

Are You Asleep?

by

J. C. Ryle
(1816-1900)

"Awake thou that sleepest."-Eph. 5:14

I put before you now a simple question. Look through the pages of this paper and you will soon see why I ask it. *"Are you asleep about your soul?"*

There are many who have the name of Christians, but not the character which should go with the name. God is not King of their hearts. They mind earthly things.

Such persons are often quick and clever about the affairs of this life. They are, many of them, good men of business, good at their daily work, good masters, good servants, good neighbors, good subjects of the Queen: all this I fully allow. But it is the eternal part of them that I speak of; it is their never dying souls. And about that, if a man may judge by the little they do for it, they are careless, thoughtless, reckless, and unconcerned. *They are asleep.*

I do not say that God and salvation are subjects that never come across their minds: but this I say,—they have not the uppermost place there. Neither do I say that they are all alike in their lives; some of them doubtless go further in sin than others: but this I say,—they have all turned every one to his own way, and that way is not God's. I know no rule by which to judge of a man's estate but the Bible. Now when I look at the Bible I can come to only one conclusion about these people: *they are asleep about their souls.*

These people *do not see the sinfulness of sin, and their own lost condition by nature.* They appear to make light of breaking God's commandments, and to care little whether they live according to His law or not. Yet God says that sin is the transgression of the law,—that His commandment is exceeding broad,—that every imagination of the natural heart is evil,—that sin is the thing He cannot bear, He hates it,—that the wages of sin is death, and the soul that sinneth shall die. Surely *they are asleep.*

Is this the state of your soul? Remember my question. ARE YOU ASLEEP?

These people *do not see their need of a Saviour.* They appear to think it an easy matter to get to heaven, and that God will of course be merciful to them at last, some way or other, though they do not exactly know how. Yet God says that He is just and holy, and never changes,—that Christ is the only way, and none can come unto the Father but by Him,—that without His blood there can be no forgiveness of sin,—that a man without Christ is a man without hope,—that those who would be saved must believe on Jesus and come to Him, and that he who believeth not shall he damned. Surely *they are asleep!*

Once more I say, is this the state of your soul? Remember my question. ARE YOU ASLEEP?

These people *do not see the necessity of holiness*. They appear to think it quite enough to go on as others do, and live like their neighbors. And as for praying and Bible-reading, making conscience of words and actions, studying truthfulness and gentleness, humility and charity, and keeping separate from the world, they are things they do not seem to value at all. Yet God says that without holiness no man shall see the Lord,—that there shall enter into heaven nothing that defileth,—that His people must be a peculiar people, zealous of good works. Surely *they are asleep!*

Once more I say, is this the state of your soul? Remember my question. ARE You ASLEEP?

Worst of all, these people *do not appear to feel their danger*. They walk on with their eyes shut, and seem not to know that the end of their path is hell. Some dreamers fancy that they are rich when they are poor, or full when they are hungry, or well when they are sick, and awake to find it all a mistake. And this is the way that many dream about their souls. They flatter themselves they will have peace, and there will be no peace; they fancy that they are all right, and in truth they will find that they are all wrong. Surely *they are asleep!*

Once more I say, is this the state of your soul? Remember my question. ARE You ASLEEP?

—If conscience pricks you, and tells you you are yet asleep, what can I say to arouse you? Your soul is in awful peril. Without a mighty change it will be lost. When shall that change once be?

You are dying, and not ready to depart,—you are going to be judged, and not prepared to meet God,—your sins are not forgiven,—your person is not justified,—your heart is not renewed. Heaven itself would be no happiness to you if you got there, for the Lord of heaven is not your friend: what pleases Him does not please you; what He dislikes gives you no pain. His word is not your counsellor; His day is not your delight; His law is not your guide. You care little for hearing of Him: you know nothing of speaking with Him. To be forever in His company would be a thing you could not endure; and the society of saints and angels would be a weariness, and not a joy. At the rate you live at, the Bible might never have been written, and Christ might never have died, the Apostles were foolish, the New Testament Christians madmen, and the salvation of the Gospel a needless thing. Oh, awake! and sleep no more.

Think not to say *you cannot believe your case is so bad, or the danger so great, or God so particular*. I answer,—the devil has been putting this lying delusion into people's hearts for nearly six thousand years. It has been his grand snare ever since the day he said to Eve, "Ye shall not surely die." Do not be so weak as to be taken in by it. God never failed yet to punish sin, and He never will: He never failed to make His word good, and you will find this to your cost, one day, except you repent. Reader, awake: awake!

Think not to say *you are a member of Christ's Church, and therefore feel no doubt you are as good a Christian as others*. I answer,—this will only make your case worse, if you have nothing else to plead. You may be written down and registered among God's people: you may be reckoned in the number of saints; you may sit for years under the sound of the Gospel; you may use holy forms and even come to the Lord's table at regular seasons; and still, with all this, unless sin be hateful, and Christ precious, and your heart a temple of the Holy Ghost, you will prove in the end no better than a lost soul. A holy calling will never save an unholy man. Reader, awake: awake!

Think not to say *you have been baptized, and so feel confident you are born of God, and have His grace within you*. I answer,—you have none of the marks which St. John has told me, in his first epistle, distinguish such a person. I do not see you confessing that Jesus is the Christ,

overcoming the world,—not committing sin,—loving your brother,—doing righteousness,—keeping yourself from the wicked one. How then can I believe that you are born of God? If God were your Father, you would love Christ: if you were God's son, you would be led by His Spirit. I want stronger evidences. Show me some repentance and faith; show me a life hid with Christ in God; show me a spiritual and sanctified conversation: these are the fruits I want to see, if I am to believe you have the root of the matter in you, and are a living branch of the true vine. But without these your baptism will only add to your condemnation. Reader, awake: awake!

I speak strongly, because I feel deeply. Time is too short, life is too uncertain, to allow of standing on ceremony. At the risk of offending, I use great plainness of speech. I cannot bear the thought of hearing you condemned in the great day of assize; of seeing your face in the crowd on God's left hand, among those who are helpless, hopeless, and beyond the reach of mercy. I cannot bear such thoughts,—they grieve me to the heart. Before the day of grace is past, and the day of vengeance begins, I call upon you to open your eyes and repent. Oh, consider your ways and be wise. Awake: awake! Why will ye die?

This day, as the ambassador of Christ, I pray you to be reconciled to God. The Lord Jesus who came into the world to save sinners,—Jesus the appointed Mediator between God and man,—Jesus who loved us and gave Himself for us,—Jesus sends you a message of peace: He says, "Come unto Me."

"Come is a precious word indeed, and ought to draw you. You have sinned against heaven: heaven has not sinned against you. Yet see how the first step towards peace is on heaven's side. It is the Lord's message: "Come unto Me."

"Come" is a word of *merciful invitation*. Does not the Lord Jesus seem to say, "Sinner, I am waiting for you: I am not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth. I would have all men saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Judgment is my strange work,—I delight in mercy. I offer the water of life to every one who will take it. I stand at the door of your heart and knock. For long time I have spread out my hands to you. I wait to be gracious. There is yet room in my Father's house. My long-suffering waits for more of the children of men to come to the mercy-seat before the last trumpet is blown,—for more wanderers to return before the door is closed for ever. Oh, sinner, come to Me!"

"Come" is a word of *promise and encouragement*. Does not the Lord Jesus seem to say, "Sinner, I have gifts ready for you: I have something of everlasting importance to bestow upon your soul. I have received gifts for men, even for the rebellious. I have a free pardon for the most ungodly,—a full fountain for the most unclean,—a white garment for the most defiled,—a new heart for the most hardened,—healing for the broken-hearted,—rest for the heavy-laden, joy for those that mourn. Oh, sinner, it is not for nothing that I invite you! All things are ready. Come: come unto Me."

Hear the voice of the Son of God. See that you refuse not Him that speaketh. Come away from sin, which can never give you real pleasure, and will be bitter at the last; come out from a world which will never satisfy you: come unto Christ! Come, with all your sins, however many and however great,—however far you may have gone from God, and however provoking your conduct may have been. Come as you are: unfit, unmeet, unprepared as you may think yourself,—you will gain no fitness by delay. Come at once: come to the Lord Jesus Christ!

How indeed shall you escape if you neglect so great salvation? Where will you appear if you make light of the blood of Christ, and do despite to the Spirit of grace? It is a fearful thing to fall

into the hands of the living God, but never so fearful as when men fall from under the Gospel. The saddest road to hell is that which runs under the pulpit, past the Bible, and through the midst of warnings and invitations. Oh, beware, lest like Israel at Kadesh, you mourn over your mistake when it is too late; or, like Judas Iscariot, find out your sin when there is no space for repentance.

Arise, and call upon the Lord. Be not like Esau: sell not eternal blessings for the things of today. Surely the time past may suffice you to have been careless and prayerless, Godless and Christless, worldly and earthly-minded. Surely the time to come may be given to your soul.

Pray, I beseech you, that you may be enabled to put off the old ways and the old habits, and that you may become a new man. I yield to none in wishes for your happiness, and my best wish is that you may be made a new creature in Christ Jesus. This is a better thing than riches, or health, or honour, or learning. A man may get to heaven without these, but he cannot get there without conversion. Verily if you die without having been born again you had far better never have been born at all. No man really lives till he lives unto God.

I leave my question with you. The Lord grant that it may prove a word in season to your soul. My heart's desire and prayer to God is that you may be saved. Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. Arise, O sleeper and call upon God. There is yet hope. Forsake not thy mercies. Do not lose thine own soul.

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