

“Children of Light”
1 Thessalonians 5:1-6
(Preached at Trinity, November 10, 2019)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Paul has been setting our sights upon the second coming of Christ. It will be a spectacular event. Jesus will come with His holy angels with Him to gather the elect from the four corners of the earth and to bring history to a close. This has long been the hope of the church. Jesus is coming. At the appointed time, Jesus is coming in clouds of glory.
2. There is a natural question that follows such an announcement. When?
The answer is clear. While it will come at the appointed time known only to the Father, it is a time completely unknown to us. Jesus will come suddenly and unexpectedly.
3. Paul uses the illustration of the thief in the night. - "just like a thief in the night."
 - A. This is an illustration Jesus used
Matthew 24:43-44 NAU - "But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into.
⁴⁴ "For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think *He will*."
 - B. We must maintain a condition of earnest watchfulness. We lock our doors because thieves do not announce their arrival. They come at unexpected times – one is wise to always be prepared.
4. In these verses Paul describes what watchfulness for the Christian looks like.
1 Thessalonians 5:4 NAU - "But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief;"
 - A. Paul is drawing a contrast between the believer and the unbeliever.
Paul describes the lost as being in darkness. Of being asleep.
For those in darkness the Day of the Lord will overtake them like a thief. There will be no place to hide, no shelter from the storm.
 - B. Believers, on the other hand, do not live as if they are asleep. They are no longer enveloped in the darkness that once blinded their eyes.
Christians are now in the light.
1 Thessalonians 5:5 NAU - "for you are all sons of light and sons of day.
We are not of night nor of darkness"
 - C. Salvation involves deliverance from this realm of darkness.
Colossians 1:13 NAU - "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,"
5. This darkness has two dimensions
 - A. First, it speaks of spiritual blindness, the absence of spiritual comprehension. The lost man is consumed by the things of this earth. His eyes are blinded to the things above. He cannot comprehend them.

1. He cannot think spiritually. He cannot comprehend the glories of Christ. The thought of His return is completely beyond his thinking.
 2. Darkness involves not comprehending the danger. As we grope around in the darkness we can be completely unaware of what lies around the next corner. The lost man merrily goes through life unaware that the Day of the Lord is at hand.
- B. Second, darkness has a moral aspect. It describes the corruption of the human heart.
- Romans 1:21 NAU** - "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened."
- 2 Corinthians 6:14 NAU** - "Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?"
1. Darkness describes corruption, evil, that which is opposite to the purity of God.

1 John 1:5 NAU - "This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all."
 2. The Christian has been delivered from this darkness

1 John 1:6-7 NAU - "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; ⁷ but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin."

John 8:12 NAS - "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life."
- I. Paul's point is, in view of the return of Christ, how shall we live?
- A. We must live with expectation because we are sons of light
- 1 Thessalonians 5:5 NAU** - "for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness;"
- 1 Paul links this unique condition to our adoption. He uses the word "brethren" in **Verse 4** and then "sons of light" in **Verse 5**. We are adopted into the family of Christ and are being prepared for our homecoming.
 - a. We bear the image of our Father who is Light and dwells in light inaccessible.

We bear the image of Christ who is the Light who has shined upon the world.

John 1:4-5 NAU - "In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. ⁵ The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."
 - b. We share in this inheritance of light

Colossians 1:12-13 NAU - "giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. ¹³ For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,"

- c. The people of this world wander in darkness. Their father is the father of darkness. They are oblivious to the all encompassing reality of our Creator who governs all according to the good pleasure of His will.
- d. But that is not us! We are not of the darkness but of the light. We gravitate towards the light like a plant leans towards the sun. Jesus Christ is our light.
John 8:12 NAU - "Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."
2. Paul uses the familiar, "Be what you are" format.
- In Verse 5 he describes what we are – "you are sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night or of darkness."
 - Then in Verses 6-8 he gives the consequence—"So then" or "therefore" "let us not sleep but let us be sober."
3. We are not blind to the reality of the nearness of Christ's return. It could be at any moment.
4. We live with expectation. Our bags are packed. We are prepared for the coming of the Bridegroom. We do not know when He will return, but we will not be caught unprepared.
- B. We must remain alert and sober
1. Sober means to refrain from the mind-numbing effects of wine. Here metaphorically it means staying constantly aware of the danger of sin; aware of the mind-numbing draw of this present world.
Alert carries the same meaning – it means maintaining consciousness of the nature of this life and our call to holiness. It demands being constantly ready to take action and constantly ready to see Jesus coming in the clouds of glory.
Matthew 24:42 NAU - "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming."
1 Peter 5:8 NAU - "Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."
2. Remember, **Chapter 4** had sanctification as its main theme. This is still Paul's focus.
1 Thes. 4:3 NAU - "For this is the will of God, your sanctification"
1 Thessalonians 4:4 NAU - "that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor"
1 Thessalonians 4:7 NAU - "For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification."
3. Christian living demands being alert unto sanctification
 Matthew Henry: "What! shall Christians, who have the light of the blessed gospel shining in their faces, be careless about their souls, and unmindful of another world? *Let us watch*; we must not be secure and careless, nor indulge spiritual sloth and idleness. We must not be off our watch, but continually upon our guard against sin, and temptation to it"¹

¹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2343.

- II. Looking for the return of Christ demands watchfulness – wakefulness
1 Thessalonians 5:6-7 NAU - "Let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. ⁷ For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night."
- A. The Christian must maintain a state of alertness
1. Paul is saying that most people live as though they were asleep secure and careless, spiritually unconscious.
 2. This sleep is to indulge in spiritual sloth and idleness or being so consumed with the business of this life that spiritual life is consumed. They sleep away precious moments – time that will never be regained
- B. The Bible uses this metaphor of sleep often – always by way of warning.
1. Did not Samson lose his strength while he slept?
Judges 16:19 NAU - "She made him sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his hair. Then she began to afflict him, and his strength left him."
 2. Did not the disciples sleep while they should have been watching and praying?
Matthew 26:40-41 NAU - "And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "So, you *men* could not keep watch with Me for one hour? ⁴¹ "Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."
 3. Did not the enemy sow tares while the laborers slept?
Matthew 13:24-25 NAU - "Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ "But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away."
 Spurgeon wrote: "Those who ought to have been watchmen, and to have guarded the field, slept, and so the enemy had ample time to enter and scatter tares among the wheat."²
 4. Did not the virgins sleep while the Bridegroom delayed His arrival?
Matthew 25:5 NAU - "Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and *began* to sleep."
Matthew 25:11-13 NAU - "Later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' ¹² "But he answered, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' ¹³ "Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour."
- C. The Christian must be continually on guard against our spiritual enemies. You must be alert, awake. Our greatest enemies are Satan, this world, and our own flesh.

² Richard D. Phillips, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, eds. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 208–209.

1. As a Christian you must be alert against the attacks of Satan
 - a. Satan is our great enemy. He despises Christ and despises us. His attacks are subtle and deadly. We maintain watchfulness against his attacks. The return of Christ will be a great victory. Christ's victory will be our victory
Romans 16:20 NAU - "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you."
 - b. The warrior on watch never removes his armor. He doesn't sleep or slumber.
2 Timothy 2:3-4 NAU - "Suffer hardship with *me*, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴ 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."
1 Thessalonians 5:8 NAU - "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."
2. As a Christian you must always be on guard against the lure of the world
James 4:4 NAU - "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."
 - a. Christianity demands separation from the corruption of this world. Instead of participating in their sin our lives must exhibit righteousness.
 - b. Our righteousness must expose their corruption. This is what light does. This was the meaning of our Lord's words in the Beatitudes
Matthew 5:14-16 NAU - "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; ¹⁵ nor does *anyone* light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. ¹⁶ "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."
 - c. This world entices us to idolatry – fixing our attention and affection upon the affairs and pleasures of this life.
3. As a Christian you must be on guard against the sinfulness of your own flesh – you must keep your appetites and desires in check
 You must understand that your greatest enemy is inward. Being spiritually alert demands the discernment to recognize when you heart begins to cool.
1 Peter 2:11 NAU - "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul."

Conclusion:

1. Paul is reminding us that we are children of light. Light characterizes everything that points to Christ. We are awaiting His return. When we see Him He will be in bright shining light.
Revelation 1:13-16 NAU - "/ saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. ¹⁴ His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. ¹⁵ His feet *were* like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice *was* like the sound of many waters. ¹⁶ In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength."
2. He has shined His light upon His people
2 Corinthians 4:6 NAU - "For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."
3. We are to reflect the radiance of His glory while we patiently await His return.
Matthew 5:14-16 NAU - "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; ¹⁵ nor does *anyone* light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. ¹⁶ "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."