Romans: Wake Up, You Sleepyhead!
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Bible Reference(s):
- Romans 13:11-14
- Ephesians 2:8
- 1 Corinthians 1:18
- John 9:4
- Malachi 4:2
- Ephesians 5:8
- Galatians 3:27

PURPOSE: To challenge us to be spiritually awake and alert, and to live a godly life in the midst of this ungodly world system.

I don't think I've ever been a lazy person, but once in awhile I find it difficult to wake up and get going in the morning. I'm a morning person; I like to get up and get things going, but sometimes it's hard to wake up. It would happen periodically when I was a kid, and my mother would come into my room and say, "Wake up, you sleepyhead." It was one of her favorite sayings. We've all heard the song that goes like that: "Wake up, wake up, you sleepyhead; get up, get up, get out of bed; cheer up, cheer up, the sun is red. Live, love, laugh and be happy." Some people need that encouragement on a daily basis.

I'm afraid that some Christians need that same exhortation in the spiritual realm. They seem to be spiritually asleep. They've gone to church for years, and may even have perfect Sunday School attendance pins dangling down to their belt buckles, but nobody has ever noticed any basic changes in their lives. They sit with their arms folded, defying anybody to capture their interest and teach them anything. They may be in a class that goes through the whole Bible in seven years or so, and they've been through it six or seven times. Yet every time they still sit there with their arms folded, in a semi-stupor, letting the powerful, life-changing truths of God's Word go right by them. They are spiritually asleep.

They can even walk in their sleep. Sleep-walking is a fascinating practice. It amazes me that people can be sound asleep, yet get out of bed, walk around, and in the morning not remember anything they did. When I was a kid, we lived in a two-story house with three bedrooms. My dad used one of them for his study, and it was right at the top of the steps. I had to walk past his door to go down the stairs. He used to study late at night--he was a night person--sometimes until twelve or one o'clock. One night about 12:30 he heard me walking down the steps. When he came out to see what was going on, he realized that I was sound asleep. "Where you going?" he asked. "I'm just going downstairs to check up," I answered. "What are you going to check?" he persisted. "Don't worry, Dad, I'm just checking up," I replied. Well, he knew by that time that I was asleep, so he gently led me back to bed and tucked me back in. In the morning, I had no recollection of what had happened.
That incident highlights another significant fact about sleepwalkers: normally they are easily led. And spiritual sleepwalkers are no different. They usually lack any clear sense of spiritual purpose, but simply fall in line with the spirit of the age.

If others around them are living for material things, they will adopt the same values. If the people they work with are driven by ambition to get to the top, they will probably set that as their goal as well. If most people around them are insisting that sex outside of marriage is okay, or that homosexuality is an acceptable lifestyle, or that abortion is a good method of birth control, they'll probably agree. They just sort of drift through life, letting their values, their attitudes and their actions be dictated by the world around them. Instead of influencing the world with Christian values, they let the world squeeze them into its mold.

Things are no different today than they have ever been. The Apostle Paul was concerned about the same problem in his day, and he is about to deal with it. He concludes this chapter with an earnest challenge to wake up and live a godly life in the midst of an ungodly world system. Let's listen in, because we need to hear the same challenge.

**Wake Up to Your Imminent Salvation (Romans 13:11-12a)**

He has just finished encouraging us to love one another, and now he says, "And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed" (Romans 13:11).

You know how it is when you first wake up in the morning. It's still dark outside, but you sense that day is about to dawn and it's time to get up. You can do one of two things. You can begin to think of the responsibilities of the day, pry your eyes open, plant your feet on the floor and get moving. Or you can roll over and go back to sleep. Which one is easier? For most people, it's easier to go back to sleep. The day promises work, and sometimes problems and struggles, and maybe even conflict and pain. The night holds peaceful dreams. So we would rather sleep. But if we keep going back to sleep, life is going to pass us by. And it's too short to let that happen.

That's the point of what Paul is saying here: "...for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed." As you know, salvation is in three tenses. We have been saved from the penalty of sin in the past (Ephesians 2:8). We are being saved from the power of sin in the present (1 Corinthians 1:18). And we shall be saved from the very presence of sin in the future (Romans 5:9).

That's the one Paul is talking about here—the same thing he called in chapter 8 "the glory which shall be revealed in us" (verse 18), and "the redemption of our body" (verse 23), and our glorification (verse 30). This is our ultimate salvation, the day Christ returns, and we enter His presence and are made like Him.

That day is nearer in time than it's ever been, certainly nearer than the day we first trusted Christ as Savior from sin. That may not sound very profound, but it's true. None of us knows the time of Christ's return, but every generation can say that it is "nearer" than it was the generation before. And Paul uses that as an incentive for us to wake up and get moving spiritually speaking, to get growing in the likeness of Christ.

Romans 13:12a. "The night is far spent, the day is at hand."
He likens this present age when Christ is physically absent to nighttime, and the return of Christ and the establishment of His kingdom on earth He likens to daybreak. That makes sense. When Christ came to this earth the first time, He brought a brief period of daylight. Remember, He said, "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work" (John 9:4). And when He ascended into heaven, the sun set and the world was plunged into the darkness of night. But the day is coming, as the prophet Malachi put it, when "...the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings" (Malachi 4:2). Christ is coming back again, and the light of day will dawn once more.

And from all appearances, that could be soon. As Paul puts it here, the night is almost over and the breaking of day is at hand. It's imminent. It could happen at any time. That's always been true, since the day Christ ascended back into heaven. But it's nearer today than when we first believed. We could stand before our Savior at any moment and answer to Him for the quality of our Christian lives. Are you satisfied with where you are spiritually? Are you ready to meet Him? We may not have much time to get ready.

So wake up, sleepyhead. The sun will be coming up at any time. Don't roll over and go back to sleep. Climb out of the sack. Splash some cold water on your face. Brush your teeth. Get ready for the dawn of a new day. Wake up to your imminent salvation.

**Wake Up to Your Present Responsibilities (Romans 13:12b-13)**

Paul lists two of them in this verse. Romans 13:12b. "Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light."

The words "cast off" and "put on" were used of clothing--getting dressed and undressed. There are some things the well-dressed Christian ought to be wearing. And there are some things the well-dressed Christian ought not to be wearing. So let's look at these sets of clothing that Paul is going to talk about and see whether we're in style.

**The Clothes to Take Off**

Paul calls the clothes to take off "the works of darkness," "Take off the works of darkness," he says. When people want to do something they know they're not supposed to do, they usually do it under cover of darkness. So naturally "works of darkness" means sinful works, things that are part of the godless world system in which we live, a system of nighttime. The world is in spiritual darkness. And sometimes we Christians have a tendency to walk as the world walks: to walk in darkness. Don't do it! Cast off the works of darkness.

It's easy to let the philosophy of the world creep into our minds and affect the way we live our lives. Don't let it happen. As soon as you detect that some unbiblical idea has seeped in, put it off. Don't waste any time about it. Don't let it settle down and become a part of you and influence your behavior. Put it off.

In the next verse (verse 13), Paul describes some of those works of darkness we need to put off. He organizes them in three pairs, like socks or shoes. Each pair deals with the same general issue.
Romans 13:13. "Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in licentiousness and lewdness, not in strife and envy."

Let's walk in a manner fitting the daytime. Let's put off these six pieces of nighttime clothing. Let's get rid of each pair.

1) Revelry and Drunkenness

The first pair is revelry and drunkenness. That's an endless search for fun and pleasure. Everybody knows what drunkenness is. Revelry could be partying and carousing, or even things that could be innocent in themselves, but which begin to consume our lives. They begin to dominate our lives. I'm talking about things like movies and plays, or concerts and operas, or sports, or television. There's nothing wrong with entertainment. But when being entertained becomes the primary goal in life, and we're focused on finding distractions from the business of living, and simply having a good time, we've been deluded into putting on the world's clothing with Satan's designer label. It's the works of darkness.

Listen in to the average work crew made up of unbelievers. On Monday and Tuesday, all they talk about is great time they had last weekend. And beginning on Wednesday, they start to talk about the great time they're going to have next weekend. The totality of life for them is a desperate search for pleasurable diversions. And we Christians can get hooked on the same lifestyle. But that's the way of darkness. That's revelry. They are night clothes. Wake up and put them off. Put on clothes that are fitting the daytime—and we'll talk about them in a moment. Right now, just get rid of the night clothes. Paul says, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (Ephesians 5:8)."

2) Licentiousness and Lewdness

The second pair is licentiousness and lewdness. We don't use the word licentious much in our culture, but it simply refers to illicit sexual relations of any kind—fornication (pre-marital sex), adultery (extra-marital sex), prostitution, pornography, homosexuality, bestiality. Lewdness means shamelessness. In other words, it describes the person who not only engages in illicit sex, but flaunts his lustful attitudes and actions without shame.

God made us to be sexual beings, and He made sex to be beautiful, holy and good when it is enjoyed within the bonds of marriage. But the people of the world laugh at that standard. To them, to keep sex within the framework of marriage is absolutely ludicrous. They consider it to be ridiculous. It's assumed by the world that people are going to have sex with anybody they want to have sex with, and that it would be absurd to think of spending the rest of your life with the same mate. The world laughs when abstinence is suggested as a way to avoid sexually-transmitted diseases; abstinence is not even considered. In fact, in some places, teaching abstinence is even being legislated out. And to be married to the same partner for a lifetime is unthinkable. Mary and I are coming up on 37 years of marriage. Whenever we have the opportunity to share that with people of the world, they act like that's some amazing record. But that's the way God intended marriage to be.

It's easy for professing Christians to get a little sleepy and get sucked into the world's way of thinking through books, magazines, music, movies, videos, and television programs, even things as innocent as talk shows. They bombard us with the philosophies of the world until we begin to think, "Well, you know, maybe that's right." Some major Christian denominations have even considered adopting the world's standards as their official policy. Because everyone is doing it. That's exactly what Paul was
speaking about here. God says they are works of darkness--night clothes. Wake up, sleepyhead, and put them off. Walk in a manner fitting the daytime.

3) Strife and Envy

The third pair is strife and envy. It amazes me that the Apostle Paul puts contention and jealousy--strife and envy--in the same category with drunkenness and immorality. Isn't that incredible! It's a good thing to remember. If you like to get people riled up and you like to get their goat, you better sit up and take notice of this. God puts this strife thing in the same category with drunkenness and immorality. That's how serious God considers it to be. And by the way, jealousy is a major factor in almost all dissension and strife. We don't want others to get ahead of us, so we try to push them down by criticizing them, gossiping about them, lying about them and picking fights with them. But that's the way of darkness. Strife and envy are night clothes. They have no place in the life of a believer. Put them off, and walk in a manner fitting the daytime.

They are the clothes we are responsible to take off and put aside. Now go back to verse 12 again and look at the clothes to put on.

The Clothes to Put On

"Therefore, let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light" (Romans 13:12). That's interesting. You would think that Paul would write in parallels. Instead of saying "works of light" as we would expect, Paul substitutes the word armor. That's probably to remind us that the Christian life is a warfare, and the clothes which the well-dressed Christian puts on are military equipment. We know what the armor includes. I hope you know it. Paul describes it in detail in Ephesians 6:10-18: the waistband of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit (which is the Word of God--the only offensive weapon). And the whole thing is empowered by prayer.

I think it is interesting to note that here he calls it "the armor of light." We have only in recent years discovered the immense power of light. The focused light waves of the laser may be the most effective defense against enemy satellites and ballistic missiles. Powerful. Light. The Christian's armor of light is his best defense against the relentless attacks of the wicked one. Yet some of us have no idea what these pieces of armor are or how to put them on. We've been sound asleep when the instructions have been given. And it's no wonder that Satan is winning the battle in our lives. Nobody is seeing any significant changes or growth in the likeness of Christ in us.

So wake up, sleepyhead, to your present responsibility. Take off your night clothes and put on your day clothes, your armor of light. That's the only way you will ever be able to live a godly life that honors Christ in the midst of this ungodly world system.

But speaking of the clothes to put on reminds Paul of the Christian's ultimate defense against Satan and his world system. And that's how he wants to conclude this wake-up call. Wake up to your imminent salvation, wake up to your present responsibility, and finally, wake up to your ultimate defense.
Wake Up to Your Ultimate Defense (Romans 13:14)

Romans 13:14. "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts."

Haven't we already put on the Lord Jesus Christ? Paul wrote to the Galatians, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27). We have done it, so why are we told to do it here?

I think the thing here is that we need to apply to our daily practice what we did the moment we put our faith in Christ for our eternal salvation. We need to remind ourselves daily and do it all over again—not get saved all over again, but appropriate the truth of it all over again. I like the way Ray Stedman describes it: "When I get up in the morning I put on my clothes, intending them to be part of me all day, to go where I go and do what I do. They cover me and make me presentable to others. That is the purpose of clothes. In the same way, the apostle is saying to us, 'Put on Jesus Christ when you get up in the morning. Make him a part of your life that day. Intend that he go with you everywhere you go, and that he act through you in everything you do. Call upon his resources. Live your life IN CHRIST.'"

That's what it means to put on Christ. It's the same thing as in John 15 when it says to "abide in Him." It's pretty much the same thing as Ephesians 5:18 that says "be filled with His Spirit." Be dominated by the Lord Jesus Christ. Allow Him to be part of everything in your life. Share every moment with Him. That's our ultimate defense against Satan.

And right along with it, "...make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts." We've learned what the flesh is--our weak human nature with its tendency to sin. We all have it, even after we're saved. The word provision (pronoia) literally means "forethought." That's important. In other words, don't feed the values of the world into your mind, then plan and strategize how you're going to satisfy the sinful cravings of your human nature that are instigated by the thoughts and values of the world. Don't plan for how you're going to satisfy your flesh; don't give it forethought.

You know, most of us don't just fall into deep sin all of a sudden. We see Christian leaders who fall and everybody says, "Oh, they got caught in a weak moment." I don't believe that. There has been a pattern that leads up to that sin. The downward spiral begins when we start opening our minds to the world's ideas and values as they are presented through the world's ways such as the media. Then it continues as we let those thoughts linger in our minds and allow ourselves to fantasize about them. Eventually we begin to plan how we're going to act out our fantasies. That's provision for the flesh. Don't do that!

Give no forethought to the flesh and how to fulfill its desires. Instead, wake up to your ultimate defense. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Get to know Him more intimately. Be conscious of His presence with you through the day. Fill your mind with His Word. Spend time with Him in prayer. Depend consciously on the power of His indwelling Holy Spirit moment by moment. Put Him on in the morning when you wake up, just like you put on your clothes. Let that be the most important thing you do when you get out of bed every morning. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and watch the tide of the battle turn to victory.

It's practically impossible to teach this passage without referring to Saint Augustine, the great fourth century theologian. Before he became a Christian, Augustine was a brilliant young philosopher who was thoroughly caught up in this world system. For one thing, he insisted that sex drives were meant to be satisfied, and he did just that, any way he could. He had sexual liaisons with a variety of women. But there was an emptiness about his life that began to distress him. He got more and more sex and it was less and less satisfying. He wanted to know why this was and he longed to be free from this bondage.
Christian friends challenged him to consider Christ, who could meet him where he was and give him strength to overcome sin.

He finally obtained a copy of Paul's epistles, and of course, in the fourth century, that was not easy to come by. He had it with him in the garden one day when he heard some children playing and singing outside the garden gate. It sounded like they were saying, "Take up and read, take up and read." It seemed that God Himself was speaking to him, so he picked up the scroll and began to read this very passage: "Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in licentiousness and lewdness, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts" (Romans 13:13-14). At that moment, the light dawned on his darkened soul, and Augustine trusted Christ as his Savior and began to clothe himself with the Lord Jesus, who gave him the power to resist the sinful temptations of his flesh.

One day after his salvation he met a beautiful woman with whom he had been involved before he had become a Christian. But he was wide awake and fully alert, and he began to run away from her. She ran after him calling out, "Augustine, why do you run? It is only I?" Running even faster, he looked back over his shoulder and replied, "I run, because it is not I." He knew he was a new creation in Christ, but he also knew that he could not give any thought whatsoever to fulfilling the desires of the flesh.

And we could learn from his example. Let's wake up, and put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. God will begin to give us victory and joy in the Christian life. We'll live a life that brings glory to Him and attracts the world to Him.

**Trusting Jesus as Your Savior**

Maybe some of you here this morning are in the same condition Augustine was in before he met Christ: You are sick of sin. You've been looking for something to satisfy and you've tried everything the world has to offer and you are willing to finally admit that it leaves you empty. You're in a bondage that you need more and more and it leaves you less and less satisfaction. You're ready for something real and God has it for you.

He sent His Son to Calvary's cross to die for you and pay the penalty for your sins. He offers us forgiveness of sins--past, present, and future--and the wonderful gift of everlasting life. Will you acknowledge your sinfulness and your need of a Savior? Will you open your heart to Christ? He will fill you with Himself and give you a new joy and a new purpose. Best of all, He gives you the power to overcome sin. It's there, if you will avail yourself of it, in the Person of His indwelling Spirit. Open your heart to him today, will you?

Let's bow together in His presence. With our heads bowed prayerfully, let me ask you if you do know Christ as your Savior. Is there a time in your life that you remember acknowledging your sin, admitting that your sin deserves God's eternal condemnation, consciously believing that Jesus died in your place and paid for your sin, and receiving Him as your Savior? Have you ever done that? If you're not certain, oh, I urge you to do it now. Right now. Don't put it off. This is eternal life: knowing God and His Son, Jesus Christ. We know Him in a personal, saving relationship. We acknowledge our need for Him and put our faith in His death at Calvary, and His resurrection from the grave.

May I lead you in prayer? You don't need to pray it out loud. God hears what goes on in our hearts and minds. If you mean business with Him, pray something like this:
God, I'm a sinner. I believe that Jesus went to Calvary to pay for my sin, and He rose again to
give me His life and fit me for heaven. So, Lord Jesus, I'm trusting You as my Savior right now.
Come into my heart and save me from sin.

That's faith, and He responds to that act of faith. You become God's child at that moment. It's an exciting
new life and there will be some great changes that take place if you mean business. But it starts at
Calvary, where Christ paid the penalty of your sin.

If you've made that decision, but there are things that linger on, and you know they displease the Lord
and they are contrary to His word. If you are wearing clothes of darkness, would you commit today to
cast them off and put on the armor of light. I'm not going to ask you to make some promise that you're
going to break tomorrow morning. We all have weaknesses and we all sin. But you have to begin
somewhere and it usually begins with a commitment.

Yes, Lord, here is my life. I do want to honor You. I do want victory over these things that
displease You.

Tell Him, will you?

**Closing Prayer**

Father, I pray that You'll do a great work in our lives and in Your church. Set us ablaze with love for
Jesus Christ and a desire to please Him. For we ask it in His name. Amen.