

Wake up! Get Dressed! Watch out! Romans 13:11-14

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Are you familiar with the name Augustine? Some say "Augusteene." Many call him Saint Augustine. Or Augustine of Hippo as he lived in that region of North Africa. He was African. His life straddled the late 400s and 500s AD. He was arguably the most important non-apostolic theologian in history. All the major branches of Christianity revere him including the Reformers. It's hard to overstate his influence.

What is less known unless you've read a biography about him, is how he became a Christian. As a young man, Augustine was given over to his sensual desires. As a young man he began a 15-year relationship with, what he called, his concubine. At age 31, he was brilliant, accomplished, and spiritually empty. He was in total bondage to sexual lust. He was searching for meaning in life.

One day he was overcome with despair at his life. He tore his hair. He beat his own head. He threw himself down under a tree. Then he heard the voice of a child singing over and over, "Take it and read. Take it and read." He took this as somehow from God and at random opened the Bible and he read the verses that make our sermon text today. It spoke to his heart and his need. He trusted in Christ. Jesus freed him from his bondage to sexual lust and started him on the path to becoming the great St. Augustine.

Are you interested? Might this same passage work in someone today to be set free from the bondage of sin and find freedom by new life in Jesus? I pray so. Here is what Augustine read.

"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. 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. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (Romans 13:11-14 ESV).

These verses stand between Paul's urging the Roman Christians to love one another in verses 8-10 and his practical teaching about love and Christian liberty in chapter 14. In between are verses 11-14, a continuation of the need for gospel mercies from chapters 1-11 to transform who we are and how we follow Jesus in the day-to-day of life.

Wake up!

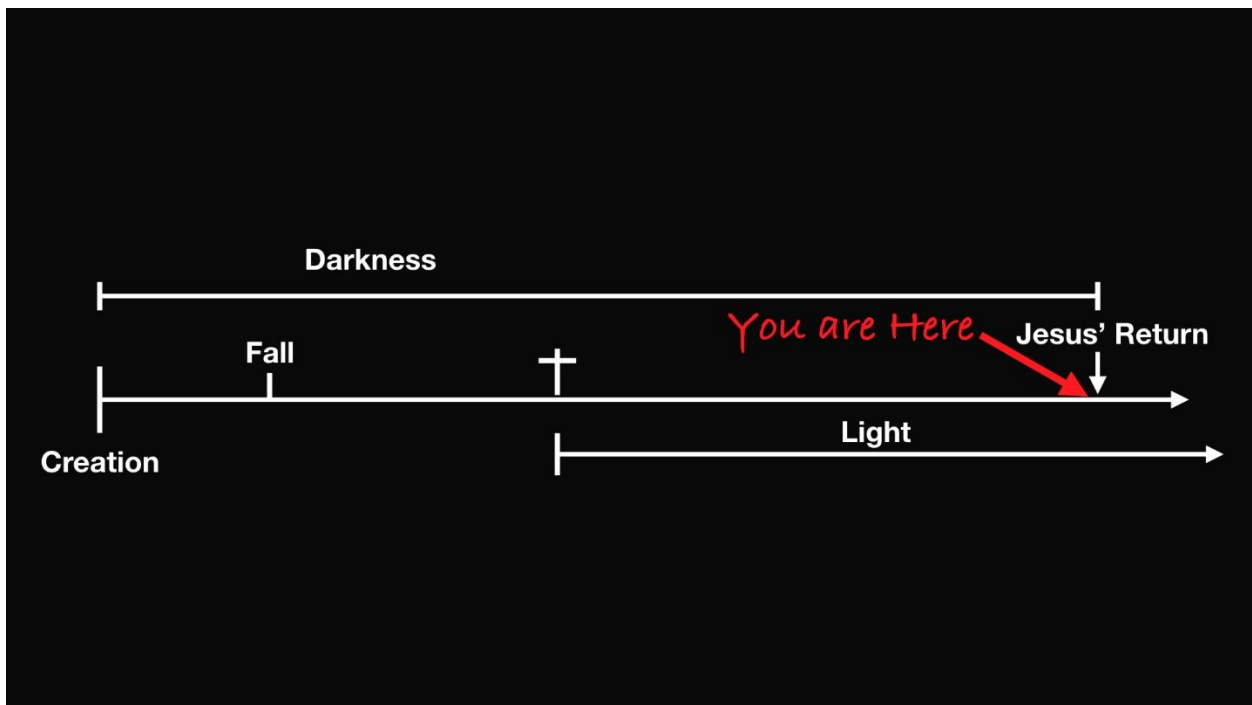
"Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand" (Romans 13:11-12).

Paul places the ethical dimensions of our lives within the timeline of God's salvation. His illustration is of the dawning of a new day (see picture below). He says it's a picture of the transition from the era of spiritual darkness to the light of God's new creation and eternal life.



"Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep." "You know the time." Do we? What time is it? What day is it? My 5-year-old daughter Madeline is learning days and weeks but currently determines days by sleep and wake up. So, if we have something special in three days, to her, she's going to sleep and wake up, sleep and wake up, sleep and wake up, and then it's her birthday.

God determines time different from us too. Not by the chronological clock but by the redemptive one. What time is it redemptively? The salvation timeline of God? Remember, to him, a thousand years is like a day (2 Peter 3:8). God tells time less by minutes, seconds, and days, and much more by where we are in the chronology of salvation.



Look at verse 12. "The night is far gone; the day is at hand." What is "night"? Or "darkness" in verse 13? These are describing the time before Jesus. Spiritually speaking, this was nighttime. Darkness time. The light had not yet come. Jesus is the light of the world. Don't mix the metaphors, but it's helpful to see Jesus' coming compared here to the sun rising. You know that transition time between night and day. Darkness and light.

What was dark? It was dark as sin ruled man's heart ever since the Fall of Adam and Eve. Yes, there was moonlight. Some light. Israel. The Old Testament Law. Actions of God in the flood and prophecy and Mt. Sinai. Moonlight. In God's way of telling time, Jesus' incarnation, death, and resurrection are the decisive transitions from darkness to light. From death to life.

These eras overlap, like dawn is the overlap of darkness and light. The old age is passing, the new age has come. But there is overlap. Theologians would say the already and the not yet. Jesus' coming was the beginning of the new age. It's not yet all that it will be. And the old age isn't gone yet either. It's dawn. Darkness is fleeing. The sun is rising.

"For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed" (Romans 13:12). This might mean chronologically, in which case, if Paul thought it was closer after the 30 years since he believed, then what would he say to us 2,000 years later? It's really, really close now. What is? *You are here*—Paul wants us to place ourselves on God's timeline and realize, we are very close. Close to what? Salvation.

Salvation? Wait, I'm confused. I thought I was saved already when I trusted in Jesus. Yes, but salvation from the Bible's perspective is past, present, and future. When did you get saved? Well, I was saved when Jesus died in my place. I was saved when I placed my faith in Jesus. I'm being saved as God continues his good work in me. I will be saved when Christ returns. Past, present, and future.

It is this future sense in view here. Salvation is "nearer" means the final stage. Other biblical terms would be the Day of Judgment, the last day, the day of wrath, and the Day of the Lord. What happens? Jesus returns. Final judgment and the new heaven and earth. All this is nearer now than it has ever been.

Do you realize what time it is? It's dawn. The new day is here. Therefore, wake up!

Get Dressed!

"So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (Romans 13:12-14).

This should sound familiar. What do you and I do every morning? First, we understand the time. The alarm goes off. It signals the start of a new day. We get up and we take off our night clothes and we put on our day clothes. Rarely do we sleep in our day clothes and rarely do we go through our days in PJ's. Although in the DeWitt house...sometimes when we don't have anything going on, like on a Saturday, it will be midday and we will realize, the girls are still in their PJ's! Maybe we are too. Rather than a problem, that's a sign of a good day, don't you think? But generally, we don't go to work or school in our PJ's.

This is the illustration Paul is using. The clothes are ethical and moral in nature. There is a moral way of living that aligns with the night. Moral darkness.

Paul lists six examples of night clothes: Orgies. Drunkenness. Sexual immorality. Sensuality. Quarreling. Jealousy. Note three of these are sexual sins. Orgies. Immorality. Sensuality. These reflect the city of Corinth where Paul wrote Romans. Aphrodite was the

goddess. The temple of Corinth was filled with male and female prostitutes. It was a city given over to sexual freedom of any and every kind. An ancient Las Vegas.

In a sense, we all live in Corinth now, if not geographically than certainly online. The desire for sexual freedom dominates our culture and politics. Why is abortion so important to so many, as one example? Sex without consequence. Sex without obligation. That's sex in moral darkness. Sex in the spiritual night. As a side note, here at Bethel, we are good earthy Christians who celebrate sex as God intended, within marriage between a husband and a wife. This is good and holy and worship. It's darkness sex that's in view here. Sex outside God's will.

Drunkenness is listed—the immoderate and controlling use of alcohol along with the moral vices that flow when alcohol takes over a person's life. Then quarreling and jealousy. We might be surprised to see these listed. We may expect murder and bank robbery or some other "really bad sin." But quarreling? Paul is preparing them for chapter 14. Strife among God's people is not daylight living, that's darkness stuff. We should keep this in mind as for some, quarreling about politics, doctrine, church, COVID-19, masks, or race is our number one hobby.

For Paul, quarreling and all the others are clothes aligned with moral darkness. Things people do in the dark. Completely inappropriate for Christians who are living in the daylight. Take those immoral clothes off. Don't live like that.

In typical Pauline fashion, he doesn't leave us naked with just taking things off. We are to put things on. Like what? Verse 12, "*put on the armor of light.*" The ESV translates this as "armor." It could be weapons of light. It's clearly a military term and echoes Ephesians 6 where Paul describes this spiritual armor in detail, like a Roman soldier. Helmet of salvation. Breastplate of righteousness. Sword of the Spirit. Some of you men in particular geek out on military and guns and weaponry. I think Paul did too. Put on the armor of light. See the second "garment" we put on.

"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 13:14). That may sound confusing as Jesus is a person in heaven. How do I put him "on"? First, I have to want to. I have to want to NOT live in darkness. I have to be fed up with it. Think of Augustine, he lived a sexually immoral life. He was filled with lust. It was insatiable, eating him up. Even having what he called a concubine didn't satisfy him. He was literally to a point of beating his head, pounding the wall, throwing himself down. This is where darkness takes us. To the end of ourselves. You can't have enough sex, alcohol, parties, or quarrels to make you happy. It just sucks us into more darkness.

Augustine heard the beautiful sound of a child's voice. He read these very words that described his life as darkness. He longed for something different. He longed for a life in the light.

"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 13:14). This is a word for Christians primarily, but God used it to lead Augustine to believe in Jesus in the first place. Perhaps he will do so again today. You can't put on Jesus unless you first believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior. This is the necessary first step. Repentance. We must confess our sins and sinfulness to God. Turning from them is a turning to Jesus in faith, believing Jesus died for my sins and guilt. Believing he is who he claimed to be, Son of God and Savior. His death on the cross in my place. His resurrection for my eternal life. All of time turns on Jesus and his cross. Is he your Savior? Put your personal trust in him today.

As a Christian, putting on Jesus sounds a bit confusing unless we understand it in context. We are to “take off” life choices aligned with darkness. So, clothes describe a moral lifestyle. Putting on Jesus is putting on a lifestyle like his. It is to put on his attitude. Put on his values. Put on his manner of life. Put on his treatment of others. Put on his life of prayer. Put on his _____.

- *“Let the word of Christ dwell in your richly” (Colossians 3:16).*
- *“For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son” (Romans 8:29).*
- *“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).*

These and many others are describing this same truth. Putting on Jesus is like getting dressed every day. It is the morning prayer, *Jesus, help me to reflect you in everything today has in store.*

Getting ready this morning, I had some music playing in the shower on Pandora, and up comes one of my favorite songs, “Be Thou My Vision.” Because this truth is in my heart right now, the words really spoke to me:

*“Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art-
Thou my best thought by day or by night,
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.”¹*

Can your heart sing that in the morning? That’s what it means to put on Jesus. If you’re not putting on Jesus, you’re putting on you or Satan. We all walk out the door with a set of values, a perspective, a way of looking at the world, and Paul is saying as children of light living in light of the dawn and knowing what is about to come, I am now going to live with clothes that are appropriate to the daytime; to the spiritual light that I am walking in as a believer in Jesus Christ.

How we need this! Too often we go through our day in our spiritual PJ’s. Our attitude stinks. Our words are hurtful. Our thoughts are lustful. Our values are sinful. We failed to take the night clothes off. We also fail to put our day clothes on. To submit our hearts and lives to Jesus yet another day. To desire to walk in moral and ethical light. To live the new creation in the midst of the old. What clothes are you wearing right now? How about this past week?

But Pastor, what do I need to do? Wake up! Realize the hour is late. The sun is rising. The light of the eternal kingdom is breaking through. This creates urgency to our lives knowing the times, knowing the day is at hand. Clothe yourself in the light. Put on Jesus.

Watch Out!

Finally, verse 14 is a special verse and I don’t want you to miss it. God has used this verse in my life as it gives a tip for how to do all this. *“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Romans 13:14).*

The flesh. Do you remember it from chapter 7? The flesh is not our physical flesh but that aspect of our sin nature that is set against God and his will in our lives. This internal enemy

¹ Mary Elizabeth Byrne, “Be Thou My Vision,” 1905.

that is with us all the time—indwelling sin. You know what I’m talking about. It wars against the spiritual us and seeks to undermine God’s good work in us.

The flesh has desires that it subtly inserts into our affections. Paul describes it in chapter 7:19 as, *“For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.”* That is when the flesh wins.

Putting on Jesus is the offense. But here we have a clue for a great defense. *“Make no provision for the flesh.”* (Romans 13:14)

The Greek word for *provision* has the sense of foresight. See something in advance. Making no provision for the flesh is to see in advance when and where my sin nature is going to exert itself. Perhaps situations where I have fallen before? Or temptations that I am struggling with mentally, where if given the chance, I could compromise. *“Make no provision.”* Don’t go there. Don’t do that. Know yourself well enough to not put yourself in places where you may likely fall into sin.

When the forecast is rain, you make provision and bring an umbrella. When it’s snow, you put on boots and a heavier coat. When it comes to the flesh and sin, make NO provision. Give no quarter. Don’t even begin to create a scenario that will make it easy to sin. Actually, try and create situations where its hard to sin. Know yourself. We all have weaknesses. Maybe a past besetting sin. Maybe a present temptation. Deal radically with it, don’t coddle it. Don’t nurse it along. Deal radically with it. How?

We are to flee temptation. Can you get out of the situation? I find if I can talk freely about it, I’m not likely to sin in that area. But when I want to hide it or I could never speak of it, sin has its grip on me. Jesus urged us to deal radically with temptation. Remember his illustration about gouging out your eyes. Is there some radical “amputation” you could employ? Eliminate the friendship. Drop your cable TV. Stop driving by that billboard. Block that site. Get accountability with a fellow Christian. But when you hide it, beware.

Young people, there are so many situations you find yourself in where there is much provision for the flesh. That party you were invited to and you know what’s going on there. A particular group that is known in the school for doing this or that, nothing good. They want you to hang out with them. What are you going to do?

Make no provision for the flesh. Proverbs says, the wise man sees danger and flees. Is that online thing worth the visual temptations? Is that entertainment choice drawing you closer to God? Is that whatever causing you to love Jesus more? *“Make no provision.”* We want to make it as hard as we can to sin. We want to make it as easy as we can to put on Jesus. God used these verses to produce the church’s greatest theologian. How might he use them in us today?

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