

Wednesday in the Word
Digging Deeper
June 9, 2021
1 Thessalonians 5:4-11
To Sleep or Not To Sleep...
That is the Question

Symbolically light and dark represent the difference between good and evil. Generally speaking, light serves as a symbol of life, happiness, prosperity, and, in a wider sense, of perfect being. As a symbol of life, light can also serve as a symbol of immortality. Darkness, on the other hand, is associated with chaos, death, and the underworld. It could be argued that the Bible serves as the basis for almost all themes found in Western literature. At the heart of the biblical themes is the concept of good vs evil. Goodness is often portrayed as some element of light. In Genesis, God creates light and calls it good. Genesis 1:3-5. In the New Testament, Jesus himself is described as the light of the world. John 8:12. The visions of heaven described in the Revelation of John contain imagery of light. Revelation 21:23. Popular literature carries on this ancient theme. Dark and light symbolism abound in many of the works of Shakespear. In "Macbeth" darkness is used a number of times to symbolize death. The famous line, "Out, out brief candle," refers to Lady Macbeth's suicide. Banquo's torch is extinguished at the moment of his death. In "Romeo and Juliet," light is used to show Juliet's beauty and her dazzling influence on Romeo. When Romeo first sees Juliet, he says, "O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!" Even when she dies, her brightness endures. When Romeo finds her in the tomb, he says, "A grave? O, no, a lantern, slaughtered youth, For here lies Juliet, and her beauty makes This vault a feasting presence full of light ". This same symbolism reveals to us in today's text that we Christians are the very children of the Light (vv4-5) birthed in us through the Holy Spirit on the day of our salvation. We ourselves are even called light by Jesus Himself. Matthew 5:14. As that light we shine in the darkness to show the world the path to heaven through faith in Christ. V16.

The symbolism of sleep is revisited in art time and time again. Why do artists return to this inactive, common, basic human function? The appeal of sleep lies in the fact that, although it is common, it is extremely complex. A sleeping woman takes on the posture of death but is very much alive. She is conscious but not cognizant. She lies physically in reality, but her thoughts run in fantasy. Sleep delights, frightens, regenerates, and may even lead to fatigue. It can over-power like a heavy, irrepressible fog or elude us like the sweet thrills of happiness. Here again this reference in the Word of God speaks of a weakened state. (vv6-8). Sleep alludes to laziness, carelessness, ignorance and inattentiveness. Consider some of the biblical characters with whom the troubles of sleep were worthy to note. Mark 14:37-38, John 11:11-14, Judges 4:21, Matthew 25:25. Consider this haunting account of another portion of Shakespear's tome; Sleep symbolizes the peace and innocence of King Duncan in Macbeth. After murdering the King in his sleep, Macbeth hears a voice say, "Macbeth does murder sleep." Not only has Macbeth destroyed Duncan's sleep but he has also murdered his own ability to rest peacefully.

Finally we explore the base comparisons of drunkenness and sobriety, also found in vv7-8. Wine was used as a symbol of blessing and judgement throughout the Bible. Drinking a cup of strong wine and getting drunk are sometimes presented as a symbol of God's judgement and wrath, and Jesus references this cup of wrath, which he several times says he himself will drink. Matthew 26:42. Not that He would get drunk but that the violence of the experience would be released upon Him for us. He took the Wrath of God intended for us. A work from 1899 tells us this; "Noah survived one flood, only to be the source of another; a flood that for its disastrous results and heartrending consequences has outrivalled the flood of his preserver, for the sparkling, crimson fluid from Noah's wine press has been the cause of misery for millions of helpless, struggling, pitiful human objects, carrying them on and on to an ocean of woe, to a deep, dark sea of oblivion". Shakespeare had this to say; "I have very poor and unhappy brains for drinking. I could well wish courtesy would invent some other custom of entertainment".

Today's scripture uses these illustrations; darkness and light, sleep and wakefulness and drunkenness and sobriety to give us stern warning concerning the great divide between the Wrath of God coming on unbelievers and the Hope of Salvation reserved for those who, in humility have accepted His offer of Eternal Life. The many symbols cross and overlap but the message is clear. Come into the Light! Wake up! Sober up! Live for Christ and please, please pass it on!