

How We Should Now Live

I Thessalonians 5:1-24

I. The Return of Christ

A. “Times and Epochs”

- 1. The first time we see this exact phrase used it is with Jesus when He was talking to His disciples about the restoration of the Kingdom of Israel:**

“And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; ⁸ but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Act 1:6-8).

- 2. Thus, as Paul is writing this portion of his letter to the Thessalonians, he is in no way instructing or encouraging them to be focused on trying to determine just when Jesus is coming back, but rather on the fact that He is, and His return is imminent – that is, it could be at any time!**
- 3. That being the case, for those who want to spend their time in predicting when they believe Jesus is coming, or who try to ‘work people up’ into believing that certain signs mean His coming is going to be at a certain time, in particular, in “their lifetime,” are doing a great disservice to the Body of Christ as a whole, as well as making a sham of the truth of Jesus’ imminent coming before the world at large.**
- 4. When Jesus said “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority,” He meant it.**
 - a. Notice that Jesus didn’t qualify His statement by saying, “except in the late 20th and early 21st centuries,” or any other qualifiers.**
 - b. The word for “know” in Acts 1:7 is γινῶναι (*gnōnai*), and it comes from the Greek verb γινώσκω (*ginōskō*), which means “to arrive at a knowledge of someone or something; to acquire information through some means; and to grasp the meaning or significance of something.”**

- c. The words for “times and epochs” respectively are χρόνος (*chronos*) and καιρός (*kairos*), with χρόνος (*chronos*) meaning “an indefinite period of time during which some activity or event takes place,” while καιρός (*kairos*) means “a point or period of time; a defined period for an event; and a period characterized by some aspect of special crisis.”
- d. The word “fixed” comes from the Greek verb τίθημι (*tithēmi*), which in the particular form it is used here means “to arrange or ordain by someone or something; to appoint and establish; to make or consign someone to something or some event.”
- e. The word for “authority” in Greek is ἐξουσία (*exousia*), and it means “a state of control over something; the potential or resource to command, control, and govern, and the right to control and govern; and the sphere in which power is exercised.” In addition, the phrase, “his own authority,” is indicative of the fact that this authority and control is exclusively God’s, and no human being, at any time, can even begin to come close to comprehending the depth and totality of that “authority.”
- f. Thus, when all of the above is combined, including the particular verb form of “know” that is being used in Acts 1:7, we have the following amplified reading: “It is not for you to even begin to grasp and fully comprehend the times, events, and situations that God has arranged, ordained, and consigned by His very own control and governance, and His alone.”
- g. Therefore, it is quite clear from this passage alone, not to mention Matthew 24:36: “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone,” that God has not called us to pursue trying to figure out when Jesus is returning, nor to be fixated on events in trying to interpret them so as to determine just when Jesus is returning. What we do see in Acts 1:8, however, is what Paul is exhorting us to be about doing in I Thessalonians 5:1-24, and that is to be a witness to the saving and life changing power of Jesus Christ: “but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

B. “Be alert and sober”

1. As we read I Thessalonians 5:2-11, we are immediately confronted with the fact that what we need to be consumed with, if you will, is not misguidedly attempting to discover when Jesus will return, but rather to be focused on living

for Jesus every day as we walk in Luke 9:23-24: “And He was saying to them all, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. ²⁴ “For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.”

a. The word for “alert” in I Thessalonians 5:6 means “to be watchful and in a constant state of readiness,” which is what Luke 9:23-24 above is the foundation for.

b. The word for “sober” means “to be well-balanced and self-controlled,” which is also what Luke 9:23-24 is encouraging, and the result of walking in Luke 9:23-24 will produce “alertness” and “sobriety” on a daily basis – conversely, setting aside Luke 9:23-24 in one’s life as a believer will result in spiritual and mental dullness and apathy, as well as an imbalanced and undisciplined life.

(1) It is interesting to note that in I Thessalonians 5:8, being “sober” is directly linked to having on the “breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.”

(2) Thus, we see that walking in spiritual, mental, and emotional victory in our lives is something that God provides for us, but it is something that the enemy of our souls is adamantly against – coming against us with fear, versus faith; hatred and anger, versus forgiveness, mercy, and love; and uncertainty of God’s eternal care and keeping of us as His children through the absolute certainty of His forgiveness for us through Jesus as our Savior (John 10:27-28: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸ and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand.”)

(a) The phrase in John 10:28, “they shall never perish,” is the most emphatic, grammatical construction in the Greek New Testament.

(b) In Greek, it is written, οὐ μὴ ἀπόλωνται εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα (*ou mē apolōntai eis ton aiōna*), with the Greek verb, ἀπόλωνται (*apolōntai*), being what is called an aorist, middle subjunctive. The aorist tense, in this instance, is viewing the whole of one’s Christian life, from his or her rebirth, up their home-going to Jesus; the middle voice in this instance is reflexive, which means it is referring to the individual doing something to himself or herself; and the subjunctive mood is the mood of probability.

- (c) The Greek root verb of ἀπόλωνται (*apolōntai*) is ἀπόλλυμι (*apollumi*), which means “to ruin, perish, lose and be lost, & destroy,” and with the οὐ μὴ (*ou mē*) being attached to this aorist subjunctive (*ou mē* being the double negative, “no not,” which idiomatically in Greek means, “absolutely not!”), we have the subjunctive of emphatic negation – meaning that the idea of probability contained in the subjunctive mood is totally removed, and there is no doubt, whatsoever, of whatever is being discussed that it will indeed not occur.
- (d) Thus, what is being said in John 10:27-28 by Jesus is the following amplified translation: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never, throughout all eternity, ever cause themselves to perish and be lost, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.”
- (e) Thus, it is this absolute certainty that Satan wants to rob from the truly born-again child of God.

- 2. Therefore, our passion needs not to be for the “rapture,” which is coming at the precise millisecond God has predetermined, but rather living for Jesus day by day, desiring to reflect His love and nature to all around, knowing that His return could be ANYTIME!

II. Our Daily Walk

A. Our relationship to those who are in spiritual authority

- 1. In I Thessalonians 5:12-13, we are told to “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.”
 - a. The word for “appreciate” in Greek is οἶδα (*oida*), and a far better translation would be “to know,” and with the verb form use here, it would mean “to have come to know someone over a period of time on a more personal and interactive level,” versus just simply coming to a church service, hearing someone preach or teach, and leaving.
 - b. The word for “esteem” does not mean to “worship” them as the grid through which alone you can only receive God’s Word, but rather to respect them for their ministry and pray for them consistently that God would strengthen them in His calling on their lives.

2. The balance of respect, but not idolizing someone as your grid for biblical truth is seen in I John 2:27: “And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.”

B. Our walk with the Lord in relation to others

1. In I Thessalonians 5:13:b-22, we have the foundational key to victorious living in Christ as we walk in Luke 9:23-24 already quoted above:

“Live in peace with one another. ¹⁴ And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men. ¹⁵ See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men. ¹⁶ Rejoice always; ¹⁷ pray without ceasing; ¹⁸ in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. ¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit; ²⁰ do not despise prophetic utterances. ²¹ But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; ²² abstain from every form of evil” (1Thessalonians 5:13b-22).

2. As Paul listed the “fruit of the Spirit” standing over against the “deeds of the flesh” in Galatians 5:19-24, what we have here in the above passage in I Thessalonians 5:13-22 is the practical, manifest living out of the fruit of the Spirit in real life.

C. Our personal, day by day commitment to the Lord in our daily walk

1. In I Thessalonians 5:23-24, we find the reiteration of Luke 9:23-24 concerning our personal, daily commitment, as well as the assurance of our eternal relationship with the Lord in John 10:27-28: “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. ²⁴ Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass” (1Thessalonians 5:23-24).
 - a. God is the one who does the sanctifying and the preservation as we are His children and “His workmanship”: “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8-10).
 - b. However, the two verb tenses used in I Thessalonians 5:23 with the verbs “sanctify” and “preserve” imply that the sanctification and preservation work hand-in-hand with our surrender to His Lordship and control of our

lives – that is, although our salvation is eternally secure in Jesus, our day by day sanctification and preservation from the wiles of the devil is dependent upon our daily surrender to Jesus’ Lordship in our lives.

- (1) The word for “sanctify” in the Greek is *ἀγιάσαι (hagiasai)*, which comes from the Greek verb *ἀγιάζω (hagiadzō)*, and it means “to make holy, consecrate, dedicate, & purify,” and the word for “preserve” in the Greek is *τηρηθείη (tērētheiē)*, from the Greek verb *τηρέω (tēreō)*, which means “to keep watch over, to guard; to hold, keep, & preserve; & to pay attention to.”**
- (2) What is significant about these two verbs is that both are in what is called the optative mood in Greek. The optative mood, like the subjunctive mood, is a mood of possibility, but it is also one more step removed from reality than the subjunctive. Thus, what we have in Greek is the indicative mood, which is the mood of reality; the subjunctive mood, the mood of probability; the optative mood, the mood of possibility; and the imperative mood, the mood of commanding someone to do something, and the mood father removed from reality in comparison to the above three.**
- (3) However, in verse 24, we read, “Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass” (I Thessalonians 5:24), which is stating that there is no possibility of God failing on His part in “sanctifying” and “preserving” us. Why, therefore, is the mood of possibility being used here, and what does it mean?**
 - (a) As there is absolutely no question regarding the eternal relationship every true born child of God has through Jesus Christ with our heavenly Father, verse 24 is reiterating that absolute truth – what God begins in our hearts as His children, HE WILL FINISH AND COMPLETE IT!**
 - (b) However, God is not a “puppeteer,” and we have a responsibility to respond to Him in faithful obedience in order that His “good works” that He created in Christ Jesus before the “foundation of the world” might be realized in our lives (Ephesians 2:8-10).**
- (4) Therefore, what verse 23 is speaking about is our daily walk with the Lord in surrendering to His Lordship over our lives in order that we will not be entrapped by Satan’s lies, leading us into compromising with our sinful lusts, based on our narcissism, versus putting Jesus first in our lives and, once again, walking in Luke 9:23-24: “And He was saying to *them***

all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. ²⁴ "For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it."

c. This can be demonstrated in Romans 12:1-2: "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

(1) The Greek word translated "spiritual" in verse 1 comes from the Greek word λογικός (*logikos*), which is where we derive the English word "logical" – thus, what Paul is actually saying is that this is the only true, logical way to worship the Lord, with everything else being a fraud.

(2) The words "conformed" and "transformed" may literally be translated as "do not be continually being conformed to this world, but be continually being transformed by the renewing of your mind," with the Greek word for "transformed" being μεταμορφόω (*metamorphoō*), which is where we derive the English word, metamorphosed, which means "to change one's nature and form" – thus, to be "conformed to the image of Christ" (Romans 8:29).

(3) As we do the above, then indeed we will be enabled to "prove what the will of God is," with the Greek word for "prove" in this particular instance meaning "to continually be able to know, discern, prove, & approve" what God's will is, versus one's own carnal inclinations, as well as the carnal manipulations of others who may be Satan's emissaries

b. In II Corinthians 5:10, we are told that "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

(1) In I Corinthians 3:11-15, we have a description of the grid of the measurement of our "works in Christ" that will be examined at the "judgment seat of Christ":

"For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is *to be* revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it

remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire" (I Corinthians 3:11-15).

(2) Therefore, our responsibility is surrender in faith, and Gods work is to sanctify and preserve us in our daily walk in preparation for our eternal home with Him.

2. In I Thessalonians 5:24, as we have already seen above, we have the wonderful conclusion and promise of God's faithfulness, even in the midst of our unfaithfulness, to work in and through us that which He has determined before the foundation of the world: "Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass."

a. This promise of completing His work within us may also be seen in His work of "discipline" that He carries out in His children that we may "share His holiness" and be free in Him:

"For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart. ⁴ You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; ⁵ and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Nor faint when you are reproved by Him; ⁶ For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives." ⁷ It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸ But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹ Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. ¹¹ All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness" (Hebrews 12:3-11).

b. Therefore, God indeed completes what He begins in His children, and the invitation is extended to all: "For whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13).