

AWAKE THOU THAT SLEEPEST, AND ARISE.

– *EPH. 5:11-21.* – *MARCH 23.* –

"Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the spirit."

OUR LESSON inculcates the transforming tendency of the truth. Like all of the New Testament epistles, it is addressed, not to the wicked, not to the worldly, but to Christians. The Lord's spirit, the spirit of truth and of righteousness, received as a result of faith in the Redeemer and consecration to him as a follower, a pupil, is the beginning of a new life, which starting in the will, should grow, develop, increase, until it permeates and fills all the avenues of life – its affections, its ambitions, its cravings.

Today, as in the Apostle's day, those who have become the Lord's people through faith and consecration need to be informed respecting the possibilities of their new life, else they may permit it to lie comparatively dormant – permit it to be covered up, and finally to be extinguished, smothered by the old nature – the will of the flesh, its affections, its ambitions, its cravings. While, therefore, it is important that conversion should take place – a turning of the will, the intention, from sin to holiness, from self to God, – it is very important that conversion be not esteemed to be the end, but merely the beginning of the Christian's course. It is, of course, important that the begetting should be of the truth, and not of error, so that the new mind may be of the proper kind; but even when properly begotten of the truth, as a child of the Kingdom, it is essential that the new creature shall be nourished first with the "milk," subsequently with the "meat" of the truth, which God has provided for this very purpose.

New converts, like new-born babes, are much inclined to sleep; but while this in nature is profitable, in grace it is dangerous; for the new creature to sleep in self-satisfaction means death; the begetting of

the spirit has been for the very purpose of energizing; and hence, the Apostle here calls upon such "babes in Christ," fallen asleep under the spirit of the world and of the nominal church, and thus in danger of complete failure in the way of character development, saying, – "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine upon thee." (R.V.) The "new creature" is to recognize the fact, that the whole world is dead; – not merely under a death sentence, nor merely figuratively dead – but in a death condition, as respects the highest and noblest things of righteousness and truth. Our begetting of the holy spirit of truth gives us merely a first suggestion of our own condition by nature, and the condition of the whole world, in trespasses and sin – in thought, word, and deed. It is necessary that the mind should first be awakened to *seek* for other things; it is necessary that the ear should hear the voice of him who now speaks unto us from above – the anointed Head of the anointed body; it is necessary that the eyes of our understanding should be opened that we may see the true situation of things; and all this is well represented in the Apostle's figure of *awakening*.

We regret to say that the general tendency in Christendom is not to awaken the sleepers, but rather to lull them to sleep. This, however, is not always, nor generally, done with a view to serving the adversary, [R2967 : page 73] and permitting the new life to become extinct, just as not many nurses and mothers wilfully contribute to the weaknesses, diseases, and death of the infants under their charge. In both cases good intentions are often thwarted by ignorance of the governing laws. Those who occupy the position of teachers in the various denominations, while not devoid of good intentions as respects the babe in Christ, lack the theoretical and practical knowledge which they should inculcate – they are babes in spiritual matters themselves, as the Apostle wrote in one of his epistles, – "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles [rudiments] of the oracles of God." – Heb. 5:12.

When the believing, converted, consecrated, begotten, sleeping, "new creature" has been awakened – when the eyes and ears of his understanding have been opened, as above suggested, to see the true conditions of the world, and to realize himself as a "new creature" in Christ, – his next duty is to *arise*. His arising from the dead signifies the activity of the new mind, the new will, in directing and controlling his mortal body. This implies effort; the putting forth of all the energy of the new creature. It requires no effort to sleep, or to lie after one gets awake; but to rise requires the exercise of every muscle. Arising is not an instantaneous act, but a process requiring one movement after another, until it is fully accomplished; so also is the arising of the "new creature" from the dead conditions of sin and trespass against the laws of righteousness and truth and purity; it requires his every effort, and is a work of time. Indeed all experienced Christians who have followed the Apostle's injunction to arise from the dead, have found that it requires days, months, years, of energetic effort to rise up above, superior to the fallen tendencies of his own flesh, – common to the world of mankind. He finds that even after he has risen fully up, so that he does not wilfully practice sin, nor countenance it in any sense or degree, he still must be on his guard lest he be entrapped by the weaknesses of his mortal body; or by the allurements of the world; or by the temptations of the adversary; and thus stumble again over some of the things of sin and death from which he had arisen by the Lord's grace.

The Apostle in the previous verses has explained some of these things of sin and death to which the Lord's people should become thoroughly awake, and from which they should arise completely. In verse 3, he mentions some evils which should be "not so much as *named* among you – as becometh saints." In vs. 4, he mentions "foolish talking" as among the things of sin and death from which the Lord's people must arise. While we believe that the saints will make most progress themselves, and be most helpful to others, by avoiding all kinds of light and unedifying conversation, and while we strongly recommend this course to all, nevertheless, we do not understand the

Apostle here to refer to what might be designated as harmless jokes or levity. From the text we understand him to refer to coarse, *lascivious* talking, and to [R2967 : page 74] a more refined jesting with half-suggestions of profanity or vice, sometimes practiced by the educated and witty.

We are to arise from all such low conditions of thought, word, and deed as we find prevalent about us; because as children of God, begotten by his spirit, we can have no fellowship with these things. We must regard them as the Apostle suggests, as "unfruitful works of darkness." The Apostle by this word, unfruitful, no doubt intended to give us the thought that sin is *destructive* instead of *productive* – that its tendency is toward death. On the contrary, the tendency of the new mind of Christ is toward fruit-bearing, development, blessing, uplifting, refreshment. Not only is this true in the individual Christian, but as our Lord's words suggest, the individual Christian exercises a preservative influence on others; wherever he may live he is a shining light dispelling the darkness of sin; he is the salt of the earth, preserving the mass from corruption. The moral standing of the civilized world today, is unquestionably largely due to the indirect influence of the holy spirit in God's people; – which as the Apostle declares, reproveth the world. Our reproof of sin may always be through the living epistles of our daily lives which, as bright and shining lights, should ever reprove by manner, look, act, and tone, everything tending toward darkness and sin, – "Let your light so shine before men that they seeing your good works may glorify your Father in Heaven." Occasionally it may be proper, and still more occasionally it may be duty, for us to speak or to act in opposition to darkness; but the light of a godly life, testifying for the truth and exhibiting the holy spirit, is certainly one of the most forceful reproofs of sin that can be administered.

While passing, we might have in mind the Apostle's words, "unfruitful works of darkness," laying emphasis upon the last word. Sin is figuratively represented by darkness; and, additionally, it

generally prefers literal darkness for the accomplishment of its purposes. The Lord's children are children of the light, and are to walk in the light of truth; they are to have their hearts enlightened and their minds so illuminated as to make them burning and shining lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, blinded and darkened by the Prince of Darkness. And all such while endeavoring to arise from the dead and to live separate from the world are recommended to walk in the light of truth; and so far as possible to live in the light actually, – to see that their homes are well lighted, – recognizing that even the natural light is a foe to the darkness of sin.

The Apostle suggests the necessity of taking the various steps above outlined, before the Christian will get fully into the light himself. It is after he has arisen from the dead by the Lord's help, by the help of the brethren, by the assistance of the exceeding great and precious promises of the Word, by the indwelling spirit of the Word; – after he has arisen from the dead and indeed while he is arising from the state of sin and death, while he is attempting to bring his members into subjection to the new life, a new light is shining upon him – his light is increasing, his knowledge of the Lord, his knowledge of sin, his knowledge of righteousness, his appreciation of truth and righteousness "in the inward parts," as the prophet expresses it. The light shining upon him, and deep into the recesses of his heart, may sometimes cause distress, as he finds that his own natural weaknesses and imperfections are even greater than he had at first been aware of; nevertheless, as a child of the light, begotten by the Father of lights, he loves the right, and hates the sin; and the more clearly the light shines upon him and shows him the blemishes of his own mortal body, the more he runs for and strives for the perfection which the Lord assures him he shall attain to in the actual resurrection – of which the present "rising to walk in newness of life," is but the figure.

The Apostle, progressing with the thought before us, declares that the one who thus arises from the dead is not even then to stand still. He must walk – not after or toward the flesh and its standard, but after

and toward the spirit and its standard. And he will need to walk circumspectly – with careful scrutiny of each footstep. The Apostle suggests that any other course than this would be foolish. We are to remember that our adversary was more disposed to let us alone while we were asleep, but that now, when we are awake and seeking to walk after the spirit, he will be on the alert to ensnare and entrap us; – hence the need of our circumspection. The Lord gives us light, not only on our own characters, and upon sin and righteousness in general, but, additionally, he gives us light upon the road we are to travel. This light upon our pathway is the light shining from the Scriptures of which the Prophet declares, "Thy Word is a lamp to my feet, a lantern to my footsteps." He who neglects the lamp, neglects one of the very important means of walking circumspectly. And alas, how many Christian people today, with the Bible in their homes, are neglecting to trim and use it as a lamp; – if not standing in the dark they are walking in the darkness, stumbling, or in danger of stumbling, continually. Let us remember the importance of this lamp, and use it; to the intent that ours may be the "path of the just, shining more and more unto the perfect day."

Thus we are to redeem the time – to purchase opportunities for the new creature and its interests and concerns, at the expense of the old nature. We as new creatures are to exchange the things of darkness for the things of light; the opportunities for sowing to the flesh for the opportunities of sowing to the spirit. The opportunities must be thus purchased else we will have none: if we give way to the inclinations of the flesh, its appetites and desires, it will consume all there is of time and opportunity, strength and influence, and leave nothing for the new creature, – "because the days are evil;" that is because they are unfavorable to spiritual progress. They present thousands of temptations for worldly pleasure and worldly ease and worldly fame and worldly progress; – and thus they multiply the tests which come upon us as "new creatures." We must remember that the Lord desires that these tests shall demonstrate the *degree* of our love, the *degree* of our [R2967 : page 75] sincerity, the *degree* of our consecration to him:

the more our love for the Lord and for righteousness, the greater will be our zeal in snatching time, opportunity, influence from the flesh and consecrating it to spiritual things. In so doing we will not be unwise, but will display our understanding of the Lord's will. – Verses 16,17. Unless we are awake we cannot arise to present newness of life; and unless this arising to newness of life is accomplished we cannot share in the First Resurrection.

The Golden Text of the lesson is the 18th verse; in it the Apostle contrasts two spirits. Under present conditions men naturally look for something to exhilarate them, to refresh, to revive – to counteract **[R2968 : page 75]** life's trials, burdens and sorrows: many of the dead in trespasses and sins find this stimulant and relief from care, in various intoxicating stimulants, – wine, spirituous liquors, opium, etc.; but the child of God is to look in a totally different direction for his stimulant, his exhilaration, his relief from care and trouble – he is to be "filled with the spirit" of the Lord. He is not merely to have a little of it, but is to become intoxicated with it to the extent that it will change the general appearance of all his surroundings and conditions in life. And cannot each advanced Christian, filled with the Lord's spirit testify that this is true? – that all things are changed from the new standpoint and its new hopes, new ambitions, new relationships? Can he not say, "Old things have passed away, all things have become new?" What need has he for the wine cup to drown his troubles, or smother his sorrows? He knows from observation if not from experience that all such exhilaration and oblivion to sorrow brings an after effect of pain: he knows also from experience and observation that to be filled with the Lord's spirit need not be a temporary oblivion to sorrow, but a permanent one – that, – "Earth has no sorrows that Heaven cannot cure;" – that even the deepest pains and sorrows of the heart are more than counterbalanced and cancelled by the joys of the Lord secured through the possession of a fullness of his spirit.

The lightness of heart of the intoxicated "dead in trespasses and sin" often leads to bacchanalian revelry and song, repulsive even to the same person when sober; but the filling of the spirit of the Lord leads to songs and rejoicings, not only with the lips but with the heart, – refreshing, comforting, and uplifting, not only to the singer but also to the hearer. It is this "new song" *in the heart* that constitutes the Christian a separate and distinct being from all others about him. "Thou hast put a new song in my mouth, even thy loving kindness, O Lord!" Because it is in the heart, therefore, it must be in the mouth also, and must influence all the affairs of life; for we cannot but speak the things which have so wonderfully uplifted and refreshed our souls. And the speaking of these things is the proclamation of the Gospel, – "good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people."

In our new attitude, figuratively risen from the dead and walking in newness of life with the Lord our Redeemer and Head, all of life's affairs have a new coloring. Not only can we sing, –

"Sweet prospects, sweet birds and sweet flowers,
Have all gained new sweetness to me.

but we can glory in tribulation also, and give thanks for these, as well as life's blessings, to the Heavenly Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus; knowing, having the conviction, the assurance, that life's disciplines are working out for us a "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." And not only so, but, this dependence upon the Lord and filling with his spirit makes us humble; so that we do not think of ourselves above what we ought to think, but think soberly. It is in view of the humility of this class that the Apostle suggests that they submit themselves one to another in the reverence of the Lord. Those who have the Lord's spirit will have the brotherly kindness which is a part of it; and will be quite willing to defer to each other's preferences in many things – in all things not contrary to the principles of righteousness, – in all things in harmony with reverence to the Lord, his Word, and the principles it inculcates.

It may not be amiss here to remind the brethren that the Scriptures show two kinds of symbolic or figurative intoxications: the one above described, filling with the spirit of the Lord and its joys, and peace, and comfort; – the results of the fruitage of the vine which the Heavenly Father planted, of which Christ is the central stock, and of which his followers are all "branches." The other wine is a counterfeit, an illicit wine; it is not produced by the vine of the Father's planting, but from the grapes of the "vine of the earth." It is of this wine that the Lord tells us Great Babylon has made all the nations drunken – the wine of her inconsistency, of her infidelity. This is the wine or spirit of the world, – of Churchianity.

Looking all about us we fear that many, who think they are filled with the holy spirit of the truth, are really filled with this intoxication of Churchianity. Those intoxicated with this wine will shortly be aroused to a realization that it was sadly adulterated, and the effects will be painful. Those who are intoxicated with this wine of Churchianity are rejoicing not in the cup of the world and of devils, not in gross sins, but nevertheless not in the spiritual things. They glory each in the prosperity of his own sect, they are generally intoxicated with love for sectarianism, so that worldly persons, dead in trespasses and sins are often loved and brothered by those intoxicated with this adulterated spirit, while saints are spurned and treated as enemies because of faithfulness to God in rebuking sectarian Churchianity and its doctrinal falsities.

Let us, dear brethren, beware of the natural wine and its drunkenness, – of the cup of devils, gross sins and immoralities; let us beware of the still more deceptive wine of Babylon's cup of mixture which has a *form* of godliness, in which church and world and lodge combinations tend to stupefy and to give illicit joy; let us, however, having made sure of the Lord's cup, drink thereof and be filled with the spirit of our Master and with his joys. **page 75**

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Golden Text: – "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." – Acts 2:36.

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