

A Wake Up Call

By Paris Reidhead*

Turn, if you will please again, to Ephesians, Chapter 5, and vs 14. This is Thanksgiving Sunday. It hardly seems possible that a year has elapsed since last Thanksgiving Sunday. Perhaps you have noticed that as you get older time seems to accelerate in its flight, and weeks seem like days did when we were children, and years like months. It goes so quickly. But it is not just true that time is passing as far as it affects the calendar. The only days that you will have in which to serve the Lord as now you are free to serve Him are in this period called time.

You will notice in the 14th vs that Paul is writing to a people that seem to be unaware of the passage of time and what it means for eternity. And so he seeks to stir them by these words: "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." (Eph. 5:14)

Apparently he felt that in that church and in this, and in churches down across the centuries, there would be a tendency for one to feel that the round of living was the end of living, the getting up, and eating, and working, and coming home to eat that one might retire, to rest, to get up, and so to continue the passing of days would seem to be the end of life. There is something terribly drab, awfully gray about a life that is lived just for its own perpetuation. If the end of our being is simply to survive another day so that we can earn the means of surviving but another day, then we have gotten on to the ultimate treadmill of uselessness and futility, and our lives are going to fade from any color, and significance, and meaning until they are just gray, and we become sort of animated blobs of human protoplasm, filling a place but not very effectually, and not very meaningfully.

And I think this was something about what Paul was concerned about, and something that the Lord is concerned about, and something that you and I ought to have before us, and especially on this Thanksgiving Sunday. We must understand that today is the day the Lord has made. This is the day that God has given. Perhaps you have been wishing your life away. I think this is an affliction of Americans, because of the fact that from earliest childhood we are infected with what I call "national goalism." That is, a child lives for the day when he can go to Sunday School, or to Kindergarten, and then he just lives and pants for the day when he can graduate from the sixth grade and enter Junior High, and constantly held before him are these goals, these epochs in his life, and so many times young people in college just endure college. Oh, that I can get my degree, that I can get out, just to finish, somehow to tenaciously put their fingernails into the fabric of college life and just hang on so that they can get through; then when they have done that to just hang on to this job or that and constantly wishing their life away. Oh, when it is morning, would God it were night. And when it is night, Would God it were morning. Constantly living for some time that is before them, that is going to be the Eldorado of their existence, that is going to be filled with meaning, that all of a sudden they are going to become whole, complete and wholesome, happy people. Maybe it is when we get the new car; or perhaps it is when we get the house paid for, or some other goal is set beyond which life is going to have meaning.

Unfortunately, when that goal is reached, another is substituted for it. And so they run uphill all their lives, and never actually live.

Now I think this is peculiar to the western culture. I have often said that we are the most civilized, uncivilized, uncivilized people on the face of the earth. We have filled our homes, and factories, and houses with tools that are labor saving devices. And so, because a father has spent 250 or 300 dollars to get mother a labor saving device, mother feels she must labor all the time she can to use the device to justify the expenditure, and so she has no time to save for any leisurely pursuits. And the result of this is that we are said by one who just recently completed a study, the one nation who knows the least about leisure, and is frightened of leisure. Leisure is defined as doing something that you have not planned on doing, just because you enjoy it, with no thought of making a schedule to repeat it. And we know very little about leisure.

And so we have lived our lives in a constant uphill climb, expecting a plateau to be just at the next step, and even if we found such a plateau, we would hastily construct another flight of stairs, because we are only at rest when we are restless. And this I think is what I mean when I say, just existing for the end and sake of existing, and failing to realize that God has intended you to live today.

What are the principles of it? What is involved in living while you are alive? You see, you are going to have very little to share in what we are — and this is still related to our general theme of fellowship and communion, and sharing. You are going to have very little to share unless you are living a fruitful, effective, and meaningful life. If you have not found this secret of rest, and joy, and peace in living while you are alive in every Biblical, and Scriptural, and effective term, you have very little to share. And we are going to have to understand that fellowship is going to be no more meaningful than that which is shared by those who participate in it. And so Paul said to his day, “Awake.”

I am confident that they were not sleeping when they read it, because the words must have a meaning other than literal, physical sleep. He must have meant that there was an attitude that was causing them to live their days as ineffectively as though they were asleep. Then he says, See that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time. Redeeming the time, buying up the time, saving it from being squandered, saving it from being wasted, saving it from passing through your fingers, as a little thing. How important time is is seen by the fact that if you work overtime you get time and a half, and if it is on a holiday you get double time. This time belongs to you. And so unions insist that if you use it they pay double time, and time and a half for over time is the rule that has been established in our culture because it has been stated as a principle that this is your life, and if you are using more than is reasonable then you are to have compensation beyond the usual. Redeem the time.

Are you aware of how important today is? Are you buying up the opportunities? Are you walking circumspectly? Now this has several meanings, but eventually it means walking toward a goal, walking with an aim in view. Have you some end, some aim for your living in the next year? Will you approach Thanksgiving, 1963, with more for which you are thankful, not in things but in inner achievement than you have in 1962. Well you won't if you are just drifting. If you are just carried along by the tide of days, and somehow slip down the stream between yesterday and tomorrow, and are carried out without any particular purpose, you will reach Thanksgiving, 1962, with relatively little more to stir within your heart gratitude than you have—in 1963—than you have now in 1962. And so it means to walk circumspectly.

Whenever I read this word, I am always reminded of what Dr. R. L. Moyer of Northwestern School said when he was talking to us about this verse, He said, “To walk circumspectly is walk as a kitten would on a high board fence with a big angry dog on each side of it. Every time they put the foot down they are certain where they put it, because there are consequences for missing the next step.”

Well we would like to think that this is true, morally, walking through an immoral world. We realize, as Spurgeon¹ said to Chalmers in his day, “We are not walking toward failure and change; we are walking along the crumbling edge, the cliff of failure and shame.” And of course you can thank God; all of us can, if we have gotten to this good place without having been actually captured by the enemy and by the foe. But, in addition to walking so as to escape from the pollution of the world, to walk circumspectly ought to mean to walk with a goal in view, a worthy goal, an important goal, and to walk toward this. Now what is it?

Well I think it is to be in time what God intended a Christian to be in time, to know and to do what God intended Christians to know and to do. To come to maturity is set forth as the end of the grace of God, and the laver of the servants of God. Paul said, “He gave evangelists, pastors, and teachers that He might present every man — for the perfecting of the saints,” bringing to the end, bringing to the desired goal (Eph. 4:12). And then Paul said he labored night and day that he might present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Teachers in school realize that today's lesson is built upon yesterday, and makes the way for tomorrow. The student must learn it if he is to be trained and prepared.

And so you ought to recognize that to redeem the time and to walk circumspectly is to have the goal of becoming what a Christian man or woman ought to be in the full possibilities of that Christian manhood. Do you understand that? Well this is what is before us. Now we see that it is important because you are never going to have this past year again. It is finished. You might like to do it over, but you won't and you are beginning now a new year of opportunity — every day begins that new year, but when Thanksgiving Day comes we ought to be grateful for the past, and we ought to be prayerful for the future. And

¹ Charles Haddon (C.H.) Spurgeon (1834-1892) British Particular Baptist Preacher

this, I believe, is its purpose and its intent. So we find that this is important. Our lives are shorter. Do realize you are as young today as you will ever be? We would like to reverse the calendar, and think next year we will be younger, but this is not the case. You have probably more health and vigor and keenness of mind and spirit than you will ever have to some degree at least. Perhaps some of you are just reaching the time of maturing powers, but others of you realize that life has an increasing amount of sand in the glass.

Now how are you to live? Well we will understand here that he told us that we are to be wise, understanding the will of the Lord. What is the will of the Lord? "Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess" (Eph. 5:18). This is the will of the Lord. And so we have a negative aspect to this maturing as a whole and complete Christian personality. There are some things you are not to be. The first is, You are not to be drunk with wine. Well why? Because of course it is a substitute for a proper relationship with God. You understand that when you are where you ought to be, then you have joy and peace, and blessing, and the fruit of the Spirit is the constant condition of your heart, and your life. Well there are those you see who are not willing to meet the conditions and become what God wants them to become so they find a short cut, a short cut to escape from what they are, and from their problems and from their difficulties, and it is just about two inches down the neck of a bottle, and then they have arrived at their Elysian field; they have come to the place of rest, and peace, and satisfaction, because they have narcotized brain and personality. And this of course is the debasing of humanity, and for this reason drunkards are going to have to be in the Lake of Fire. And we have recognized that when He says, "Be not drunk with wine," He is simply saying that this is but a childish escape, a means whereby one can avoid the fact that they are not what they ought to be, and they are not willing to become what they can. And so they will use this means.

But drunkenness unfortunately is not limited to alcohol. There are other means of drunkenness and escaping from life. I think we could write this and say, Be not drunk with worry, be not drunk with despair, be not drunk with discouragement for this too is a narcotizing of the human spirit. There are some who escape from the joy of the present and the blessing of the present by sinking beneath the wave of despair. And they feed upon despair, and they feed upon worry the same way that someone may feed upon opium or feed upon morphine. They feed upon it because it is become a habit of the heart, and it is easier just to worry than it is to make adjustments to life that are going to enable one to face it joyously and courageously. And so if anyone feeds upon worry or feeds upon despair, or feeds upon discouragement, he is equally, equally narcotizing the spirit, and escaping from life, because life is not that bad. It is a diversion of powers, and it is a perversion of powers, for one to live constantly under the narcotic of worry. Worry is said to be interest that is paid upon trouble that is not going to come, and it is not due.

Someone said on a little card that he hung up in his study, a pastor, he said, "Oh, why pray when you can worry." Well this seems to be a disease of the human mind and of the human spirit, and one to which all of us are prone and subject. And if you have retreated into worry, if you have retreated into despair, then you have escaped from life and responsibility equal with the drunkard. Different. You won't stagger as far as your walk is concerned, but I assure you of this, You are poisoning your spirit with every day, and you are poisoning your body, because it is a kind of hate, a hate of others, and a hate of self that becomes an actual poison in the human personality, and it is as damaging in some respects as is wine or alcohol. Be not drunk with bitterness, we might change this. Oh, how easy it is for our spirits to become bitter, how easy it is for a person to bite off a chunk of memory of the past, how often you will find people that have had some experience in the past, and instead of meeting it and letting it go as part of the fabric of their life, they constantly carry it with them. AND SO in order to become properly bitter in the morning they bit off about ten minutes of conversation about this, and they chew it over as a way down in India they will take a cocoa leaf, and a little bit of lime or whatever it is, a Betel nut, and chew it for the effect that it gives, and in other places they will do other things. So they will chew over in conversation some experience in the past, sort of nourishing the human spirit so that they can work up a good fever of bitterness. It has become the means by which they have escaped the joy and pleasure, and beauty of the day. And this is tragic. This is tragic to personality, and tragic to physical health, and to testimony. Be not drunk with bitterness.

Then of course we could add to this and say, Be not drunk with anger. It is said that anger will release into the human body enough poison, actual poison, that if it were... a good mad, a good anger will so fill your body with poison that if it could be distilled and was not diluted, and were injected—as someone said, One good angry spell, one good fit of anger fills the human body with enough poison that a half a dozen dogs could be killed with it if it were directly injected into their nervous system.

And so your body has to assimilate that. You have to get rid of it. Be not drunk with anger. Be not drunk with bitterness. Be not drunk with worry. Be not drunk with ambition.

“Godliness with contentment is great gain” (I Tim. 6:6). We see so often that if we can just get this and get that—My heart has been moved as I have in the past months become acquainted with the Amish people down in Pennsylvania. I do not suggest we all convert to the Amish way of life. But I want you to know dear friends that to have a piece of ground and from it get an apple for your sauce and for your apple butter, and a cow for milk and butter, and ground to grow your vegetables, Well after all what beyond is there? Why have we gotten into this mad race that says that happiness is going to come from the accumulation of position, or possessions, or something else? And if we can come to the place where we are not drunk with ambition...

We need to see that there is no position that is going to make you happier than you now have. You say, Are you destroying the great American quality of ambition? No, I am not. I am simply saying that as Christians we have got to become anti-American in a wholesome, Christian sense; that is, we have got to resist the spirit of the day and the age and represent something better. And therefore I think that it is for your interest that you be not drunk with ambition.

You know, I saw in a restaurant years ago when I was a pastor in Minnesota a little sign behind the counter, Work hard 8 hours a day so you can get to be boss; then work 12 hours a day. And this I suppose summarizes a great deal. I do not mean to be cynical, but I am simply trying to say that if your life is lived in the end of achieving some new goal, the achievement of the goal will be but a hollow victory and it will carry with it very little.

Now we have said enough about what we should not be. Let us see what we ought to be, because this is more important. And I will be accused of being negative, and I am not negative. I want to be positive, but I want you to see what it isn't so you will know that it is. It says, “Be filled with the Spirit” (Act. 9:17). And He is saying, “Be filled with God,” be intoxicated with God, implying that God is willing to condescend to so relate Himself to you that He will be the answer to your desire to escape from the unpleasant, and you won't need wine. And you will be the answer to the bitter experiences of your life, and you won't need bitterness. He will be the answer to the future, and you won't need worry. He will be the answer to the unhappiness, and you won't need anger. He will be the answer to the future, and you won't need ambition. And He is going to then put you in a relationship with Himself for you are available for any responsibility He gives. But your satisfaction is in Him. “Be filled with the Spirit.”

This is the deepest insight into human need. You are made for God, and to know Him less than on this level of fullness of the Spirit of God is to doom these months from Thanksgiving, 1962, to a year from now to emptiness to a large measure. You can know the fullness of the Spirit. You ought to know the fullness of the Spirit. For nature abhors a vacuum, and if you are not filled with the fullness of God you are probably going to be filled with worry. Oh, you are going to be filled with bitterness. Oh, you are going to be filled with anger. Or, you are going to be filled with ambition. That empty space in your spirit that is made for God will if denied Him settle on something else as a substitute. But you are hurting yourself and everybody else when you allow it. Be filled with the Spirit.

You can be, and you ought to be, and He is waiting and longing for you to be. What is going to be the outflow of this? Well, you will see a whole new dimension of life now begins to burst in upon you. Notice that from within there is going to be a fountain bursting. The fullness of the Spirit is going to so complete you inwardly, and so complete you in relation to God, so made you whole and satisfied, that now there is going to be an effect. There is going to be an overflow, there is going to be an alluvion that will just — the steam that comes from the boiling water, because the water has been filled with fire. There is this, and so when you are filled with the Spirit of God there is going to be an outflow, there is going to be an effect.

What is it? Speaking to yourselves in Psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs. Isn't it wonderful. Here you are going to have a whole congregation to listen to you preach. You haven't had one in the pulpit? All right. So he said, Speak to yourself. Speak to yourself in Psalms. Speak to yourself in hymns. And speak to yourself in spiritual songs. Now just one thing. Don't get carried away and take one of these red books home with you. Please not. There are some wonderful hymns in that. We have a blue one for you if you need it, but do not take the red ones.

But the point we are trying to get you to see is this, that knowing Him has released in your heart that for which your neighbors and friends are looking. You say, Well I am saved, I am going to go to heaven, but I don't know how I am going to get through next week. And the people that hear your testimony about Heaven are so appalled by your lack of confidence for next week, and the inadequacy of God to complete you, and fulfill you, that as you worry about next week; you completely dissuaded them that there is any meaning in Christ for eternity. And so when you come to the place that He fills your heart today, and tomorrow, and all the next week, as He allows, and from you because you built yourself up, speaking to yourself in Psalms, and hymns and spiritual melodies, spiritual songs, singing, making melody in your heart to the Lord.

You say, Well if we just had that house paid for then I could sing. No, you would find something so that you did not have to sing then. You say, Well if I could just get a new suit of clothes I would not mind singing. No, you would be just as you are; the clothes, the house, whatever it is is not going to change you until you take yourself by the nap of the neck, shake yourself up the way David did when he said, "Bless the Lord, O my soul." Get busy, you sluggardly thing you. Here you are, sitting in all the blessings God has given and content it. You see, blessing the Lord is not saying, Bless the Lord. When he said, "Bless the Lord, O my soul," this is self-discipline (Psa. 103:1). He is shaking himself up. He is shaking his finger in his own face. And he is saying here, God has forgiven all your iniquities, here God has healed all your diseases, here God has supplied all your needs, and you are sitting there moaning because Saul is shaking a spear at you. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His Holy Name."

And this of course is the outflow of a relationship with God, knowing who He is, and knowing how you are related to Him. And so we find that there is to be this relationship to the Spirit of God, that is going to have its effect in your ... You say, Well if I am filled with the Spirit, does this automatically follow? No. It does not automatically follow, because you are not an automaton. It is possible, but it does not automatically follow. Nothing automatically follows except tomorrow, following today. But what happens tomorrow is going to determine about what you do with it, and God has by relating you to the Holy Spirit given you the privilege of making tomorrow a glorious day, for if you will speak to yourself from Psalms and hymns, and spiritual psalms He will cause it to become true in your heart and life.

But this is to not only to nourish and strengthen you. This is not only praise released. But then notice something else. And here is the Thanksgiving application. Giving thanks always for all things unto the God and the Father, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Isn't that wonderful? I told you, didn't I, the time that I was speaking about I Thessalonians 5:18, "In everything give thanks." And the dear lady that came to me and said, Brother, aren't you glad that He said, In everything, and not, For everything? It sounded good, because I was a little defeated too at the time, sort of whistling past the cemetery of my need. So I seized on that because it allowed me to stay where I was. The next time I was speaking I said, Well the Lord said, In everything, and He did not say, For everything, and a dear brother came to me after the service and said, Brother it has been a long time since you have read Ephesians 5:20, Isn't it? Oh, I said, Not so long. It didn't make much impression on you when you read it, or you wouldn't have said what you said today. Well what did I say? You said, It said, In everything. Thank God it didn't say, For everything. If you had read Ephesians 5:20, you would not have said that. I said, Thank you, Brother, and I went ahead, and around the corner and I looked it up, and oh how chagrined I was, because here it says, "Giving thanks always for all things.."

Well you see God set His love upon you. Nothing can touch you but what we allow it. And if you are prepared to recognize that the secret of a joyous, fruitful, happy Christian life is filled with the Spirit, and filled with the fullness of God, then you are going to recognize that God whom you come to know through Psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, that this God is on the throne, and nothing can touch you but what He allows it. And so the secret of Thanksgiving is giving thanks for all things.

Now would you sanctify the past 12 months? You want to know how? I know that they have been filled with grief, and heartache, and need and burden. I know that. I know that we have passed through deep waters, and great need. But let us come to the day tomorrow, shall we, let's come to tomorrow with an entirely new, fresh, joyous possibility in our Christian life. Do you know how? Let's go back through the past 12 months and beyond that, the past of our lives, and gather it all up, and say, Thank you, Father, for this. And thank you for that. And thank you for allowing this to happen. You say, I do not feel like it. I know you do not. Do not do it because you feel like it. Do it because He told you to do it. Do it out of obedience. And when you do it out of obedience, He will make you feel like it. Let's just obey God by bringing all the past, it's failures, even it's sin, its

heartache, its grief, Let's bring it all up, shall we, and gather it up and say, Thank you, Father. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you for this, and thank you for that. And get it all there.

And do you know what will happen? You can begin today, the balance of it, and tomorrow, unencumbered by the load, and the weight, and the pressure, and the burden of the past. Perhaps I speak to someone who has lived without Christ. If you will just come to Him and bring your past with all of its guilt and its uncleanness to the cross, God for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ, who loved you and died for you, and shed His Blood for you will wash away that past, and you can begin again, unencumbered by the sin and guilt and failure of yesterday. There is pardon, there is cleansing, there is forgiveness, dear burdened friend. Come to Him.

Christian, Christian, child of God, carrying the weight of worry and bitterness, and vanity and ambition, and anger, let us bring all the past, lay it at His nail pierced feet, and say, Thank you, Father. Thank you. Thank you. And watch the sanctifying grace of God just lift the burden of the past and allow us to begin tomorrow on this level of joy and blessing that is to be our heritage in Christ. Awake thou that sleepest. Do not just go through the next day, and week, and month, and year, governed and controlled by yesterday. Redeem the time. Buy up the opportunity. Walk wisely toward God. Allow Him to fill you with His Spirit, and let your life take on the radiance of His presence, singing, making melody in your heart to the Lord, gathering up all the past, failure, and grief, and heartache, and leaving it there, thanking Him, because somehow in His grace He has used it all to make you what you are now, and He will use it all to make you what you ought to be tomorrow.

This is Thanksgiving. When we take the past and bring it all and put it at His feet and say, Thank you, Father. Then the burden is lifted, the cords are cut, the grief is erased, the tears are gone, and tomorrow is ours and His, because we are His and He is ours.

Let us pray together. Our Father, our neighbors and friends, and those who walk with us, those who know we are Christians, deserve usually so much more of a testimony to faithfulness and effectiveness of Christ than we have given them and Him. And it has been so often, Father, because we have carried yesterday into today, and we have been burdened by it. Grant that the Word shall be to our hearts and we will awake from the sleep of just existing. We will buy up the opportunity and redeem the time, and walk wisely to the end that is before us, the end of a joyous relationship with Thee, filled with Thy Spirit, the end of praise rising because we have learned who Thou art, of thanksgiving because it touches all in our lives, submitting ourselves then one to another in the fear of Thyself, sharing the faithfulness of our God. Give to us, Lord, this that when we meet together in fellowship we have something to share. Grant, Lord, that this Thanksgiving shall be sanctified in its effect, all the past, the failure and need is brought to Him who allowed that past and brought us through it and into this present. Show us our Lord Jesus, His nail pierced hands, and nail torn feet, but now those hands holding the rod of power with all authority in heaven and earth given unto Him. Might we worship Him, and serve Him, and adore Him, as He deserves. For His name's sake. Amen.

Let us stand for the benediction. Now may the love of God, the Father, and the communion and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be and abide with all of us, each of us, now and until we meet at His feet. Amen.

* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Morning, November 18, 1962 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.

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