

**1st Thessalonians 5: 6-8; “Let us be Sober”, Sermon # 23 in the series –
“A Persevering Faith”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
September 16th, 2018, in the Morning Worship Service.**

We have been looking into the subject of the Day of the Lord, that Day which should not overtake any believer as a thief. We have seen that no one will miss out on this great eventful Day, for there will only be one Second Coming of Christ, and this will be the last day of the world because on that day will come the resurrection of all the dead. What joy that Day will bring to all those who have been sober about how they would live their Christian life! What agony it will be to those who have not been sober, and have not watched! We want to look at both sides of this subject, this morning, of what it means to be sober. We want to see that those who are not sober have put themselves in a very indefensible position in relation to the Day of Judgment. They will not be able to defend themselves against the Judgment which shall surely come to them from the lips of our Lord. He will say to them, “Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness, into the fire which was prepared for the Devil and His angels.” And we also want to see that being sober in this life will be the best defense of the Christian on that Day when Christ returns. It shall be a part of his armor. It is given to each serious and sincere Christian by the Savior, to shield him from the wrath of God on that awful Day when God will judge the secrets of men’s hearts, and every secret thing shall be made known.

So let us look 1st of all at the indefensible position of those who are not sober about the way that they live their lives. (verses 6 and 7)

“Therefore let us not sleep, as other do, but let us watch and be sober.” “For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.” “But let us be sober....” To be sober, my Dictionary tells me is “to be sparing in the use of food and drink: abstemious.” It is “not to be drunk”. Secondly it means “to be marked by a sedate or gravely or earnestly thoughtful character or demeanor; to be serious or solemn”. I think that the words in our text can refer to both. The first refers to what you do in regard to the body, that you do not deliberately put alcohol or drugs into your body so that your mind loses its ability to discern things correctly. This is sinning against God and against your body which is the temple of the Holy Spirit. It means that you cannot be sober in that situation. And the second refers to the way that you think. You realize that living a godly life requires thoughtfulness and seriousness if you are going to glorify God with the time that he gives to you in this life.

The person who is trying to please God will be a sober person. When they are not, they are putting themselves into a place where they are not able to prepare themselves to deal with the judgments which God will bring against them for their moral stupidity, and their moral unfaithfulness. If a person is a drunkard, he is destroying his own life and contributing to the downfall of the persons under his charge. Usually a person drinks too much and becomes drunk because they want to forget about their problems. They don’t want to face up to the realities of life. Instead, through the use of alcohol or drugs they find themselves for a time in a world which is care-free. They have deliberately chosen this way of coping with the meaning of their life. They think that they are finding happiness and joy by this awful means.

But I want to turn you to a few verses of scripture to show you that this drinking and drunkenness is anything but the right way to deal with your problems, or to try to find your joys. Proverbs chapter 20, verse 1. “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.” Using this means to find joy, or to cope with the problems and difficulties that you have, is to bring real trouble to yourself. You will find that the state that you find yourself in, will be as though someone is mocking you and beating you up for doing so. Now turn with me over to Proverbs 23: 29. “Who has woe?” “Who has sorrow?” “Who has contentions?” “Who has complaints?” “Who has wounds without cause?” “Who has redness of eyes?” “Those who linger long at the wine, those who go in search of mixed wine.” “Do not look on the wine when it is red,

when it sparkles in the cup, when swirls around smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper.” “Your eyes will see strange things.” “Yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, or like one who lies at the top of the mast, saying, “They have struck me, but I was not hurt; they have beaten me, but I did not feel it.” “When shall I awake, that I may seek another drink?”

This is the picture, I am saying, of a person who is really at the mercy of other people. This is a picture of vulnerability to the judgment of God and men. Will the person who drinks to be drunk escape from those judgments that are coming? He will not escape any of them. Ask yourself – In the book of Daniel, chapter 5, when was Belshazzar’s kingdom taken away from him? If we were to turn to that chapter we would find it was when he made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine with them in the presence of the thousand. It says – “They drank the wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.” What was he doing? He was not being sober. He was not only not being sober physically, but he was not being sober spiritually. There are no real gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.

And so when we read on further in Daniel 5, verse 5, we find this – “In that same hour the finger of a man’s hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace, and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote.” It says – “Belshazzar’s countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked together.” And in Daniel 5, verses 10-12, it says that when his wife the queen found out about this, she came to the banquet hall and she said to him – “O king, live forever!” “Do not let your thoughts trouble you, nor let your countenance change.” “There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God.” “And in the days of your father light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods were found in him.” “Inasmuch as an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas were found in this Daniel.”

Now what we see here is that Daniel was a sober man. He was looking to God for his answers. But Belshazzar, being deceived by wine, and being drunk on his own pleasures and power and fame, found himself the most helpless of men. When Daniel did give him the interpretation of the writing, it was this – “You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting.” “Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.” “That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans was slain.” No person, not even his wife the queen, could save him from the judgment that came upon him. Her words were sober words of truth, but the king himself was not a sober man. Now, we should understand that this was only the prelude to eternal judgment, for Belshazzar. We need to recognize this, and be sobered by it.

The earthly judgments that come upon people because they are not wise or humble enough to receive the truth that they are sinners who need a Savior; those earthly judgments that come upon them because they drink and are drunken, and make mistakes in judgment, so that other people are affected by those bad judgments, all of this is the prelude to the eternal judgment of hell, if it is not repented of. “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?” This is much worse than losing any temporal earthly kingdom. “Neither fornicators, nor thieves, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards...will inherit the kingdom of God.” (1st Corinthians 6: 9) Why? Because they are not sober. They will not, and indeed they cannot, think through the implications of what their drunkenness is doing to them.

What is the reason that Alcoholics Anonymous is so often resorted to by drunkards? It is because in the 10 step program it teaches them to trust in a higher power to help them to deal with this addiction. But let me tell you something. By its very nature, drunkenness is more than an addiction. It is a state and condition of being in unbelief in regard to God, and His word the Bible. The drunkard needs to acknowledge this as he seeks a higher power. And he needs to seek the name of the higher power if he would ever truly be freed in an everlasting sense from the unbelief of his heart; that unbelief which causes him to think that he can laugh in the face of adversity, laugh in the face of God, or make up his own god of pleasure and drink to save him from his

problems and calamities. But let him call upon the name of the Lord, let him call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and He will save him.

Alcoholics anonymous will teach the drunkard to think of his addiction only. It will teach him that he can never think that he will ever be free from this addiction. It will merely be controlled by him. But the Bible calls the alcoholic a drunkard because drunkenness is a sin which needs to be repented of, and forsaken. And the only way that that can be done is to be freed, not only from the power of the alcohol, but from the power of the unbelief which has led him away from the answers which God gives in the Bible. "Those who get drunk, are drunk at night." This is a picture of the spiritual state of the man. He has much darkness in his soul; it is the darkness of sin and ignorance. He is walking around in the night doing these things. He is destroying his own soul and bringing himself most surely into the judgment of hell.

What is the antidote to drinking? It is to be saved by calling upon the Lord Jesus to break the power of the addiction, and thereby it will give the drunkard faith and hope by the powerful working of His grace. And then, he must learn, as all other Christians must learn, that it is his duty and responsibility to be sober. He will not be sober by merely abstaining from alcohol, but he will be sober by actively engaging himself to believe that Christ will give him the strength and joy that he needs to cope with his problems, and find holy pleasures to pursue instead of drinking. And here I must add a word about social drinking among Christians. There are some very prominent Christian leaders in our day who are promoting their Christian liberty by occasionally getting together with others who are like-minded, to have their cocktail parties with other Christians. I must put in my protest. I wonder if this is right?

I wonder if this is a good example to younger believers, or even older believers, as well? Those who see you acting like this may not only be weak in the area of their conscience in regard to having a drink, but they may also be the kind of person, who if they take one drink, might find themselves addicted to it to the point that they will sin against God and against themselves, and others around them, because they do not have the strength or the self-control to conquer the sin of drinking too much. And what will you say to this; to respond to them and other people around you who have the same mindset concerning Christian liberty. I suspect that you would say in the words of 1st Corinthians 10: 29 – "Why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience?" "If I partake with thanks, (of a drink) why am I evil spoken of, for the drink over which I give thanks?" "Therefore," Paul says, "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Ah yes, this is so, but Paul also goes on to say in verse 32 – "Give no offense either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many that they may be saved."

I believe that the Bible teaches us that all drinking of alcoholic beverages, without great moderation, is an unholy, sinful pleasure. But for the Christian who wants it, and pursues it, Christ gives self-control, so that if they do drink they will have self-control and they will be moderate in their use of it. But let me say also that Christ is the One who gives the true holy pleasures. I would urge those Christian leaders who are engaged in social drinking to ask themselves this question – Do I have the moderation and self-control not to overdrink? Well, perhaps you do. So let us ask another follow-up question – Do I have the grace to ask myself – Is this display of Christian liberty, in my social drinking, really profitable to me, or others? What does it prove when I engage in it? That I am able to have this little high, this little zing, with beer or wine or a mixed drink, and you believe that it brings you joy, and the others with you? Are you searching in your heart how to gratify your flesh with wine, while guiding your heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till you might see what is good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives, as Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 2: 3?

I hope that you will see that if you convince and encourage other Christians to take the same view of social drinking as you do, that you may cause some of them to stumble. But if you were to cause even one Christian not to be sober and watchful, and somehow to be led to stumble and to fall into drunkenness, would you not say as the apostle Paul does in 1st Corinthians chapter 8, verse

13, when he spoke of eating meat around others who were vegetarian, “Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble?” I hope that you will see that it is so much better to promote in others the pleasures and duties of seeking a clear conscience, and all the joys of having fellowship with Christ in all the activities and duties of life. That is what you are called to as a Christian pastor and leader.

Now 2nd – Let us look at the very defensible position of being sober, both in this life and on the Day of Judgment.

“But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breast-plate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.” It is faith, hope, and love which are the defense of the Christian. They are those graces which protect the soul of the Christian just as much as the armor of a soldier protects his body. The Christian is “of the Day”. The meaning of this is found in the context of Christ’s having risen from the dead as the Sun of Righteousness. He is the light of the World. The one who believes in Him will not walk in darkness; he will not walk in sin or practice sin; but he will have the light of life. Those who are drunk, as our text has said, are drunk at night. Their whole experience is in the realm of the darkness of sin, and they stumble over many things related to the truth of the word of God, and they do not understand them.

Because these are stern realities that seem to take the fun out of life, they reject them. They love the darkness more than the light because their deeds are evil. And so, because they are of the night, they practice many sinful things that are not good. Their purpose is to find their meaning in life in those things which will not profit either themselves or God. People who pursue drunkenness, sensuality, and boastfulness; they are those who are often unkind, and unloving, and unthoughtful in their heart and actions. They are not sober as to eternal realities. They are not sober as to the reality of Christ as Savior, Lord, and coming Judge; the reality of discerning God’s will in His word and pursuing it with their heart. They do not see that they are hastening on to a Christless eternity, the reality of everlasting punishment, unless they find salvation in Christ and repent of all of their sins. But our text says – “Let us who are of the day be sober.” Let us walk in the light as He is in the light. Let us be careful and thoughtful in our words and let us be eager to engage in good works to help the brethren and all men.

Let us put on the full armor of God; that which will guard our heart and our mind in Christ Jesus. The pieces of spiritual armor mentioned here in our text are the breastplate of faith and love, and a helmet, which is the hope of salvation. Faith in God and in our Lord Jesus Christ is a shield. It will keep you, the Christian, from being discouraged and down when you become weary in the way of obedience. Let me read to you verses from Psalm 3 on this subject. “Lord, how they have increased who trouble me!” “Many are they who rise up against me.” “Many are they who say of me, “There is no help for him in God.” “But You, O Lord, are a shield around me; my glory and the One who lifts up my head.” “I cried to the Lord with my voice, and He heard me from His holy hill.” We see here that David found grace through prayer to see Christ as His shield. It was Christ who was his glory and he is also our glory. It is Christ who lifts up your head so that you are not ashamed, and so that you do not remain discouraged or depressed for a long time over people who are against us as Christians. The breastplate of faith is protecting your heart. In Psalm 5, verses 11 and 12, David says again, “But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; let them ever sing for joy, because You defend them; let those also who love Your name be joyful in You, for You, O Lord, will bless the righteous; with favor You will surround him as with a shield.”

Then there is also love to be found in this breastplate which we put on. I take it that the grace of love protects your heart, in that when you have it poured out within your heart by the Holy Spirit, you are guarded from having suspicious and unkind thoughts ruling in your heart toward God Himself, and all the brethren. It is very possible for a Christian to come to have hard thoughts toward God because they know that God is sovereign. Since they know that God is sovereign then they also know that is God who brings all the providential ordering of circumstances in their life. And they may not like what God is bringing to them in their particular circumstances. The Christian may also become discouraged in their relationships with other Christians if they are not

careful to guard their heart. The grace of God is there working in their heart, and God the Holy Spirit is certainly there in their heart to help them to be able to guard their heart.

But if that Christian person will put on love, then they will have the power to think about others in the right way. They can then think about what they need to learn about doing the Lord's will, in the context of their loving people around them; not in terms of their being suspicious of them, or thinking badly of them on a regular basis. This right thinking protects the Christian from having a root of bitterness grow up within them, by which not only they would be defiled, but by which many other people would be defiled. "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things; love never fails." "Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it." "Love is as strong as death." And this is what Christ died for; to make us strong in faith and love; to protect us in our hearts from falling into sin in relation to God and other people.

And then finally, we see that there is also a helmet here. And we are told that this helmet is "the hope of salvation". Hope really does protect your mind because you know that you have a sure hope. The Christians' sure hope is based upon the death and resurrection of Christ on your behalf. But sometimes we are cast down because we think that God has left us to ourselves. Our enemies seem to triumph over us, and our fears overwhelm us, and our soul is disquieted within us. What do you do at those times? Well, you must learn to do what David did in Psalm 42, verse 5. You pray and you say to God and to yourself – "Why are you cast down, O my soul?" "And why are you disquieted within me?" "Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God." That is putting on the helmet of the hope of salvation.

It will do you good, to think at those times, of Christ's perfect righteousness and all that God has done for you in the past to bring you out of the darkness and into His marvelous light. Lift up your prayer to God, praying as David did in Psalm 71: 14, "But I will hope continually, and will praise You yet more and more." "My mouth shall tell of your righteousness and Your salvation all the day, for I do not know their limits." "I will go in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of Your righteousness, of Yours only." This will indeed protect your mind from thinking about God and other people in ways which will only dishonor Him and do harm to them. Rather give thanks and praise the Lord Christ that He has given you this armor, and then put it on.

Yes, dear friends, it is good to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present age; looking for that blessed hope and glorious appearing of Christ. He gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. Be sober, for that Day is coming! That great Day will come, when Christ will be told by His Father – Now, My Beloved Son; now it is time for you to return. All of your enemies have been made a footstool for your feet. Now is the time for the angel Gabriel to blow his great trumpet and shout. Now is the time for the last and greatest enemy, death, to be triumphed over, in all the lives of all of My people. Now is the time for all of Your saints, whom You have purchased with your precious blood to be raised from the dead and to be caught up together to be with You in the air. Now is the time for the gathering together of all of My Elect, for that great and awesome time of judging the World. Now go, My Son, and show them Your power and Your glory; show them Your Wisdom in Justice in the separating the persons who are precious from the persons who are vile. Go, My Son, to glorify all who have believed in You; all who were sober, and who watched and waited for this Day. Go, My Son, and ride through the skies in triumph, and judge the world in righteousness, and bring My people into the New Heavens and New Earth in which will dwell righteousness. This, my friends, is why we must be sober.