

DICHOTOMY

Scripture Reading: Read 1 Thessalonians chapter 5

An accusation made against Christians is that far too many of them are so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good. While that may have been true at some point in the past, it has been my experience that far too many believers are so earthly minded that they are no heavenly good!

Paul would have a problem with either position. He didn't want the Thessalonian believers to be so caught up with heaven and the return of Christ that they disconnected from the world around them. Some of the Thessalonians seem to have done this based on the fact that Paul on more than one occasion chides the Thessalonians about being idle (1 Thess 5:14; 2 Thess 3:6, 11) and commands them to work (1 Thess 4:11-12; 2 Thess 3:7-10, 12). It appears that a number in the church were simply waiting for Christ to return and ignoring any responsibilities for themselves, their families and the world around them. They were so heavenly minded that they were no earthly good.

Other believers in Thessalonica went the other way. They were so earthly minded that they were no heavenly good. Their focus was not on Christ's return but on earthly pursuits. Paul had to remind such folks that, *"it is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality."* Paul wanted the Thessalonian believers to be alert and self-controlled (1 Thess 5:6) and avoid every kind of evil (1 Thess 5:22). In light of Christ's soon return, Paul prayed that God would sanctify the Thessalonians through and through (1 Thess 5:23). Paul expected that they would lead a quiet life, mind their own business and work hard to provide for their own needs so as to be a good witness to the unbelieving world around them (1 Thess 4:11-12) so that the lost could be won to Christ.

Paul's admonition to the Thessalonians is just as applicable today. During the course of my Christian life, I've heard of believers who have been so convinced they knew the date of Christ's coming, that they quit their jobs, ran up debt on their credit cards (figuring they wouldn't have to pay it!) and climbed up a mountain to await Christ's return. How tragic and what a poor witness for Christ! On the other hand, I have also known believers who have practically neglected the fact that Christ will return "like a thief in the night," and abused God's grace by living unholy lives. Again, how tragic!

The Lord does not want a disconnect or dichotomy in our lives. He wants us to be both heavenly minded and earthly good. Indeed, as the apostle John affirms, we should be so heavenly minded that we are truly earthly good. *"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure (1 John 3:2-3).*

Action Step & Prayer Focus: Ask the Holy Spirit to evaluate your life to make sure there is no dichotomy in the way you live your Christian life. Allow the certainty of Christ's return to fill your heart with joyful anticipation as you await the coming of Christ. At the same time, ask the Lord to empower you to live a holy life and make a difference here on earth while you wait for Christ's return.

Take-a-way: *Christians are to be both heavenly minded AND earthly good!*