

Somnolence

“You do not know when the owner of the house will come back. . . do not let him find you sleeping” (Mark 13:35-36).

“Understand the present time! The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed” (Romans 13:11).

“Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you. Be very careful then how you live, not as unwise but as wise” (Ephesians 5:14,15).

“[We] are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled” (1 Thessalonians 5:4-6).

People who have advanced, irreversible disease become somnolent. In a way, that’s actually a blessing because it spares them the frustration and painful awareness of a failing body. But we who have healthy bodies must not be somnolent, for we have God’s will to fulfill. Jesus and Paul were keenly aware that we might lapse into moral or spiritual slumber, thus we have these warnings. I believe that modern Christendom, Scriptural warnings notwithstanding, is sound asleep. Comatose even. I’m not referring, of course, to natural sleep, but to indifference to God’s purposes for us and apathy regarding the world’s heavy influence on us. We’ve become so complacent with our (evangelical) religious state that we don’t even care about God’s will. Let’s discuss this, because the warnings are there for a good reason.

First, some necessary basics regarding our existence on earth, regarding life. God created us as His image. The invisible, spirit-Being made us to be His physical representative, an icon of His Person, here in this physical world. But there was more: We had to obey Him. Why was that so essential? Because a personal relationship is the issue. And obedience is a test, an indicator of love. Our supreme desire had to be God, to know Him and to serve Him as He instructed. So God gave humanity a role to fulfill and work to do on His behalf. If we fulfilled His will, life—that is, God’s own, transcendent, supernatural, eternal life in joyous relationship with Himself—was on offer. If not, death. If there’s no life, there’s only death. Sin, alienation and death are God’s judgments on refusal to obey, that is, rebellion. The core issue is, do we desire God? Do we love Him, want to know Him, obey Him and serve Him? *Do want to be with Him?* Or not. And if not, by default, we want to be free of God and His will and His values and His instructions. We can do good, or we can do evil; God defines these categories with reference to Himself. All these basic truths hold for all time for all humanity.

If we’re asleep, we lack understanding. We lack discernment. We’re not dead. But we fail to fulfill our role and our work. We fail to be what God wants us to be and we fail to do God’s revealed will. There’s no love. No obedience. And we don’t care.

The Reformation was so successful in working out biblical soteriology that Protestants, with consummate smugness, could safely go to sleep. Reformers didn’t significantly change other RCC doctrines. Later, having developed doctrines of inerrancy, dispensationalism, premillennialism and a pre-Tribulation rapture, evangelicals could go to sleep too. The gospel was defined as forgiveness of sins thru belief in Jesus and “decisional” salvation became the rule, in large part due to the ministry of Billy Graham. Churches sent out missionaries, bible colleges and seminaries were founded and it really appeared as if the Church (in the West anyway) was complete. There was nothing more to do. Sleep was safe. Why not?

But all thru these centuries, while the Church ensconced itself in a bubble [there to suffocate], the Serpent lashed back with new strategies and new lies. Bacon (and others, including Newton) introduced and promoted the notion that the world operates autonomously, like a clock. The cosmos has the necessary mechanisms to run by itself by mathematically demonstrable operations. Heliocentrism replaced geocentricity; Earth was no longer a unique place where unique things would happen. Soon evolution explained origins and geologists were certain the earth was billions of years old; the rocks proved it. Science would explain the workings of nature, uncover its truths. Naturalism was to be preferred. Human reason was capable of discovering truth; there was no need for “revelation,” which was declared to be just so much superstition and ignorance. The

purpose of all this “Enlightenment”? To make it ridiculous to believe in God? Ok, sure. But Spinoza made it clear for Western man: Reject authority! We need to be free of kings and especially free of God. We can be our own authority.

So then, the next step: Enjoying freedom became the highest goal in life. Government needed to be so constituted to make liberties possible. Church leaders couldn’t anticipate where this emphasis on liberty would lead. Most in the church therefore agreed that political freedoms were of supreme importance (and they still do). As long as the church’s soteriology was untouched, the Church could slumber on.

Predictably, it got worse. A sexual revolution took place in the Western world. Political freedoms meant liberty to do whatever was pleasing to the individual. Abortion then became necessary to deal with unwanted pregnancies. So abortion was accepted as “freedom to choose.” Liberty also required tearing down restraints on homosexuality. Gay marriage then was introduced and adopted with astonishing ease. My concern is this: In the Church, among Christians, the same political liberties expressed themselves as the license to live as each individual pleased—as long as belief in Jesus assured a secure eternal destiny.

Christians also believe they have the liberty to use the internet as it pleases them. The internet and its myriad delights control our thinking and our desires; it affects our character and it replaces God. But as long as the freedom to use it exists, there’s no compunction to eschew its use. Christians likewise believe they have the liberty to use their wealth as it pleases them. And their leisure. *Discernment is absent.*

In our land, Marxist ideology spreads widely without significant refutation. Violence and hatred proliferate, and our culture not only justifies but celebrates it. We prize Intellectualism above all other character traits. The chief virtue of modern man has become concern for “social justice.” Secularism is being forced onto all domains of society. With these (and more) cultural and political issues swirling, it’s nearly impossible to retain any sense of stable order or peace, so . . . We retreat into the comfort of a self-absorbed life. We won’t courageously confront our God-despising society with the Word of God, in the power of the Spirit of God, as did the prophets of old, and probably suffer ridicule or other loss because of it. We won’t lovingly share Christ with our hopelessly lost neighbors. Oblivious to God’s will for us, we hide our beliefs in the supernatural and transcendent with an insouciance that mocks the cross and voids the commandment to love God and others.

This too: We’ve adopted a bizarre gospel that makes Christ our servant. He came and died to serve us with eternal salvation. He’s our insurance agent and contract. We say “Thank you” of course; but knowing that our destiny is secure, we sense neither obligation to Him nor any responsibilities. “God loves us,” is our controlling mantra. We’re fully in love with ourselves. We’re little gods, free to live as we please while secure in our private bubble. We pursue life unaware that Christ has absolute authority over us (Matthew 28:18; John 17:2).

Karl Barth wisely wrote, “Man is made to serve God, not God man.” We have lost (along with much else) a sense of serving God. We don’t know Him, we don’t love Him, and so we don’t serve Him. Why is serving God (or Jesus) so critical? Because it’s the converse, the opposite, of our sinful, rebellious lust for freedom. Unbelievers desperately want to be free of God and His norms, free from His demands. Free also, tragically, from what He’s provided at great cost to Himself to rescue us from sin and death. They don’t want to know God nor to be with Him. So, they won’t be with Him, forever. Believers too, lacking discernment, lacking understanding of God’s revealed will, pursue life free from any sense of responsibility to God. We ignore His creational intent. We ignore the Law of Christ. We ignore Christ’s commands, teachings and instructions, supposing that our “belief” is sufficient to obviate any and all demands. We’re deep asleep. How better to describe the state of today’s evangelical church?

What to do? Nothing! It’s too late. I can only suggest that we wake up and confess – with tears, I would hope – that we’ve been asleep, we’ve failed, and plead with God for mercy. Every indication compellingly suggests that this church age is imminently coming to an end. There’s no time for repentance. There’s no time to undertake any study of Scripture to see what needs to be done to do it right. The exalted Christ will very shortly return. May He *at least* find us expecting Him, desiring Him.