

THE LETTER THAT CHANGED THE WORLD - The Biblical Theology of Romans - Part fifty-two

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Pastor Don Horban - Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

PUTTING ON THE ARMOR OF THE LIGHT

Romans 13:11-14 - “Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. [12] The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. [13] Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. [14] But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”

Since **Romans 12:1** Paul has been giving a list of moral imperatives to the Christian church. As in all Paul's letters, he starts with the doctrinal content (**chapters 1-11**) and then moves on to the practical exhortations. He never begins with anything other than doctrine. He never just starts telling the church to love one another or to reach the lost or to exercise spiritual gifts or to pray. He always starts with **God** and **what God has done**. He never really starts with us at all. He **gets** to us eventually, but only in the light of the great truths of God he has already unfolded.

There's much to be learned from that approach. We see this incredible **patience** with Biblical truth. The Bible won't work as a **self-help manual**. If you read the Bible to discover seven steps to “**your best life now**” you will miss the true power of the sword of the Spirit. We learn God's Word has to be **planted** before it can **grow**. There must be **thought** before we will see **fruit**. In other words, **doctrine** is impractical to the Christian in the same sense that **sowing seed** is impractical to a **harvest**.

But from **Romans 12** to this point it has all been practical. It has been all about not conforming to the world. It has been all about renewing our minds. It has been all about finding and exercising our gifts in the body of Christ. It has been all about not striking back when wronged, but leaving everything in God's hands. It has been all about our relationship to government and those in authority over us. It has **all** been practical instruction.

Then we come to our text in **13:11-14**, and especially verses **11-12**, which we looked at in our last study. And quite suddenly we find Paul once again, not talking about **doing** something, but **knowing** something. It's all based again deeply in doctrine and understanding. Christian people are people who know the “**night is far gone**” and the “**day is at hand**” (**12**). And we saw last week Paul tells them this to **keep them from getting discouraged** and to **keep them from getting lazy** - in that order.

First, they're to **fight discouragement** by **knowing the night is “far gone.”** They are to know, however much they still groan, Satan is **spending himself**. He is like the batteries in a flashlight that has been left “on” overnight. So Paul comes to these people and urges them - “**Don't focus on how dark it is and how bad things are and how long it has seemed like night. Set your mind on the fact that the night is “far” gone! This isn't going to last very much longer.**”

Then, second, they're to **fight laziness** by remembering “**the day is at hand.**” It's like running harder because you can actually see the finish line. There is a rousing of the heart as faith begins - just **begins** - to turn to sight. As you see the pale, pink dawn of Christ's **first** coming, which is so much more than millions of seeking saints of the Old Testament ever saw, it raises the pulse and hope of excitement over the certainty of the full, blazing sunshine of Christ's **second** coming. Once the dawn is coloring the sky, there is nothing on earth that can stop the day from arriving in full strength.

Everything we've said is compressed into Paul's phrase at the beginning of **verse 11** - “**Besides this you know the time....**” Everything hinges on knowing the time. You can't do anything else right until you **feel in your bones** that the world is dark and asleep. Things aren't normal. If you **think** they are normal - if you **buy shares** in this world as though it was normal - you are sleep-walking. And if you don't **see** the dawning of the day in Christ Jesus - I mean if you don't **buy your shares** in that **coming** day instead of this **fading** one you will be without Jesus Christ when that day arrives.

Today we will ponder two more truths about **knowing the times**:

1) THE CHRISTIAN IS CALLED TO BE AWAKE IN THE MIDST OF A SLEEPING WORLD

Romans 13:11 - “Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.”

There is another text from the pen of Paul that parallels this one like the two rails of the train tracks - **1 Thessalonians 5:5-8** - “**For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. [6] So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. [7] For those who**

sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. [8] But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.”

Both these passages are **day/night** passages. They divide and separate the people of earth into two groups. There are people who are **asleep** and people who are **awake**. There are people who are of the **night** and people who are of the **day**. The people of the night have no idea the night is almost gone. It's "**far spent**," in Paul's words, but they don't see the inevitable end coming.

Why? What keeps them from seeing clearly? Paul tells us they are asleep. They are like people whose plane is taking off at the airport but they're still asleep in their hotel because their alarm didn't go off. There is a real plane and there is a real airport and there is a real departure time. It's **not** that these things aren't happening. It's that this dozer is asleep to their reality. When he wakes up he will realize he has missed it all. Only, in the context of our text, there will be no more flights.

This is the cause of Paul's cry to the church. You can almost hear him yelling. You can see him waving his arms. "**The hour has come for you to wake from your sleep!**" **Entertainment saturated people** can't be awake to Christ. **Money saturated people** can't be awake to Christ. **Sports-saturated people** can't be awake to Christ. **Sex-saturated people** can't be awake to Christ. **Leisure saturated people** can't be awake to Christ.

It's day or night, light or darkness, awake or asleep. Everything that doesn't awaken more faith and joy in Christ Jesus - anything that doesn't **rivet your attention more distinctly on Him** - puts you to sleep.

Notice, Paul doesn't say that **Jesus** will awaken us from our sleep. He says it's time for **us** to awaken from our sleep. It's **morning**. It's too late for **sleeping**. The call is to **become freshly awake - freshly alert - to the reality of the passing of this age and the coming of another**. And Paul thinks millions of church goers **believe** this to be so, but aren't **awake** in their grasp of its urgency and the full glow of its glory.

2) TO BE AWAKE IS TO BE AT WAR

This is made clear in **verse 12** - "**The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.**"

Then he repeats this concept again, but in different words in **verse 14** - "**But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.**"

Why does Paul change his words in these two verses? I think he wants to tell people about putting on the "**Lord Jesus Christ**"(14), but he wants to tell them this in a way that isn't just **religious talk**. So he **first** describes putting on Christ as putting on "**the armor of light**"(12). Paul knows how much we all talk about "**putting on Christ**," and how we all say "**Jesus is Lord**," and how we speak of having "**Jesus in our heart**." But that can all become quite empty and trite. We all know the lingo. Talk to a thousand Christians and you know you're reading the same script.

So Paul says, "**I'm not talking about jargon. I'm talking about a whole different kind of putting on Christ. It's really an alertness - an awokeness - to Christ that I'm talking about. I'm talking about 'putting on the Lord Jesus Christ' as a declaration of war - a declaration of war against empty, sleepy, verbal spirituality. In fact, the only way I can describe it is like putting on armor for war in the hills of Afghanistan. This is not something to be done without a lot of concentration and effort. It's not something you ever get used to.**"

So there's the fundamental point. To be **awake** is to be at **war**. This is so important because in the next two verses Paul is going to give some instructions that people **might** interpret as being narrow and confining. They might just see old Paul spinning out some religious rules. But what he's really doing is listing the kinds of things that keep people **asleep** and in the **dark** - "**Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. [14] But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires**"(13-14).

We're going to examine the three groupings in these verses next Sunday - "**orgies and drunkenness**," "**sexual immorality and sensuality**," and "**quarreling and jealousy**." These are the world's **sleeping pills**. This is **how** Satan keeps brilliant people numb and dumb and asleep toward God - asleep toward the **rapid close of the night** and the **sure and soon arrival of Christ's dawn**.

But the point right now is Paul doesn't want anyone of us minimizing the importance of his warnings. He's trying to head off at the pass any thought that his words are really only for preachers or missionaries or grandparents, or the

super-spiritual.

We all know the church is growing huge crowds of people who secretly doubt the seriousness of these issues. But Paul isn't exaggerating. He's thinking clearly as he says, ***"If you don't stop doing these kinds of things you just aren't awake to God at all. You might be spitting out the right words, but you don't get it. You're still sound asleep spiritually. And there's a lot at stake. It's dangerous to be asleep on the battlefield. Terrorists will pick you off!"***

3) THE DEEPEST MEANING OF THIS PRESENT MOMENT

What is the call of the Spirit to our church from this text? We must not miss it. Is it the call to sexual purity? No, that's not it. Is it the call to peaceful unity without jealousy and quarreling? No, that's not it either. Perhaps it's the call away from substance abuse and drunkenness. Again, this is important, but misses Paul's point.

The primary meaning of our lives in this moment is to all become more fully **awake**. Without this, what is the incentive to all the specific steps Paul gives in **verses 13-14**? No one will do all these things with any degree of consistency or joy unless he first becomes **persuaded** of the fading of the night and the arrival of the new dawn.

This is my heart's desire as pastor of this church. The drive for **"putting on Christ"** must be **internal**. It can't for long be enforced by preachers, parents, or youth pastors. You, each of you hearing these words, must **"wake up"** to the urgency of the times for yourself. Most of your life is lived in private. Your church can't **legislate** your spirituality. You're either awake to its consuming importance or you aren't.

Christians have to **keep** waking themselves up in this drowsy, lazy world. This is obviously what Paul intends because he is telling **Christians** to wake up. At first that seems odd. But we all, I think, know that awakening from sleep isn't instantaneous. We all know the difference between that first moment of gaining consciousness and the **effort required** to rouse and rub the eyes and clear the throat and finally use your muscles to throw yourself over the edge of the bed.

Paul says we need to do this all the more as the night speeds to a close and the day gathers momentum. We are to be constantly taking off the pajamas of this world. This world saturates our minds with spiritual sleeping pills. To not be **aware** of this - to not be constantly **fighting** against this - is to be asleep already.

There isn't much time to wake up. The night is **far gone**. The day is **at hand**. Salvation is much **nearer** to us now than when we first believed. Don't let the lullaby of the spirit of the age take away your spiritual edge. Don't let the culture in which you live most of your life sing its dark, confused values into your mind. Sing for joy. Look up at the brightening sky. And never stop for one minute putting on the armor of light.