

It is more profitable to know Jesus than to know about Him.

Weekly Edition – September 4, 2015

Paul's Letter to the Romans

The Day Is Near

¹¹ And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. ¹⁴ Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh. ^a

An Urgent Wake-Up Call – Wake from Your Slumber

- 1) In view of the mercies of God, as made known to us in Jesus Christ our Lord, Paul urges us to awake from our spiritual slumber – whereby our spiritual faculties have been allowed to atrophy, become dulled, and “fallen asleep” so to speak.
- 2) He urges us, in light of the tremendously high stakes involved – even eternal life – to rouse ourselves from our spiritual slumber.
- 3) “Slumber” represents the natural state of man whose life is ordered and ruled by Adam’s sin – and hence represents a deep sleep of the soul – a soul not at all livened to the things of the Spirit.
- 4) A slumbering soul is not yet awake to the truth of the reality of sin. A slumbering man is still in denial of the fact of sin in his life and therefore is not awake to the truth of his true condition.
- 5) On account of Jesus Christ we can be roused from our slumbering state. We can wake up, see what the problem is and let Christ makes us into a new creation – from the inside out.
- 6) In the Church we call the experience of being awakened “conversion” - a deliberate and willful choice to invite Jesus Christ to be Lord and Master of my life.
- 7) Once we let Christ wake us out of sin, we must be careful not to fall back into the slumber of that old way of life.
 - a) Once you get your wake-up call, don't hit the snooze button!

Outline of Romans

1. **Paul's credentials**
(1:1-1:18)
2. **Justification by Faith (1:18-11:36)**
 - a. **Sin – the “need” for Salvation**
 - 1) of Gentiles (1:18-2:16)
 - 2) of Jews (2:17-3:8)
 - 3) universal need for Salvation (3:9-20)
 - b. **Justification by Faith - the “Provision” made for Salvation**
 - 1) God's Righteousness through Faith (3:21-31)
 - 2) Abraham as an Example (4:1-25)
 - c. **Freedom - the “Result” of Salvation**
 - 1) Freedom from Wrath (5:1-21)
 - 2) Freedom from Sin (6:1-23)
 - 3) Freedom from The Law (7:1-25)
 - 4) Freedom from Death (8:1-39)
 - d. **Jew and Gentile - The “Scope” of Salvation**
 - 1) God chooses to save Believers (9:1-33)
 - 2) Israel trusted their own Righteousness (10:1-21)
 - 3) Jew and Gentile can have Salvation through Faith (11:1-36)
3. **The Transformed Life (12:1-15:13)**
 - a. In relation to overall conduct (12:1-21)
 - b. In relation to civil authority (13:1-7)
 - c. In relation to fellow man (13:8-14)
 - d. In relation to weak brethren in the Body of Christ (14:1-15:13)
4. **Concluding remarks, instructions and benediction (15:14-16:27)**

^a In contexts like this, the Greek word for *flesh* (*sarx*) refers to the sinful state of human beings, often presented as a power in opposition to the Spirit.

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The Hidden War

- 1) Paul reminds us that a hidden war is waged in the heart of every Christian. It is a struggle between the Spirit and our "flesh," – i.e. our fallen nature that inclines us towards evil. (Romans 8:5-8) Hence, when Paul talks about living in the flesh, he means living by the impulses of our fallen nature.
- 2) Unless we follow the Spirit's lead, the lusts of the flesh will dominate our lives and enslave us to sin. This fallen state is the slumber from which Paul seeks to arouse us from sleep to being wide-awake.
- 3) When we respond to grace – the guidance of the Holy Spirit – we enable the Spirit to work powerfully in us by clearing away the vices that lead us away from God. This happens little by little in the life of a believer, and as we have said previously, is called "sanctification."
- 4) The "flesh" doesn't just apply to our body, per se, but to the whole range of weaknesses we inherited from Adam including our corruptible bodies (Romans 8:3); our darkened minds (Romans 1:21); our inability to obey God without grace (Romans 8:7); our inclination towards sin (Romans 7:25); etc.
- 5) Because of our inherent weakness as human beings, victory in this struggle is possible but not easy. (see 1 Corinthians 9:25-27)

Three Other Wake-Up Calls

- 1) ¹⁴ *This is why it is said: "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."* (Ephesians 5:14)
- 2) ³² *If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus with no more than human hopes, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."*^{b3} *Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."*^c ³⁴ *Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God—I say this to your shame.* (1 Corinthians 15:32-34)
- 3) ⁴ *But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.* ⁵ *You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.* ⁶ *So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober.* (1 Thessalonians 5:4-6)

The Nature of the "Times" in Which We Live

- 1) We live in a time between times. We are not where we once were, when creation lived in spiritual darkness, but neither yet are we in the promised time to come.
 - a) Isaiah prophesied about the day of Christ's future appearance when from antiquity he said, *"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned."* (Isaiah 9:2)
 - b) This "darkness" is the same thing as what Paul writes when he refers to the "night." Paul says the night is already over. Jesus Christ *has been* revealed. Isaiah's prophecy has been realized. Jesus Christ is the "dayspring from on high" as recorded in Luke's Gospel. (Luke 1:78)
- 2) The Apostles wrote of this present "time between times," describing it as *"this present evil age."*
 - a) ³ *Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,* ⁴ *who gave Himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,* ⁵ *to whom be glory for ever and ever.* (Galatians 1:3-5)
- 3) Jesus said His Father's house has many rooms (John 14:2) and that He goes to prepare a place for us in that future place and for a future time. That future time is not yet come – but it is getting nearer!

^b Isaiah 22:13

^c Paul quotes from the Greek poet Menander

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The Immanence of Salvation

- 1) Immanence is motivational – it is the inspiration for why we should take the Gospel message seriously instead of living as in a slumber – dull to the things of the God and leaving our spiritual development on cruise control.
- 2) Holy Scripture defines three “tenses” of salvation: past, present and future. We tend to reflect only on the future tense, and when we do, we rob ourselves from discovering the richness of salvation available to us here and now!
 - a) **Past:** ²⁵ *God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of His blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished...* (Romans 3:25) Salvation in terms of forgiveness for sins was extended retroactively back to all men who lived and died before the day of our Lord. God is so merciful, so generous, and so thorough, that He left nothing out of His grand plan of salvation – including those who lived and died in the march of history before Jesus opened the way of salvation.
 - b) **Present:** ¹² *Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,* ¹³ *for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.* (Philippians 2:12-13) (also see 1 Corinthians 1:18-19 and 2 Corinthians 2:15-16)
 - c) **Promised:** *This inheritance is kept in heaven for you,* ⁵ *who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.* (1 Peter 1:5-9)

¹³ *Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming.* ¹⁴ *As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.* ¹⁵ *But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;* ¹⁶ *for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”* (1 Peter 1:13-16)

Why Salvation is Nearer

- 1) Each day we are one day closer to the hour of our death. That day and hour will come like a “thief in the night.”
- 2) Each day we are one day closer to our Lord's eventual return.

Why We Need to Wake-Up Now – The Difference Between Night and Day

- 1) The nature of Night
 - a) As night is darkness to our eyes, so spiritual darkness is night to our soul.
 - b) Night represents living in sin, in death and in darkness; it represents living as a slave to the flesh.
- 2) The nature of Day
 - a) Jesus is the light that has come into the world. The light scatters the darkness, such that darkness has no place in the light. Even as darkness flees a room when a lamp is switched on, so darkness flees our soul when the light of Christ comes into our hearts.
 - b) Darkness cannot prevail against the light. A light can be extinguished, but darkness cannot be switched on; hence – darkness can only be where there is an absence of light. But men prefer darkness as John wrote:

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- i) *This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.* (John 3:19)
- c) Jesus tells us that on account of new life in Him, we have become the light of the world. He said, *"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."* (Matthew 5:14-16)

How to Live Like it is Day

- 1) Cast off the works of darkness (Romans 13:12a) by confessing our sins. Confession can be thought of as exposing our sin to the light of God's truth. In this way, the healing quality of light can be seen as it relates to our soul. The presence of God's light heals the infirmities of sin that can only dwell where God's light has not yet shined on them.
- 2) Put on the armor of light (Romans 13:12b) means to fully submit ourselves to God's leadership – since God alone "covers Himself with light as with a garment." (Psalm 104:2)
 - a) As we grow in Christ, so do we also grow more and more in "light" – think of it as adding lumens - a measure of the total "amount" of visible light emitted by a source. As we grow deeper and deeper in our life in Christ we glow brighter and brighter as children of the light!
- 3) Walk appropriately by behaving according the grace which is ours in Jesus Christ. We are to, in increasing degree, live lives that reflect the new creation we have become/are becoming in Jesus Christ.
- 4) Put on Jesus Christ. It is a very strong statement.
 - a) A beautiful expression for the most intimate union with Him, it means that we are to be clothed with all the graces which were exhibited in Jesus during His ministry on earth. It encompasses all of Him, meaning that we are to receive and accept, in faith and love, every part of His doctrine; obey His precepts, imitate His example, and adorn ourselves with the person of Jesus.
 - b) Paul does not say, "Put on purity and sobriety, peacefulness and benevolence;" but he says all this, and a thousand times more, at once, in saying, "Put on Christ." And make not provision for the flesh — To raise foolish and sinful desires in your hearts, or, when they are raised already, to devise means to gratify them.

Make No Provision for the Flesh

- 1) Paul is not counseling us to neglect our physical and emotional needs; he is counseling us not to cater to sinful desires. Of course we should care for our bodies through proper diet and exercise, and care for our emotional and psychological well-being too, but not through the pursuit of sinful impulses. Instead, the best care we can provide is by yielding ourselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit!

Discussion Questions

- 1) Which most reflects where I am right now: Sound asleep? Wide awake? Snooze-button set?
- 2) What has been most helpful to me as it relates to how I cast off works of darkness?
- 3) How have I put on the armor of light? What does that look like in my life?