



Living Like "the Sons of Light"

Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; (1 Th. 5:1-5)

This is not a rhetorical question nor am I being derisive or sardonic, but can someone explain to me why the timing and structure of the End Times was no mystery to the Early Church and yet we seem to hold endless conferences and publish untold numbers of books and websites on the subject? In all fairness, perhaps I need to re-frame the issue. It actually seems that the problem does not pertain so much to the thirst for knowledge about the fulfillment of God's plans as the day of the Lord approaches, but how to *live* in the shadow of that knowledge. It might be the age old issue of the positioning of the cart relative to the horse. It seems that there are some who believe if they can just obtain enough information it will inspire them to live as they should in the shadow of the Last Days; Paul teaches we already have enough information so that we should be doing nothing **BUT** living as we should in the shadow of the Last Days.

I could not even estimate how many times I have been presented with some kind of chart "explaining" the time line of the Last Days. I applaud the effort but find I am hopelessly entrenched in the notion that, like most things in a Believer's life, it is not as much a test of knowledge as a test of faith. Paul intimates that this is so elementary and basic to every Believer's understanding that it is almost not worth mentioning at all! "*For you yourselves know full well*". (1 Th. 5:1) The

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structure of these things is as rudimentary any other doctrine of the Gospel. Every Believer knows without question how it works:

1. "...*the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night.*" (1 Th. 5:2)
2. "...*then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains...*" (1 Th. 5:3)
3. ...*and they will not escape.*" (1 Th. 5:3)

There it is. You may know that birth is eventually going to come when you are 6 weeks pregnant, but at the end of the 9 months, no matter how prepared you think you are, everyone is shocked and panicked when the first, relatively sparse birth pangs hit, and are never quite prepared as they quickly gain frequency and intensity culminating in a "sudden" birth which everyone knew was always coming no matter what. What does every Christian need to know about the End Times? It will come unexpectedly, it will transpire very quickly, and there will be no escape for the unprepared.

Pardon the pun, but there is a good reason why I am belaboring the issue of what every Christian is supposed to know about the End Times; it is because of the rest of Paul's message in 1 Thessalonians 5. He proceeds from the assumption that since we already **know** everything we **need** to know, that there is a basic set of characteristics associated with those living in the shadow of Christ's Return. And how is it that we should be living in these Last Days? What does Paul teach should be the overriding concerns and behavior of End Times Believers?

But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; (1 Th. 5:4-5)

The metaphors of light and darkness are a fascinating study throughout the whole of Scripture which cannot be fully detailed here, but in this particular context the emphasis is on lifestyle. As far as

those living in darkness are concerned, His coming will be sudden and unexpected. But how does this metaphor materialize in real life? What characterizes someone who is living in spiritual darkness?

So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. (Eph. 4:17–19)

It is an unrepentant life, someone who lives for their self and pursues that life by operating "*in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding*". This is the biblical definition of "deception". When someone pursues the wrong thing persistently, resisting all attempts to reach or bring them back, God eventually gives them over to the very thing they so tenaciously seek. Contrast this to what Paul teaches about those coming out of the darkness into the light...

for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. (Eph. 5:8–10)

Those in darkness live for themselves; those in the light live for Christ. In fact, this is exactly what Peter highlights as a prominent reason why we have been called to live exclusively for Christ, to no longer live like our former selves.

But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; (1 Pe. 2:9)

A "Last Days Christian" is characterized as someone who is living in the Light – someone who is their self salt and light to the rest of the world.

How does this “living in the Light” take place? How are such Believers identified? How can they be distinguished from those in darkness? One is “*alert and sober*”, the other is “*sleeping*” and “*drunk*”.

so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. 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. (1 Th. 5:6–8)

Spiritual drunkenness in Scripture is equated with spiritual deception. It results in the same condition that comes from imbibing in an excess of alcohol where someone becomes ignorant not just of what is going on inside of them but everything else around them. They are not going to recognize the imminent destruction of the world because they cannot recognize the personal destruction they are invoking on themselves. Paul makes a further distinction by stating that these two types of people are differentiated by their deeds, particularly in their behavior and treatment of others.

The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. (Rom. 13:12–13)

It is most notable that in such times Paul advocates the Believer’s need for protection by the armor of God. It is a further picture of someone who is prepared for the Last Days who actively dons “*the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation*”. Faith is our soul’s protection where our relationship with Christ is concerned, love is our heart’s protection where our relationship with others is concerned, and the helmet of hope on our head is the protection of our mind which is to be on the things above. (Col. 3:1-3)

A “Last Days Christian” is characterized as sober and awake – someone visibly different in their relationship with Christ, their relationship with others, and their way of thinking.

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For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him. Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing. (1 Th. 5:9–11)

Where does living in the darkness vs. the light, being drunk vs. sober, or sleeping vs. awake ultimately lead to? For those living for themselves (in darkness, drunk, and sleeping) it is to experience God's wrath; for those who live exclusively for Christ (in the light, sober, and awake) *"we will live together with Him"*. Salvation is not confined strictly to that moment when a decision for Christ was made, but continually proven by a changed life going forward which puts His Word and ways into practice.

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'" (Mt. 7:21–23)

They knew His name! They cast out demons and performed miracles! But they did not live according to His Word but instead were those *"who practice lawlessness"*.

I would submit that the reason Paul follows this up with, *"Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing"* is to encourage an environment which prizes **lawfulness** – obedience to God's Word – to such a degree that this will not happen to Last Days Believers. In fact, given the context of Paul's teaching to this point, it would seem there are three prominent things which should be used to encourage and build up Believers in the final hours:

1. The doctrine of the Resurrection, that *"whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him"*. (1 Th. 5:10)

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2. The encouragement to live sober, awake, and as children of the light. In other words, putting God's Word and ways into practice to live visibly changed lives.
3. To employ the whole armor of God here identified with faith, love, and hope (1 Th. 5:8) which protects the heart, soul and mind.

A "Last Days Christian" is characterized as not only pursuing personal faithfulness, but encouraging the same in others.

But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. (1 Th. 5:12–13)

There is a whole other sermon here about the fact that biblical leaders "*diligently labor among you*" – they are active participants in the ministry, and "*give you instruction*" – that is, they teach how to put God's Word into practice. But it is important to note that Paul interjects the need to "*appreciate*" and "*esteem...very highly in love*" our spiritual leaders. It probably has much to do with the fact that biblical leadership is essential during any time of history or life but is ***especially*** crucial in times when darkness, drunkenness, and falling asleep become the norm rather than the exception. I do not think the admonition, "*Live in peace with one another*" is strictly applying to the leader-follower relationship but between members of the flock as well. A leader's resources are more effectual when concentrated on the ministry rather than distracted by conflict resolution.

We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people. (1 Th. 5:14–15)

Wait a minute! Have we not written these responsibilities into the job description of our local leaders? Why are ***we*** called to take on these

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responsibilities? Biblical leadership is not modeled on dictatorship; it is a partnership. Paul narrows things down to a more intimate level. What each of the things listed here have in common is that they all have to do with **personal** relationships. The congregation as a whole is supposed to be involved in how the instruction provided is put into practice.

There are three types of people identified: "*the unruly*", "*the fainthearted*", and the "*weak*". We might better understand their nature if we translated them as "the undisciplined", "the challenged", and "the spiritually immature".

The "*unruly*" are basically experiencing a crisis of obedience, unwilling to put God's Word into practice. This is why they must be admonished, dealt with a little more directly and firmly much in the same way a loving parent deals with a willful child. They need discipline.

The "*fainthearted*" are basically experiencing a crisis of faith, weighed down by circumstances which challenge their faith. Encouragement is most valued in the moment. They do not need a firm hand but a warm embrace.

The "*weak*" at various times experience either a crisis of obedience or a crisis of faith or both. Whatever approach is appropriate must be offered in the spirit of help just as a loving parent wants their child to grow and mature and eventually learn to make the right decisions on their own.

A "Last Days Christian" is characterized by not only pursuing biblical relationships with others, but with their leaders as well.

Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Th. 5:16-18)

Paul brings it all down to an even more personal level. I would offer that it is not simply the three characteristics of "*rejoice*", "*pray*" and "*give thanks*" which are of particular importance, but the adverbs attached to each which identify them as more than simple, cursory obligations.

- We are to "*rejoice **always***". This describes a continuous state rather than an occasional feeling. It is indicative of someone in constant communion with Christ.
- We are to "*pray without **ceasing***". When our heart desires what God desires we are praying all day long as the Spirit intercedes for and in us. (Rom. 8:26-27)
- We give thanks "*in **everything***". This is the constant recognition that God is always in control, provides for every need, and is preparing us for every contingency.

Paul does not characterize this as casual advice, but unequivocally states, "*For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus*". How many times have we said if we knew God's will we would do it? Yes, we often make that assertion when referring to the "big" things in life, but biblically we are taught that the "big" things come about as the result of paying attention to what the world considers the "little" things. Personal faithfulness in the greater things comes from consistent, daily faithfulness to the details.

The "Last Days Christian" confirms God's will by their personal attitude.

Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil. (1 Th. 5:19–22)

So after we are admonished to live in the light, to be sober and awake, to not only pursue personal faithfulness but encourage it in others, to

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pursue biblical relationships with everyone, and to confirm God's will by our personal attitude of rejoicing, prayer and thanksgiving, what is next on the list? To exercise discernment, to "*examine everything carefully*".

(I just want to interject the observation that, as Jacob Prasch has often said, before you can do physics you have to learn trig; before you do trig you have to learn geometry and algebra; before you even begin algebra you have to learn math. Discernment comes only after a Believer achieves all the basic requirements and not a second before. Where there is no spiritual maturity there is no discernment.)

How do we examine and approve authentic "*prophetic utterances*" from the false? By the Word of God. How do we know how to "*hold fast to that which is good*" and "*abstain from every form of evil*"? By the Word of God. We do not need the special gift of discernment, but every Believer is equipped to know what comes from God, what comes from Satan, and what comes from the flesh because Scripture is the standard.

What happens when someone fails to exercise biblical discernment in one of these areas? It results in quenching the Spirit because in either case it is a mishandling of God's Word. Just as "*prophetic utterances*" are to be confirmed/exposed based on the Scripture, so the difference between "*good*" and "*evil*" is derived the same way. A Spirit-filled environment is one which is fully obedient to God's Word on every level. And the quickest way to extinguish the flame of the Holy Spirit is to deviate from the standard of God's Word.

A "Last Days Christian" measures all things by the standard of God's Word.

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful

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is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass. (1 Th. 5:23–24)

In modern-day sermons we like to give a formal introduction and then proceed point by point to prove the overall teaching and tie the whole thing up neatly in a summary. In the New Testament it is not unusual for the author to hold onto the very core of the theme until the very end. What in reality has Paul been talking about this whole time? ***Sanctification***. You know...the process by which we are being separated exclusively to Christ alone, becoming more and more like Him and less and less like the life we left nailed to the cross.

A “Last Days Christian” is consumed by the work of sanctification.

Stay with me here. Let us gather together all of Paul’s teaching points in one place to see what a Believer is supposed to be when living in the shadow of the Last Days.

- A “Last Days Christian” is characterized as someone who is living in the Light – someone who is their self salt and light to the rest of the world.
- A “Last Days Christian” is characterized as sober and awake – someone visibly different in their relationship with Christ, their relationship with others, and their way of thinking.
- A “Last Days Christian” is characterized as not only pursuing personal faithfulness, but encouraging the same in others.
- The “Last Days Christian” is characterized by not only pursuing biblical relationships with others, but with their leaders as well.
- The “Last Days Christian” confirms God’s will by their personal attitude.

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- A “Last Days Christian” measures all things by the standard of God’s Word.
- A “Last Days Christian” is consumed by the work of sanctification.

What do these things all have in common? They are the exact, same things **every** Believer during **every** age of the Church was supposed to do. Why are there no “special” or “additional” instructions from the Apostle Paul when it comes to how a “Last Days Christian” should live? Why does he seem to merely require the same standard of Christian living from those living in the Last Days as well as those alive during **any** age of the Church?

Jacob Prasch teaches a Bible interpretation technique derived from the hermeneutics of Jewish Midrash called “*kal v’homer*” which he explains means “light to heavy”. It means that something that applies to a general situation is especially important in a specific situation, or that something true in a light situation is of amplified importance in a heavy situation.

I am not making the case that this is an exclusive example of Paul using the midrashic principle of “light to heavy”, but I think the concept explains why Paul would advise “Last Day Christians” to do the exact, same things “Everyday Christians” have been required to do since the beginning. What has been true during **every** previous age of the Church is **especially** true in the last age; what applied to Christians in **previous** generations is of **amplified importance** for the **last** generation: the continuing work of **sanctification**, of being separated exclusively for Christ alone.

In the final hours leading up to His Return, it is **especially** important that Christians are living in the light, personally faithful in all their relationships, measuring all things by God’s Word, and being visible

examples of His love and grace. It has ***always*** been important, but it is even ***more*** important now!

The evidence of a life that is biblically convinced they are living in the Last Days is a life devoted more than ever to the fundamental attributes of a faithful Christian. This is ***especially*** important more than ever. Remember what was spoken through the Prophet Daniel, that in the Last Days it is not just knowledge alone which becomes amplified, but ***righteousness*** – the combined result of all the goals Paul has set forth in his letter to us through the Thessalonians.

“Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. (Dan. 12:3)

Turns out that not only have we been given all we need to know about the basic structure of the coming day of the Lord, but we have already been provided precisely what we are supposed to do about it.

In His Love,

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