

1 Thessalonians 5:4-8

"Let Us Be Sober"

Sermon

NAS text

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1.

Introduction

1.

Context. In **1 Thessalonians 5:1-3**, Paul told us about the Day of the Lord, the day when Christ will return. He said that it will come at a

secret time

, that it will be a

surprise threat

to the unbeliever, and on unbelievers it will bring a

sudden trauma

. And from these verses we gathered that we are not to try to discover the times or seasons of Christ's return. That is not the right way to prepare for Christ's return, and it could easily lead us to live irresponsibly. How then should we prepare for Christ's coming?

2.

Text. So now in **vv. 4-8**, Paul tells us how we should prepare for Christ's second coming. In a nutshell, it is this: " **let us be**

sober.

" We're going to spend our time today coming to understand what Paul means by that one phrase.

3.

Metaphors

1.

Some clear, some obscure. We have to introduce this passage today by making a few comments about the big-picture metaphors Paul employs. He fixes our minds on these grand realities of immense importance— *day and night, light and darkness*

. The great and awesome and glorious Day of the Lord, the evil and ominous and terrifying darkness of this sinful world. It is only in regard to their greatness that these grand metaphors are difficult to grasp. But

in this passage

Paul also fixes our attention on metaphors that are more obscure and inscrutable

—
awake

,
asleep

,
sober

, and
drunk

. And in fact Paul's exhortations in this passage focus our *greatest concern* on these more *difficult*

metaphors: in

v. 6

: “

let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober

,” and in

v. 8

, even more narrowly-focused, “
[let us be sober](#),
” which is the title of this sermon.

2.

Problem. How do all these metaphors fit together? And especially, how are we to connect Paul’s biggest big-picture metaphor here, the “*Day*,” with Paul’s most focused, practical, detail-oriented metaphor of being “*sober*?” Paul exhorts us to make that connection in

v. 8

, where he says: “
[But since we are of the day](#)
[, let us be sober](#)

·
”

1.

Answer.

1.

Context and contents. The hardest thing to catch on to in these metaphors is the way they speak first of a

context

, and then of the contents which fill that

context

. This passage tells us what each context is, and what it is filled with. And this passage tells us who

you

are, and what

you

are filled with.

2.

(This chart shows some of the relationships, but needs to be more clear:)

□ Outside you

Context

Filled with

Inside you

Context

Filled with

day

light

1 Th. 5:4-8 - Let Us Be Sober

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awake

sober



night

darkness



asleep

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drun

V

V

Inside you

awake

sober



asleep

drunk

3.

Broadest distinction: There are two contexts: *day* and *night*

. Those contexts are filled with two respective contents: *light* and

darkness

.

-

The *day* is full of *light*

-

The *night* is full of *darkness*.

-

Your *connection* with that context (basic): You are in one of those two contexts, and your context affects you.

-

If you are of the day, then you are awake to it. You can see your surroundings (John 3), and you keep watch (Matt. 23-24; Mark 13-14).

-

If you are of the night, then you are asleep. You can't see your surroundings, and you don't keep watch.

-

Your *progress* within that context: What fills your context will increasingly fill you.

-

If you are of the darkness, that darkness will fill you, and you will become drunk—not just unaware of your surroundings, but unaware of the great evil within you.

-

If you are of the light, your privilege and duty is for that light to fill you, and to make you more *sober*.

-

Conclusion: If you're of the day, you're already awake. **If**

you're a Christian, you've got to be *sober*

.

-

Outline. So Paul tells us our **identity** in vv. 4-5, and the **lifestyle**

which accords with that identity in

vv. 6-8

. In each section he first makes the point in

summary

, then second gives us

detail

about the two sides: light and darkness, day and night.

-

Body

1.

Identity (v. 4). So, to get Paul's point here you first need to know your identity. Who are you? Are you in the darkness, or in the light? Paul shows us our

identity

in

vv. 4-5

, first in

summary

and then in

detail

. In

summary

,

1.

4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief;

2.

Darkness. Now of what sort is this darkness? It is the kind which would allow the Day of the Lord to overtake you like a thief.

1.

Why do thieves come in the night, in the darkness? Now certainly sometimes they come in the day. But in this passage, they come in the night because you cannot see a thief coming at night. The darkness hides the thief from your view. In the dark you are effectively blind. The darkness blinds you.

2.

This darkness is the “dominion of sin that characterizes the life of the unconverted.”¹ This darkness is found throughout the whole world:

-

John 3:19 19 “This is the judgment, that the **L**
ight
has come into the world, and men loved the
darkness
rather than the
Light
, for their
deeds were evil

▪

-

It soaks into men's hearts:

-

Romans 1:18-21

-

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,

-

21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their **foolish heart was darkened**

.

-

This darkness makes men's minds futile, and darkens their understanding, and it cuts them off from the life of God:

-

Ephesians 4:17-19 17 So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of

their mind, 18 being **darke**
ned in their understanding

, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; 19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

-

If you are in this darkness, then the Day when Christ returns will come as a big surprise to you. It will “**overtake you like a thief in the night**”, (v. 4)

and “**there will be no escape!**” (

v. 3

) Your sins will be

found out

on that day, and you will be charged as a criminal, tried, justly condemned for your sins, and sent to suffer the tormented agony of Hell...

forever

.

-

But if you have come to Jesus Christ, in whom is life, who is the light of the world, whose light shines in the darkness of this world, though the darkness neither comprehends nor overcomes His light, if

His light has shone in your heart,
enlightening your minds in the
knowledge of Christ, then you are not in
darkness, for your light has come, and
the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.
This “Word became flesh and dwelt
among us, and we have seen His glory,
glory as of the only begotten from the
Father, full of grace and truth....16 For of
His fullness we have all received, and
grace upon grace. ” **John 1:14-16**

-

Detail (v. 5) If you have received His
grace and truth, this light, this

everlasting life through trusting on
Jesus Christ as your Savior, then Paul
tells you in **v. 5:**

1.

5 for you are all sons of light and sons
of day. We are not of night nor of
darkness;

2.

Here we see your true identity in fuller
detail. And in this detail Paul is giving
us the big picture of a Christian
worldview.

3.

Antithesis. First, we see the full contrast between light and darkness, night and day. This contrast is *absolute*

“

What fellowship hath light with darkness?

” There is an

utter antithesis

between the darkness, and the light. Between the evil of this world—with its demons, spiritual forces, false religions and philosophies, occultism, corrupt governments and social structures, evil leaders and evil followers, temptations of wealth and

power, fame and fortune, greed and pleasure—and the moral perfection of Christ and His kingdom—His righteousness, His holiness, His peace, His grace, His truth, His wisdom, His strength to obey, the fruit and gifts of His Spirit as they are lived out in the life of His church in His world. This contrast between moral darkness and moral light is *absolute*

.

4.

Already / not-yet. Second, we see that this light is the light of the Day

of the Lord, and this darkness is the darkness of the night of this world.

This Day and this night are comprehensive states of affairs encompassing the whole creation.

And this Day has in fact already begun. We see this in the

expression “
[sons of light](#)

” “
,

[sons of the day](#)

▪
”

[2](#)

This day has already begun its influence upon you. The Day of the Lord predicted by the OT prophets

came when Jesus Christ,
Isaiah 60

's “

glory of the Lord

” who would be “

risen upon you,

”

Malachi 4:2

's “

Sun of Righteousness,

”

John 1:4

's “

Light of men,”

shone upon this dark world in His
incarnation, life, and ministry. He
told us in

John 12:36

“

,

While you have the
light

, believe in the
light

, that you may become
sons of light

.

” And so also in His exalted state in
heaven, Christ shone His light
down from heaven on the
Damascus road, blinding Paul, and
sending Paul to the Gentiles “
to open their eyes, in order to turn
them from
darkness

to
light

, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.

” And so you have become sons of God, and Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:8 that “

you were once
darkness

, but now you are
light

in the Lord. Walk as
children of light

.

” You see, by uniting you by faith to Jesus Christ God the Father “
has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light

. 13 For He rescued us from the domain of darkness

, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.

” (

Colossians 1:12-13

) Christ’s kingdom has already

begun in His first coming, and its fullness is

yet

to come at His second. In this sense, the Day of the Lord prophesied in the OT and spoken about in the New has already come, but not yet in complete fullness.

5.

Participation. Third, we see in v.

5

that we are “

sons

of the day,” “

sons

of the light.” This means that we have begun to

participate

in the blessings of salvation, in the Day of the Lord, in the Light of the Christ. So we are

identified

with the Day, with Christ’s coming, with Christ’s presence, with Christ’s kingdom.

You have in fact been irreversibly changed, irreversibly conveyed from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light.

Ultimately there is no turning

back. Your identity cannot be changed. Just as much as you cannot change who your earthly father is, so you cannot change the fact that you are a son of God.

6.

Lifestyle (vv. 6-8) Now if this is our identity, how ought we to live? Paul tells us what our **lifestyle**

must be in

vv. 6-8

, first in

summary

, then in

detail

▪

1.

Summary. First in summary in **v. 6** :

1.

“6 so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. ”

2.

Summary. Just as there are two all-comprehensive identities—you are either a son of the day, or a son of the night—so there are two all-comprehensive lifestyles—you either sleep and get drunk, or you are alert and

sober.

3.

Metaphors. Here in **v. 6**, the words “sleep” and “alert” are opposites. When you are asleep, you can’t see what is going on around you. You don’t know what is outside waiting to attack you. When you are awake, you do see what is going on around you, and you’re able to watch out for

dangers and avoid them, or watch out for Christ, and welcome Him when He comes. This word “alert,” or “watch,” calls to mind Christ’s own use of this word in the central places where He speaks about His second coming—His “Olivet Discourse” delivered on the Mount of Olives and recorded in **Matt**
hew 24-25, Mark 13, and Luke 21 .

There He tells us to “

35 "Watch therefore, for

you do not know when the master of the house is coming -- in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning -- lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping.

” (

Mark 13:35-36

) Here we see that we should watch for Christ's second coming. But the way in which He tells us to watch is by living a holy life when He returns, which

Luke 21:34-36

tells us: “

But take heed to yourselves,
lest your hearts be weighed
down with
carousing

,

drunkenness

,

and cares of this life

, and that Day come on you
unexpectedly. 35 “For it
will come as a snare on all
those who dwell on the face of
the whole earth. 36 “

Watch

therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.

" In fact, we must not only watch for the big-picture event of Christ's second coming, but we must also watch out for the moment-by-moment temptations that Satan throws our way—in

Mark 14:38

Christ said: “

Watch

and pray, lest you enter into
temptation

. The spirit indeed is willing, but
the flesh is weak.

”

4.

Let us be alert, let us watch
out for temptation. Now why
should we do that?

5.

Detail (vv. 7-8) The reason is that we are of the day, not of the night. Our identity must influence our lifestyle. It even must flow out into our lifestyle.

1.

Night life (v. 7)

-

This is what happens with unbelievers who are of the night. Hear **v. 7**, which gives us more **detail** about the difference between our lifestyle and the lifestyle of those who sleep:

-

“**7 For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get**

drunk at night.

-

It is natural to sleep at night, and it is common for people to get drunk at night. People don't normally sleep or get drunk during the day. But here these are metaphors—sleep, and

getting drunk. What do they stand for?

-

Sleep. Well, we already know what sleeping is—it is the guilty darkness, hardness, ignorance, and deadness of a man's heart who does not have the light of Christ in him. Such a man is unaware of any danger

that awaits him on the judgment day. This sleep is the opposite of being awake to the Day of the Lord, to being alert and watching for that Day.

-

Drunk. But what then is drunkenness? It is the opposite of being “sober

” in

v. 6

. We are not to be asleep and drunk, but awake and sober. This drunkenness is the opposite of spiritual, moral sobriety and self-control. When you're awake, you're thinking; when you are asleep, you are *not* thinking, and that comes

with its own problems. But when you are drunk, you are not only not thinking correctly, you are out of control and *acting improperly.*

When you are sober, you are self-controlled and acting properly. Not only do you not know what unseen dangers may lurk *outside*

of you, but you have a deep

problem on the
inside
of you, within your heart,
your mind, your body.

-

The night of sin, the night
of this world, is trying to
drag you into its flood of

sin, its “**carousing, drunk
enness**

,

and cares of this life

,” in Christ’s words. And I tell you, this is a “night life” of the most dangerous kind. Be warned, if you are living in darkness, you are not safe. Turn to Christ now, or He will give you over to even greater depths of evil.

-

Day life (v. 8) But if you
are of the day of Christ's
first coming

, if you are of the day of
Christ's

second coming

,

then

***that darkness does not
fill your heart***

and life

. No! “

The God who

commanded

light

to shine out of

darkness

, ...has shone

in our hearts

to give the

light

of the knowledge of the

glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ

▪
” (

2 Corinthians 4:6

) “
We have the prophetic
word confirmed, which
you do well to
*heed as a
light*

that
shines
in a
dark
place
, until the
day dawns
and the
morning star rises in
your hearts

▪

” (

2 Peter 1:19

)

You are children of light!
And so Paul exhorts us in

v. 8

·
·

-

8 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.”

-

Encouragement. “Let
us be sober!

” Let the proverb be fulfilled in us that “

The path of the righteous is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.

” (

Prov. 4:18

) “

Let your light so shine

before men that they
may see your good
works and glorify your
Father in heaven.

” (

Matthew 5:16

) For you “

who walked in darkness
Have seen a great light;
[you] who dwelt in the
land of the shadow of

death, Upon [you] a
light has shined.

” (

Isaiah 9:2

) “

The Gentiles shall
come to your light, and
kings to the brightness
of your rising.

” (

Isaiah 60:3

)

-

Sober. Let us then be sober. Some of your translations translate this word as “self-controlled.” Let us be self-controlled.

—

Definition.

—

Positive. The word refers to sound judgment that flows out into wise actions,

and in the NT this
word always keeps
Christ's second
coming in view.

3

-

2 Timothy 4:5-6 **5**
But you be

watchful

in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. 6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.

—

1 Peter 1:13 13

Therefore gird up the
loins of your mind,

be **sob**
er ,

and rest your hope
fully upon the grace
that is to be brought

to you at the
revelation of Jesus
Christ;

-

1 Peter 4:7 7 But
the end of all things
is at hand; therefore

**be serious and
watchful
in your prayers.**

-

**1 Peter 5:8-9 8 Be
sober**

, be vigilant;
because your
adversary the devil
walks about like a
roaring lion,
seeking whom he
may devour. 9
Resist him,
steadfast in the

faith, knowing that
the same sufferings
are experienced by
your brotherhood in
the world.

—

Negative. Being sober contrasts with getting drunk, with giving in to the lusts of the flesh, the evil thoughts, intents,

and desires that
war in our
members,
tempting us to sin.
Being sober is
exerting the
strength to resist
the devil so that
He will flee from

us, it is being able
to stand in the evil
day. Are you
resisting
temptation?

-

Ground. The ground

of our spiritual
sobriety is

ultimately the

Day of the Lord

. We live in the

Day that has

already begun, the

Day of our Lord's
resurrected and
exalted Messianic
reign in heaven,
the day of this
reign which
surrounds us by
the light of His
gospel revealed to

us in His word, by
His redemptive
work in our hearts
by His Holy Spirit,
by His dwelling in
us and even
seating us with
Him on His throne
today in the

heavenly places,
by His making us
to be partakers in
the inheritance of
the saints in light.
Do you root
yourself in the
solid ground of the
Day of the Lord, of

His Kingdom in your life?

-

Wellspring. The w
ellspring
of our spiritual

sobriety is the
Light of Christ
, the Light of His
Day. Zechariah
told us in
Luke 1:78-79
about the
spiritually
renovating

influence that
Christ's light has
on us: “

78 Through the
tender mercy of
our God, With
which the
Dayspring from on
high has visited

us; 79 To give
light
to those who sit in
darkness
and the
shadow
of death, To guide
our feet into the
way of peace.

" And so we
say with David, “
With you is the
fountain
of life, and in Your
light
we see
light
.

” (

Psalm 36:9

) The

wellspring

of our knowledge,

of our walking in

the way of peace,

is the

light

of God's grace and
mercy in Christ.

Do you drink
deeply from this
wellspring of
spiritual sobriety?

—

**Receptive
instrument. And
so the
receptive
instrument
of our spiritual
sobriety is
faith**

, believing on
Christ in His
Person, Offices,
and Work of death
and resurrection,
humiliation and
exaltation, as the
sole

substitutionary
atonement, as the
full sacrifice for
the payment of
our sins, as the
living God who
alone provides the
strength to mortify

the deeds of our
flesh, and as the
One who will
come again to
judge the earth,
and to claim those
who long for His
appearing. It is

this faith that is at
the heart of Paul's
command to be
awake, to watch,
to be awake to the
Christ who has
come, and to
watch for Him to

come again.
Unless a man is
born again he
cannot see the
kingdom of
heaven, but now
that God has
given you a new

heart in
regeneration,
though the world
does not see
Christ, you see
Him. So then, do
you watch and
pray to Him, lest

you fall into
temptation? Do
you watch for His
return?

—

Substance. So

our spiritual
sobriety has its
ground in the Day
of the Lord, its
wellspring in the
Light of Christ, its
receptive
instrument is to

keep watch by
faith, but what
then is its
substance
? The
substance
of spiritual
sobriety is

maintaining,
enduring,
growing, and
conquering
in our faith, love,
and hope, in
Paul's summary
of the whole

Christian life. It is
spiritual maturity
. Spiritual sobriety
is having not just
faith, but having a
working
faith. It is not just
love, but having a

laboring

love. It is not just
hope, but having
an

enduring

hope. It is not just
having these
things, but living

them out more
and more,
growing and
abounding in our
love for God and
for all people, so
that God will
establish our

hearts blameless
at the coming of
our Lord Jesus
Christ with all His
saints.

—

Armor. You see, there is in fact a great battle going on between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness, and

by God's grace
you are more than
conquerors in that
battle. You have
been equipped
with the armor
that will win, and
now you need to

use that armor.
You need to grow
in your faith. You
need to grow in
your love. You
need to grow in
your hope. Paul
describes this

armor as a
motivation for us
to use it in
v. 8

▪
▪

—

1 Thessalonians

5:8 “8 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.

”

-

This translation
says we have

already put on
the armor; other
translations say
we need to be
sober by putting
on the armor in
the present. The
exegetical and

lexical arguments
for the one or the
other translation
don't matter very
much, because
either way the
point is that you
need to use this

armor. It is useful.
It will protect you.
Now a soldier
going into battle
with only a
breastplate and a
helmet would be
inadequately

equipped, but
when you are
equipped with
this armor of
faith, love, and
hope you do not
lack in the least
respect. You

have the full
ground, and
wellspring, and
receptive
instrument for full
spiritual sobriety
right at your
fingertips. You

even have the beginnings of the victory within your own heart and life! But you need to keep fighting the battle, using this armor. Paul

is exhorting you
to fight on the
winning side !

-

Hear Peter's

encouragement in 1 Peter 4:1-5:

-

Therefore, since
Christ suffered for

us in the flesh, ar
m

yourselves also
with the same
mind, for he who
has suffered in
the flesh has
ceased from sin,

2 that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. 3 For we have spent

enough of our
past lifetime in
doing the will of
the Gentiles --
when we walked
in lewdness,
lusts,
drunkenness,

revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. 4 In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with

them in the same
flood of
dissipation,
speaking evil of
you. 5 They will
give an account
to Him who is
ready to judge

the living and the dead.

—

And Paul in Romans 13:11-14

-

11 Do this,
knowing the **time**

, that it is
already
the
hour
for you to
awaken
from
sleep

; for now
salvation
is nearer to us
than when we
believed. 12 The
night
is almost gone,
and the

day
is near. Therefore
let us lay aside
the
deeds
of
darkness
and put on the

armor

of

light

. 13 Let us

behave

properly

as in the day, not

in carousing and

drunkenness, not
in sexual
promiscuity and
sensuality, not in
strife and
jealousy. 14 But
put on the Lord
Jesus Christ, and

make no
provision for the
flesh in regard to
its lusts.

—

Put on the armor
of faith, love, and
hope, and use it!
And you will grow
in spiritual
sobriety.

—

Let us then be
ones who can
say with Paul, “7
I have fought the
good fight, I have
finished the race,

I have kept the
faith. 8 Finally,
there is laid up
for me the crown
of righteousness,
which the Lord,
the righteous
Judge, will give

to me on that
Day, and not to
me only but also
to all who have
loved His
appearing.

” (

2 Timothy 4:7-8

)

-

And so let us not
sleep as others
do, but let us be

alert, and let us
be sober.

1Green, 235.

2Cf. Luke 16:8.

3 The related
adjective does
not:

1 Timothy 3:2
(adjective) **A**
bishop then must
be blameless,
the husband of

one wife,
temperate
,
sober-minded
, of good
behavior,
hospitable, able
to teach;

Titus 2:2

(adjective) that
the older men be
sober, reverent,
temperate,
sound in faith, in
love, in patience;