

## HOW TO LIVE TILL THE TIME OF CHRIST'S SECOND COMING

First Thessalonians 4 & 5

September 8

"Further, then, we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as you have received from us how you ought to walk to please God -- you should keep on abounding thus, more and more! For you know what Commandments we gave you, by the Lord Jesus.... Strive to live quietly, and to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands -- as we commanded you.... You are to behave honestly toward those who are outside [of the Christian Church]; and you are to lack nothing.... Therefore, let us not keep on sleeping; as others do! But let us be watchful and sober!"<sup>3890</sup>

Paul complimented the Thessalonian Christians for their great enthusiasm in promoting the spread of the Gospel. For he wanted them to realize that this would "hasten" Christ's Final Coming. Next, however, Paul nevertheless went on to give them some very strong admonitions.

The Second Coming of the Saviour was not imminent, as many of the Thessalonian Christians wrongly thought -- declared Paul. Consequently, they should **not** (as some of them **had** been doing) neglect the very exacting duties of their professional and personal lives -- simply in order to be able to devote more time to the work of "spreading the Gospel."

To the contrary. The Thessalonian Christians rather needed to glorify God in **all** that they did -- including their professional and personal activities. They needed to "dig in" for a **long** wait -- until Jesus finally comes again; visibly; and for the Final Judgment.

Paul had **already** told them to "**increase** in love" toward one another and toward all men. This, he had said, was necessary. For the Lord wanted to establish them more and more in holiness, in the sight of God -- **before** the Final Coming of Christ with all His departed saints.<sup>3891</sup>

So Paul **immediately** went on: "Further, **then**, we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as you have received from us how you **ought to walk** to please God [namely by **keeping the Decalogue**] -- you **should** keep on **abounding** thus, **more and more!** For you know what **Commandments** we gave you, by the Lord Jesus."<sup>3892</sup>

Here, the *Geneva Bible* rightly comments that "the Greek word [for 'Commandments'] signifies such Commandments as one receives from some Man -- to give them, in His Name, to others." In other words, the word "Commandments" here means -- the Lord Christ's Commandments; alias God's Decalogue.<sup>3893</sup>

Calvin comments that Paul here "urges them to make progress." Indeed, "he suggests that they are already on the way" -- **abounding** in keeping God's **Commandments!**

This constant **increasing** and **abounding** holiness of life<sup>3893</sup> was obviously a **long-range** project, to be worked on continuously and tenaciously. It clearly militates against the unscriptural theory of an 'any-moment-rapture' of the Church by an 'imminent' Final Return of Christ.<sup>3890</sup> This theory was regarded as heresy before 1820 A.D. Yet it thenceforth became very popular, especially in the United States.

Now this false 'any-moment' theory of Christ's Final Return was even then being entertained by **some** of the Thessalonian Christians -- to the exclusion of **their** God-required long-range planning for **victory** in the various areas of earthly life. So, under the infallible inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul combated it.

He did so -- by writing to **correct** them and to **wean them away** from this unbiblical belief. For this is apparent, from the following considerations.

First. The unmarried believers among the Thessalonian Christians were warned to delay their enjoyment of the privileges of sexual intercourse -- until they themselves got married. Meantime, each was to learn how to discern which Christian of the opposite sex would make him or her a suitable helpmate and partner for the rest of the earthly lives of both of them together. Obviously, this process of increasing

discernment implies patiently waiting and learning -- as opposed to impatiently expecting Christ's Final Return at 'any moment' (*sic*).<sup>3894</sup>

Second. The Thessalonian Christians were not to be satisfied with their brotherly love for one another merely on the local nor even just on the regional level. To the contrary, they were encouraged to "increase" that love "more and more" -- until it became **World-wide**.<sup>3895</sup> And this too presupposes that they should expect to stick around, here on Earth, for a very consider-able length of time.

As Calvin comments, although Paul here "affirms that they were willing enough to undertake all the duties of love -- he does not, however, cease to exhort them to make **progress**. For there is **no perfection**, among men" -- at least not as long as they remain here on Earth.

"Certainly, we are to wish for **improvement** -- even in what seems best in us. Having admonished them to **increase** in love, he commends to them a holy rivalry so that they may vie with one another in mutual affection -- or at least charges each one of them to strive for self-mastery....

"In order, therefore, that their love may be perfect -- he expects of them the **competition** which is usually found among those who eagerly aspire to **victory**.... This accords very well with **progress** in love -- where[ver] so many obstacles present themselves."

Third. They were not (just) to fold their hands in prayer and to ask God for the conversions of a few more unbelievers to Christianity -- in order to "hasten" Christ's Final Coming. No! While **indeed** testifying to others with their **mouths**, they were far rather also "to **work** with" their "own **hands**" -- and to "**strive** to live **quietly**."<sup>3896</sup>

They were to make it a matter of their very honour, to live in **peace** and **prosperity**.<sup>3897</sup> This was and is a **really long-range** project.

Fourth. Paul enjoined them: "**Mind your own business!**" That is: 'stick to your own trade!' This too was a long-term project.

As Calvin comments, the best way "to maintain a peaceful life -- is when each one is intent upon the duties of his own calling." For then, each "car-ries out the commands which the Lord has given, and devotes himself to these tasks....

"The farmer is busy with the work of cultivation. The workman carries on his trade.... In this way, each keeps within his proper limits."

You are, the Apostle continued to urge the Thessalonian Christians, "to work with your own hands -- as we commanded you." You Thessalonian Christi-ans are 'not to be idle' -- as the *Geneva Bible* comments.<sup>3896</sup>

Now you are to do this, Paul explained, so "that you may **behave honestly** toward those who are outside" the Christian Church. Moreover, "you are to **lack nothing**" -- because you are thriftily to accumulate savings, and to in-crease your purchasing power.

This too was **yet another** long-range project. For the *Geneva Bible* comments that the Thessalonian Christians were to be "**able** by your **diligence** to **supply** your **want** and necessity."<sup>3896</sup>

Indeed, Calvin comments that Paul here "commends manual labour for two reasons -- so that they may have enough to support life; and so that they may act honourably, even before unbelievers. There is nothing more disgraceful than an idle good-for-nothing who is of no use either to himself or to others, and seems to have been born merely to eat and drink. Further, this task or way of working -- has a wide reference. For when Paul speaks about 'hands' -- he is using the part for the whole. It is quite certain that **he includes every useful occupation of human life**."

Furthermore, the Thessalonian Christians were not to waste time sorrowing or worrying about those of their number who had died. They were not to do this, because the **souls** of the dead-in-Christ were even then alive and well -- no longer here on planet Earth; but, far better, with Jesus in Heaven.<sup>3898</sup>

Moreover, the Thessalonian Christians should know that even the bodies of the dead in Christ -- would finally rise from the dead, and meet Him in the air. This would occur when the trumpet of the Lord would be heard; when Jesus conspicuously descends on the clouds at His final coming (bringing the souls of the **dead in Christ** with Him, from Heaven and back to Earth).<sup>3899</sup>

For then **their** resurrected bodies shall rise up from their graves, and meet Him in the air. Indeed, that would occur even **before** the bodies of those believers who will still be alive at that distant future time -- will then themselves ascend and meet the returning Saviour in mid-air.<sup>3899</sup>

Consequently, we should not waste time uselessly worrying about the dead in Christ. For living Christians should spend their time **working** for Christ in **every sphere** of endeavour, **here and now** -- rather than sorrowing or speculating about details of the present and future state of deceased believers.<sup>3899</sup>

As Calvin comments, "we must not grieve inordinately for the dead. Because we are **all** to be raised again!"

Here, in this Epistle. Christ's Final coming -- when it finally occurs -- is stated to be **noisy** and **conspicuous** to **all** mankind. Indeed, Christ then comes visibly and audibly -- with **great fanfare**. Moreover, it will occur together with His appearance with the deceased saints from Heaven.

Seeing He then comes "with" the souls of the dead saints who are already in glory, He will **not so much** then come **for** the living saints. For He will then come **gloriously** with the souls of the dead saints, rather than **secretly** for the bodies of the never-dead alias the living saints. Indeed, how could His coming to remove visible bodies from the Earth -- be done secretly?

Nor will He then come for the saints in order to rapture them away from this Earth, so as then to leave the ungodly undisturbed on the Earth simply to desecrate it yet further. No!

It is obvious, then, that this passage First Thessalonians 4:14-18 cannot refer to an "any-moment" secret rapture. Indeed, it is an integral part of the immediately-following passage (First Thessalonians 5:1-3f). And that next passage is **post-tribulationistic** -- as even the Pioneer Dispensationalist C.I.Scofield implicitly realized.

Indeed, even in First Thessalonians 4:17, the Greek expression used ("*eis apanteesisin*") -- which the *King James Version* translates: "to meet" (the Lord in the air) -- is a technical term. It describes an old-fashioned public welcome given by a city-state to a visiting dignitary.

In such a welcome, the citizens **very visibly** leave their city -- in order to meet their **very visible** visitor. Then they immediately return together with him, **back to their city, in triumph** -- and **visibly**.

Last. Christians should know that the **time** or the day of Christ's Final Coming -- is quite **unknown**. Any-moment-rapturists think they **know** that the day of Christ's Final Coming -- is **soon**. Indeed, they **expect** it any day now.

But the inspired Apostle Paul tells us that this certain coming will be **unexpected**. For it will occur just like a very visible thief in the night -- **not imminently**; yet very **visibly** and quite **unexpectedly**.

Some consistent and very earnest rapturists can hardly sleep. For they think it possible, if not also even likely, that Christ will come finally -- **tonight!** Unbelievers, however, are fast asleep -- not believing that Christ will ever come.

But **Bible-believing Christians**, alias **Calvinists**, neither fret like rapturists nor sleep continuously like the unbelievers. As the Calvinistic *Geneva Bible* comments, "we ought to beware of all dreams and fantasies of men who weary themselves and others -- in searching out curiously the time that the Lord shall appear."

Instead, consistent Christians are sober. "Whether we are awake or asleep -- we should **keep on living, together with Him**."<sup>3890</sup> In other words, we need to realize we are already living together with Christ -- in and with His Spirit.

It is true that consistent Christians do not expect Christ's visible and Final Coming at the very end of World History, for a long time still. Yet each knows that he is **already** living and reigning together with Him, right now, even here on Earth. Ephesians 2:6 *cf.* 6:3.

Too, each also knows that Christ would indeed come for his soul right now -- if he should suddenly die. For that would be 'the end of the World' for him -- the end of his place in this **present** World.

Calvin comments that Paul "now calls to their attention the nature of the duty of believers, which is that they look to[ward] that [final] day in **hope** -- **even though it be remote**. This is the purpose of the metaphor 'day' and 'light.'

"The coming of Christ will take by surprise the ungodly who are heedlessly abandoning themselves to pleasure -- because, being covered in darkness, they can see nothing. There is no darkness greater than ignorance of God.

"There is, however, a great difference between **us** on whom Christ has begun to shine by the faith of His Gospel -- and **them** [the ungodly]. For the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled in **us**... While darkness covers the Earth, the Lord arises **upon** us -- and His **glory** is seen **in** us. Isaiah 60:2."

For all of the above reasons, urges Paul, Christians are always to be alert. "Therefore, let us not keep on sleeping; as others do! But let us be watchful and sober!"<sup>3873</sup>

So Christians should live sober and watchful lives at all times.<sup>3901</sup> They should be orderly, both in church and also in society at large.<sup>3902</sup> They are to engage in such long-range activities as: warning the unruly; comforting the feeble-minded; supporting the weak; being patient toward all men; and pursuing that which is good -- toward all people.

They should "not despise prophesyings." This means they should not pietistically neglect the systematic and thorough study of the Bible. Further, they should test or "prove all things -- while holding fast to that which is good."<sup>3903</sup> Thus they are: to treasure the Biblical prophecies; to throw out the trash; and to keep what is good -- and to **build** with **all** of this!

Indeed, they should keep on doing all of this, until finally the very God of peace sanctifies them wholly -- and their whole spirit and soul and body is preserved blamelessly, down till the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>3904</sup> For His purpose in so doing, will be -- only then -- to judge the living and the dead.<sup>3905</sup>

All of the above takes much time to execute. Once again, this disproves the possibility of an 'any-moment rapture' or a 'speedy final return of Jesus' soon after Paul wrote these words. That is obvious, also from the following comment of Calvin on Paul's above phrase: 'be patient toward all men.'

Paul, writes Calvin, "commends 'longsuffering toward all'.... For severity must be tempered.... We are especially liable to be wearied in healing the diseases of our brethren.

"If a man has more than once strengthened a person who is faint-hearted and has to do the same thing a third time, he will experience a certain disgust and indeed indignation -- which prevents him from doing his duty.... If by admonishing or ascribing blame we do not immediately make the desired progress, we abandon hope of further success. **Paul's purpose** was to **hold** this kind of **impatience** in **check** -- by commending to us **forbearance** toward **all**!"

Again, Christians are "not to return wrong for wrong -- but to endure it, with patience.... Since our hearts are easily depressed, until they give way to impatience -- we are to **note the remedy** which he presently adds. When we are cast down and laid low, we are **raised up again by prayer** -- because we lay the burden which oppressed us, upon God. But since every day, and indeed every moment, there are many things which can disturb our peace and drive away our joy -- **he bids us keep on praying without ceasing.**"

So "therefore," urges Paul, "keep on strengthening yourselves together!" He adds: "Keep on edifying one another!"<sup>3906</sup> However, both to strengthen and to edify

(alias to keep on building up) -- takes much time. Such actions are irreconcilable with the error that Christ's certain return, is -- '**imminent.**'

Comments Calvin: "He adds that they are to **build each other up.**" And indeed, this too is yet but one more **long-range** project.

O Christian. may we too in our laudable enthusiasm to see souls saved, not neglect our daily tasks! In our everyday lives, may we do everything thoroughly -- and exclusively to the glory of God! May our oral testimony that the lost need to be converted, never be laughed to scorn by them -- on account of the inconsistent way in which we live in other areas of our lives where we are being scrutinized by the very unbelievers we seek to win!

For only by living **full-orbed** Christian lives in **every** aspect of our concrete existence, will our testimony really be effective and winsome. More importantly, only thus will we really **glorify** God in **all** that we do.

So on, then, Christian soldiers! Onward, to victory!

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3890. I Th. 4:1,2,11,12 & 5:1-10. 3891. I Th. 3:12f. 3892. I Th. 4:1.  
3893. Cf. Ex. 20:1f; Jn. 14:15; 15:10,14; I Jn. 3:22-24; 5:2f. Too: I Th. 1:9;  
4:2,11f; 2:8; 2:14; 3:12; 4:3-7; II Th. 2:3-8.  
3894. I Th. 4:2-8. 3895. I Th. 4:9f cf. 3:12 & n. 3889. 3896. I Th. 4:11f.  
3897. *Id.* in *ABEN* (see n. 13), *in loco.* 3898. I Th. 3:13 cf. II Cor. 5:8 & Phil.  
1:21-23. 3899. I Th. 4:13-18 cf. 3:13 & II Th. 1:7. That Christ's I Th. 4:16  
coming is noisy and conspicuous to all mankind, is obvious also from the fanfare  
mentioned in Mt. 24:30f & Acts 1:11 & I Cor. 20-23,52. Note too that Christ then  
comes "with" the saints; not "for" them (see at n. 3886). See too G. Kittel:  
*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1964, I:380f.  
For a general refutation of the any-moment-rapture theory, see too at nn. 3907 to  
3925.  
3900. I Th. 5:1-4 cf. Mt. 24:36-50. 3901. I Th. 5:6,10.  
3902. I Th. 5:12-14.  
3903. I Th. 5:14-21. 3904. I Th. 5:23.  
3905. I Th. 1:10; 5:2-6 cf. II Tim. 4:1 & Rev. 20:11-15. 3906. I Th. 5:11.

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