

Comfort and Edify 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Having taught the Thessalonians about the differences between the Rapture and the Second Coming, Paul makes the argument that since we are of the day (the age that will experience the Rapture) we are to watch (be alert) and be sober (clearheaded) (verse 6). Those who miss the Rapture and become saved during the Tribulation are also told to watch, but with a different connotation. They will be watching for the signs of the coming of the Lord at the end of the Tribulation as laid out for the Disciples in Matthew 24. These signs were given to Israel to encourage them in the darkest moments of the Tribulation. They will be watching for their salvation, the coming of the Lord (Micah 7:7—10; Matthew 24:42—44). Believers in Israel will be given garments of salvation at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Isaiah 61:10; Matthew 22:11). Their salvation is future while ours is present. We are pictured seated in the heavenly places because we already have a permanent relationship with Christ while Israel will have to wait until the Second Coming when Christ comes to marry His bride, Israel.

Edify one another (verse 11)

Paul sums up his teaching with the admonition to comfort and edify each other with this information contrasting the Rapture and the Second Coming. The comfort comes from knowing we are not going to go through the horrors of the Tribulation. The Body of Christ has no reason to be purified by fire or cleansed by the fullers soap (Malachi 3:2—3; 4:1; Zechariah 13:9; Isaiah 1:25; Daniel 12:10). We stand perfectly purified in Christ (1 Corinthians 6:11) as a new creature (2 Corinthians 5:17). The Body of Christ was chosen before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before Him (Ephesians 1:4) so anyone who becomes a member of the Body is already holy and blameless. Those who do not see the uniqueness of Paul's doctrine often mix Israel's Prophetic program with the Church's Mystery program and come to a tainted understanding of our position in Christ.

Paul is using the special Mystery doctrine, given to him personally by Jesus Christ, to give great encouragement to the Thessalonians. The Thessalonian believers had suffered great hardship at the hands of unbelieving Jews, family and friends for turning aside from their family's idols to serve the living God (1 Thessalonians 1:9; 2:14; 2 Thessalonians 1:5). Paul is using the fact that they will not suffer God's wrath in the Tribulation but instead can look forward to living with Him in glory for eternity to encourage them to look beyond the pain and suffering they were enduring.

This is not some euphoric feeling they were to experience because they had believed in Jesus Christ as Savior. This was knowledge given to them by the Apostle Paul so they could be encouraged by the facts. Christians too often look for a feeling of some sort to confirm their position in Christ. They want to "feel" Him in a new and deeper way. They want to "experience" His leading. They want to "sense" in their hearts what God would have them to do. They don't understand that feelings not only do not define the Christian experience, but that they can actually become dangerous when trying to live in a manner pleasing to Him. Feelings and emotions were given to us by God and therefore are good, however, emotions cannot be trusted. We may have an urging or desire to take a certain course of action but Scripture and mental assessment must be used to validate these feelings. Scripture will tell us if our desires are proper or improper. For instance, we know we should never be unequally yoked with an unbeliever (2 Corinthians 6:14). Any endeavor that legally binds Christians together with the unsaved defames God and is to be avoided.

If Scripture is silent on what we desire in our hearts then we can pursue that aspiration through mental planning and strategizing with guidance given to us by the Holy Spirit. God is still in control when we allow Him to do so with a renewed mind (Ephesians 4:22—24). The renewed mind is one that has been given over to the Lord for His own purposes. When we give up self-control to give God full control we will please Him in all we do. This is the only proper way to make God-honoring decisions. Emotions may begin the process for us to serve the Lord in a certain capacity, but the mind (guided by the Holy Spirit) had better take over to evaluate and implement the desires of the heart. Emotions may be the driving force behind our desire to serve the Lord tirelessly, but we were not designed to be guided by feelings and emotions. Paul time and time again tells us to think and study.

We can see the interplay of mind vs. heart in Paul's decision making. Paul had a great desire to visit the Christians at Rome but was not able to because the work was so great in other areas (Romans 15:20—23). His heart said "Go" but his head said "No." The same conflict is seen between heart and mind in Philippians 1:23 where Paul desired to depart and be with the Lord but realized he was still needed as a minister of the Mystery. We also need to be careful to never make emotional decisions when deciding what the Lords wants us to do. Any time someone says that the Lord told him something or that he felt led of the Spirit to do something, the little red flag should go up as a warning that something may not be quite right. That person, whether he realizes it or not, is claiming special, extra-biblical revelation. An understanding of Paul's Mystery doctrine should lead people away from these poor, non-biblical methods of decision making.

Paul's doctrine is encouraging to individuals and edifying to one another. We are not to keep our encouragement to ourselves but are to share this with other believers. Paul does not tell us this just for our own good but so that we can take this same encouraging message to others. This information can also be used to those who are lost spiritually in the attempt to impart to them the same comfort and encouragement that can be theirs by believing. When we live our lives in complete faith, others will wonder how we are able to be free of anxiety in a world gone out of control. Our lives can be a testimony of how hope in Christ produces a practical and positive outlook on life. We should no longer look to the world and its problems, but look heavenward with a confident expectation of His return. That is the ultimate encouragement.

One body

Even though we have come from all different backgrounds and walks of life, believers are all members of the same Body and therefore members of one another (Romans 12:4—5). This one body (Ephesians 2:15) was formed with the salvation of the Apostle Paul on the road to Damascus. He is our prototype, an example of those who would come after him (Philippians 3:17; 4:9; 1 Timothy 1:16). That makes me as responsible for you as you are for me. Everything we do should be for the edification (building up) of the Body (Romans 14:19). When we come to church our primary concern should not be whether or not we are getting fed, but in building up other believers. Obviously, proper feeding is critical for a believer to grow and mature, so a church that strays from Pauline doctrine is doing a great disservice to the Body of believers (Ephesians 4:11—12). As believers feed on proper doctrine they will be better equipped to help other believers become perfected in the Lord (Ephesians 4:13).

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