

The Apostle's Admonition To Awake From The Sleep Of Sin.

Text: Rom 13:11-14

1) To Whom This Admonition Is Addressed

Suggested Hymns:

2) What It Requires

1, 6, 358, 283, 491

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Romans 13:11-14, ¹¹ *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.* ¹² *The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.* ¹³ *Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.* ¹⁴ *But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The Hymnist Johann Olearius wrote,
Again is come the new church-year;
Rejoice, all Christians, far and near!
Thy King, O Zion, comes to thee,
Therefore rejoice eternally!

The first Sunday in Advent is "New Year's Day" for the Church, because on this day the beginning is made of the Epistle and Gospel lessons which in olden times have been selected for the different Sundays.

And what a joyful beginning is made today! The Gospel of the day assures us that Christ, our heavenly King, comes to the daughter of Zion, that again He comes to us, and will continue to come in His divine Word and in His holy Sacraments.

Must not every true Christians' heart be filled with joy and gladness to know that our dear Saviour will not desert us in spite of all our sins, but continue to come and be with us always?

And the Epistle of the day also refers to Christ's coming, to His second advent. It is with reference to Christ's coming in the clouds that Paul says, "*it is high time to awake out of sleep*" and "*The night is far spent, the day is at hand.*"

The Apostle calls attention to the fact that the day is dawning, the true day, compared to which all the previous ages are as night, the day of the Lord, the day in which Christ shall come to judge the living and the dead, the day which shall be day forever, and not be followed by another night.

All the holy Apostles and all the early Christians expected Christ to come in the clouds in the near future, while they were still living. And this was in strict conformity with Christ's teaching, who had told them that of that day and that hour knows no man, but that He would come most unexpectedly.

Therefore they should be watchful and look for Him continually and expect Him to come, that they might be in readiness to be received into His eternal kingdom.

Now this fact that the Lord's day is at hand, that, though He delays His coming, He may come unawares at any time, induces Paul to set forth a special admonition in our text, an admonition *to awake from the sleep of sin*. This is our theme for today. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Apostle's Admonition To Awake From The Sleep Of Sin To Whom This Admonition Is Addressed

The Apostle says, ¹¹ *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.* ¹² *The night is far spent, the day is at hand.*

To whom does the Apostle address this admonition to awake from the sleep of sin? The answer is to be found in the words, "*for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.*" To the believers the Apostle addresses this admonition, to the Christians, to those who should see in Christ's second coming their salvation, or, as Christ says,¹ who should lift up their heads because their redemption draws near, and whose salvation is nearer now than it was at the time when they joined the ranks of Christ's followers and began to believe.

It may seem that the Apostle should address such an admonition to the Christians, and tell them to awake from the sleep of sin. Would we not expect him to say this rather to the secure sinners, to those who are fast asleep in their sins, to those who merrily sin away and do not care, and therefore, have no claim to the Christian name? Indeed not.

This is the dangerous mistake which is so often made, that the admonition to awake from the sleep of sin, which should be addressed to the Christians, is addressed to the secure sinners. And when such a sinner begins to reform and to leave off from certain sins, he is led to believe that now he is truly converted, that he is a Christian, for the simple reason that he sins no more, or not as much as he did before.

Truly the sinner should turn from his wicked ways, for God has no pleasure in wickedness, and His commandments, "*Thou shalt,*" and, "*Thou shalt not,*" He addresses to all people, also to the secure sinners.

But what good will it do to tell a person that he must awake from his sleep so long as he is in a death-like sleep and cannot hear the voice which tells him to wake up? The sleeper must, first of all, be roused from his sleep and be made wide awake, and not before that can he hear the voice which addresses him.

We must know that by nature all people lie in a spiritual death-like sleep. By nature we are all enveloped in the night of sin, and though we be wide awake as to the body, we are fast asleep as to the soul. By nature our soul is alienated from God; we know Him not, we do not care for Him, and pay no attention to Him when He calls us, because the deep sleep of sin is upon us.

As the Apostle says in 1 Corinthians 2:14, ¹⁴ ***But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*** By nature we walk upon this earth as in a dream, and chase after the phantoms of this life, after the riches, pleasures, and honours of this present world.

Now, as long as we are in this indifferent condition, asleep in our sins, even dead in trespasses and sin, as the Apostle says, what are we benefited by the admonition to awake from the sleep of sin? What good does it do to tell the natural man that he must shun sin, and follow after holiness, and walk the narrow way that leads to eternal life?

He is, and always will remain, deaf to this admonition because he is still asleep. He will not understand what he is told, much less will he possess the power and strength to rise from the couch of his sin, and to walk in newness of life according to God's will.

The first thing to be done to the sinner is, that he must be roused from his death-like sleep, and that is not done by the Law, not by telling him what a terrible thing sin is and where sins lead to. Even if the sinner is frightened by the Law and induced to desist from certain sins, he is not thereby roused from the sleep of sin, but he still loves sin, and sleeps on as fast as ever.

The only means by which the sinner is made wide awake is the Gospel. Tell the sinner who is ready to sink into despair that he has a merciful Saviour, that the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which is lost, that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, has atoned for all his sins by His painful suffering and bitter death on the cross.

This glorious message of the Saviour is the only effective means of rousing the sinner from his sleep and of making him wide awake. If the sinner hears this message, and does not maliciously and wilfully resist the Spirit of God endeavouring to convince him, he will come to the faith, to the faith that in Christ Jesus all his sins are forgiven.

Then is he roused from the sleep of sin, then he becomes conscious of where he is and what he is to do, then a thrill of new life passes through him, then a new heart is given to him, a heart which truly hates and detests sin and endeavours to please God.

And now the admonition is in place to awake from the sleep of sin. It is an admonition to be addressed to the believers in Christ, to the Christians. Can we say that such an admonition is unnecessary because Christians are awake from the sleep of sin and need no more be told to awake? Does not sin haunt Christians as long as they are in the flesh? Are they not in constant danger of falling back into the fatal sleep?

The devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh continually endeavour to deceive us, to seduce us into misbelief, despair, and other great and shame sins, and thus to lull us into the sleep and slumber which is so disastrous to the soul.

O how necessary, therefore, for every Christian is the admonition to awake out of the sleep of sin!

2. The Apostle's Admonition To Awake From The Sleep Of Sin What It Requires.

And now, in the second place, let us consider what this admonition requires.

Two things are required of us that we might awake from the sleep of sin. The one is, that we cast off the works of darkness, and the other, that we put on the armour of light.

“Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness,” says the Apostle. And which are those works of darkness that should be cast off? The Apostle says, ¹³ *Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness.* Revelry and drunkenness, or drunken binges, are works of darkness, done usually in the night. Let us beware of them, says Paul to the Christians in Rome who, doubtless, were sometimes invited to the sumptuous banquets of wealthy Romans where they would go to excess in eating and drinking.

And how necessary this admonition is for the Christians in our days, ¹³ *Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness.* God says in Galatians 5:19–21, ¹⁹ *Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: ... drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

And do you think that you will be able to stand before the Son of Man if suddenly you should be called away, or if Christ would come in the clouds, while you are taking part in a drunken party? Let us walk honestly, as in the day, not in *revelry and drunkenness!*

And the Apostle adds: *“not in lewdness and lust.”* These are sins against the Sixth Commandment, works of darkness, which, also, are usually done in the night.

The highly educated Greeks and Romans were monsters in these sins of unchastity, showing that refinement, education, and culture are by no means safeguards against loathsome sins.

O how the Christians should in our days, and especially the young Christians, guard against these terrible sins which ruin both body and soul, and say in the hour of temptation with chaste Joseph, ***“How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”***²

Our text says, ¹³ ***Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust.*** And ***“not in strife and envy,”*** says the Apostle. Strife and envy also pertain to the works of darkness which Christians should cast off.

A Christian should not be quarrelsome, arguing with his neighbours and using abusive language. Nor should he envy others and begrudge them what they acquire and possess, whether it be earthly goods or mental accomplishments, gifts or talents. Let us walk honestly, as in the day, not in strife and envy!

The other thing required that we might awake from the sleep of sin is, that we put on the armour of light. If we are clothed in the armour of light, we shall be true Christian warriors, wide awake, and not liable to fall back into the sleep of sin.

And what is this armour? Paul gives a full description of it in Ephesians 6:14–17, ¹⁴ ***Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness,*** ¹⁵ ***and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;*** ¹⁶ ***above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.*** ¹⁷ ***And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.***

This is a complete description of the armour of light which guards us against the sleep of sin.

But in our text the Apostle refers to two points only. Firstly, he says: ***“Put on the Lord Jesus Christ!”*** Now we know that we must put on the righteousness of Christ, that by a true faith we must appropriate to ourselves our Saviour’s perfect fulfilment of the Law and make it our own, as the Apostle says in Galatians 3:27, ²⁷ ***For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ,*** and as we say in the hymn:³

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness

My beauty are, my glorious dress,
Wherein before my God I'll stand
When I shall reach the heav'nly land.
My beauty are, my glorious dress.

However, in our text the Apostle does not speak of Christ's righteousness, but of the virtues of Christ which we should put on. He is telling us, *'My dear Christians, see that always you become more and more Christ-like in true Christian virtues, in meekness, in kindness, in charity, in patience, in temperance, and so forth. Thus you put on the Lord Jesus Christ.'*

Secondly, he says ***make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.*** This is the last point in the Apostle's admonition. He does not say that Christians should make no provision whatever for their mortal bodies.

Christians must eat and drink, and be clothed and sheltered, and even need temporal enjoyment as well as anybody else. What the Apostle warns against is to make provision for the lusts of the flesh. We should not go to excess in things that are gratifying to our flesh, but should abstain from everything forbidden in the divine Word. We should crucify our flesh with the affections and lusts. Otherwise we are not fit to wear the armour of light and not worthy of the Christian name.

May the Lord grant us His grace that as true believers we heed the admonition addressed to us this day and increase always more and more in holiness of life to the glory of God! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Luke 21:27

² Genesis 39:9

³ Hymn 327