

CHRISTIAN LIVING.

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"For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him."

I Thessalonians 5:9-10

I Thessalonians is believed to be the oldest book of the New Testament. No doubt many letters were written before this one, but were lost. It would have been tragic if this one had been lost too. The letter is from Paul, Silvanus and Timothy. It is thought that Silvanus was Silas, who had faced many a riot with Paul. ^{Young} Timothy was greatly loved in Thessalonica. He had brought Paul a report of the church, which probably caused the letter to be written. There were bickerings and strife where there should have been love and understanding.

The early Christians had a secret sign by which they knew each other. If a man was a Christian he drew the outline of a fish with his staff on the ground. It was necessary for them to have some secret pass word or sign to identify friends in a world that was so unfriendly to their way of life.

A first century writer tells us of another mark by which they were known, which was not secret. "They are not distinguished by country, language or customs from other men--- They are in the flesh, but live not after the flesh; their life is spent on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They love all men, and are persecuted by all. They are ignored and condemned; put to death---and made alive! They are dishonored and in their dishonor glorified. They are reviled-- and they bless others; they are outraged--and they honor

men. Doing good, they are punished as evildoers; when punished, they rejoice." 48

How this puts to shame much of the Christian living we know today. How many of us love all men? How many today have their citizenship in heaven? How many bless others when they are outraged? When we do good we are not punished as evil doers; we are praised and honored for it. Yet how slow we are to do good. We have so many of the good things of life, but it gives us such pain to divided with those who do not.

Surely it took more courage and grace to live such a life in a pagan world than it does in the world we live in. It takes courage of the highest kind for a man to live above the standards of his time. These Christians must have had it.

We know from Paul's letters that many of the Christians of his day did not live up to this high standard. It is not surprising that some broke under the strain of pagan opposition and example. Is it any wonder they longed for His second coming? It is certain they expected His second coming in the first generation of Christians. No doubt this hope gave wings to the first preaching of the gospel. To them the Kingdom of God meant the physical presence of Jesus of Nazareth. Day after day they expected Him. They speculated on the impact of His appearance in a pagan world. But He did not come. Many thought they would live to see Him coming in the clouds in glory, and thereby would obtain immortality. But as some of their own age began to drop off they became despondent.

To many this hope of the second coming was an escape from the cross. They thought His coming would solve all the

complex problems of the race. Why worry about the lame, the sick, the blind? They would all soon be healed. Why take thought for any temporal wants? He would soon supply them with abundance. His second coming would give his faithful ones dominion over all their foes. Their hope was very much like the Jew's hope of His first coming. In the Messiah the Jews were looking for a great earthly King who would restore the power of Israel in the world. We know they were disappointed in their hope of earthly riches and glory. They were offended when He came to them poorer than the foxes of the field and the birds of the air. We know the first Christians were disappointed in their hope of His speedy return. The winning of the world to Christ was not so easy or speedy as they expected.

If the expectation of the second coming of Christ is only an escape from the cross, it will surely be a disappointment. No man knows the day of His coming. Neither do we know the manner of His coming. No man is wise enough to say how God will finish His work on earth. But we do know that He will finish it in a far more glorious and holy way than any we had imagined. His second coming will surpass all the expectations of man in splendor and magnitude. It could be as different from what we are expecting as the first coming was from what the Jews expected.

"God hath not appointed us to wrath." He has better things for those who love Him. His coming will be a great day for all the faithful.

"The day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night."

What would you want the Lord to find you doing if He came today? Would it be good if He found us on our knees in prayer?