

The Pastor's Quarry

First Baptist Church of Granite Falls, MN
December, 2011

Fighting To Stay Awake – Spiritually

In his letter to the church in Thessalonica, Paul told them to stay awake:

1 Thessalonians 5:1-6 (ESV) 1 Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. 2 For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 While people are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. 4 But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. 5 For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. 6 So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.

Obviously, Paul is not talking about sleeping with our bodies here. He is talking about sleeping *spiritually*. This is a real danger for us, or he wouldn't have warned us against it. We must fight against spiritual sleep; we must fight to stay spiritually awake!

We all know what it is like to fight against physical sleepiness. As every mother knows, even babies fight against it – just watch a little one who starts to nod off, only to jerk himself awake! After a few more years, the fight to stay awake during long sermons begins (a fight that young Eutychus of Troas lost so dramatically in Acts 20:9!). We fight to stay awake when we pray, sometimes, as the disciples did in the garden of Gethsemane. And we who drive cars know well the fight to stay awake at the wheel. We all fight to stay awake when we *want* to stay awake.

But while we easily recognize the signs of sleepiness in our bodies, the signs of spiritual sleepiness are not always so easy to recognize! Just what are the signs of spiritual sleepiness? Here Paul's letter to the Romans helps us:

Romans 13:11-14 (ESV) 11 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. 12 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. 13 Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

The sins Paul lists here are signs of spiritual slumber. It is not an exhaustive list, of course; Paul simply lists a few sins as examples. But if we wait for such obvious signs, we've already nodded off. To stay awake, we must be on guard against the slightest wave of sleepiness, the slightest hint of spiritual drowsiness.

In other words, we must be on guard against the slightest hint of desire within us to satisfy our fleshly appetites. This is why Paul says, “Make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” If within our hearts we play with sin, we are already getting drowsy – and with every tiny step we take toward fulfilling our sinful desires we are shifting into a more comfortable position, getting ready to give in and fall asleep.

How then do we fight to stay awake, spiritually? We do it in much the same way we fight against physical sleepiness. First and foremost, we *desire* to stay awake; we dread falling asleep. And just as vigorously as we jerk ourselves upright to cast off the drooping of our eyelids, even standing up and walking around to put on alertness as armor against physical sleepiness, so, spiritually, must we vigorously “cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light . . . the Lord Jesus Christ” against the spiritual sleepiness we dread, so that we can enjoy the spiritual wakefulness, the righteousness, for which we hunger and thirst. This is how we must fight to stay spiritually awake – the very way we first woke up, the moment we turned to Jesus Christ for the first time.

When something big is coming the next day – something we are excited about – we don't want to sleep, do we? No! And when morning comes, we eagerly rise as early as we can. So let us rise! The greatest day has dawned; Jesus is coming again!

“So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober!”

Mark Your Calendars

Sat., Dec. 31, 5:00 P.M.-9:00 P.M. On New Year's Eve, all are welcome to gather in the lower level of the church building for a time of rest, recreation, and reflection. Bring some food if you can, and, if you wish, a game, poetry, or whatever other edifying thing you would like to share.

Sun., Jan. 15: Annual Business Meeting immediately after the Fellowship Meal.

Sun., Jan 29, 1:15 P.M.: In the afternoon assembly, I hope to present another installment of the Fifth-Sunday Biography Series.

Memory Verses

Here are the verses we will recite from the ESV at the beginning of the Sunday School hour, one week after the date assigned:

Jan. 1:	Gal 5:22-25
Jan. 8:	Psa 9:9-10
Jan. 15:	Psa 16:11
Jan. 22:	Php 4:13,19
Jan. 29:	Psa 91:1-3

Quote of the Month

Each man believes himself a rational being, but in the clutch of desire the human reason is no more than a puppet. The will-to-live cracks its whip, and the World dances.

Henry Dwight Sedgwick

Pro Vita Monastica

Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying

by

Philipp Nicolai, 1599

tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1858

Wake, awake, for night is flying;
The watchmen on the heights are crying,
Awake, Jerusalem, at last!
Midnight hears the welcome voices
And at the thrilling cry rejoices:
Come forth, ye virgins, night is past!
The Bridegroom comes; awake,
Your lamps with gladness take;
Alleluia!
And for His marriage feast prepare,
For ye must go and meet Him there.

Zion hears the watchmen singing,
And all her heart with joy is springing;
She wakes, she rises from her gloom;
For her Lord comes down all glorious;
The strong in grace, in truth victorious;
Her Star is ris'n, her Light is come.
Ah come, Thou blessed One,
God's own beloved Son,
Alleluia!
We follow till the halls we see
Where Thou hast bid us sup with Thee.

Now let all the heavens adore Thee,
And men and angels sing before Thee,
With harp and cymbal's clearest tone;
Of one pearl each shining portal,
Where we are with the choir immortal
Of angels round Thy dazzling throne;
Nor eye hath seen, nor ear
Hath yet attained to hear
What there is ours;
But we rejoice, and sing to Thee
Our hymn of joy eternally.

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A Bit of History

For this month's "A Bit of History," I commend to you this excerpt from Leon McBeth's book, *The Baptist Heritage*, in which he corrects two mistakes in the way many Baptists understand our history:

A fourth way of looking at Baptist history arose in the nineteenth century. Denying that Baptists originated from English Separatism and disdaining a continuity of mere principles, the Organic Successionist school would settle for nothing less than tracing actual Baptist churches from the New Testament to the present Perhaps the most vivid example of successionist history is the booklet by J. M. Carroll, *The Trail of Blood* . . . This booklet is a popularization of Orchard's ideas, but includes a vivid chart which purports to show that "according to History . . . Baptists have an unbroken line of churches since Christ." Baptists are traced back through the centuries by a series of connected red dots representing the blood of those who have suffered for the true faith, thus a "trail of blood." The "false churches" (i.e., all that are not Baptist) are traced by a line graph. This chart is set forth as "Illustrating the History of the Baptist Churches from the time of their founder, the Lord Jesus Christ, until the 20th century." . . . No major historian today holds to the organic succession of Baptist churches. This view was based on inadequate sources, was more polemical than historical, and made large assumptions where evidence was lacking. This interpretation arose in a time of intense denominational competition and helped reassure some Baptists that theirs was the true church. It received wide dissemination in the South by becoming identified with Landmarkism

One sometimes hears the question whether Baptists are to be identified as Protestants. Whether one takes the shortcut answer, or goes into lengthy explanation, the answer is the same: Yes. Such important reformation doctrines as justification by faith, the authority of Scripture, and the priesthood of believers show up prominently in Baptist theology. Further, the evidence shows that Baptists originated out of English Separatism, certainly a part of the Protestant Reformation. Even if one assumes Anabaptist influence, the Anabaptists themselves were a Reformation people. The tendency to deny that Baptists are Protestants grows out of a faulty view of history, namely that Baptist churches have existed in every century and thus antedate the Reformation

Of the different explanations of the origin of Baptists, perhaps none takes seriously enough the role of the Bible. England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries cannot be understood apart from the impact of the English Bible. No doubt J. H. Shakespeare was right that "the great discovery, therefore, of the age was not the New World, but a book." John Wycliffe, the "morning star of the Reformation," put the Bible into English by 1382; John Tyndale issued his New Testament in 1525; Miles Coverdale put out his translation in 1535; the "Great English Bible" came out in 1539; numerous English editions of Scripture circulated during the time of Henry VIII and afterward. The famous King James Version first appeared in 1611, in the midst of Baptist beginnings.

Even the briefest glance at early Baptist writings confirms that they sought to draw their teachings directly from Scripture. Other movements may have provided a framework for their understanding, but Baptists never consciously sought to pattern their teachings from these sources. Instead, they consciously and conscientiously sought to draw every teaching and practice from Scripture. Perhaps Shakespeare is too partisan, but he made his point when he wrote that one could wipe out all the religious groups of the seventeenth century, leave an open Bible, and "there would be Baptists" tomorrow.¹

¹H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 58, 59-60, 62-63.