

Awake or Asleep?

Romans 13:11-12

I have yet to hear anybody say they love their alarm clock! I have had friends who slept so deeply that only the loudest, most abrasive sounding alarm would get them up in the morning.

Paul's alarm clock is an alarm clock unlike any other! It is an alarm to wake up and run your race, to walk in the light, to put on your armor for the fight.

He is not speaking to those dead in their sins and need a different alarm clock. That can be found over in Ephesians 5, a resurrection alarm clock: "Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you!"

Here we find sleepy Christians – like in Gethsemane; they are asleep in the light – not knowing the time; not knowing that it is mid-morning or noon; that the glorious sun of salvation is closer and burning brightly than when they were first saved.

Yet the night is here in which they lie in bed; the day is breaking. Verse 13 says let us walk as in the day, though the day is not yet.

Our first point is to understand what Paul means here. How to understand the time, as there are various ideas.

The most popular is Paul is speaking about every Christian's personal experience. For every Christian, the night being left behind is our own sinful past. The day that is closer is our death-day, our best-day, when we see Jesus. This is not untrue – salvation is closer now than ever.

But is Paul speaking of the individual here? Paul's use of "The Day" addresses the final Day, the Day of Days, the return of Christ. So this is a public and not a private or individual one. It is the day, that day, the great day of judgment, the last day, the day of the Lord, the day when the Son of Man is revealed, the day of Christ. The strong parallel in 1 Thessalonians 5 is so clear.

Another view, the liberal one, held that Paul and the Apostles thought the return of Christ was just around the corner. They say the NT expected Jesus' return, in their lifetime.

But we are warned by these same Apostles and the Lord against date setting. Peter could not be any clearer on seeing the return of Christ as being far off and yet, not.

⁷ The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober *spirit* for the purpose of prayer. ⁸ Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. (1Pe 4:7-8)

⁸ But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. (2Pe 3:8-10)

This speaks of the return of Christ and the new day to be brought in by His second advent. Yet see the glory of Christ in that Day affects us here and now.

This is what we call the ‘already’ and ‘not yet’ tension.

“The Bible divides history into ‘this age’ and ‘the age to come’, and the NT authors are clear that the age to come or the kingdom of God was inaugurated by Jesus. So at the present the two ages overlap. We are waiting expectantly for the Parousia, the coming, when the old age will finally disappear, the period of overlap will end, and the new age of God’s kingdom will be [completed].” John Stott, p. 351

That is what is going on here in Romans 13. You are alive to be alive to this tension of the already/not yet. You have the foretaste of what is not yet here in full. Christ has brought resurrection life into full view well before the final resurrections of the just and unjust. This is the death bell to this present age. *I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining. (1Jo 2:8)*¹⁷ *The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever. (1Jo 2:17)*

This brings us to the main question: Why live life urgently?

This passage is filled with such decisiveness about life. Up and Living! Some have taken this passage so literally as to insist all Christians must be up very early every morning! Chrysostom thought so; Wesley noticed a great difference when his students arose at 5 am – instead of 4!; Korean Christianity is renown for rising early to pray.

To live life urgently may or may not include this. But the urgent hour it is. What makes it so urgent that we understand the times: 1. The reality of the coming salvation is known and felt. We are assured of what is to come. What a failure to live sleepy; asleep in the light! 2.

This age that is night is short lived. The black, the evil, the age of sin, of this world, is passing away. You and I are no longer a part of the condition. Christ's death and resurrection lifted us up and out of death and into life. 3. The great threat to a child of light, is that you still wrap yourself in the black blankets of darkness – works of darkness. News flash!! Christians still sin! The metaphor of sleep is powerful. Don't live in a dream state. Live with your eyes wide open.

Third and last, so as to walk in the day, we must know, prize and live for the Day! The opposite to Romans 12:2 – be not conformed to this world, means to be conformed to *that world*! Living for things above begins with setting your whole life on things above – Col. 3:1. This is the opening of your eyes first before you stretch and roll out of bed, get dressed and walk in Christ, dressed in Him, armed by Him.

To awake out of sleep, then, is to see that divine things are realities. When you are half asleep, you see things imperfectly. You are not affected by divine realities. Now, what is it to awake out of sleep? To awake out of sleep is to see sin as it is—your heart as it is—Christ as He is— the love of God in Christ Jesus. And you can see all this by looking to Calvary's Cross. It is an awful thing to look to the Cross and not be affected, nor feel conviction of sin - nor feel drawn to Christ. O! I do not know a more sad state! O! pray that you may be wide awake. M'Cheyne

When Paul sees these Romans asleep in their walk, he preaches to them the Day that is coming which instead of pushing them, draws them forward to the reality of their hope. He calls you and me to lean into what is coming for certain.

Do you have this hope set before you? You won't get out of bed without it!

How do you hear the gospel bells ringing and singing that you can be born again? Have you heard? Or is this all tradition? Or emotionalism?

Is this not why the church is so vulnerable to new and false movements, like woke, today? We are to be "Awake Not Woke".

I leave you with Paul's summary to live urgently. Are there alarm clocks going off in deeply in your mind, your heart, your soul, and into your life?

And it is not just the urgency that is FROM something – like from a house on fire, from danger, from limitations – these are legitimate for sure.

But we are to be urgent TO something, which draws us out of ourselves and to our neighbor.

*'Tis not for man to trifle ! life is brief ;
And sin is here.*

*Our age is but the falling of a leaf
A dropping tear.*

*We have no time to sport away the hours;
All must be earnest in a world like ours.*

Luther's remark fits: live as though Christ died yesterday, rose today and returning tomorrow.