

DAY PEOPLE

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Have you ever noticed some people are morning people, and some people are not? Veteran journalist Bob Schieffer replaced Dan Rather as anchor of the CBS evening news. Schieffer recalls an embarrassing moment from his early years as a television news reporter. He had worked through the night covering a brutal hurricane battering the Texas coastline.

He got back to the news desk in time to make his broadcast for the 6 a.m. news. But exhaustion set in, and Schieffer fell asleep during the 10 a.m. broadcast. A cameraman woke him and he jumped right back in to delivering news bulletins. Strangely, the station received very few calls about the incident. Viewers either didn't notice, or didn't care, that their news anchor had fallen asleep on the job. At least Schieffer had an excuse. He had worked all night.

Pastor Ron Mehl tells about an associate pastor eager to make a good first impression at his new church. The night before his first Sunday, he was too anxious to sleep. The next morning, as he sat in the warm, dimly lit sanctuary, he became drowsy. At one point, he felt himself leaning further to one side. Then he remembered his head coming to rest in his wife's lap. And then he was asleep. A few moments later, he woke to see the senior pastor staring down at him. Flustered, he jerked up out of the seat and glanced at his wife on his right. Only problem was, his wife wasn't on his right. She was on his left. He had been resting his head in the lap of a woman visitor.

That could happen if we do not get enough sleep. Still, there seem to be two kinds of people, morning people and night people. Some simply don't function well in the mornings—at least not until our third cup of coffee. Others have difficulty functioning in the evening. We start falling asleep about 8:00 p.m. Does this sound like anyone you know?

St. Paul tells us there are two kinds of people, but it has nothing to do with sleep patterns. Paul calls these two kinds of individuals people of the day, and people of the night.

He writes, "Now, about times and dates, we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, so this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all of the light and the day. We do not belong to the night, or the darkness."

"So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath, but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him..."

People of the day, and people of the night. People of the light and people of the darkness. People of character, and reckless people without self-control. People who live in expectation of Christ's coming, and people who live as if there is no tomorrow. Two kinds of people.

St. Paul doesn't realize it, but he has put himself right at the center of today's so-called culture wars. Ever since the 1960's, there has been a battle going on in society. We read about Red and Blue states. Conservatives and liberals. Moral absolutes and moral relativity. Christianity and humanism. "Born again" and mainline. Pro-life and pro-choice. I am walking through a minefield even mentioning such things. My concern is not to deal with the politics of Paul's statement, but the theology. What is St. Paul saying that is vital to our daily lives, regardless of our politics?

St. Paul is saying, first of all, that you ought to be able to tell by a person's behavior whether that person is a follower of Jesus Christ. If that puts St. Paul in a particular camp politically, so be it. Most people nowadays don't want to think about things in black and white. We want lots of grays.

A few years ago, college professor Kay Haugaard had her students read a short story by Shirley Jackson called "The Lottery." "The Lottery" is about a small farming community with a dark secret. Every year, the people conduct a lottery; the "winner" of the lottery is stoned to death in the town square. The townspeople view this human sacrifice as a necessary way of maintaining their way of life. "The Lottery" was originally written to demonstrate the evils of blindly following society's morals. It was written four years after the end of World War II, when the world was still grappling with the horrors of Nazism, and a whole German culture that condoned the massacre of 6 million Jews. But here's what is disturbing. Professor Haugaard reports that her well-educated college students weren't really disturbed by the ending of Jackson's story. In fact, few of them considered it wrong. One student commented, "If it's part of a person's culture...and if it has worked for them" then how can we call it wrong? They didn't view the situation in terms of right or wrong; they viewed it in terms of individual preferences. Stoning someone to death is a mere cultural preference? That is startling. There are times when the follower of Christ must take a stand and say, "This is wrong."

People of good conscience may disagree on what constitutes wrong. Good people may argue about great issues. But what we may not say is they don't matter. Christians are called to wrestle with significant moral issues of our time, and make our voices heard.

Even more importantly, we are to live out our beliefs in our daily lives. What is really disturbing is that today's Christian man or woman does not seem to be living any differently than neighbors. More people are in worship, yet fewer people seem to be affected by worship. This moral flabbiness is true of society as a whole.

Author Bill Perkins asked a prominent business leader to name someone he would cite as a "leader of integrity" in both business and personal life. This man counted numerous wealthy, powerful, influential men and women among his colleagues and friends. Yet he couldn't think of a single leader who demonstrated integrity in both professional and personal life. Even CEO's who demonstrated impeccable integrity in their businesses often had moral lapses in their private lives. That's a frightening situation. There's something happening to us as people. The moral foundations are crumbling.

St. Paul compares the Christian life to a soldier preparing for war. He writes, “But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.” It matters when you begin your day, how you think of yourself. Are you simply a sales person, teacher, manager, technician, engineer or whatever, getting ready to go into work?” Or are you a follower of Jesus Christ who happens to be a sales person, teacher, manager, technician, engineer or whatever getting ready for a day of spreading the faith, hope and love of Jesus to people you come into contact in your work? It makes a difference. Are you an emissary of Christ, or simply a nice person?

National Geographic carried an interesting article titled “How to Dress for War” (April 2005). It was about those people who dress up in costume to re-enact battles from the Civil War. Perhaps you’ve witnessed one of these re-enactments. Civil War re-enactors are fascinating history buffs, according to this article. These men research the civil War meticulously, especially the manner in which the war was fought. Then they spend spare time setting up the most realistic re-enactments of the historical battles of the War possible.

According to re-enactor Michael Melford, these men “prepare for battle 365 days a year.” Re-enactors live, eat, and breathe the actual Civil War soldiers. They wear soldiers’ garb sewn out of the same type of material in use for the Civil War. They use ancient muskets. During re-enactments, they live like soldiers would have lived, sleeping on the ground, never bathing, eating very little food. They are willing to endure hardship, and discomfort, to re-enact a war that has long since been settled.

That may seem a little quirky, but similar to what we should be doing as followers of Jesus. Civil war re-enactors “prepare for battle 365 days a year.” They are willing to endure hardship and discomfort. Think what an impact the church of Jesus Christ could have with that level of commitment.

Sometime back *People Magazine* carried a story on the training American soldiers receive in urban warfare at Louisiana’s Fort Polk training center. These soldiers practice battle scenarios in a mock village. The village is loaded with fake snipers, land mines, and booby traps. The training is stressful, and even dangerous; two soldiers died in training practice when accidentally run over by a tank. But overall, the soldiers feel like training in the mock village is vitally necessary to their work. As they say, “The more you bleed in training, the less you bleed in combat.” When you are a soldier in combat, you have to believe in your mission. You have to subordinate your own desires to the task at hand. And you have to give yourself completely. No half-hearted commitment will do.

So it is with people now. We are soldiers of Christ in a war against forces of darkness. Some of us may be uncomfortable with the imagery of war, and forces of darkness. But how would you describe such scourges as racial hatred, child abuse, violent crime, terrorism, genocide, etc.? We might have different lists of evils we ought to be fighting, but this is no Pollyanna world. Darkness abounds. Only one group of people is called by God to do battle with these forces—the church of Jesus Christ. We are God’s light in a dark world.

AMEN