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Prepared and Preparing for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ

Introduction:

In recent weeks we have addressed the important doctrine of the second coming of Jesus Christ. The day will arrive when the “the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:16f).

In our addressing this matter, we have sought to expose and distance ourselves from much popular, but, we believe, unbiblical teaching regarding the second coming. And so, we have also addressed some of commonly and popularly held, but errant teachings. The Holy Scriptures do not teach what is most commonly believed in most “Bible-believing” churches. The popular belief is of a two-stage second coming--a pretribulation rapture of the “Church”, followed by a seven year tribulation, concluding with a second stage of the second coming of Jesus Christ. It is believed that then there will exist 1,000 year Jewish millennium on earth, which is followed by the final judgment of unbelievers. But in contrast to this view we believe the Bible to teach a single return of the Lord, which will be the last day of history of this fallen world. It will be a day of a general resurrection of all mankind, judgment according to their works, and then the Lord will consign the eternal fate of both believers and unbelievers.

This single coming of Jesus Christ as the final event in human history of this fallen world is consistent with what our Lord Jesus taught His disciples. Our Lord taught His disciples that He would raise His people from the dead on “the last day.” He said this in several different ways, as recorded in John 6. He declared, “This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at *the last day*” (John 6:39). In the next verse we read, “And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at *the last day*” (John 6: 40). A little farther in John 6 our Lord said, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at *the last day*” (John 6:44). Later still in John 6 He declared, “Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at *the last day*” (John 6:54). Much later in John’s Gospel when the Lord was speaking of the future resurrection of the righteous, Martha affirmed this doctrine of the last day. We read in John 11:24, “Martha said to Him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at *the last day*.’”

Now some say that this “last day” in which Christians will rise from the dead, is a different and separate occasion than when the Lord will raise the unrighteous from their graves to face their judgment. They argue that 1007 years separate the resurrection(s) and judgment(s) of the righteous and the unrighteous. But in John 12:48 our Lord spoke of the damned and that they would also be judged on *this last day*. We read our Lord’s words, “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him-- the word that I have spoken will judge him in the *last day*” (John 12:48). The simplest, “literal” meaning of our Lord’s words is that there will be a single *last day*, in which He will raise the dead and judge all mankind, separating the righteous from the unrighteous, sending the damned into everlasting punishment and granting the righteous entrance into the fullness of the kingdom of God prepared for them. This is consistent with our Lord’s clear teaching in Matthew 25:31ff

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. ³³And He will set the sheep on His

right hand, but the goats on the left. ³⁴Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, ***inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:*** ³⁵for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; ³⁶I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’

³⁷“Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? ³⁸When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? ³⁹Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ ⁴⁰And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’

⁴¹“Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘***Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:*** ⁴²for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’

⁴⁴“Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ ⁴⁵Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ ⁴⁶***And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.***”

The Holy Scriptures teach that there is one second coming of Jesus Christ on the last day, in which He will judge the world in righteousness, separating the righteous from the unrighteous.

But now in the paragraph before us, which is **1 Thessalonians 5:1-11**, we read that ***Christians are prepared*** for the coming of the Lord, but that ***non-Christians are unprepared***, even unconcerned and unformed of the second coming of Christ and the calamity of His judgment upon this fallen world. But the apostle also shows that although Christians are prepared to face the Lord in judgment, nevertheless, they are to be ***preparing*** themselves for that event. Let us read our passage.

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. ²For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. ⁵For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. ⁶So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. ⁷For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. ⁸But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. ¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

We read of two kinds of people, those who are ready for the second coming of Jesus Christ and those who are not ready. What do we mean by “ready”? Christians are ready in that they are ordering their lives in righteousness with view to the coming of Jesus Christ. All others are not prepared for His coming; they order their lives without thought or reflection upon the accounting that will be required of them on that day.

Let us work through our passage. Here is an outline that will help us understand what our Lord has revealed to us.

- I. The Day of the Lord will be sudden and unexpected (5:1, 2)
- II. The Day of the Lord will bring sudden destruction on non-Christians (5:3)
- III. The Day of the Lord will not “surprise” Christians (5:4, 5)
- IV. The Day of the Lord should be before the eyes of Christians (5:6, 7)
- V. Christians are to be prepared for the Day of the Lord (5:8)
- VI. Salvation is certain for Christians in the Day of the Lord (5:9, 10)
- VII. How Christians are to treat one another until the Day of the Lord (5:11)

I. The Day of the Lord will be sudden and unexpected (5:1, 2)

Paul wrote, “Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. ²For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.”

Paul was continuing his discussion that we examined in the verses at the conclusion of chapter 4. He was comforting and assuring those in the church at Thessalonica that at the coming of Jesus Christ they would be reunited with their Christian loved ones who had died. The question would have naturally arisen, “When will this great event take place?” Perhaps they had expected a very soon coming of the Lord. But Paul informed them there was no way to know when the Lord would return. The Lord Himself had told His disciples, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority” (Acts 1:7). And here, Paul is saying that determining when the Lord Jesus will return is not possible for us to know. ²For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.” He is going to come suddenly and in an unexpected manner.

Paul declared in **verse 1**, “*Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you.*” The words, “times” and “seasons”, are linked together in several places in Scripture.¹ It conveys the thought of both general and specific aspects of time. Paul declared that there was no need for him to write regarding the “times and seasons” for they already had been taught by Paul that no one can know even in general when the Lord will return a second time.

Matthew Henry addressed this:

The apostle tells the Thessalonians it was needless or useless to enquire about the particular time of Christ’s coming: *Of the times and seasons you need not that I write unto you* (v. 1). The thing is certain that Christ will come, and there is a certain time appointed for his coming; but there was no need that the apostle should write about this, and therefore he had no revelation given him; nor should they or we enquire into this secret, *which the Father has reserved in his own power. Of that day and hour knoweth no man.* Christ himself did not reveal this while upon earth; it was not in his commission as the great prophet of the church: nor did he reveal this to his apostles; there was *no need* of this. There are times and seasons for us to do our work in: these it is our duty and interest to know and observe; but the time and season when we must give up our account we know not, nor is it needful that we should know them. Note, there are many things which our vain curiosity desires to know which there is no necessity at all of our knowing, nor would our knowledge of them do us good.

He stated in **verse 2**, “*For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.*” We have already addressed in an adequate manner, I believe, this idea of Jesus coming as a thief. They are mistaken who argue that Jesus returning as a thief in the night is that of a “secret”, “quiet” rapture of His Church, a snatching away of His people ahead of a future seven year tribulation. Jesus coming as a thief does not carry the idea of a secret coming, but of a sudden and

¹ Cf. Acts 1:7; Dan. 2:21; Ecc. 3:1ff.

unexpected coming. The second coming of Jesus Christ is like when a thief comes in the night--He is And His coming as a thief will certainly not be secret or quiet, as 2 Peter 3:10 so clearly informs us. Peter wrote, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up." When Jesus returns as a thief at His second coming, He will appear to all, but they will not have expected this event. They are caught unaware when He suddenly appears.

Paul's statement of verse 1 is but one more place in the Holy Scriptures that teaches us we cannot know the date of the second coming of Jesus Christ. Our Lord Himself told His disciples, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Matt. 24:36). Nevertheless, in spite of the clear teaching of Scripture about this matter, there are those who insist on setting the date for the coming of the Lord.

There were thousands who gathered in 1844 because **William Miller** claimed the Lord would return on a specific date. Seventh Day Adventists trace the beginning of their movement to this event, which was October 22, 1844. Of course when the Lord failed to appear there was great disappointment. One of the early Adventists wrote: "Such a spirit of weeping came over us as I never experienced before... we wept and wept till the day dawned."² This did not seem to discredit the movement, however, for they say that Christ did "return", in that on that day the Lord began to execute His final judgment. Adventists call this doctrine "The Investigative Judgment." They claim that Jesus Christ has been in this role since October 22, 1844. It was all based on a futile effort to declare in advance a date of our Lord's second coming.

Charles Russell, the founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses, claimed that the Lord would return in 1914. In fact, there were five occasions, including the 1914 date, that the Jehovah's Witnesses claimed Christ would return. I have photocopies of pages from the Watchtower magazine for each of these claims that Jesus would return on a specific date.

But date setters have come forward throughout church history. **Tichonius**, who was an early Christian write, claimed that Christ would return in 381 AD. **Hippolytus** and **Lactantius** claimed that Jesus would return in 500 AD. There were numerous people who had predicted that He would come in the year 1,000 AD. **Joachim of Floris**, and Italian monk, said that He Christ would return in 1260 AD. Isaac Newton said it would be in 1715. **Johann Bengel** believed it would occur on June 18, 1836. **John Wesley** had agreed with that date. **Edward Griffin** spoke of the coming of Christ and the onset of the millennial kingdom in 1921. I have a book in my library that is entitled, "88 Reasons Christ could return in 1988." **Harold Camping** wrote a book, 1994. In spite of the clear teaching of Scripture no one knows the "times and the seasons", date setters persist in their proclamations.³ Do not be deluded by these errant teachers.

II. The Day of the Lord will bring sudden destruction on non-Christians (5:3)

In **verse 3** Paul declared that the coming of Jesus Christ will result in severe, sudden destruction on non-Christians. He wrote, "*While people are saying, 'There is peace and security,' then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.*" "He tells them how terrible Christ's coming would be to the ungodly" (Matthew Henry). It will be to their everlasting ruin.

It seems to be commonplace in our Lord's dealings with His enemies that He first lulls them into a false sense of well-being just before His wrath comes upon them. The people in the world, who do not know or believe on Jesus Christ for salvation, will be unaware and unprepared for the coming of the Lord. It may be Paul's reference to "peace" speaks to an internal sense of security or tranquillity and "security" refers to external safe-keeping. But it is clear that their sense of "peace and security" is a false sense of

² Ralph Woodrow, *His Truth is Marching On* (Ralph Woodrow Evangelistic Association, 1977), p. 8.

³ *Ibid*, pp. 18-21.

well-being. But it is a delusion, for even when they are believing they are safe and secure, then the Lord Jesus will bring sudden destruction upon them at His coming.

When they thought themselves most secure, they were then in the greatest danger; when they were most off their guard, then the crisis came.⁴

The destruction our Lord will bring is as a woman whose time has arrived to give birth, when the severe birth pains come suddenly upon her. The idea of the inevitability of judgment is being conveyed. It cannot be postponed or dismissed. When the time arrives, the end of their unbelief and rebellion will seal their fate and secure their condemnation. ***“They will not escape.”***

III. The Day of the Lord will not “surprise” Christians (5:4, 5)

Paul wrote to these Christians, ***“But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.”*** Christians need not fear that coming Day. “He tells them how comfortable this day will be to the righteous” (Matthew Henry).

Here the metaphor of “darkness” not only conveys the idea of ignorance, but also of immorality. They are unaware of His coming but they are also ill prepared for His coming. But in contrast to them, Christians “are not in darkness.” They are aware of His coming and they are prepared for His arrival. This is not because they know ***when*** He will return, for no one knows the “times and the seasons”; but they do know with certainty that He will return, and they purpose to be ready for Him. This is because they are not “in darkness” that they will not be unaware or ill prepared; they will not be caught by “surprise.”

However, we are not to be presumptuous regarding our standing when the Lord returns. We have a responsibility placed upon us, as we see next.

IV. The Day of the Lord should be before the eyes of Christians (5:6, 7)

Paul wrote, ***“So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night.”*** Christians are not to “sleep”, as others do. Obviously the Lord is not instructing us to go without sleep, though some of us may feel that we nearly keep this word literally. What Paul is advocating is that Christians should always remain alert with view to the coming of the Lord. He expressed this same idea in different ways in different places. For example, we read Paul’s instructions to the church at Corinth:

²⁴Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. ²⁵And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. ²⁶Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. ²⁷But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. (1 Cor. 9:1)

Paul strove to be holy, disciplined in all his life, for he desired to win the prize set before him. The “prize” is salvation itself. Similarly, we are to be “awake” and be “sober.” He makes reference to being “sober.” Drunkenness is a great sin. But drunkenness is also a metaphor for one who is ***spiritually***

⁴ H. D. M. Spence, Joseph S. Exell, eds. *The Pulpit Commentary*, vol. 21 (William B. Eerdmans, 1950, rep. 1962) p. 103.

insensitive and unconcerned about what is taking place around him. We are not to be as those who get drunk.

Charles Spurgeon preached a sermon on this text of 1 Thessalonians 5:6, “*So then let us not sleep, as others do.*” It was entitled, “Sleep Not.” Here are a few of his words:

A piece of news about a fire in another continent makes a sensation in all our homes, but the fire that never shall be quenched is heard of almost without emotion. The discovery of a gold-field will affect half the markets in the world, and send a thrill through the public pulse. But when we speak of that blessed City where the streets are of gold, how coolly men take it all, regarding it as though it were a pretty fiction, and as if only the things which are seen were worthy of their notice. We sleep when heavenly things and eternal things are before us. Alas, that it should be so.

We are to be alert, always ready for the coming of the Lord. We are not to be as those who are “sleeping” with regard to these matters. May the Lord help us to be awake and alert.

V. Christians are to be prepared for the Day of the Lord (5:8)

Here we read how we are to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord. **Verse 8** reads, “*But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.*” We are not only supposed to be awake, that is “watching”, but we are to be armed also with view to the coming of the Lord.

Paul uses the metaphor of spiritual armour. Of course the more full metaphor is to be found in Ephesians 6, but it is here also. There are a few differences between the passages. Here the breastplate is “faith and love”, but in Ephesians 6 the breastplate is that “of righteousness.” Here the “helmet” is the “hope of salvation”, but in Ephesians 6 the helmet is the helmet “of salvation.”

In the breastplate we have tied together “faith” and “love.” **Thomas Manton** (1620-1677) wrote of this:

The breastplate consisteth of two graces, faith and love; these two are joined together, for the one can do nothing without the other. Faith without love is but dead opinion, and love to God in Christ cannot be without faith; both together enable us to do notable things for God: Gal. 5:6, “Faith worketh by love.” What can withstand faith working by love?⁵

But we see the triad of grace before us--faith, hope, and love. “Faith” is to be in the Lord Jesus. “Love” probably speaks of our love for the Lord but also for the brethren. “Hope” is the certain prospect of our future final and full salvation at the coming of Jesus Christ. Paul wrote that these are essential and primary qualities that are characteristic of every Christian. He wrote, “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love” (1Cor. 13:13).

VI. Salvation is certain for Christians in the Day of the Lord (5:9, 10)

Although we have a responsibility to be ready and prepared for the second coming of Jesus Christ, it is not in order to earn or merit our salvation that will be fully revealed at His coming. Our salvation is certain, not in doubt. God has decreed that we will be saved. We read in **verses 9 and 10**, “*For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.*”

Here “wrath” refers to the wrath of God’s punishment that will be poured out upon the lost at the coming of Jesus Christ. The fate of the wicked and unbelieving world is eternal damnation, the

⁵ *The Works of Thomas Manton*, vol. 18 (Solid Ground Christian Books, 2008), p. 454.

eternal, unending wrath of God. But praise be to God that He “has not destined”, that is, He had not determined, He had not decreed, that we will receive His wrath--thank God. But God has “destined” that we will obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul is referring here to God’s purpose in eternal predestination.

That the Bible teaches this doctrine of predestination is really not open to debate; it is a clearly stated matter. We might cite Ephesians 1; it clearly sets forth the truth that what is unfolding in history is the realization of God’s plan and purpose from eternity.

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ⁴***just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world***, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, ⁵***having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will***, ⁶to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. ⁷In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace ⁸which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, ⁹***having made known to us the mystery of His will***, according to His good pleasure ***which He purposed in Himself***, ¹⁰that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth-- in Him. ¹¹In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, ***being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will***, ¹²that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. (Eph. 1:3-12)

Here the inspired writer clearly wrote in Ephesians 1 the eternal election and predestination by God the Father results in the salvation from sin of the ones He chose from eternity. How anyone can read Ephesians 1 and continue to deny the doctrine of eternal and unconditional election is beyond me. I once read of an account in which **Charles Spurgeon** rehearsed what **John Newton** had experienced and said about this matter. John Newton, of course, is the song writer of ***Amazing Grace***. Here is the account:

John Newton used to tell a whimsical story, and laugh at it, too, of a good woman who said, in order to prove the doctrine of election, “Ah! Sir, the Lord must have loved me before I was born, or else He would not have seen anything in me to love afterwards.” I am sure it is true in my case; I believe the doctrine of election, because I am quite certain that, if God had not chosen me, I should never have chosen Him; and I am sure He chose me before I was born, or else He never would have chosen me afterwards; and He must have elected me for reasons unknown to me, for I never could find any reason in myself why He should have looked upon me with special love. So I am forced to accept that great Biblical doctrine. I recollect an Arminian brother telling me that he had read the Scriptures through a score or more times, and could never find the doctrine of election in them. He added that he was sure he would have done so if it had been there, for he read the Word on his knees. I said to him, “I think you read the Bible in a very uncomfortable posture, and if you had read it in your easy chair, you would have been more likely to understand it. Pray, by all means, and the more, the better, but it is a piece of superstition to think there is anything in the posture in which a man puts himself for reading: and as to reading through the Bible twenty times without having found anything about the doctrine of election, the wonder is that you found anything at all: you must have galloped through it at such a rate that you were not likely to have any intelligible idea of the meaning of the Scriptures.”

The main subject of the passage we read, Ephesians 1:3ff, is those who are saved from their sin, whom God chose from among fallen humanity, are saved due to God’s grace. Here we read in verse 3 that God “***chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.***” We see that the believers’ election by the Father clearly speaking to God’s decree. And then in verse 5 it says of the elect that God had “***predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself.***” Now technically election and predestination are two different doctrines, although the terms are commonly used interchangeably.

Election speaks of God the Father's choice or selection of certain ones to be the objects of His saving grace. And then predestination speaks of the end or destiny to which God has purposed to bring His elect. God elected sinners in love. And then He predestined that those elect ones would become adopted sons of God the Father by Jesus Christ. Both the sinners' election and predestination are aspects of God's eternal decree, determined by God before creation. Paul declares that God's decree had been that which God "purposed in Himself" (1:9), again a reference to God's decree. Indeed, Paul asserts that Christians are ones who had been "*predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will*" (Eph. 1:11). And that is a declaration of God's decree all things that take place in God's world. All things that transpire in God's creation are a manifestation, an unfolding, a realization of God's decree, although He is not the chargeable author of sin.

Now, Arminians⁶, that is, those who deny that God has decreed all things that take place in history, do rob God of the glory that is His by arguing that God merely *knew ahead of time* what would occur in history, because He is omniscient, God knows all things. We certainly would affirm that God knows all things. But it strips God of His glory and the truth of His person and work to say that God *only* knew and did not *plan* and thereafter *execute*, bring to pass all that He willed from eternity. The Scriptures will simply not allow for such an explanation of the nature and works of God.

Psalm 33:11. "The counsel of the LORD standeth forever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations."

Isaiah 14:24. "The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand."

That is not speaking of God's knowledge, but of God's intention and purpose to bring to pass what He has planned. God has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. He chose us in Christ before creation and He predestinated us to be saved from our sin and conformed to His Beloved Son.

Paul asserted in our passage of 1 Thessalonians 5 that our salvation was all due to the work of God on our behalf through Jesus Christ. Again, he wrote, "For God has not destined us for wrath, *but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us*" (5:9, 10). Our salvation is wholly due to the merit and work of our Savior on our behalf. He is the only way in which sinners may be saved from God's coming wrath. Peter had declared, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Jesus Christ was our Champion, who went forth on our behalf to win the battle for us. He did so through his suffering and death "for us."

Charles Spurgeon described our Lord as our Champion who won the day for us:

Further, it is clear that he is a champion: "The Lion of the tribe of Judah hath prevailed." What was asked for was worthiness, not only in the sense of holiness, but in the sense of valor. One is reminded of a legend of the Crusades. A goodly castle and estate awaited the coming of the lawful heir: he and he only could sound the horn which hung at the castle gate; but he who could make it yield a blast would be one who had slain a heap of Paynim (pagans) in the fight, and had come home victorious from many a bloody fray. So here, no man in earth or heaven had valor and renown enough to be worthy to take the mystic roll out of the hand of the Eternal. Our champion was worthy. What battles he had fought! What feats of prowess he had performed! He had overthrown sin; he had met face to face the Prince of darkness, and had overcome him in the wilderness; ay, he had conquered death, had bearded that lion in his den; had entered the dungeon of the sepulchre, and had torn its bars away. Thus he was worthy, in the sense of valor, on returning from the far country to be

⁶ Arminians, not the Armenians, the ethnic people. Arminians are those who subscribe to the doctrines that Jacobus Arminius promoted, doctrines that the Reformed churches of Europe condemned as error at the Council of Dort in 1619.

owned as the Father's glorious Son, heaven's hero, and so to take the book and loose the seals thereof. The brilliance of his victories does not diminish our delight in him as the Lamb. Far otherwise, for he won these triumphs as a Lamb, by gentleness, and suffering, and sacrifice. He won his battles by a meekness and patience before unknown. The more of a conqueror he is, the more astounding is it that he should win by humiliation and death. O beloved, never tolerate low thoughts of Christ! Think of him more and more, as did the blessed Virgin, when she sang, "My soul doth magnify the Lord." Make your thoughts of him great. Be-greaten your God and Savior, and then add to your reverent thoughts the reflection that still he looks like a lamb that has been slain. His prowess and his lion-like qualities do but set forth more vividly the tender, lowly, condescending relationship in which he stands to us as the Lamb of our redemption. (C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 35, pp. 386f)

There is one more clause in verses 9 and 10 we want to consider. Again, it reads, "For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us *so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.*" First, notice the words once again, "awake" and "sleep." This is actually the third time these words are used together in this passage. But in each instance a different nuance is conveyed. In verse 6 when Paul used the word, "sleep", it conveyed the idea of "spiritual carelessness." In verse 7, however, Paul used the word, "sleep" to refer to natural sleep. But here in verse 10, Paul used the word, "sleep", to refer to Christians who have died before the coming of the Lord. And so here, Paul declared that God had destined that His people redeemed by Jesus Christ would live with Him, whether they were living or they had died in the Lord.

VII. How Christians are to treat one another until the Day of the Lord (5:11)

Paul concluded this paragraph in **verse 11**. It reads, "*Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.*" This concludes Paul's own words of encouragement to this church about the fate and future of those Christians who died in Christ (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13ff). He commands the Christians in this church to "encourage" one another and "build" one another.

Verse 11 accompanies verse 10 in a similar way that 4:18 followed 4:17.

The relation between 5:10 and 11 is a close parallel to that between 4:17 and 18. Just as in chapter 4 the clause, "And so shall we ever be with the Lord" was followed by "Therefore encourage one another with these words," so here in chapter 5 the clause "In order that . . . we may live in fellowship with Him" is followed by "Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, as in fact you are doing."⁷

Let us be actively encouraging one another, not discouraging one another. Let us build up one another, not tear one another down. This is how we can best prepare ourselves and one another for the coming of the Lord.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24f)

⁷ William Hendriksen and Simon Kistemaker, *Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews*, New Testament Commentary (Baker Academic, 1955), pp. 128f.