

*1 Thessalonians 5:8-11***PREFACE**

Writers tend to repeat themselves. Not only will they reuse words and phrases that are comfortable to them, but they will often revisit concepts and imagery that to them are especially meaningful, rich and important. These need not be of their own invention: a good writer is also a good *reader*, and familiar with earlier concepts and imagery created by even better writers. We have all of this in v8 of our passage.

Paul employs imagery he will use again, but which he borrowed from a writer predating him by roughly 700 to 800 years.

v8

In v5 Paul declared that “you are all sons of light and sons of day.” Then in vv6-7 he goes on to describe the behavior of those who dwell, instead, in night and darkness. The opposite of “alert and sober,” they get drunk and sleep (synonymous with being ignorant). He reiterates our position and calling in v8.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:8.

Let’s briefly trace the imagery Paul uses. [Look at the handout that accompanies this session.](#)

<p><i>Isaiah 59:17</i> (c. 700 BC)</p> <p>He put on righteousness like a breastplate, And a helmet of salvation on His head; And He put on garments of vengeance for clothing And wrapped Himself with zeal as a mantle.</p>	<p><i>1 Thessalonians 5:8</i> (AD 50)</p> <p>But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.</p>	<p><i>Ephesians 6:14-17</i> (AD 63)</p> <p>Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.</p>
---	---	---

Additionally, in the *Wisdom of Solomon*, one of the volumes in what we refer to as the *Apocrypha*—not in our canon. This book was not actually written by Solomon, but by an Alexandrian Jew during the first century BC, *impersonating* King Solomon. Paul would certainly have been familiar with the work, and thus the passage in its Chapter Five.

And his zeal will take armour, and he will arm the creature for the revenge of his enemies. He will put on justice as a breastplate, and will take true judgment instead of a helmet: He will take equity for an invincible shield. (Wisdom 5:18-20 DRB)

Before we dig into Paul’s use of this imagery in our text, let me point out something that struck me this week. Although in the Thessalonian letter he calls it “the breastplate of faith and love,” in the Isaiah passage and later, in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, it is called the “breastplate of righteousness.”

Look at the image in the handout; it is a photograph of a famous statue of Caesar Augustus. The Roman breastplate (or *cuirass*, which referred to the attached front and back pieces) could be as simple as unadorned leather, and rarely as ornate as what we see in this statue, called the *Augustus of Prima Porta*, created some time during the last quarter-century before Christ. But a common feature of the *cuirass* was that it was made to represent an idealized male torso—well proportioned, well-muscled, intimidating. Forget that the one wearing the armor—be it common soldier or emperor—could in reality be a 98-pound weakling underneath, the purpose was to portray the wearer as powerful and beautiful.

That is a perfect real-life illustration for how the “breastplate” is used in God’s word. We as believers do not stand in our *own* righteousness. In reality we are, spiritually, only 98-pound weaklings. The beauty, the strength, the rugged “virility” of the righteousness we “put on” is not our own, but Christ’s alone.

In our text, however, the “breastplate consists of “faith and love”—on which, indeed, rests our righteousness (Lange).

having put on the breastplate of faith and love,

having put on = *endusamenoī* = from <G1722> (en) and <G1416> (duno) (**in the sense of sinking into a garment**); **to invest with clothing** (literal or figurative) :- array, clothe (with), endue, have (put) on.

As best I can tell, the tense of the verb here is as it is translated in the NASB and ESV: “having put on,” that is, in Christ it is already there; we need not go to the closet every morning and put it on—although, admittedly, we may, from time to time, need to remind ourselves it is there.

breastplate = *thoraka* = of uncertain affinity; **the chest (“thorax”)**, i.e. (by implication) a corslet :- breastplate.

The breastplate, the first piece of armor, represents two essential qualities:

faith and love = *pisteōs kai agapēs*

Twice now in this letter (1:3 and 3:6) Paul has associated these two qualities, which seems natural: with the first comes the second.

Lange: The one cannot be without the other. **Genuine faith is not a harsh dogmatism; it dwells only in a heart touched by the love of God, so that of necessity love grows out of it.** A faith that does not justify itself in the way of love is not the genuine; it is a reliance on notions, instead of a personal trust in the God of grace; and through the inflation of knowledge it lays itself open to the enemy. A love, moreover, that loves not the life that is born of God, but spares the ungodly nature, is not genuine love. Only where faith and love are really and intimately one, is the Christian heart (the centre of all inward and outward life) secured within the shelter of this breastplate against all condemnation, against all thrusts of the accuser, against all devilish assaults. (emphasis added)

and as a helmet, the hope of salvation

Note how this armor protects head and heart, the emotion and the intellect, two vital components in a walk of faith—a walk in the light of “the day.” As Lange points out, our walk is one of love because it is love that has saved us, but it is also more than that. Notice how in his letter to the Colossians Paul weaves together the two.

Read Colossians 2:1-7.

Faith without knowledge is too fragile, and soon falters; knowledge without faith is too proud, and soon has no need for a Savior. They are meant to work together, and both are part of a healthy, thriving walk in Christ.

v9

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10.

For God has not destined us for wrath,

What does God’s “wrath” look like? In the Revelation, Chapter Six, we see just a portion of it, a window on part of the Great Tribulation.

Read Revelation 6:12-17.

Global humanity has never experienced anything like the consuming wrath of God—nothing remotely like this. As we see in v16, the people of this earth—those not already dead—will plead for death, for the mountains to bury them, instead of having to face Almighty God, and “the wrath of the Lamb.”

Sidebar: Can one imagine anything more incongruous than “the wrath of the Lamb”? This, in itself, illustrates the unbridled horror that awaits those who suffer this. The gentle Lamb, the Savior of peace and gentleness and grace will release the full fury of His judgmental wrath. Mere flesh shudders just to read of such things.

But the body of Christ, the church, will not experience this, for they were not “destined [or appointed] for wrath.” It was set down, before any of them were even born, that those in Christ would never personally experience the wrath of God. As individuals we have and will in our lifetimes experience His discipline, perhaps even the effects of His righteous anger—and heaven knows we certainly *deserve* His wrath. But we will never experience anything like what the remaining inhabitants of this globe will experience during the Tribulation, because the wrath we deserved—and still deserve—was borne by the Savior on the cross.

but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

We need to be careful here.

obtain(ing), receive^{niv} = *peripoiesin* = from <G4046> (peripoieomai); **acquisition (the act or the thing)**; by extension preservation :- obtain (-ing), peculiar, **purchased, possession**, saving.

This flexible word can refer to the *act* of acquiring, or the item acquired, and can be either active or passive. The translation “obtain” hovers over the line between the two. For example, if I go to the store to purchase a carton of milk, I have “obtained” the milk with *my* actions, *my* money and choice of selection. By all of those I *actively* took possession of the carton of milk. I obtained it.

If, on the other hand, someone gives me a birthday gift—something which *their* money and actions and choice purchased—then when they hand it to me, I *passively* obtained that gift through no effort of my own. I *received* it.

Paul himself signals how we are to interpret this word:

1:4 knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you
1:10 that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come
5:9 for God has not destined/appointed us for wrath
5:10a (salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,) who died for us

And, of course, we could back this up with myriad passages in the NT by the apostle Paul and other writers. Save for placing our faith in Christ, nothing we do gains our salvation—and, since, as Paul points out, we are *His* choice, even that decision is of Him. We receive (NIV) salvation through or by (*dia*, the channel of an act) Jesus Christ. *He* is active; we are passive. And v10 underlines this.

v10

(obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,) who died for us

From the perspective of two thousand years of accumulated doctrine and theology, the first words of v10—“who died for us”—are met by Christians today with a shrug. But historically, this verse is a milestone: Here in his first letter to the Thessalonian church is Paul’s first mention of salvation by means of Christ’s death. About five years later, in his letters to the Romans, the Corinthians, the Galatians, Paul will expand on this.

so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.

Paul does not launch into a treatise on the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ; he stays on topic. As Thomas puts it, “His death on our behalf...was the sole condition in procuring as God’s peculiar possession a people destined for salvation when the rest of the world is plunged into the wrath of the future day.”

Paul is closing the circle on the discussion he began in Chapter Four.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14.

Christ’s death is what makes the difference, not whether we are alive or dead when He returns. When the day of the Lord arrives, our earthly-life status will make no difference; whether we are “awake”—i.e., living—or “asleep”—i.e., dead— on this earth, it is our heavenly-life status that will make the difference.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17.

And he wraps it up here as he did in Chapter Four.

4:17b-18 - "and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words."

5:10b-11 - "we will live together with Him. Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing."

So long as we are alive on this earth we will require encouragement and comfort. The world in which we live—this society, this culture—has many ways of *discouraging* the Christian, of eroding the hope we have in Christ. Never forget: this is Satan's realm. He has an entire arsenal of weapons for doing great damage to our hope. He cannot remove it—and he certainly cannot change ultimate future events. But until the day we meet Christ in the air, we will need to encourage each other, building up rather than tearing down each others' faith, to counteract the corrosive effects of this fallen world—just as we already are doing.

No class next week!

Isaiah 59:17 (c. 700 BC)	1 Thessalonians 5:8 (AD 50)	Ephesians 6:14-17 (AD 63)
<p>He put on righteousness like a breastplate, And a helmet of salvation on His head; And He put on garments of vengeance for clothing And wrapped Himself with zeal as a mantle.</p>	<p>But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.</p>	<p>Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.</p>
<p>And his zeal will take armour, and he will arm the creature for the revenge of his enemies. He will put on justice as a breastplate, and will take true judgment instead of a helmet: He will take equity for an invincible shield. (Wisdom of Solomon 5:18-20 DRB)</p>		



Session 25

