

Understanding Jesus' Call to Watchfulness

INTRODUCTION: WATCHFULNESS, THE END OF THE AGE, AND THE JUDGESHIP OF JESUS

- The pages of the New Testament are consistent with the exhortation of the Spirit for the people of God to watch or to pay attention to the spiritual climate of the generation in which they live and, in particular, for the generation in which the Lord Jesus will return to the earth. Watchfulness is probably the primary biblical exhortation to the church by the Holy Spirit. The idea of being spiritually alert is carried consistently throughout the pages of the gospels and continued in the writing of the apostles (Mt.16:1-4, 24:36-44; Lk.19:41-44, 21:34-36; Mk.13:9,32-36; Rom.13:11; Eph.6:18; 1 Thess.5:6; 2 Tim.2:5; 1 Pt.4:7; Rev.3:2-3).
- Jesus emphasized the generation in which He would return more than He emphasized the generation in which He lived and ministered. This is because the ultimate priority for humanity is to be reconciled to God in the light of an approaching day when that opportunity will be taken away (Mt.3:2; 1 Cor.7:29-31; 2 Cor.6:2; Heb.4:7). The scriptures speak of the time-period of Jesus return as a time where He will release God's judgment activities against wickedness on the earth (Joel 3:2; Rev.5:1-7; 6; 8; 9; 11:15-19; 14:7; 15-16; 17:1, 18:10,20; 19:2,15,17-21).
- It is important that we realize that Jesus is a righteous judge (Jn.5:27-30). Many Christian teachers today do not believe that Jesus, because of the biblical testimony of His great compassion for humanity, could be the agency of God in releasing God's judgment against a sinful world. Still others mistakenly teach in the name of Christ that there is no judgment at all for sin, that sin is its own consequence, or that there is no hell because hell is just a metaphor for the suffering of this present age. Some teach that the atoning work of the cross fully satisfied the need for judgment, everywhere, altogether, for all time (see Rom.6:15). While it is true that because of the righteous and sacrificial death of Jesus upon the cross the judgment of God against sinful man has been sufficiently satisfied, humanity must still apply the work of the atonement to their lives (Rom.5:2) as demonstrated through repentance (Mt.9:13; Ac.3:19), regeneration (2 Cor.5:17) and an evidential testimony of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Mt.3:8; Ac.26:20).
- It is precisely *because of* Jesus' compassion for humanity that He is worthy to judge (Rev.5:1-14). "*You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; For You were slain.*" (Rev.5:9 [cf.Rev.16:4-

8; 19:1,7]) and to be worshipped as a judge, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!” (Rev.5:1). The gospel of John firmly establishes Jesus’ identity as humanity’s supreme judge, “For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son,²³ that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father.” (Jn.5:22-23). In this text, the word translated into English as *judgment* is the Greek word transliterated, *krisin* from the root word *krisis*. [56.22 κρίμα^b, τος *n*; κρίσις^b, εως *f*: (derivatives of κρίνω^e ‘to judge legal cases,’ 56.20) the authority or right to judge guilt or innocence—‘the right to judge, the authority to judge.’¹] (cf.Jn.5:27; Rev.20:4). The emphasis is placed on Christ’s *right* to judge. In essence, He is saying, “For the Father judges no one but has committed the right to judge to the Son.” This is a profound theological statement concerning the way that the Godhead has chosen to interact with the sinfulness broken humanity. It demonstrates the highest levels of mercy and justice as the Advocate and Redeemer of humanity has now become our Judge. This does not mean that the Father has abdicated His role as Judge (see Dan.7:9-14) stunningly He has taken that role and His divine right to exercise authority over the created order and given it to a human being! (Jn.3:35; Rom.1:16; Eph.1:10; Heb.2:8).

EXAMINING JESUS’ WORDS IN MATTHEW 24:43-44

“But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into.⁴⁴ Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” - Matt.24:43-44 (Lk.12:39-40)

- This text is part of what has become known as Jesus’ *Olivet Discourse* (Mt.24-25) because this teaching was given on the Mt. of Olives just outside of the city of Jerusalem (Mt.24:3).
- In context, Jesus has been speaking about His return and describing the turmoil that defines that hour of history in response to His disciples three questions in Mt.24:3.

³ Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” Mt.24:3

¹ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 554). New York: United Bible Societies.

- We do not need to over-analyze the text to understand the main point that Jesus was trying to convey here. *“If a homeowner knew that a thief was coming to rob him and knew what time that thief would come, he would stay awake and make sure that He was prepared to deal with the situation.” (paraphr. v.43)*
- In the same way, the application is clear. *“Just like the homeowner did, you too, make sure that you’re awake and prepared to deal with what takes place as I’m about to return.” (paraphr. v.44)*
- Preparation would therefore imply that one *believed* and *recognized* (1 Cor.2:14) the trends and events that Jesus was referring to in Mt.24:4-41. Some bible teachers today believe that Jesus and the apostles spoke figuratively when referring to the end time events surrounding the return of Jesus and thus interpret their words in a spiritual, non-literal sense. In other words, from this perspective, we can’t take the eschatological words of Jesus or the apostles in their plain sense meaning and instead need to discover their hidden, symbolic interpretation. This presents a serious challenge for those seeking to understand the scripture because it opens the door for a relative and subjective explanation of the biblical text.
- It is true that Jesus used both figurative and symbolic language when speaking of the end of the age, but we must let the Bible interpret the Bible as a general rule. *See the examples below*
- ³² *“Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. ³³ So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! -Mt.24:32-33*
- ¹⁶ *He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, -Rev.1:16.*
**In this instance, Jesus gives the meaning of the symbol of the seven stars in Rev.1:20. Hosea 6:5 helps us to understand the meaning of the sword from Jesus’ mouth.*

“THEREFORE, YOU ALSO BE READY”

- To be ready here means to be prepared as in Mk.14:15

“FOR THE SON OF MAN IS COMING AT AN HOUR...”

- The term ‘hour’ can be better understood as a time or an occasion as in Ac.7:17

“YOU DO NOT EXPECT”

- This was especially true for the disciples that Jesus was speaking to. They had no reference grid for a two-thousand-year delay. For us today, this may apply is bit differently. Jesus was not saying that they would have no way of anticipating the time because He had already given them clear signs that would indicate the nearness of His return. His exhortation to them was focused on living prepared or ready to meet the Lord.

⁴I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, ⁵that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, ⁶even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, ⁷so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁸who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Cor.1:4-8 (cf.Rom.13:12;1 Thess.1:10,3:10-13)

EXAMINING PAUL’S WORDS IN 1 THESS.5:1-4

“But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. ²For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. ³For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. ⁴But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.” -1 Thess.5:1-5

- Here Paul seems to be giving a brief commentary on Jesus’ teaching as he cites Him twice. First when he uses the phrase “times and seasons” (Ac.1:7) and second when he uses the phrase “thief in the night” (Mt.24:43). Jesus was the primary influence on Paul’s theology starting with His revelation on the Damascus road (Ac,9:1-9).
- As mentioned earlier, the apostle’s doctrine (Ac.2:42) became the foundation for the beliefs and practices of the early church. In addition to this, Paul made the claim that the message concerning the kingdom of God was given to him by direct revelation from Jesus Himself (Gal.1:12). Jesus commanded His disciples to teach their converts *everything* that He had commanded them (Mt.28:20).
- Paul was with the Thessalonian congregation for only a short time (Ac.17:1-4) and he made it a priority not only to preach the suffering of and death of the Messiah but to lay a foundation for

the *return* of the Messiah. The Jewish storyline saw the Messiah as a conquering King from the line of the mighty king David and therefore was looking for one who would rescue Israel from her oppressors and lead her into a time of prophetic fulfillment as head over the nations (Is.2:1-4;Jer.31:7).

- The immediate context to Paul's words here (1 Thess.5:1-5) rests in his previous reassurance to the Galatian believers informing them that they had not missed the Day of the Lord and in particular the catching up of the saints to meet the Lord in the clouds (1 Thess.4:17) [e.g., Mt.24:30,26:64;Mk.13:36,4:62;Ac.1:11;Rev.1:7)

“ BUT CONCERNING THE TIMES AND THE SEASONS” v.1

- The Greek root χρόνος [chronos] translated as ‘*times*’ [chronon] in this verse indicates a general period of time determined by the context². As mentioned earlier in the notes Paul seems to be using a direct quote from the lips of Jesus (Ac.1:7). If this is true, then the time period he is referring to is related to what the disciples asked Jesus in Ac.1:6, ⁶ *Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”* Paul's teaching in Thessalonica builds upon the foundation of Israel's messianic hope and the revelation of Jesus as Israel's Messiah and now includes details related to Messiah's return. Therefore, when Paul speaks to them of ‘*times*’ he is referring to the general time-frame that surrounds Christ's second coming.
- The Greek root καιρός [kairos] translated as ‘*seasons*’ [kairon] in this verse indicates (Mt.13:30;26:45;Ac.7:17) an occasion for a particular event rather than a general timeframe.
¹⁷ *“But when **the time** of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham...”* Ac.7:17
*“...When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not **the season** for figs.”* Mk.11:13
- A chronos time in our context would be the whole time of a woman's pregnancy, for instance nearly ten months, whereas a kairos moment is a set time, as in the birthing of the baby. E.g. “She endured the **time** [chronos] of her pregnancy, but when the **moment** [kairos] of her delivery came she felt as if she could endure it no more.”

² Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 638). New York: United Bible Societies.

- "...the chronological periods ("times," Gr. *chronos*, an extended period) and the major features of those periods ("epochs," Gr. *chairos*, a definite period)..." -Constable, Thomas L.; *1 Thess*; p.44. ed. 2017.
- Here I offer a loose paraphrase of vv.1-2, "But concerning the timeframe of Christ's return and the dates that God has set by His own authority, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. ² For you yourselves know perfectly that [the exact moment] in which the Lord returns will come as a thief in the night."

"THE DAY OF THE LORD v.2"

- The phrase "*the Day of the Lord*" or similar phrases like, "*the great Day*" or "*that Day*" occur in scripture nearly 100 times (Amos 5:18–20; Isaiah 2:9; Zephaniah 1:7ff., 14ff.; 2:2–3; 3:8 [Jn 6:39–40, 1Cor. 1:8, Phil. 1:6, 2 Th 1:10, 2 Pe 3:12, Yd 6, Rev 1:10]) and in the Old Testament approximately 80 times. Sometimes, depending on the context, the word "*Day*" can mean a literal 24-hour day and other times it can mean a season of months or even years. (E.g., Joel:2:11[25], 2:31[3:1-2]). **In addition to this comment, see note below*

"The Day of the Lord" (= "the Day of Yahweh") is a central feature of the prophets' message to their contemporaries. This phrase and such closely related expressions as "the day of the anger of Yahweh," or "Yahweh has a day," occur over two dozen times in prophetic books (most frequently in Isaiah, Joel, and Zephaniah), and once in Lamentations (2:22). Similar terms, particularly "that day," "the day of," and "the day when," appear nearly 200 times in the prophets, occasionally in Lamentations, and twice in Psalms (Pss 110:5; 137:7).³

- The day of the Lord indicates a particular time-frame where God reveals His power and strength on the earth in manifest ways and in particular expresses judgement realities whether against Israel (Lam.1:12; Joel 2:1-2) and the Jewish people or against foreign (gentile) nations and peoples (e.g. Is.24:21; Amos 5:18 etc.).

"The day of the Lord" usually refers in Scripture to a time in history characterized by God's working in the world in direct, dramatic ways. It contrasts with "the day of man," in which affairs appear to be proceeding without divine intervention. -Constable, Thomas L.; 1 Thess; p.44; elec. ed. 2017.

³ Hiers, R. H. (1992). Day of the Lord. In D. N. Freedman (Ed.), *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (Vol. 2, p. 82). New York: Doubleday.

⁹ The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” 2 Pt.3:9

¹¹ Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.” Ecc.8:11

THE GREAT AND TERRIBLE DAY OF THE LORD (Joel 2:11; Mal.4:5-6)

- This day of the Lord reality speaks to both dimensions of such a day. The greatness of God refers to the glory of God’s power being revealed over sin and satan, while the terrible or dreadful dimension refers to the impact of God’s power against sinful mankind who resist God’s person and purposes.

“SO COMES AS A THIEF IN THE NIGHT v.2”

- This particular phrase has been widely used to affirm a sudden and secret rapture of the church just before the tribulation of the last days. But as we mentioned earlier Paul is borrowing language directly from Jesus’ teaching in Matt.24:43-44 where Jesus taught that the Son of Man would come like a thief in the night. As we seek to understand what Paul is talking about we want to first understand what Jesus was referring to.
- Jesus was referring to the coming of the Son of Man which encompasses a much broader theme than just the rapture portion of His end-time activities. Jesus only comes back one time and when He does there is a sequence of events that transpire of which the rapture of the saints is part. The primary idea behind Jesus’ return is that He is coming to establish His kingdom in the nation of Israel and the physical city of Jerusalem.
- Jesus said His return would come like a thief in the night to those who were not prepared. This is why He took the time to give His disciples a series of signs (Mt.24; Lk,21; Mk.13). They were to be prepared for Him by recognizing the time frame, Jesus used the word generation (Mt.24:34), of His return to the earth.
- Both Jesus and Paul taught that believers did not have to, and were not supposed to be, surprised by this Day of the Lord (Mt.24:44; 1 Thess.5:4-8).

⁴ But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. ⁵ You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. ⁶ Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. ⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those

who get drunk are drunk at night. ⁸ But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.” -1 Thess.5:4-8

FOR WHEN THEY SAY, “PEACE AND SAFETY” v.3

- Paul’s words echo that of the Old Testament prophets when speaking about dimensions of the Day of Yahweh (Jer.6:14, 8:11, 23:14b, Ezek.13:10,16).

¹⁶ Thus says the Lord of hosts: “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; They speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the Lord (Is.14:14). ¹⁷ **They continually say to those who despise Me, ‘The Lord has said, “You shall have peace”’; And to everyone who walks according to the dictates of his own heart, they say, ‘No evil shall come upon you.’** ¹⁸ For who has stood in the counsel of the Lord, and has perceived and heard His word? Who has marked His word and heard it? ¹⁹ Behold, a whirlwind of the Lord has gone forth in fury—A violent whirlwind! It will fall violently on the head of the wicked. ²⁰ The anger of the Lord will not turn back until He has executed and performed the thoughts of His heart. **In the latter days you will understand it perfectly.** -Jer.23:16-20

- Some Bible scholars suggest that Paul was making what would be termed by the Thessalonians as subversive comments regarding the Roman Empire by referring in a subtle yet satirical way to the *pax et securitas* (peace and security) claims of the imperial government. *Securitas* was the goddess of security and stability in Roman mythology and was featured on certain Roman coins positioned in a relaxed and carefree manner. The peace and *securitas* of the Roman Empire was boasted about by Roman emperors who liked to implicate themselves as it’s wellspring. We can easily imagine Paul taking an under-the-radar shot at the so-called glory of the Roman Empire here. The ideal espoused by this Roman ‘*peace and security*’ slogan was that of a life completely free of any semblance of cumbersome care and worry in-light of the power and protection of the imperial might.
- It may be true that Paul was using a form of crafty word-play when speaking here, but I believe the roots of his meaning go much deeper than that. Consider the words of the prophet Jeremiah, ¹⁴“They have also healed the hurt of My people ⁴slightly, saying, **‘Peace, peace!’** When there is no peace.” -Jer.6:14 (e.g.; Jer.4:10,8:11,14:13)

⁴ Superficially

- The idea behind the phrase ‘Peace, Peace’ from Jeremiah’s prophecy was essentially the same as that of the Roman propaganda slogan ‘*Peace and Safety*’. An ideal of impenetrable protection, security and economic blessing was envisioned because of a relationship with a deity who would guarantee such conditions in return for careful and costly veneration. In the generation in which Jeremiah the prophet lived and ministered this thinking was rampant.

⁸“How can you say, ‘We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us’? Look, the false pen of the scribe certainly works falsehood.” Jer.8:8

- Spiritual leaders claiming and misapplying prophetic promises
- National-religious posturing based on past works of the Lord

⁸ *Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, ⁹**and do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’** For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. -Mt.3:8-9*

- The Bible teachers and prophetic voices in the land were interpreting and applying the scriptures wrongly because they misunderstood both the nature of God and the prophetic council of God for their generation.

⁷“**Even the stork in the heavens knows her appointed times;** and the turtledove, the swift, and the swallow observe the time of their coming. But My people do not know the judgment of the Lord. -Jer.8:7

³²“...of the sons of Issachar **who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do,**” -1 Chron.12:32

- Jesus speaks to this issue of peace and safety in His Olivet Discourse.

³⁷ **But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.** ³⁸ For as in the days before the flood, they were **eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage,** until the day that Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. - Matt.24:37-39

- In certain circles today there exists a fair amount of speculation regarding some of the different social and spiritual dynamics that were prevalent in Noah’s day.¹ While we can’t know for certain the exact details of those dynamics we can know that God raised up a prophetic voice (Gen.6:13-22, 5:32,7:10) as a sign of what was to come in the midst of a perverse generation (Gen.6:5-6).

- Jesus likened the generation in which He would return to Noah’s generation because of the maturity of wickedness in the earth (Is.13:12; Rev.9:21, 14:15), the accompanying severity of judgment (Rev.6:17), and the glorious surety of safety and deliverance for the redeemed (1 Thess.5:9).
- Jesus uses the phrase, *“eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage”* to describe the unconcerned attitude of many in the generation in which He returns. This is exactly the type of carefree attitude of many that Paul was referring to when he used the phrase, *“Peace and Safety”* above.
- It is hard to imagine embracing a carefree type of attitude in the midst of the global culture that Jesus was describing to His disciples just a few verses before in Mt.24:1-29. But, Jesus assures us that this is the case when He states that His words, and thus His predictions, carry the same authority as those of God the Father (Ps.119:89-90; Is.40:6-8).

^{35k}*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.” -Mt.24:35*

- Living carefree in this sense involves a deliberate rejection of what the Spirit is emphasizing in our generation. Many will embrace a hardness of heart toward the Lord’s activities, both positive and negative (Mt.11:16-19,16:1-4,13:11-16a; Rom.1:18-28; Rev.9:20,21,16:9,11).

¹³ *Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.* ¹⁴ *And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:*

‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive;

¹⁵ *For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.’” -Mt.13:13-15 [Is.6:9,10]*

⁴⁹ *Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.” - Ezek.16:49*

⁵ Jewish tradition, including the Book of Enoch, the writing of Josephus and compilations of rabbinic literature [see Louis Ginzberg; *Legends of the Jews*] offer a window into how ancient Judaism understood the generation in which Noah lived.

⁸ *“Therefore hear this now, you who are given to pleasures, who dwell securely, who say in your heart, ‘I am, and there is no one else besides me; I shall not sit as a widow, Nor shall I know the loss of children’” -Is.47:8 (cf.;Is.2:7-8; Zeph.2:15; Rev.18:7)*

“THEN SUDDEN DESTRUCTION COMES UPON THEM” v.3 (Is.16:3-9)²

- Paul’s apocalyptic ‘*sudden destruction*’ doesn’t occur in the proverbial vacuum. He is not suggesting that destruction [from the Almighty (Joel 1:1)] comes without warning or without process, as if one day all things are fine and the next all things are in complete chaos. Both Jesus and Paul provide warning and signs that precede the Day of the Lord (2 Thess.2:1-12).
- As we have mentioned earlier, the phrase, or similar phrases, the Day of the Lord are used in both a broad and a narrow sense. In the broad sense, the Day of the Lord can refer to both the redemptive and the judgment activities of God in the generation in which Jesus returns (Mt.24:34) or they can refer, in the narrow sense, to the final seven years before Jesus returns (Dan.9:27; [cf. Dan.7:25; Rev.13:5]. Paul is referring here to the Day of the Lord in the narrow sense and not in the generational sense (see 2 Thess.2:1-12 for context).
- The Day of the Lord isn’t only destructive. Jesus uses His judgment activities to liberate oppressed people that are held captive by wicked and evil men and confront the sin of an entire generation that they might turn to Him (i.e. Rev.9:20,21,16:9,11). Paul is making reference to a specific attitude in those that choose to resist what the Spirit is saying in their generation which ultimately leaves them completely unprepared for Jesus to return (Joel 2:2; Amos.5:18,20; Zeph.1:15).
- It is sudden in the same way as the destruction in Noah’s day was sudden. Though Noah preached (2 Peter 2:5) a message of repentance for over 100 years, there was a definite time in which the judgment activity of God was released (Gen.7:16)and in that day it came suddenly. (cf. Is.47:11; Jer.6:26)

“AS LABOR PAINS UPON A PREGNANT WOMAN” v.3

- Commentator and Bible scholar, Craig Keener notes that, “*Birth pangs were a common image of agony and destruction*” (Ps 48:6; Is 21:3; 26:17–18; 42:14; Jer. 4:31; 6:24; 13:21; 22:23; 49:22–24; 50:43; Hos 13:13).⁴
- Jesus used the analogy of a woman enduring the pangs of childbirth to help bring understanding to the different levels and seasons of intensity during the Day of the Lord.

“These are the ***beginnings*** of ²sorrows.” -Mk.13:8 (cf. Mt.24:4 NASB)

- Labor pains are not unexpected for a woman who is pregnant. She knows that eventually they will come near the time of the baby’s birth. But the *exact moment* when they come is unexpected. Using this analogy to describe the narrow Day of the Lord activities is fitting because, with God’s help, one is able to recognize this unique season on the earth and rightly expect that intensity will increase (Mk.13:19-20). Consider Jesus’ words in Lk.19:41-44,

⁴¹ When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, ⁴² saying, “If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ “For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, ⁴⁴ and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, ***because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.***” -Lk.19:41-44 NASB

“AND THEY SHALL NOT ESCAPE” v.3

- This statement by Paul adds a final exclamation point on the surety that those that disregard the exhortation of the Spirit to see and hear in that day will not escape the negative dimensions of the Lord’s activities as the manifestation of His power increases. This is not a threat by the church to unbelievers in the end-times, this is a sober warning that the God of Heaven is to be revered and obeyed and held in awe by the nations of the earth.

⁴ Keener, C. S. (1993). [The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament](#) (1 Th 5:3). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

² Lit. *birth pangs*

⁴⁹ *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” 2 Pt.3:9*

“BUT, YOU BRETHREN, ARE NOT IN DARKNESS”. v.4 (Eph.1:17,18a)

- Paul is using the imagery of literal darkness as a metaphor for those who cannot see spiritually (Is.42:7; Lk.11:35,22:53; Jn.1:5,3:19, 8:12;12:35,46; Ac.26:18; Rom.2:19,13:2; 1 Cor.4:5; 2 Cor.6:14; Eph.5:8,11; 1 Pt.2:9; 1 Jn.1:6,2:8,11). In addition, He continues by saying that, *“we are not of the night, therefore let us not sleep...for those who sleep, sleep at night...”*
- The scriptures describe the reign of the evil one (Mt.6:13; Jn.17:15; 2 Thess.3:3), the devil, as the power of darkness.

¹³ *He has delivered us from the **power of darkness** and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,” Col.1:13*

¹² *Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. **He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness**, but have the light of life.” Jn.8:12*

⁴⁰ ***He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts** (see for context Is.6:37-39), lest they should see with their eyes, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.” Jn.12:40 (cf. Is.6:9,10)*

“SO THAT THIS DAY SHOULD OVERTAKE YOU AS A THIEF” v.4

- Returning to the words of Jesus in Mt.24:34 as our starting point, we have a basis for understanding this phrase, ⁴³ *But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into.”* Jesus intimates that one doesn’t need to be suddenly overtaken and overwhelmed by the events surrounding His return. This is why He says, *“Watch!”*
- Some Bible teachers focus primarily on the rapture portion of the Day of the Lord and view the *“suddenly”* dimension of Paul’s teaching in vv.3-4 as referring essentially to that. But Paul doesn’t

say that here, He says the *Day* of the Lord which is a much broader scope of thing to come. In fact, he says that this Day *does not have to surprise us* as a thief would. He teaches that we ought to be ready for all things to be shaken (Dan.7:2; Hag.2:8; Heb.12:27-28). Our worldview should reflect the Biblical forecast. ²*For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the Lord will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you.*" -Is.60:2

- Jesus said the He would come at an hour in which His hearers would not expect. From that perspective He was addressing an interim period of nearly 2,000 years! During this delay there would arise the temptation for His church to draw back in compromise. ⁴⁴*Therefore you also **be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.***" -Mt.34:44 *"Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder),² that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior,³ knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts,⁴ and saying, **"Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."*** -2 Pt.3:1-4

"BUT LET US WATCH AND BE SOBER" V.6

- This is a command to the church, not an option. According to Paul, we have two options, either to watch and be alert or to sleep and remain ignorant and unprepared (v.7).
- Watching requires an effort on our part. Jesus' own disciples struggled to stay awake and keep watch during one of the most critical hours of His ministry (Mk.14:32-42). They struggled to understand the importance of what was already beginning to take place (Lk.22:31;Jn.16:32) and did not know how to sustain themselves in their moment of greatest weakness and temptation (Mk.14:27; Jn.16:31 [cf.Mt.24:10-11; 2 Thess.2:1]).
- Paul uses sobriety analogously to speak to a spiritual condition. In the same way as one who is drunk is not in complete control of his or her senses one who is spiritually drunk is unable to function with clarity and restraint when needed most.

⁹ *Pause and wonder! Blind yourselves and be blind! They are drunk, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with intoxicating drink.* ¹⁰ ***For the Lord has poured out on you the spirit of deep sleep, and has closed your eyes, namely, the prophets; and He has covered your heads, namely, the seers.***" -Is.29:9-10

“PUTTING ON THE BREASTPLATE OF FAITH AND LOVE” v.8 (Is.59:17; Eph.6:14,17)

- Paul uses imagery common to the day of a Roman soldier’s battle gear to make a simple analogy regarding how we are to engage with the Holy Spirit at the end of the age *regarding the condition of our soul in the midst of intense spiritual warfare*. Paul uses contrasts such as “*light and darkness*”, “*drunk and sober*” and “*awake and asleep*” to highlight the reality of spiritual warfare and the impact it has on us.

¹² ***For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.***” Eph.6:12

⁴ ***For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, ⁵ casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ***” -2 Cor.10:4-5

- A soldier would put on a breastplate in order to protect the vital organs contained in his torso. Any substantial blow to one of the vital organs would severely impair the soldier and potentially cost him his life.
- Here, Paul chooses faith and love as the two critical features of the believer’s arsenal as he anticipates the return of Christ. Often, the idea of faith can carry with it a somewhat mystical sense. For example, Christians often encourage one another to “*just have faith*” without really understanding what that means.

FAITH

- To have faith in the most plain sense means simply to trust. Trusting in God *doesn’t* mean that we have an arbitrary hope that maybe things will work out for us somehow as in, “*Well, I’ve done my part now all I can do is have faith that God will work it all out,*” or “*Maybe if I try hard enough God will be pleased with my faith and answer me...*”. Faith is a supernatural confidence in the person and power of the God-head in that they are unsolicited in their radical and eternal commitment to protect, satisfy, beautify, glorify and mature us.

²⁸ ***And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.***” Rom.8:28

² *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ **knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.*** -James 1:3

- The testing of our faith reflects God's commitment to display His goodness to us in such a way that we respond to Him wholeheartedly as He works all things according to His plan and purpose. *God is not looking to see what we will do when it gets tough.* God is omniscient, He knows everything beforehand!
- The trying or testing of our faith reflects God's wisdom in encouraging our hearts to choose Him because of His goodness. He displays His power in order to cause our confidence in him to grow.

"Your gentleness has made me great." -Ps.18:35

⁹ *For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, ¹⁰ night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and **perfect what is lacking in your faith?***" -1 Thess. 3:9-10

- When Paul speaks of perfecting what is lacking in the Thessalonian's faith He is talking about addressing weak areas in their understanding which cause them both to fear and to draw back from their commitment to embrace difficult truths. This is precisely the point of His letter, to address these areas and to affirm what God has said and what God is doing.

LOVE

- The other pillar to Paul's metaphorical breastplate is that of love. As with faith love carries a generic distinction in our culture today. Love can mean many different things depending on how it is used and very often the lines are blurred when it comes to actually being able to define just what it is.
- As Christians, the scripture, not the culture, ought to be our standard in defining love. Our theological starting point would then begin with this statement, *"God is love."* (1 Jn.4:10,16). This is what we would call a biblical absolute. It is a definitive and unchanging truth from which we can base all other presuppositions. Therefore, if God is love, we *can* know what love is because God has revealed Himself to us through His word.
- God is love and *"God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* (Rom.5:8)

- ³⁴ “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; **as I have loved you**, that you also love one another.” -Jn.13:34
- ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, **than to lay down one’s life for his friends.**” -Jn.15:13
- ¹⁵ **“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”** -Jn.14:15

- Our context in understanding Paul’s words is the *Day of the Lord* timeframe. This helps us in narrowing down a particular application to his metaphor. As a general and unwavering statement of truth, believers are to always express God’s love in every way and at every time, but the Holy Spirit is pointing to something much more specific here.

GUARDING OUR HEART

- Paul wrote to the congregation in the city of Philippi, “⁶ *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;* ⁷ *and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will **guard your hearts** and minds through Christ Jesus.*” -Phil.4:6-7
- The idea behind “*be anxious for nothing*” is related to Paul’s urging the Thessalonians to be “sober”.
- In the same way as a literal breastplate would have guarded the hearts of an ancient soldier, God’s own love is to guard our hearts in the midst of the generation in which Jesus returns.
- Jesus taught that when we obey Him we remain in his love and His love remains in us, ¹⁰ *If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love.*” (Jn.15:10). This means that as we live in obedience to the will of God His love remains active in us. This includes the experience of His love in us and the outward expression of His love from our lifestyle.

¹⁶ *that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,* ¹⁷ *that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,* ¹⁸ *may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—¹⁹ **to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge**; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” -Eph.3:16-19*

- When we experience God’s love it provides for us a confidence that He is for us and allows to use that confidence to as the platform for our obedience.

⁵*“I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear,
But now my eye sees You.”* -Job.42:5

“AND AS A HELMET THE HOPE OF SALVATION” v.8 (Is.59:15-17; Eph.6:17)

HOPE

- One of the most significant and foundational realities that we have access to in this age is that of a sure hope. Heb.6:19 describes our hope in Jesus as, *“an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.”* Hope is one of the single greatest commodities that any person can have access to in their lifetime.
- Modern statistics tell us that hopelessness, depression and suicide are on the steady increase in America today. It may seem ironic that the most prosperous nation in world history is increasingly filled with despair. But the difficult truth is that we are becoming increasingly aware that all that man has built his hope upon in previous generations (e.g. medical, technological, societal advances) has been found to be wholly unreliable and unsatisfactory in meeting humanity’s deepest longings.
- Using this phrase, Paul may be reaching back into the imagery of the prophet Isaiah and highlighting the surety of God working salvation for those that He loves and applying that same truth to the Thessalonians. *“Then the Lord saw it, and it displeased Him That there was no justice. ¹⁶ He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him. ¹⁷ For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, **and a helmet of salvation on His head...**”* Is.59:15-17.
- The apostle Peter exhorts the people of God to *arm themselves* by adopting a particular manner of thinking in relation to Jesus, *“arm yourselves also with the same mind...”* (1 Pt.4:1). Peter is teaching that preparation for success in God involves lining up with the way that God thinks about things; in the case of Peter’s audience, about suffering as Jesus suffered. Paul is using the same idea with his metaphor to the Thessalonian Christians to put on the hope of salvation as a battle helmet.

SALVATION

- Most of the time when we talk about salvation we are thinking about the spiritual implications (1 Pt.1:9) and the eternal state, in heaven and with God forever. And while this is our sure reality

as followers in Christ there is a temporal dynamic to our hope as well. Consider this statement, *“¹³ looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ...”* (Titus 2:13)

- The idea behind our use of the word salvation in v.8 [*sōtēria*] is fairly simple. It speaks to a state of having been saved, or delivered from something⁵, in particular the penalty, power and presence of sin in a New Testament context⁶. God is our deliverer and He will deliver us. The scriptures gives us definitive promises that God is both able and willing to deliver us, whether from fear, various forms of trouble, or enemies. The hope of salvation that is to crown the believer is broader than just a spiritual deliverance from the penalty of sin. We are delivered from the *power* of sin in all it's forms and will someday be delivered from the presence of sins.
- In the same way that God clothed Himself with a helmet of salvation in Is.59:17 because He had determined to work salvation on His own behalf and because He was certain that He would not fail, we are to arm ourselves with that same mind. God *will* work deliverance for us and He will not fail.
- A theology of God's deliverance is well worth the pursuit. Many question God's method's, His care and even His ability because we do not see as He sees, however, we are to align ourselves with God's perspective and His timetable.

⁹ *After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, saying, **“Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”** Rev.7:9-10*

⁵ “Salvation or the deliverance is just the being rescued from the judgment that overwhelms the world, Rom. 1:16–18 and, referring back to this, ch. 5:9–11; and this is the immediate sense of σώζειν, σωτήρ, σωτηρία, as here of ῥύεσθαι In 1 Thess. 5:9 also ὀργή and σωτηρία stand as mutual opposites. Because in Christ judgment has already passed upon the world (John 12:31), therefore whosoever believeth in Him is no longer judged (John 3:14–18; 5:24).” -Lange, J. P., Schaff, P., Auberlen, C. A., Riggenbach, C. J., & Lillie, J. (2008). *A commentary on the Holy Scriptures: 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (p. 24). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

⁶ **21.25 σωτηρία^b, ας f:** a state of having been saved—‘salvation.’ ἡ γὰρ κατὰ θεὸν λύπη μετάνοιαν εἰς σωτηρίαν ἀμεταμέλητον ἐργάζεται ‘for the sadness that is used by God brings repentance that leads to salvation, in which there is no regret’ 2 Cor 7:10; κομιζόμενοι τὸ τέλος τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν σωτηρίαν ψυχῶν ‘receiving the purpose of your faith, that is, the salvation of your souls’ 1 Pe 1:9.⁶

¹⁶ You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. ¹⁷ And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. ¹⁸ **But not a hair of your head shall be lost.**” -Lk.21:16-18

“FOR GOD DID NOT APPOINT US TO WRATH” v.9

- This verse has often been used as a proof-text to support the idea that Christians are raptured away before the great tribulation, but I believe there is a far greater and much more glorious application here for us to understand.

[*did*] APPOINT

- **90.86** [tithemi] τίθημι⁸: to cause someone to experience, with the implication of subjecting a person to something—‘to make experience, to subject to.’...‘God did not subject us to (suffering) his anger’ 1 Th 5:9.^{7,8}

WRATH

- **38.10** [orge] ὀργή^b, ἥς f: divine punishment based on God’s angry judgment against someone—‘to punish, punishment.’...‘God does not do wrong when he punishes (us), does he?’ Ro 3:5. Though the focal semantic element in ὀργή is punishment, at the same time there is an implication of God’s anger because of evil. Therefore, it is possible in some languages to translate this expression in Ro 3:5 as ‘God does not do wrong when he is angry and punishes us, does he?’⁹
- Here is a helpful paraphrase for v.9. *“For God did not appoint us to experience His punishment against sin...”*
- ¹⁰ *and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who **delivers**¹⁰ us from the wrath to come.”* -1 Thess.1:10.

⁷ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 808). New York: United Bible Societies.

⁸ For alternate NT translations of the Gk. **etheto** (did appoint) see Ac.1:7,12:4,19:21,20:28;1 Cor.12:18,28; Eph.4:11

⁹ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 489). New York: United Bible Societies.

¹⁰ **21.23** **ρύομαι**: to rescue from danger, with the implication that the danger in question is severe and acute—‘to rescue, to deliver.’ πέποιθεν ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν, ρύσασθω νῦν εἰ θέλει αὐτόν ‘he put his confidence in God; therefore let God rescue him if

- God, who has a habit of delivering us now, will deliver us at the end of the age in the same way that He delivers us now. This is our hope, that He will continue to deliver us now, and that He will one day finally deliver us!
- God demonstrated a principle of supernatural power and provision for His people in the midst of intense and dramatic judgement all around them (Ex.8:22-23; 9:6-7,25-26, 10:22-23; 12:23,27, 23:25).
- I believe that the example of Noah and his family preserved and provided for in the context of global judgment serves as the archetype for the church at the end of the age.
- God uses the Exodus narrative as the premier example of how He will demonstrate His power against the kingdom of darkness at the end of the age.

¹⁵***“As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt, I will show them wonders.”*** ¹⁶*The nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might:”* Micah 7:15-16a (Is.10:24-26,11:11,15-16; Ez.30:9,Hos.2:5)

²²*And in that day, I will set apart the land of Goshen, in which My people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there, in order that you may know that I am the Lord in the midst of the land.* ²³*I will make a difference between My people and your people.”* Ex.8:22-23

“THAT WHETHER WE WAKE OR SLEEP, WE SHOULD LIVE TOGETHER WITH HIM” v.10

- The marvelous truth of our ultimate deliverance, that is, our final salvation from the presence and power of sin, is that we will ever be united with the Lord in the glory of the eternal realm (Lk.23:43; 2 Cor.12:4; 1 Thess.4:17; Rev.21:1-22:5).
- Strangely, the scriptures are mostly silent regarding the unique details of our eternal inheritance. They say almost nothing about the grandeur of unimaginable realms of created splendor and the

he wants to’ Mt 27:43; τίς με ῥύσεται ἐκ τοῦ σώματος τοῦ θανάτου τούτου; ‘who will rescue me from this body which is causing my death?’ Ro 7:24.¹⁰ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 240). New York: United Bible Societies.

ceaseless cascade of endless vast and unexplored possibilities that can only exist within the limitless regions of a divine and holy Creator.

⁹ But as it is written: **“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”** -1 Cor.2:9

- As breathtaking and indescribably marvelous as is our eternal abode it pales in an unworthy comparison to the glimmering apex of our inheritance, God Himself. In the person of Jesus is our ultimate inheritance (Eph.1:11), as the apostle Paul said, *“²⁸ for in Him we live and move and have our being...”* (Ac.17:28). ⁴ In Him [is] life, and the life [is] the light of men.” (Jn.1:4).

WE SHOULD LIVE TOGETHER WITH HIM

-LIVING TOGETHER WITH HIM

- We are called not just to maintain a profession of faith (Rom.10:9) nor simply a form of godliness (2 Tim.3:5) but we are called to lives defined and led by the impact and the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor.12:3).
- Jesus told His disciples that it would be better for them if He left them physically in order that the Holy Spirit would come and be *in* them (Jn.14:16,19, 1 Cor.2:12,16). *God in us is a far more glorious reality than God near us!* (Col.1:27)

-LIVING ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT: 4 PRIMARY DISTINCTIONS

1. WE WALK ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT

- *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, **who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.***” -Rom.8:1 (NKJV)

-To be *in Christ* can be understood as *“to be in relationship with Christ”*.

-We walk in the flesh when we obey its desires. Feeding and taking care of the physical body is not the same thing as walking according to the flesh. The flesh in this sense is defined as that which wars against the Spirit and is innately inclined toward sinfulness.

-Walking according to the Spirit means that we now obey the inclinations of the Spirit through the work of the new birth.

2. WE ARE FREE FROM THE LAW OF SIN WHICH PRODUCES DEATH

- “² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me **free from the law of sin and death.**”
-Rom.8:2 (NKJV)

-There are two primary applications to the phrase “*the law of sin and death*”.

- A. The first is an application in which, because of the inherent sin nature of every human, being we are inclined to continue to sin. We may want to change this reality, but apart from Jesus we are not able to. We are both inclined to desire to sin and to perpetually act in sin. The scriptures reveal the high standard of God’s righteousness and instinctively the sinful nature is inclined to do the opposite (Rom.7:3). We are in every sense of the word, the slaves of sin (Rom.7:5).
- B. A second application is one in which we strive to resist sin and imagine that our effort earns us a right standing with God. This application by nature constitutes the very definition of the concept of religion. A theology of religion convinces us that God is more favorably inclined to show mercy to those who try harder (Rom.3:20a,23).

3. WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN POWER TO OBEY

- ³ For what the Torah could not do by itself, **because it lacked the power to make the old nature cooperate,**” -Rom.8:3 CJB (cf. Rom.7:5)

-Walking in the Spirit is *defined according to the new nature* that now lives within us. Access to the commands of God in scripture alone are not sufficient to warrant our obedience. Paul taught that knowledge of the scripture makes us aware of sin (Rom.7:7) and because of that, sin actually increases apart from God (Rom.5:20, 7:7-12). *Contrast Jn.8:32*

-It is only possible to walk in obedience to God *in a way that pleases Him* when we do it according to His own nature working within us. The walk that pleases God is one of trusting (Gen.15:6; Rom.1:11, 3:29, 4; Gal.3:6). We do not strive for obedience because we seek to earn what is already ours, rather we reach for excellence both because He is supremely worthy of it (Eph.4:1; Col.1:10; 1 Thess.2:12) and because He is a rewarder (Heb.11:6).

-Is knowledge really power? Not in this case it isn’t. In fact, it only serves to complicate things. A simple knowledge of the truth is not sufficient to change our nature (James 2:19). However, our new nature not only wants to serve the Lord it has the capacity to do so! (Phil.2:13)

“¹³ for it is God who works in you **both to will and to do for His good pleasure.**” -Phil.2:13

4. WE IDENTIFY WITH THE WILL OF THE SPIRIT PT.1

- ⁵ *For those who identify with their old nature set their minds on the things of the old nature (Gal.5:19-21), **but those who identify with the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit (Gal.5:22-25).***” -Rom.8:5

SERVING IN THE OLD WAY

- A. Trying to relate to God according to the old nature results in what we call *legalism*. Legalism seeks to earn the favor and blessing of God according to one’s own righteous behavior. Jesus often criticized certain Pharisees for living this way (Mt.23:23,27-28)
- B. The religions of the world seek to prove themselves to God through radical acts of self-denial and religious zealotry hoping to procure His favor. A son does not have to earn the favor of His Father. He simply needs to receive His Father’s blessings as he purposes in his heart to live as an obedient and loyal heir.
- C. Many Christians live this way today without even realizing it. We would not consider ourselves to be like the Pharisees of old, but we often relate to God on the basis of our character rather than His. When we do right, we approach God. When we do wrong, we shrink back in shame and fear of punishment. We imagine that God is only pleased with us when we hit the mark of perfection in our spirituality and so we avoid looking Him directly in the eyes, so to speak. We mostly picture His great disappointment and imagine that now wouldn’t be the best time to bother Him, thinking that perhaps we better try back at another time.

*“For when we were living according to our old nature, the passions connected with sins worked through the Torah in our various parts, with the result that we bore fruit for death. But now we have been released from this aspect of the Torah, because we have died to that which had us in its clutches, **so that we are serving in the new way provided by the Spirit and not in the old way of outwardly following the letter of the law.**”* -Rom.7:5-6 CJB

*“For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, **so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.**”* -Rom.7:5-6 ESV

THEREFORE COMFORT EACH OTHER AND EDIFY ONE ANOTHER v.11 (1 Thess.4:18)

- It is important to remember that Paul's intent with vv. 1-11 was not an in-depth exegesis of the scripture but an exhortation to the Thessalonians designed to comfort and encourage them as they grew and wrestled with opposition to their faith and to sound doctrine.
- As we've examined, the subject of Paul's charge is the Day of the Lord. Because biblically the Day of the Lord is filled with apocalyptic imagery it is often viewed, however unintentionally, as a negative event.

¹⁸ ***Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you? It will be darkness, and not light.*** ¹⁹ *It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him! Or as though he went into the house, leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him!* ²⁰ *Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?"* Amos 5:18-20

*"...before the coming of the **great and dreadful** day of the Lord..."* -Mal.4:5

- However, in stark contrast to what seems to be the popular view held by many today, the Bible calls this Day our glorious hope!

¹³ *looking for the **blessed hope** and **glorious appearing** of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,"* -Titus 2:13

- The message of God's judgment on unrepentant sin is a clear biblical doctrine ascribed to in both Testaments. The glory in this doctrine is realized when we begin to understand the scope of the weight and penalty of sin in the created order and that God is going to finally and forever break sin's oppressive curse.
- Paul commanded the Thessalonian converts to comfort one another with these truths. God describes Himself as the God of all comfort who comforts us in all our trial (2 Cor.1:4)

⁵ *Now may the **God of patience** and **comfort** grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus,"* -Rom.15:5 (2 Cor.7:6)

- Trial is a real part of our journey in the Lord whether we're talking about denying our flesh in the midst of temptation to sin or resistance to the plan of God manifesting in our lives or even to persecutions that come because of the gospel message. Both the day of the Lord and the message of that Day will bring great trial to the church but *for* the church there is great hope and much to look forward to.

- God tells us the truth ahead of time so that we can embrace it. We joyfully anticipate the good and we diligently prepare for the difficult. God has given us both the testimony of the Spirit and the words of the scripture as the primary vehicle for our comfort (Jn.14:16; Ac.9:31).

4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” -Rom.15:4

- To edify in this context means to strengthen. (Edify- [Gk.] oikodomeō) **74.15 οἰκοδομέω^b; ἐποικοδομέω^b; οἰκοδομή^c, ἦς f:** to increase the potential of someone or something, with focus upon the process involved—‘to strengthen, to make more able, to build up.’¹¹
- The way that we strengthen one another with the message of the Day of the Lord is to anchor our development as Christians firmly in its truth. We exert energy to know the Lord because because it is his story that is being played out in our lives and that of every nation (Rev.19:10).
- Our potential for greatness in God is directly related to how we view God as a righteous judge and as a Rewarder of diligence (Heb.11:6; cf.Mt.25:24).
- We want to push one another forward by causing us to gaze upon the return of Christ as both near and certain. (Phil.1:9-11; 1 Thess.3:10-13; 1 Cor.1:5-8)

*“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense **until the day of Christ**, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. -Phil.1:9-11*

*“...And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father **at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.**” 1 Thess.3:10-13*

*“...so that you come short in no gift, **eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ**, who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” -1 Cor.1:7-8*

¹¹ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [*Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 675). New York: United Bible Societies.

