16 happens; **the dead in Christ rise first.** They're resurrected. Then what? Verse 17. **Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up,** that's whatever generation of believers are alive when Christ comes. We'll say it just like Paul, we will be caught up, as if it's going to happen in our lifetime, because it could, **we will be caught up.** **Caught up** is the word *harpazo* from which

we get rapture, it means “to snatch, to jerk”. Don’t worry, you won’t get hurt, it just means that your body is lifted up off the earth and simultaneously transformed instantaneously into a resurrection body. That’s the mystery Paul taught in 1 Cor 15:51. And when we are caught up he says **we will be caught up together with them in the clouds**. With who? With those believers who died in Christ. They were resurrected just before us, then we’re all going to have a reunion in the atmospheric clouds with all believers in Christ. So now Paul has given a very comforting answer about the dead in Christ. Now you can see why Paul says don’t grieve like the pagans that have no hope. The believers who die before Christ comes are going to be resurrected and then we’re going to be reunited with them.

And then he says, **and so we shall always be with the Lord**. So that’s more comfort, we’re always going to be with Him, So don’t grieve as those who have no hope. The Lord has a terrific plan for His bride, the church.

5:1, **Now as**, and that’s *peri de*, when Paul uses *peri de* it means he’s shifting topics. In this case it’s not a radical shift because he’s moving from discussing the rapture to discussing the day of the Lord. Since these two events are two sides of the same coin they occur simultaneously. It’s sort of like Paul is saying, on the one hand the church is going to be raptured out of the world; on the other hand the world is going to be plunged into the day of the Lord.

Now as to the times and the epochs, the **times and the epochs** refer to what? Alterations in kingdoms. There is a kingdom program running through history. In the time of Daniel the Jewish kingdom went into Exile and it was revealed that four Gentile kingdoms would arise sequentially through time. Jesus referred to this period as the times of the Gentiles. The four Gentile kingdoms Daniel predicted are Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. Once these four Gentile kingdoms run their course God will intervene in history in a mighty way and destroy all four of them, establishing a fifth kingdom, a Jewish kingdom that will cover the whole earth and be ruled personally by the Davidic king, Jesus, our Messiah. And when Daniel and the apostles use this expression **the times and the epochs** they’re referring to this shift from the four Gentile kingdoms to the fifth and final Jewish kingdom ruled by Messiah. So the subject is a vast one, **the times and the epochs**, the changes and alterations in God’s kingdom program for world history.

Paul says, regarding this **brethren...have no need of anything to be written to you. For, verse 2, you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.** In other words, it's the day of the Lord that initiates the change in God's kingdom program. And he says, **You yourselves know** this, perfect tense, you already know that the day of the Lord will initiate these changes in God's kingdom program. So evidently in the month or two that Paul spent with the Thessalonians he taught them about God's kingdom program through history and that the changes in this program from the four Gentile kingdoms to the final Jewish kingdom would be brought about by **the day of the Lord** which is a catastrophic intervention by Almighty God to exterminate sinners from the face of the earth. Now if Paul taught all this prophecy to new converts then it shows that prophecy is basic bible doctrine that should be taught to new believers. It's very important for new believers because it gives a powerful motive to live for Christ's glory in the present. However, that being said we want to qualify this by saying that Paul did not teach new believers all the details of prophecy but rather a broad outline. We know this because they were unaware of the details of the rapture as it related to those who were dead in Christ. But they did know the general truth about the rapture as it related to those who were alive when Christ came. So evidently Paul taught new believers prophecy but in broad outlines.

Paul says they knew all this **full well**, a Greek adverb meaning, "with exactness, with precision," and specifically in this context Paul says they knew how the day of the Lord would come to initiate the changes in God's kingdom program. It would come **like a thief in the night.** How does a thief come? Unexpectedly and at a time when visibility is low. Thieves come at unexpected times so they avoid being caught and they come at night when visibility is low so they can't be seen. Thus, the day of the Lord will come upon the world when the world is not expecting it and when the world's vision is blinded to the possibility of such catastrophes as will characterize the day.

In verse 3 Paul describes what blinds the world's vision to the arrival of the day, namely, **When they are saying "Peace and safety!"** it's at that time it will come. This will catch the world by surprise. They will be lulled to sleep by the appearance of global peace and safety; and it will take them by

surprise. Paul says, **then sudden destruction will overtake them just as** and an analogy is drawn from the birth pangs.

But observe the word **then** because it's much more precise in the Greek, it means "at that time." So when they are saying "Peace and safety!" *at that time* **sudden destruction will come upon them.** But the words **come upon** are the words for being overwhelmed or overtaken by something. They will be overwhelmed by the suddenness, the word **sudden** is an adjective describing the **destruction** and it means "unforeseen" destruction, they are totally blind to its arrival because they are preoccupied with the global peace and security that they have seemingly created. And when it comes it will be too late to make any preparations. There will be no escape because the only escape is to be found in Christ and raptured out of this world. So if you miss that escape then you are already in the day of the Lord and **sudden destruction will overtake** you. It doesn't mean you can't become a believer at that point, it just means that you're already in the day of the Lord, the only escape hatch has already closed

And then Paul likens this sudden destruction to the birth pangs in the gastric section of the female anatomy. See, when a woman gets pregnant, and I've seen this a few times, I just saw it happen again and it's not something you want to watch. People ask me if we're going to get to watch the day of the Lord judgments from heaven and I don't know why in the world you would want to watch them. That would be like saying I like to watch a woman in birth pangs. You don't want to watch that. But when a woman gets pregnant the gestation period is ~40 weeks. As the woman gets closer to the 40 week mark she begins to have Braxton hicks contractions several months in advance. These are small muscular contractions that occur sporadically and at unpredictable time intervals to help prepare the body for labor. These are not birth pang contractions. Birth pang contractions are markedly larger muscular contractions that occur suddenly, without warning and when they occur she will have a baby, they help push the baby through the birth canal. Once these begin she will not escape. They are markedly increased in intensity and the time interval between contractions shortens until a baby is born. This is exactly how the day of the Lord wrath will come upon the world. God has designed the birth experience of all women to teach this truth. In other words, at the Fall of man in Gen 3 when God cursed the female side of the human race in the realm of giving birth the new birthing process was

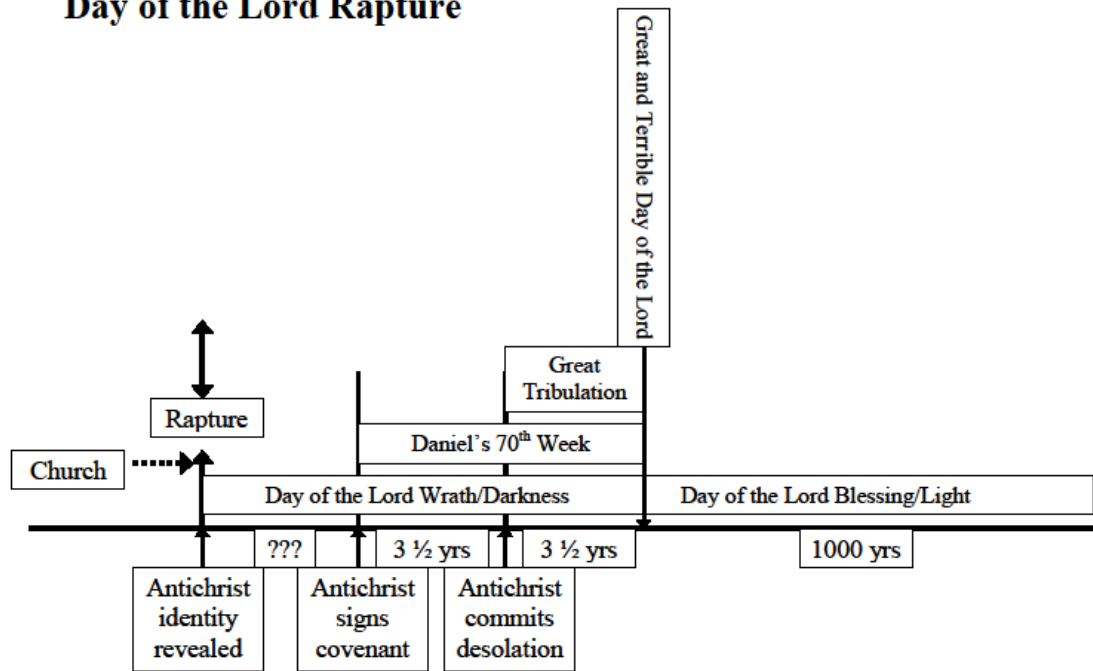
designed to teach how God would remove sin from the world and bring about His kingdom. And what it teaches is that to get His kingdom on earth requires the world going through a very painful process of intense judgments. This exact process is laid down in history in the Exodus plagues which gave birth to the nation of Israel. So this should be a well-known fact. Every woman on the planet that has a baby goes through the birth pangs (if they go through it naturally) and one reason it is important to preserve natural child bearing is precisely because it is so revelatory of this truth. There are other reasons as well. But one thing natural childbirth does that non-natural childbirth cannot do is remind those involved in the birth that God is going to send the whole world through birth pangs to destroy sin and bring in His kingdom. To not think about that when a woman is giving birth is sinful because it is suppressing the truths of God's kingdom program. I mention this because too little attention is given to design as revelatory of truth and so I play it up so we can think about truth the way God intended it to be thought about. Truth is not abstract, truth is illustrated all around us. For him and all the great saints, the truths of Scripture are revealed in concrete reality, played out in our every day experience all around us in so many innumerable ways that God cannot be missed. God has designed around us and in us and through us a revelatory playground purposed to stimulate continual worship and enjoyment of Him. It doesn't require a rock band to be impressed with God. What He has created, the form, the function is perfectly suitable to evoke worship and enjoy Him forever.

So Paul likens how the destruction of the day of the Lord will come upon the world as how the birth pangs come upon a woman. In both scenarios it is sudden, it overwhelms, it is painful and there is no escape. And so Paul says at the end of verse 3, **and in no way will they escape**, a double negative in the Greek text, it is not possible for the world to escape the destruction any more than it is possible for a woman in labor to escape the pain.

Verse 4, and now we get into the practical outworking of this doctrine. The doctrine is in vv 1-3, the suddenness of the arrival of the day of the Lord to bring about a change in God's kingdom program, the application of this doctrine is in vv 4-11. Verses 4 and 5 are going to tell us why we are not going to be overtaken by the day of the Lord. And it's very important to understand why we will not be overtaken by this day that is coming upon the world. Verse 4 begins with a contrast, **But you, brethren**, contrasts with them that

are saying “Peace and safety!” **But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; 5 for you are all sons of light and sons of day.** They are not; they are sons of darkness and sons of night. We are not. Notice the language; darkness and light. Where does this language come from? The OT day of the Lord passages. The day of the Lord begins with a period of darkness and then is followed by a period of light. If this is the case which day will we enter? Looking at our chart if we are sons of light which day will we enter?

Day of the Lord Rapture



The light phase of the day of the Lord. We will not enter the dark phase. We're not sons of darkness, we are sons of light.

So Paul bases our exclusion from the dark part of the day on what? The fact that we are sons of light. This is a statement of our position in Christ. He is the light of the world and we are in Him. We are therefore sons of light and sons of day. We are this by virtue of faith alone in Christ alone apart from any human merit. So our exclusion from the dark part of the day has nothing to do with how you live your life or whether you're watching for Jesus Christ to return expectantly or not; it has everything to do with the fact that you hold the position as a son of light through faith in Christ.

Therefore, verse 6 he begins to apply this to our experience. How ought we to live in our experience if we hold this position. It's an inferential conjunction, inference, **so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.** In other words, live the Christian life. The world isn't going to do it. The world sleeps, the world is not alert to Christ's coming, the world is going along its merry way right down a path of darkness leading to destruction, but we are not sons of darkness so we are not to live as sons of darkness. We are sons of light and sons of the day; therefore we ought to live like sons of light, sons of day. Therefore, **let us be alert and sober** or better, self-controlled, live a disciplined godly life. That's what he's saying: be disciplined, discipline yourself to study the word of God and live a godly life, to be Christ-like. It's not going to happen if you just sit there. You have to consciously do this. Be alert and self-controlled. Be alert; what did Christ say in Matt 24 to the apostles? Be alert, be watching for the any-moment coming of Christ. Your experience ought to conform to your position. Since you are a son of light by position you ought to walk in the light. This is Paul's way of talking about walking in fellowship and it's very similar to John. A wonderful and vivid application of who you are.

Verse 7, **For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night.** In other words, bad things happen at night, you are not of the night, therefore don't live like you are of the night. This is simple to understand. The world is not alert, the world is not self-controlled. The world is asleep at the wheel and the world is drunk behind the wheel. We are not to be that way. We are to be self-controlled.

Verse 8, contrast, **But since we are of the day, let us be sober,** let us be self-controlled, let's not be asleep here as if we think everything is just going to go on a day by day and the Lord Jesus Christ is not going to come for a long time. No, that would be living as if we were asleep at the wheel and drunk behind the wheel. The Lord Jesus Christ can come at-any-moment. And we ought to be living like it right now.

Verse 8, **having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.** Here we have our assets and it reminds us of the armor of God at the end of Ephesians except it has differences. Probably Paul used variations of the armor of God as he sat under house

arrest in Rome and looked at the Roman soldiers armor and he thought about the pieces and how they relate to aspects of the Christian life. The differences are not what's important, the important thing is the aspects of the Christian life. We are to be self-controlled in life and the way we do this is by putting on the armor of God. Each day we put on the armor of God and Paul says in Ephesians we put it on by prayer. And what it means is we have this equipment, we are soldiers and we have equipment to put on every day. Why do we need equipment? Because we're in a battle. If you didn't notice there are bullets whizzing by. The church of Jesus Christ is under attack. We have enemies. Our enemies are not flesh and blood but princes and principalities of darkness, ferocious demons that want to destroy how you think and destroy the categories for right thinking in the word of God so they can destroy the gospel, so they can blind the minds of the unbelieving. Don't be naïve. Satan and the demons are not near as interested in tempting you to sin as they are in deceiving how you think. If they can accomplish the deception the temptation comes easy. As long as our thinking is screwed up we can't progress. That's why the word of God is so important. It teaches you how to think. Once you know how to think about something then you can trust, then you can walk by faith. So we put on by prayer, daily, (it's an ingressive aorist), putting it on continually, day by day, the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. You want to be armed for the battle don't you? It's a battle for your mind; it's a battle for truth in the mind. Don't give up any ground, we have the high ground in Christ, who is the truth, and we are seated in Him in the heavenly places and it's from there that we defend the truth over and against deception. And the point is that as we put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation, we are doing battle with the world system and we are victorious, we are living as sons of light, we are living as alert and self-controlled Christians. On the other hand, if we are too in touch with the world we are lulled to sleep, the world distracts us, the world deceives us into not living as if Christ is coming back at any-moment, the world keeps your eyes somewhere else.

Verse 9, the reason is given. It's a causal *hoti* clause. Why should we live this way? Why should we put on the armor of God daily? Why should we be self-controlled? **Because God has not destined us for wrath**, what wrath? The day of the Lord wrath. We are not appointed to that dark day, but rather he says, **but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ**, that's

a future aspect of salvation, it's the day we get our resurrection body. Which is what day? The day of the rapture. So here again we see the two sides of the one coin; the world destined for wrath, those in Christ appointed for rapture. Both are imminent.

Verse 10, **who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.** But it's more powerful than that, it says, "whether we are awake or asleep, at once we will live with him." Meaning at the very moment of the rapture we are resurrected and we will live together with him. Where He is we will be also. We are going to meet Him in the air, he just got done talking about that in 4:13-18. But we do want to make a special point about the expression, **whether we are awake or asleep.** Does that refer to alive or dead here, the metaphor from 4:13-18, or does it refer to how we are living the Christian life? From the context it doesn't look like whether we are alive or dead though it wouldn't be impossible for Paul to be returning to that theme, but it looks like it's talking about whether we are living as alert Christians or not. And Paul is saying you should live as an alert, awake Christian, but even if you are asleep you will be raptured. In other words the rapture is not partial. There's a view called the partial rapture where only the Christians that are living it are raptured and the rest have to enter the day of the Lord wrath to get straightened up and once they get straightened up they get raptured. But that doesn't have any textual support. Paul says, **whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.** If it is the metaphor for life and death then it's also true but I think he's talking about how we live the Christian life. You can be living in darkness and yet if you are a son of light, you will be raptured, and that's good, in another sense it's too bad because you'll be ashamed when He comes and you'll have to go straight to the judgment seat of Christ and there your works will be evaluated and it probably won't be a wonderful, glowing evaluation. But in any case all believers will be raptured on that day and not just the believers that are living it.

Then we come to verse 11, the only two imperatives in the whole passage, **Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.** The first command, to **encourage** one another means to come alongside one another as fellow believers in Christ and carry one another as each one needs to be carried. Sometimes we do the carrying other times we are the ones that need to be carried. It works both ways. But in

light of the fact we are sons of light and we are not going to enter the day of the Lord we ought to encourage one another to keep on living the Christian life, being alert, being watchful for Christ's coming. The second command is to **build up one another** and this has to do with a construction project that is under way. It literally says "build into the one." And I think the point of this expression is to build unity in our congregation. We all need to be on the same page theologically and we need to be exercising our spiritual gifts in the bond of peace to build unity here. It doesn't promote much building if we here at Fredericksburg Bible Church can't agree theologically and aren't exercising our spiritual gifts.

So we should make every effort to build unity among ourselves knowing that the diversity of spiritual gifts among us brings about unity. They are service gifts, we serve one another to encourage and build up unity among ourselves. Paul says they were already doing this, they should continue doing this.

Alright, those are the two sides of the same coin, the rapture, which is a truth that comforts, and the day of the Lord, which is a truth that promotes encouragement and building of unity among sons of light. Next week I have a real treat for you. Dr Fred Lybrand, wrote a book *Faith Works*, about 500 pages and I'm having him as a special speaker to develop James 2. He's researched it for years and you know this is a battleground between Roman Catholics and Protestants, faith and the role of works in James 2. And I think he can get across better what I've been trying to say so for both the 9:30 and 10:45 hours he's going to give us a fantastic analysis of these verses and I hope you'll join us both hours. If you don't usually come at 9:30 I hope you'll come because it will be a two-part series on the most debated section of all Scripture.

[Back To The Top](#)

Copyright (c) Fredericksburg Bible Church 2011