

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

Written by Tim Black

Monday, 12 March 2007 10:00 - Last Updated Monday, 12 March 2007 14:13

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 **c**

ontext

. 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

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Filled with



day

light



awake

sober



night

darkness



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asleep

drunk

Inside you

awake

sober

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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*.

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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

,

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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 **Light** 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 **darkened 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 **M**

Matthew 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 -- 36 "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 “**carousi
ng**, **dru
nkennes**
,
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
sober

, 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 so

ber

, 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 wel
lspring**

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?

-

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**
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 fig
ht on the winning
side
!

-

Hear Peter's encouragement in 1 Peter 4:1-5

▪
▪

-

Therefore, since

Christ suffered for us in the flesh, **arm 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 a
ready
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.

1 Green, 235.

2 Cf. 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,

t

emperate

,

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;