

“Re: The Day of the Lord”

November 5, 2017

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

I. Introduction

There are 3 popular contemporary views of history. The first view is the one that comes from the Eastern religions and the New Age movement—it is called the cyclical view. This view sees history as an endless cycle, repeating the same things over and over again. Hinduism and its continual cycle of death and rebirth is an example of this. [Ecclesiastes 1:9](#) would seem to summarize this view: “What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.”

The second view of history is that of atheistic naturalism. This view sees history as linear and non-repetitive. The atheist Richard Dawkins wrote, “*Evolution has no long-term goal. There is no long distance target, no final perfection to serve as a criterion for selection, although human vanity cherishes the absurd notion that our species is the final goal of evolution.*” In other words, human history is just one phase of the meaningless flow of evolutionary history—mankind is just an accidental collection of random atoms—a blip in time.

The third view is that of Christianity. The Bible reveals history to be the results of the purposeful plan of the sovereign, creator God. Jesus Christ is the central figure in history; the Old Testament points to His coming, and the New Testament describes and explains His life, death, resurrection and second coming. According to God’s Word, history isn’t going to go on forever—[turn to 2 Peter 3:9-10](#). The same-ol’, same-ol’ will not continue forever.

When Paul was in Thessalonica, he must have preached about God’s love and God’s wrath. After he left, questions arose about the Rapture, i.e. Jesus’ return for Christians; there were questions about the Day of the Lord, too. Having just answered questions regarding the Rapture in [1 Thess. 4:13-18](#), Paul now turned to concerns about the Day of the Lord. From the blessed event of the catching away of the church, Paul turned to the horrible event that follows it—the destruction of the wicked rejecters of the Lord Jesus Christ. As he

did in describing the Rapture, Paul's purpose in writing this section on the Day of the Lord was not primarily theological or about the end times per se but pastoral and practical. His purpose was to encourage them and to build them up in the midst of their pagan surroundings and persecutions.

II. The Day of the Lord

Like people today, the Thessalonians were curious about the timing of the end-time events, i.e., the things described in books like Daniel and Revelation—things like the Rapture, the rise of the Antichrist, the salvation of Israel, the various seal, trumpet and bowl judgments, the Second Coming, Armageddon, the millennial kingdom, the new heavens and the new earth. Concerning their question as to when the Day of the Lord would come, Paul wrote, “About times and dates we do not need to write to you.” Jesus gave a similar answer to His disciples when they asked Him in Acts 1:6, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” Jesus' answer is recorded in verse 7, “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.” Similarly, the Thessalonians did not need to know when the Day of the Lord would come; they already knew all that God intended them to know about the timing.

Paul then reminded them of what they already knew: “You know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.” These were words taken from Jesus' sermon on the Second Coming in Matthew 24:43 where Jesus said, “But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into.” A thief's coming is not a hopeful, joyful event of deliverance, like the Rapture, but an unexpected, unwelcomed, and harmful calamity. Like Jesus, Paul wrote that the Day of the Lord—a day of calamity could be at any time—only God knows when it will happen.

The Bible is full of obvious, unmistakable signs but most people will still be caught by surprise when the Day of the Lord—God's judgment day—comes. The terrible outpouring of God's wrath in judgment will happen “while people are saying, ‘Peace and safety.’” Speaking about this time, Jesus said in Matthew 24:11, “and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.” These lying deceivers will persuade

the world into believing that peace and prosperity are just around the corner, despite all the signs that the Day of the Lord is rapidly approaching.

Paul wrote, “Destruction will come on them suddenly, as labour pains on a pregnant woman.” God will accomplish the destruction of “them,” the unbelievers, by casting them into the eternal torment of hell— 2 Thessalonians 2:9 says, “They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.” Back in 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul added, “And they will not escape.”

III. Children of Light vs. Children of Darkness

Paul wanted to reassure the troubled new believers in Thessalonica that they would not face God’s wrath. Using the pronouns “they” and “them,” he made a distinction between the Thessalonians and the unbelievers who will experience God’s wrath. Paul wrote that believers “are not in darkness.” In John 8:12, Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” And since the Thessalonian Christians are not in darkness, the Day of the Lord will not come upon them. As children of light, they won’t be there; they will have been taken away when “the Lord himself will come down from heaven” and takes His church out of the world.

To emphasize his point, Paul declared, “We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.” Believers live in an entirely different sphere than those who will experience God’s wrath in the Day of the Lord. Romans 6:4 says that Christians have a new life in Christ Jesus. Colossians 3:3 says that “your life is now hidden with Christ in God.” As compared to the unbelievers—the children of darkness, the “sons of the light and sons of the day,” i.e., the Thessalonians—for that matter, all Christians, do not need to fear missing the Rapture, being caught in the Day of the Lord, or experiencing God’s wrath and condemnation. Children of Light don’t need to be afraid but Children of Darkness do need to fear.

Paul went on to say that since we are “sons of the day” we should not live as those who belong to the darkness. As “day people,” the Thessalonians had been delivered out of the dark night of sin, ignorance,

rebellion, and unbelief. There is no place for night life among “day people.” Turn to Romans 13:12-14.

As Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:6, “Let us be alert and self-controlled.”

Repeating himself for emphasis, Paul wrote, “Since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.” A soldier’s breastplate protected his vital organs. 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. By “putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet,” as Ephesians 6:11-12 puts it, the Christian soldier will be able “stand against the devil’s schemes. . . . against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

Faith, love, and hope provide an excellent defense against temptation. Faith is trust in God and His power, promises, and plan. It is the unwavering belief that God is completely trustworthy in all that He says and does; it’s faith in verses like Romans 8:28 which says, “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” Faith provides a defense against temptation because all sin results from a lack of trust in God. Then there’s love. Those who truly love God will not do something that grieves Him or offends Him. Love involves delight in and devotion to God and His people. In John 14:15 Jesus said, “If you love me, you will obey what I command.” Faith in God and love for God lead to obedience. Finally, “hope of salvation” means “*the hope—really the assurance—that salvation gives us.*” There are really three different aspects of salvation: (1) *past*—I have been saved from the guilt and penalty of sin; (2) *present*—I am being saved from the power and pollution of sin; (3) *future*—I shall be saved from the very presence of sin when Christ returns. John wrote in 1 John 3:2-3, “We know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.” Children of Light are awake to God and His promises; Children of Darkness are asleep to God and have no hope.

Finally, the destiny of children of light is different from the destiny of children of darkness.

Regarding children of light, Paul wrote, “God did not appoint us to suffer wrath.” [John 3:36](#) says, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.” “Wrath” doesn’t refer to a momentary outburst of rage; it is a general reference to the final judgment, when God’s wrath will be poured out on the wicked, beginning with the Day of the Lord.

Paul reminded his readers that there is only one way to escape this wrath—“salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” [1 Peter 2:24](#) says, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.” Jesus died so that those who believe in His name would be saved—as Jesus said in [John 5:24](#), “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.” Christ’s death in the place of all children of light sets them apart from the children of darkness. The children of light will spend eternity in heaven; the children of darkness will spend eternity in hell—Jesus said in [Matthew 8:12](#), “The subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

As he did with his discussion of the Rapture in chapter 4, Paul concluded his discussion of the Day of the Lord by challenging the Thessalonians to “encourage one another and build each other up.” His closing words “as in fact you are doing” made the point that they were already doing this, but he wanted them to “do this more and more” ([1 Thessalonians 4:1](#)).

IV. Conclusion

Many believers today have such a comfortable situation here on earth that they rarely think about going to heaven and meeting the Lord. They forget that they must one day stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Jesus said in [Revelation 22:20](#), “I am coming soon.” The truth of our Lord’s imminent return should encourage us to keep pure—as we read in [1 John 3:3](#), “Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.” Paul is calling us to stay alert and to keep busy; to conduct ourselves as though Jesus may

return soon (which He might do), and to minister as though His coming may be delayed indefinitely (which it might be). We need a short-term attitude which doesn't take the future for granted. But knowing that God's timing is not our timing, we need to plan and minister for the long haul.