

There once was a boy who had been taught the truth of God by his mother, but his father was a pagan, an unbeliever. The boy grew up knowing what his mother was teaching him, but his indifference to his mother's Bible stories grew with his age, and the mischief inside him began to take control. There was one particular time where he and his friends were playing their games outside late into the evening, just so that when it was late, they could sneak into their neighbor's orchard to steal some of the pears from the trees.

You can just see the band of little hooligans running around the orchard gathering up the pears. And what did they do with them? They took one bite of each of them and threw them to the pigs. It wasn't hunger they were stealing for, nor was it because those pears were better than the ones they had in their own kitchens. They were stealing for the mischief of it, for joy of the offense itself, which the "company of fellow-sinners occasioned." Years later, he commented that it was the "*sport of it, which tickled our hearts.*"¹ Some might say, "Just kids being kids," but years later he looked back with regret on the evil he had committed.

Not too long after this incident, he became old enough to go off on his own. And off he went, off to school away from home, away from his mother and her teaching, away from God and his word. He went to make something of himself, he went off to "become a man" and to garner for himself both prestige and pleasure. He went off to "*love and be loved,*" or so he thought, only later to realize that "*I could not discern the clear brightness of love from the fog of lustfulness.*"²

For years he lived in this fog of lustfulness, treating himself to the pleasures he thought he was in love with. He fell in love, as he thought, and soon he had fathered a child with a woman he never took to be his wife. He was fascinated with the wisdom and rhetoric of the world and soon he was engulfed in what today might be called a cult. But in his wandering, he never found what he was looking for, to truly "love and be loved" In fact he found himself far from it. As he later looked back on this time in his life, he recognized what had happened, "*I sank away from Thee, and I wandered, O my God, too much astray from Thee my stay, in these days of my youth, and I became to myself a barren land.*"³

Eventually he wandered so far that he began to wander back somewhere familiar from long ago, through the doors of a church, where he began to listen again to the preaching that took place there. Where the Word of God met him in his sin, the struggle of his soul intensified until finally one night it all came to its pinnacle. He recalled that night, "*When a deep consideration had from the secret bottom of my soul drawn together and heaped up all my misery in the sight of my heart; there arose a mighty storm, bringing a might shower of tears.*"⁴ His conscience was killing him, literally ripping his soul apart. He left the company of his friend, and he went off to be completely alone with himself. In his solitude, he remembered crying out to God, "**How long, O Lord! How long, Lord, will you be angry, forever? Remember not our former iniquities,**" words from Psalm 79.

And in his vulnerable state, he began to hear the voice of a child chanting, "*Take up and read! Take up and read!*" Confused as he was, because there was no one around, and no reason for any child to be singing such a thing in a game, he obeyed the command, and he took up his Bible to read. The first thing he opened to and read are the words of our sermon text today, "**The**

¹ The Confessions of St. Augustine. The Christian Library. 1984. P.30

² Confessions, 22

³ Confessions, 30

⁴ Confessions, 135

hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.¹² The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.¹³ Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.¹⁴ Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh. (Romans 13:11-14 NIV 11).

After doing so, he remarked, “No further would I read; nor needed I: for instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away.”⁵ These words brought him to repentance. They brought back his heart and soul from years of wandering and wondering, and they fixed his eyes once again on Christ, the Savior his mother had taught him about as a boy. Who was this lost little boy whom the Lord brought back to repentance as a young man? His name was Augustine and he lived in the fourth and fifth century AD. Years later, after being baptized and thoroughly instructed he became a priest in the church. Today he’s known as one of the most prominent of the early Church Fathers and his teaching of grace had a large impact on an Augustinian Monk about 11 centuries later named Martin Luther.

The account of his life we’ve been hearing comes from his autobiography, *Confessions*. You may remember Augustine best by perhaps his most famous quotation, one that us pastors like to use quite often. “*You have made us for yourself, Oh Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.*”⁶

Now why bother to tell you all this about Augustine today? Because the words from Romans 13 that woke him up from his spiritual slumber and compelled him to repentance are the same words that need to go off like an alarm clock in our lives and tell us: it’s time to wake up and get dressed! “**The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber!**” (Romans 13: 11). Salvation is even nearer now. The end is coming and you need to be watching for it. Deer hunters, maybe you learned again how impossible it is to get a deer while you’re still under the cozy covers in bed! No! When “**the night is nearly over; and the day is almost here,**” (13:12) you need to wake up and get out there and be ready and watching because you never know when it’s going to come. It’s the same with the Day of our Salvation. Jesus says that the end will come when you don’t expect it, like a thief!

So what do we need to do to be ready? Paul says, “**Let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.**” (13:12) We need to change our clothes so we’re not wearing yesterday’s dirty laundry again today. We take off those deeds of darkness, all those sins that we love to fall into under the cover of night. The Apostle Paul tells us in another place what happens in the darkness and what happens at night. “**For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night.**” (1 Thess. 5:7) And with the night comes the host of other vices, “**excessive feasting and drunkenness,**” which greases the wheels for “**sexual immorality and debauchery,**” the giving in and satisfying of sinful sexual desires, all of which leads to “**dissension and jealousy.**” Wild living and sin don’t lead to peace and happiness, it leads to people getting hurt and jealousy.

But “**you are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.**” 1 Thess. 5:5). So “**let us put on the armor of light. Let us**

⁵ Confessions, 136

⁶ Confessions

behave decently , as in the daytime.” (Romans 13:13) Not in all those wild deeds of darkness that our sinful natures long for. **“Do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.”** **(13:14)** Those things lead us away from God. They put us into a drunken spiritual slumber, and if we’re still asleep at the hour Jesus returns, when we least expect it, that spiritual slumber will result in spiritual and eternal death forever, and there will be no changing it, no second chances, no excuses about how we set our alarm for PM instead of AM. It will be over, just like happened to all the wicked in the days of Noah and the flood.

You know the sins your prone to most, the ones that have the wool pulled over your eyes, the one that has you stuck. Now is the time for you wake up from your slumber and put new clothes on. Strip off the filthy ones from the day before by confessing your sins to God and to the people you sinned against. Maybe that’s your spouse, or your parents, or your boss, or your pastor. Come out of the darkness! **“Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.”** **(John 3:20,21)** This is the hardest and most necessary place for us to be in our entire lives.

Standing there in the light, exposed before God, he does not leave you out in the cold to die. Instead, he gives you new clothes to put on. Paul says, **“Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.”** You get to put on Christ himself like a garment, with all of his perfection and holiness, and it becomes your own. And do you know what you yourself have as the most wonderful assurance that this has truly taken place, that you are wearing these clothes? Your baptism, where the water and the word touched your body, where Christ washed away your sin, and made you his own child, a child of the light. **“For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”** **(Galatians 3:27).**

When God looks at you now, he’s not angry anymore, like Augustine expected. He doesn’t see the sins of your youth and your rebellious ways, nor does he even remember them. He sees you, his child, perfect and holy, dressed and waiting, ready for him to return. Every day, it’s time to wake up and get dressed, to clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and the armor of light, daily dying and rising in your baptism for the rest of your life. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

“Now, wake up, O Sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” Ephesians 5:14.