

## **A Call to Spiritual Sobriety and Attentiveness in the Light of a Formidable Foe**

*“Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”*

1 Peter 5:8 NASB

The immediate context of 1 Peter 5:8 addresses the need for all believers to humble themselves and cast their anxiety on Christ because He cares for them (5:7). The Greek word translated *anxiety* in 2 Peter 5:7 conveys the idea of being drawn in different directions.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, the word pertains to one’s mind being drawn in different directions or in our language, distracted. Once a Christian’s mind becomes distracted from God’s truth failure to walk by faith in the light of God’s truth ensues (Consider 5:9). The believer then becomes easy prey for the devil. Therefore Peter exhorts believers to,

*“Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”*

1 Peter 5:8 NASB

This powerful insightful exhortation comes in the form of two commands followed by a reason for the commands. The first command is a call to spiritual sobriety while the second command is a call to spiritual attentiveness. The commands are given because Christians have a slanderous enemy who is actively looking to devour them.

### **A Call to Spiritual Sobriety**

The first command in our verse is a call to spiritual sobriety. Peter uses a Greek word which means to be *free from intoxicants* when he writes, *“Be of sober spirit...”* As Christians we are not to be influenced by anything that might impair us spiritually and make us vulnerable to the devil.

The need for physical sobriety is generally easily understood. But rarely is the need for spiritual sobriety considered even though spiritual sobriety is of a far greater importance.

When we think of someone who is not sober we often think of a drunkard or a drug addict. Such a person is said to be physically under the influence or control of alcohol or drugs and therefore not in their right state of mind. Because an intoxicated person’s mind is impaired his/her five physical senses become impaired. Consequently, such a person becomes vulnerable to a multitude of hazards that can result in injury even death and in some instances injury or death to others.

However, insobriety is not to be limited to merely the physical. Spiritual insobriety exists among those whose minds are under the influence of other things besides the Word of God. In the immediate context Peter seems to have the sins of *pride* and *worry* in view as intoxicating factors to the mind (See verses 6-7). However, anything influencing our minds over and above

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<sup>1</sup> Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Greek Words

the Word of God can become a factor which results in our being intoxicated in a spiritual sense. In such a condition a believer's ability to spiritually discern self and/or surroundings in the light of the Word of God becomes impaired.

### **A Call to Spiritual Attentiveness**

Immediately after calling us to *spiritual sobriety* Peter calls us to *spiritual attentiveness* with a command to **“be on the alert”**. Not only are we Christians to be free from intoxicating factors, we are to be alert. The Greek word means to be *awake* or *watchful*. Consequently, in addition to being sober, the Christian is to be attentive. Being attentive conveys the idea of being prudent, that is being aware of the very real spiritual dangers which exist in this life.

### **A Dangerous Adversary**

#### ***Your adversary***

The next part of 1 Peter 5:8 gives a reason why believers are to be **sober** and **alert**. Since Peter is writing to believers (1:1-5), the phrase *“Your adversary”* conveys clearly the fact that Christians have an enemy. Although the Greek term translated “adversary” was a legal term used to refer to one's opponent in a court of law the term appears here in the general sense which communicates the fact that this adversary is against believers in every way. He is not just the adversary of Christians in certain areas of their lives, beloved, this adversary is against you in every area of your life. In every circumstance he is your opponent not your friend.

### **The Adversary's Identity**

#### ***the devil***

Peter mixes no words when it comes to identifying this adversary. He states his identity clearly as being the devil. This is Satan (Rv. 20:2) and while Peter could have used many names to identify the adversary, he chose the term *devil*. The word translated *devil* means *slanderer*, specifically, *one who accuses*, generally in a false sense. Revelation 12:9-10 points out the fact that the devil accuses the brethren before God day and night.

Dear Christian, God has rescued you from the devil's domain of darkness and transferred you into the kingdom of His beloved Son (Col. 1:13). Therefore, Satan is against you as much as he is against God. Satan may come in the costume of an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14) but behind the cover he remains the devil, your adversary.

### **The Adversary's Character**

#### ***prowls around***

Having identified the Christian's adversary the Holy Spirit now moves Peter to express certain aspects of his character. First of all note that he is on the prowl. He is not setting or asleep. Instead, the devil is on the move. He is an active adversary. Unlike God the devil is not omnipresent; nevertheless, the devil's inability to be everywhere present does not afford the believer an opportunity for spiritual **insobriety** or **inattentiveness** for this verse portrays the devil as a supernatural being that is always just around the corner.

#### ***like a roaring lion***

Secondly, our adversary, the devil is **“like a roaring lion.”** This phrase is used to convey the **vicious nature of the adversary**. In the Old Testament the roaring of a lion is associated with

the lion's merciless seizing and killing of its prey (Ps. 104:21; Is. 5:29; Jer. 2:15) and is used to describe the terror of a king when he is provoked (Pr. 19:12; 20:2). Anyone who has ever witnessed lions capturing their prey is aware of the gruesome sight. The ripping and tearing of an animal while it wails for its life receives no mercy from the lions. Likewise beloved, our adversary the devil is vicious. He will not let up. He is without mercy.

It is important to realize that this description of the devil's vicious character comes in the last chapter of the letter which addresses Christians who were already experiencing distressing trials (1:6) as they were being tested by fire (1:7; 4:12-13). However, the devil will not minimize his assault merely because the saint is suffering or has apparently had enough. As we shall see in the next part of the verse, suffering is not the devil's objective but an instrument he often uses to accomplish his objective. Therefore, when we consider the vicious character of the devil in comparison to that of a lion tearing its prey we must not conclude that physical suffering is the devil's objective. The likeness is to the vicious character of the devil. Our enemy the devil is ruthless. He took everything from Job and killed all of his children (Job 1) but he did not stop when he saw Job's misery which resulted from his great loss. The devil then assaulted Job's entire body (Job 2) with excruciating boils. Even still, the devil did not accomplish his objective (Job 1:22; 2:10).

### **The Adversary's Objective** *seeking someone to devour*

Finally, we are informed of the enemy's objective. He is *seeking someone to devour*. The Greek word translated *seeking* is *zētēō*. This is a rich word the meaning of which is often overlooked. But to overlook the meaning of this word in the light of the enemy is a step toward insobriety and inattentiveness on the part of any Christian. The word conveys multiple aspects of the devils prowl which is,

#### **1. Intentional**

The devil does not inadvertently stumble on to believers as he is going back and forth on the earth. Instead, he is intent on finding them and destroying them.

#### **2. Intensive**

The devil's prowl is thorough. We use the euphemism "leave no stone unturned" to describe a diligent search. In a similar sense, we could describe the devil's search by saying, "the devil will leave no church un-entered."

#### **3. Informed**

The Greek word translated *seeking* also conveys the fact that the enemy of Christians is informed as he prowls about like a roaring lion. He does not seek his prey out of ignorance. The devil knows how when where and in what areas of their lives to tempt Christians. Through well developed schemes he assaults his prey (Eph. 6:11).

The *someone* for whom the devil seeks is the Christian. The believer has been delivered from the domain of darkness (Col. 1:13) and the devil's rule (Eph. 2:1-5), while unbelievers still belong to the devil (Eph. 2:2) held captive by him to do his will (2 Tim. 2:26). Therefore, the devil *intentionally intensively* and *informatively* prowls about to devour the Christian. *Devour* translates the Greek word *katapino* which literally means "to gulp down" or to "swallow". The

idea is that of devastating or ruining the present life of the believer through sin and its effects. He knows he cannot affect the saint's eternal security so he is bent on ruining his present life.

As previously noted suffering is not the devil's objective. Suffering by itself works to a believer's advantage when he or she suffers for being a Christian and doing good (see 1:6-7; 5:10 and compare to Phil. 3:10). What the devil has in mind is far more sinister and far more vicious than just causing suffering in the life of the believer. While he does not have to use suffering he can and does use it to distract the Christian from pursuing holiness. Once distracted the devil leads the Christian to sin and then begins the devouring. Once the Christian sins the devil displays him to the lost world, giving the ungodly an opportunity to blaspheme (Consider 1 Pet. 2:12 and 2 Sam. 12:14). Furthermore, the devil accuses the believer before the throne of God (Rev. 12:10) and worst of all; he aims through the believer's sin, to discredit God and the gracious work of God toward the believer. It is here that the vicious character of the enemy finds its zenith.

Such was the devil's objective in the case of Job. Satan actually charged God with paying for Job's allegiance to God (Job 1:9 and 2:5 in context) and in doing so assaulted the person of God and the work of His grace. It was this diabolic objective that Job, even though he did not necessarily acknowledge the demonic instrument, most adamantly resisted and thereby honored God (Job 1:20-22; 2:9-10; 13:15; 19:23-27).

Precious saint, we also must be sober and alert. It is not our suffering that is evil, it is our sin. Our suffering will conform us to godliness while our sin will work against godliness. Therefore, the Holy Spirit through this epistle calls believers to holiness (1:15) and instructs us in the manner of pursuing holiness (1:17-5:7) and commands us to be sober and alert (5:8), and resist the devil in the faith (5:9).

Insobriety impairs the believer, while inattentiveness exposes the believer to the enemy. These two elements work together to provide the enemy an unguarded opportunity to tempt one to sin. Such spiritual carelessness in a believer's life is costly. Therefore beloved of the Lord,

***“Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”***

Pastor David Martin