A. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief - This important truth needs to be held in correct balance. On one hand Jesus taught us that we do not know the day or hour, but at the same time was saying that we should be aware of the events surrounding His coming so that we would not be caught unaware. Jesus made explicit statements about the fact that we were to “be on the alert” and to pay attention to the signs of His coming so that we would not be caught unaware and that this day would not overtake us as a thief.

Mark 13:23 - 23 "But take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance. NASB
Mark 13:28-29 - 28 "Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. 29 "Even so, you too, when you see these things happening, recognize that He is near, right at the door. NASB
Matthew 24:24-25 - 24 "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. 25 "Behold, I have told you in advance, NASB
Luke 21:27-36 - 27 "And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28 "But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." 29 And He told them a parable: "Behold the fig tree and all the trees; 30 as soon as they put forth leaves, you see it and know for yourselves that summer is now near. 31 "Even so you, too, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near. 32 "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all things take place. 33 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. 34 "Be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day come on you suddenly like a trap; 35 for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. 36 "But keep on the alert at all times, praying in order that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man." NASB

In fact the parable of the Ten Virgins was designed to explain this truth very clearly.

Matthew 25:10-13 - 10 "And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. 11 "And later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' 12 "But he answered and said, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' 13 "Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour. NASB

Other Apostles made it very clear that this knowledge was to cause us to be alert and on our guard.

2 Peter 3:17-18 - 17 You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness, 18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. NASB

On this basis then, Christians are to be well aware of the signs of Christ coming and not be deceived by date setters or false teachers, or to fall into a lifestyle of complacency or drunkenness and be caught in a state not ready for the Lord’s return but in fact busy about the Master’s business. Notice here, “But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief.” Paul’s point couldn’t be clearer, the parousia will not “overtake” Christians “like a thief,” but rather we will be well aware that the day is upon us and expectantly waiting for it. This is because “you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness,” and have our hearts and minds illumined by the knowledge of these things. Christ has brightly shown us these things and we are not “in darkness” and unaware, but rather “sons of light” and know full well that these things are coming upon the world. In response to this then, Christians are not to be slumbering or complacently getting drunk and living in dissipation, “so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.” Paul gives an apt description of what our lifestyle should be like in light of these truths in Romans chapter 13.

Romans 13:11-14 - 11 And this do, 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 at hand. Let us therefore 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. NASB
B. 5 for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; 6 so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober – Here the great contrast between the believer and the unbeliever is seen. The unbeliever is “in darkness,” the believer has been transformed, “for you are all sons of light and sons of day.” Of course here “light” and “darkness” have to do with our illumination to the soon coming of Christ and destruction upon the wicked. Those who are “sons of light all sons of light and sons of day” are able to clearly see what is coming upon the world, the “sudden destruction” of verse 3, to which unbelievers are “in darkness” and cannot see. The contrast here is between those who can see and will not be “overtaken by the sudden destruction like a thief,” and those who are “of night and of darkness” who will in fact be “overtaken” by the sudden coming of Christ, the great day of the Lord. Paul goes on here, “We are not of night nor of darkness; 6 so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.” His point here is, since we are “sons of light and sons of day” and can see clearly the looming judgment of the great day, and because we are “not of night nor of darkness,” that we should NOT behave like sons of darkness but rather like “sons of light.” This teaching is very clear in other places in Scripture.

Ephesians 5:5-14 - 5 For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not be partakers with them; 8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light 9 for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth). 10 trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; 12 for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. 13 But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. NASB

Jesus warned in the Olivet Discourse concerning His Second Coming that His people should not be “weighted down” by vain things or worries of life or in “drunkenness.” But in contrast to that, we should be “alert at all times” eagerly looking for our “escape” from these things.

Luke 21:34-36 - 34 "Be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day come on you suddenly like a trap; 35 for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. 36 "But keep on the alert at all times, praying in order that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man." NASB

Matthew 24:45-51 - 45 "Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? 46 "Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. 47 "Truly I say to you, that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. 48 "But if that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master is not coming for a long time,' 49 and shall begin to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards; 50 the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, 51 and shall cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites: weeping shall be there and the gnashing of teeth. NASB

The contrast between the “sons of light” and those “in darkness” is one that can be clearly discerned by our lifestyle. True Christians honor God by the way they live, both in their abstaining from sinful activities like drunkenness and immorality, and live holy lives of purity and sobriety before the Lord.

2 Peter 3:11-13 - 11 Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! 13 But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. NASB

On this basis Paul tells the Christians to live “alert and sober,” like people of the day, not to be asleep and unaware, like people sleeping at night. We are not to “sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.” His point is clear, in regard to the Second Coming of Christ, we are not to be