

## **PUT ON CHRIST NOT A CROSS!**

**Today's Text: Romans 13: 8- 14**

### **Extracts:**

**And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts [Rom. 13: 11-14]**

*In late April 2012, a group of Buddhist monks reportedly gathered behind closed doors at a luxury hotel after attending a fellow monk's memorial service.<sup>1</sup> Unknown to them, there was a hidden camera in that hotel. On Wednesday, 9 May 2012, South Korean TV networks aired shots of eight monks playing poker, smoking and drinking, during that April gathering. The scandal broke just days before Koreans observe a national holiday to celebrate the birth of Buddha, the holiest day of their religious calendar and it has led to the resignation of six leaders of Jogye,<sup>2</sup> the Buddhist order to which belongs a fifth of the country's population.*

*Buddhist monks practise an austere life style. Their followers respect and trust them as true role models in piety and holy living. The image now haunting Korean Buddhists was of a group of monks gambling, drinking and smoking behind closed doors! What they put on outside has been betrayed by what the people have now seen of them in secret.*

*Many followers of Christ are in a similar situation. In public, you can see them in flowing robes and heavy crosses on their necks. They may pray well and speak in tongues with relish. They may have very large congregations. But are they true followers of Christ? Have they put on Christ or just a cross, a mere symbol of His crucifixion? In this week's Bible verses, Paul is reminding us that salvation is nearer than when we first believed; that the time has come to put on Christ. Are you ready to do that right now? Are you ready to put on Christ, not just a mere cross? Let us find out where you stand from this week's challenging study.*

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<sup>1</sup> Based on "Hell-raising holy men: Secret video shows Buddhist monks gambling, drinking," msnbc.com staff and news services, <http://worldnews.msnbc.msn.com/news/2012/05/11/11655944-hell-raising-holy-men-secret-video-shows-buddhist-monks-gambling-drinking> ; 11 May 2012

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.koreanbuddhism.net/jokb/content\\_list.asp?cat\\_seq=27](http://www.koreanbuddhism.net/jokb/content_list.asp?cat_seq=27)

## 1. Background: Christ is more than a mere cross!

In a recent study by Professor Chen-Bo Zhong and his colleagues at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management, they found that people are more likely to cheat if no one can see them.<sup>3</sup> In several experiments that put groups of subjects under dim versus bright lights or shaded versus clear eye glasses, the findings suggest that dim light makes people dishonest compared to people under the glare of bright lights. They see themselves as not seen by others. Such conduct can occur in a crowd (anonymity of the crowd) or office behaviour, such as communicating with others by e-mail. This confirms what we can observe around us. For example, when law enforcement officers are looking for suspects, they go to dark corners of the city, such as brothels, bars and slums. They hardly go to the city centre where the lights are bright and there is nowhere to hide!

What the researchers are saying is not new at all. Over two thousand years ago, Jesus told a ruler of the Jews, Nicodemus, who had come to see Him by night, "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For *everyone practising evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed*" [Jn 3: 19-20]. The interesting thing, though, is that people who know that they do dirty things in secret come out in the open to portray themselves as holy and righteous. For whose sake do you think they are doing that? Certainly, it cannot be for God's sake "for the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD; and He ponders all his paths" [Prov. 5:21]. Therefore, *the time for pretence or hypocrisy is over! That is Paul's point in the Bible verses that we shall examine presently.*

Writing to believers in Rome, Paul says quite bluntly, "And do this, knowing the time, that now *it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.* The night is far spent, the day is at hand. *Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light*" [Rom. 13: 11-12]. Only those who know their day of death can take such a message lightly. Unfortunately, most of us do not. That is why we need to wake up and do exactly what Paul has asked all true believers to do.

Jesus has said, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" [Jn 8: 12]. Here are some of the things that people do in the dark, according to Paul [Rom. 13: 13]:

### a) *They indulge in revelry and drunkenness*

People always have one thing or the other to celebrate. For example, it could be a wedding or the birth of a new baby. It could be a new job or a promotion. It could be the funeral of an aged parent. In Nigeria, for

<sup>3</sup> "Dim light makes people dishonest, study finds," *LiveScience*, Mon., March 1, 2010; [www.livescience.com/10955-darkness-begets-dishonesty-study-finds.html](http://www.livescience.com/10955-darkness-begets-dishonesty-study-finds.html)

example, newspaper advertisements can give you an idea of the popular celebrations at a particular point in time. Soon after an election, potential contractors are already taking out full-page advertisements to congratulate winners!

Ordinarily, there is nothing wrong with celebrating success. Unfortunately, we tend to do it *to excess*. Then it turns into revelry and drunkenness that in turn invite temptation and sin. Look at what happened to the children of Israel in the wilderness when Moses delayed coming down from the mountain where he had gone to receive the Ten Commandments from God. They forced Aaron to make them gods that should go before them. He made them the gold calf as the god that had brought them out of Egypt. He did not stop there. He built an altar before it and said to the people, "Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD." The following day, the people "rose early [and] sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." Up in the mountain, God told Moses to hurry down because the people that he had brought from Egypt had "corrupted themselves" [Ex. 32: 1-7].

When you spend God's blessings on food and drinks and partying to impress your family and neighbours that you "have arrived," without giving the glory to God, you are indulging in revelry and drunkenness. Sooner than later, you may cross the point of moderation and make God regret ever granting the favours. Be careful!

*b) They love lewdness and lusts*

Unfortunately, when some people want to impress others about their new wealth or self-importance, they indulge in lewdness (filthy conduct) and lusts (strong unhealthy sexual desires). Fornication and adultery become thrillers instead of (spiritual) killers. Some people multiply spouses or get involved in sexual perversity, forgetting that their bodies are supposed to be temples of the Holy Spirit [1 Cor. 3:16-17]. Of the idolatrous conditions in Jerusalem just before the captivity into exile in Babylon, God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "I have seen your adulteries and your lustful neighing, the lewdness of your harlotry, your abominations on the hills in the fields. Woe to you, O Jerusalem!" [Jer. 13: 27]. **Therefore, lewdness and lusts represent unfaithfulness to God.**

Take the example of King Solomon that God had blessed with wisdom and exceeding material wealth "but [he] loved many foreign women ... from the nations of whom the LORD had said to the children of Israel, 'You shall not intermarry with them [lest] they will turn away your hearts after their gods.'" In the end, Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines who turned his heart away from God [1 Kgs 11: 1-3].

You may not have gone that “ballistic” but examine the lust in your heart. When you entertain lustful thoughts in your heart or secretly visit pornographic web sites or indulge in masturbation, etc, you are deeply involved in lewdness and lusts. You need to purge your heart before it purges God out of you!

c) *They practise strife and envy*

Some people are simply contentious and you cannot understand why. They particularly hate those who are better than they can ever be. They will never appreciate other people’s achievements and will try at every stage to put them down. When you scratch beneath the surface, you can easily see that they are green with envy.

Take Nehemiah’s experience after he had presented his credentials from King Artaxerxes to the governors in Judah, authorizing him to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Two officials, Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite “were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel” [**Neh. 2: 1-10**]. Thereafter, they did everything to make the project fail. We are also familiar with the running battle between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders during His earthly ministry. By the time they framed Him up with false accusations, to the point of preferring a criminal like Barabbas to Him, even the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate “knew that they had handed [Jesus] over because of envy” [**Matt. 27: 18**]. Therefore, once you sense that you enjoy other people’s failures but are saddened by the achievements of your perceived rivals, you are suffering from envy, which is a form of bone cancer [**Prov. 14: 30**].

From the foregoing, we can conclude that *the hood does not make the monk*. Those who live in iniquity cannot thereby strengthen themselves [**Ezek. 7: 13**]. Therefore, like blind Bartimaeus, you may need to cast off that outer garment (of hypocrisy) and step forward to Jesus and ask, “That I may receive my sight” [**Mk 10: 46-52**].

## 2. What it takes for you to put on Christ

Paul gives us clear guidelines on what it means to put on Christ, and they are as follows:

a) *Love your neighbour*

Paul writes, “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments ... are all summed up in this saying, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’” [**Rom. 13: 8-9**]. Your neighbour may be more than family,

friend or colleague. In fact, *your neighbour is somebody you hardly know or could even be your worst enemy!* Can you love your wicked neighbour? Well, to put on Christ, you have to!

Take the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The Jews looked down on the Samaritans and did not want to have anything to do with them [**Jn 4: 9**]. When a Jewish man was attacked and injured by robbers on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho, his fellow Jews- a priest and a Levite- passed by and left him to die. But it was a despised Samaritan, an enemy, that saved that Jewish man's life [**Lk 10: 30-37**]. The lesson of that story is that *the person you may perceive to be your enemy may actually be God's instrument for granting your heart's desires*. For example, what if God has a better place for you elsewhere and uses your current "wicked" boss to push you out? Why do you think you are not the offender by your continuous success that is evincing envy all around you? *That is why Jesus has taught us that to forgive is a matter of faith and duty for which you should not expect "Thank you!"* [**Lk 17: 1-10**]. For example, who has ever sent you a commendation note for paying your taxes promptly or for obeying traffic rules? But refuse to perform such unpleasant duties and the law will be after you!

b) *Cast off works of darkness*

According to an African proverb, an old man who falls from a pear tree should expect no sympathy because that is a chore for youths. In like manner, there are certain things that we no longer expect from seasoned believers. We no longer expect them, for example, to walk in the counsel of the ungodly, or to stand in the path of sinners, or to sit in the seat of the scornful. Instead, we would love to see them take delight in the law of the Lord and meditate on it night and day. That way, they would be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, bearing abundant fruits in its season, and whatever they do would prosper [**Ps. 1: 1-3**].

Look at the vitality of the early church. We are told, "All who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord... they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" [**Acts 2: 44-47**]. Look at the church at Antioch where believers were first called Christians. It was marked by humility, faith and charity, nurtured by and in the presence of the Holy Spirit [**Acts 11: 19-30**]. All in all, the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee and Samaria had peace and were edified. They walked in the fear of the Lord "and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied" [**Acts 9: 31**]. Only those walking in the light of Christ can do such things.

c) *Make no more provisions for the flesh*

Marriage and church are two institutions that God has created to carry out His will on earth. Just as a husband is to his wife, so is Christ to the church [Eph. 5: 22-33]. That is why those two institutions are under severe attack from the enemy, the devil. Just as criminals try to counterfeit the highest denomination of every currency, so does Satan try to corrupt those two institutions. We know that the gates of hell cannot prevail against the church [Matt. 16:18] but we cannot say that of marriage. That is why today, Christian marriages are under serious threat from within (adultery, incest and divorce) and without (by legal unions that are offensive to God). For the true believer, this is the time to make absolutely no provision for the flesh because “dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practises a lie” will be shut out of the gates of the New Jerusalem [Rev. 22: 15].

*There is no compromise in questions of salvation. Heaven is not a democracy and God does not need your vote to remain in power forever.* Our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. *Therefore, it is time to awake out of sleep of complacency and hypocrisy. It is time to wear the robe of light from the only source of true light-Jesus the Christ of God.* That is Paul’s message in this week’s study.

**3. Conclusion: You may be the only Bible others read!**

In his second letter to the church at Corinth, Paul wrote, “You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart” [2 Cor. 3: 2-3]. When Peter and John were arrested and brought for trial before the Jewish council, the leaders marvelled when they saw their boldness, especially as they perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men but “they realized that they had been with Jesus” [Acts 4: 13].

*You may not have the opportunity to speak or preach to others about Jesus or your total trust in Him. But people are reading you like a compass. You may be the only Bible that they may ever read. So, what message do you have for your admirers and detractors? Are you a hypocrite or a true follower of Jesus?*

Therefore, put on Christ, not just a mere cross!