

Romans: A Call to Live in Light of the Coming End

Romans 13:11-14

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If you have your Bibles, I'd like to invite you to turn with me to chapter 13. We are working our way through a marvelous section of the book of Romans in which Paul spells out the Christian way of life. Two weeks ago we considered Romans 13:1 through 7, regarding our conduct as Christians in relationship to the state, to the government. Last week, Paul focused our attention on general societal responsibilities, our responsibility to love our neighbors in our communities. His concern in Romans 13:8-10 is to cultivate in us to call Christians to a profound love of neighbor. He uses 'love one another' language which he typically reserves for Christians loving Christians, but the context clearly indicates that he expects us to love our neighbor expansively and extensively.

Today he continues speaking about the circumstances in which we ought to love one another and live the Christian life, and especially he draws our attention to living and loving as Christians in light of the end to come. Taking care to think to live and act and to love with a view to the coming end, with a view to the judgment day. That's his great theme in this great passage.

Romans 13, beginning in verse 11. Remember, Paul has already said, owe nothing to anyone except to love one another. Then he picks up in verse 11 saying,

And this do, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provisions for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

Amen. Thus ends this reading of God's holy and inspired word. May He write it's eternal truth upon our hearts.

Have you ever been or are you now in a relationship where you find it hard to

love? Where you find it difficult to live as you know that a Christian ought to live? Perhaps it's your marriage. Perhaps your husband has been unfaithful to you. You've stayed in the relationship with him for the children's sake, but you can't let the anger go. Or maybe you're married to a man who ignores you. All your hopes for a relationship in marriage have been dashed. Maybe your wife doesn't respect you. She doesn't respond to you. You are humiliated and frustrated and you're dominated by a mean spirit and you don't quite know how to love in that circumstance. Not just marital love; just basic Christian love. Maybe it is a relationship with a child or a parent. Maybe you have poured love and discipline into a child's life and the response has been rebellion and ingratitude. Maybe you find yourself caring for a parent who now has dementia and doesn't even know who you are there is no one to relate to there. How do you love in those circumstances as a Christian? Maybe it's a broken friendship. You try to tell a friend's wife about a minor offense that she had given to someone. You are trying to be helpful, you were trying to make sure that she was respected and honored in another's eyes, but her husband resented it. There are insecurities in the relationship there, and your words sparked off a problem and they both cut you off. How do you love as a Christian? Maybe it's just sheer endurance in a hard situation. How do you keep on living and loving as a Christian? That's what Paul is talking about tonight.

I'd like you to see three or four things that he says to us practically to help us in precisely those kinds of hard circumstances, and every circumstance of life in which he calls us to love and to live as Christians. He's calling on us, first of all, to live our lives in light of the coming of the Lord. You see that in verse 11.

I. Christians must live their lives in light of the coming of the Lord.

His first directive in this passage is *love your neighbor*. Of course, he's referring also to the other things that he has commanded in this great passage. Not only love your neighbor, but the other principles of Christian living. "Love your neighbor because of the coming day of the Lord," he says in verse 11. Do this knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep for now salvation is nearer to us than we believed. He's teaching us here that Christians must live their life in the awareness of the coming of the Lord. We are to do this, he says, not just in verses 8 through 10, but probably stretching all the way back to Romans chapter 12 verses 1 and 2 when that grand declaration was made, in light of the day of salvation. Paul is pointing your attention to the coming day of the Lord. Indeed in verse 11, Paul has three thoughts for us to latch on to, even in this one little phrase. "Knowing the time," that is the first thing he says. Our love and obedience must be mindful of the time in which we are called to live and serve.

Paul is asking us to think eschatologically as Christians. What does that mean? To think in light of the coming of Jesus at the end. Christian ethics are rooted in

what Christians believe about the end. Jesus is coming again. We don't know when, but He is coming to judge and He's coming to draw His people to Himself and Christians are conscious of that reality in their Christian living, and the Apostle Paul is saying here, do these things because you know the time. You live in the last days. You live in the days between the first advent of the Lord and the second advent of the Lord, and the next great event, the next grand event in God's redemptive scheme is going to be the coming of the Lord. And you live in light of that particular reality.

He secondly goes on to say that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep. That is an interesting way to talk about the Christian's experience of the last day, but you see, Paul is pointing to that day in which we will be transformed, and that day of transformation is not far off.

What the apostle is pressing home here is the incompatibility of our moral and religious slumber with the position which believers occupy in the great drama in redemption. If, in that day we will be transformed, then in this day it is already time for us to awaken from sleep, to be active in our pursuit of holiness.

He goes on to say, thirdly, "for now salvation is nearer than when we believed." In other words, our experience of the fullness of what it means to be saved is nearer now. You know that the New Testament uses the concept of salvation in the past, in the present, and in the future. It speaks of believers as having been saved in the past, as being saved, and usually in regard to our sanctification we are being saved, and it speaks in the future that we will be saved. That is, we will experience the fullness of what God's salvation entails. The apostle says that we as Christians must think and live with an eye to that future coming and judgment.

You've heard the story about how Jonathan Edwards meditated on heaven 20 minutes every day at the beginning of the day. Why? So that he could root his present actions in the reality of that coming event. That is precisely the spirit of the apostle's words here. We are to live with an eye on the coming judgment.

Faith is indeed nothing but living in light of what is to come, one great commentator said. Jesus' story of the rich fool is the negative side of this exhortation. The rich fool made lots of money, had tons of grain, built new granaries but oops, he forgot two things. He had a soul and he was going to die. The Lord came to him and he said, "You fool, tonight your soul is required of you." Paul's urge to Christians is to hear this exhortation, this strong admonition, that we would not be like that, that we would live our lives in light of the coming judgment day. That's the first thing that he says here.

II. Christians must live their lives conscious that they are in spiritual war.

Secondly, if you look at verse 12, he goes on to give one other directive. That is,

take off immorality and put on the armor of light. This is sort of a two-sided direction. It's a twin directive. *Take off* immorality and *put on* the armor of light. Paul is telling us in verse 12 that Christians must live their lives conscious that they are in a spiritual war. We are in a battle and Paul again, in this verse, reminds us of the nearness and the reality of the coming of judgment. He compares it to the last night watch: "The night is almost gone and the day is near, therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light." This is a call to Christians to be constantly vigilant for the rest of their Christian lives, and he's borrowing military metaphor after military metaphor. We are at war, Paul wants us to understand. We must be unencumbered by the deeds of the darkness and we must be armed.

This battle and warfare image is clearly important to Paul. Look at the second half of verse 12. Notice what he doesn't say. He doesn't say, 'let us lay aside the deeds of darkness,' or 'let us lay aside the works of darkness and put on the deeds or works of light.' He says, "Put aside the darkness, lay aside the darkness and put on the armor of light." That draws attention to the fact that he wants to make this military metaphor. He even mixes the metaphor, so interested is he in bringing home the point about Christians being at war. This armor of light is being understood ethically and religiously and it suggests that the believer is in a good fight of faith. He is wanting to shake Christians awake and remind them that they are not in a truce time, they are not in a peace time, they are not in a time of repose; they are in a fight for their lives.

The armor illustration is a favorite illustration of the Apostle Paul and sometimes he switches different aspects of the army. You hear him talking about it in II Corinthians 6:7, you see him describe it in detail in Ephesians chapter 6 verses 13 through 17, but he picks it up again in I Thessalonians 5:8 and maybe even in Romans 6:13 and certainly again here.

Notice as well that he not only tells us to lay aside, but to take up. He not only tells us to put away or to lay aside the deeds of darkness, but to put on the armor of light. Paul's general ethical pattern is not merely to say, don't do this, but also to say, instead do this. The 'do this' instead usually points to, not a new standard of living, not to a new standard of morality, but to the new dynamic of morality, the new power of morality. Don't live this way.

But notice in this passage, "Put on the armor of light." It is very clear that whatever "putting on the armor of light" means in detail, in specifics it is parallel to what he says in verse 14, which is of course, "put on Christ." He says, don't do these things, but instead put on the armor of light. Later he'll say, put on the armor of Christ. There is tremendous wisdom in Paul's words. When we have a don't not accompanied by a positive solution we simply leave ourselves open for frustration. Paul is giving us this military metaphor here. He is reminding us that we are in a moral, a spiritual, an ethical warfare and to be in cumbered by sin and to be unarmed and without armor would be like a soldier on the front failing

his duty, disobeying his commanders and occasionally shooting his comrades. Without the armor of light, this ethical transformation which comes in our union with Christ, we are not armed for the fight of faith. The Christian's life is not sleep; it's a fight. The Christian's life is not sleep, but a battle. So, Christians must live their lives conscious that they are in spiritual war. They are to love in light of both those realities. They are to love in light of the fact that there is a coming end in judgment and they are to love in light of the fact that we are in a war.

That is an interesting thing to say now isn't it? The fact is that is in the hardest places that we are called to love. That is a helpful thought. The way that we usually think is, this relationship is a battlefield and the only way to respond to that is to be angry and hate. The Apostle Paul says, you are in a battlefield: love. The weapons of our battle are not human weapons, they are spiritual weapons. The battle that we are fighting is not a human conflict between nation states and competing ideologies, it's a spiritual and moral and religious battle. It's about the establishment of God's purposes in the world and we know His purpose for us is that we would be like His son in His love.

III. Christians must live in accord with the new world order, the order that the judgment will bring in.

Thirdly, he goes on to say in verse 13 this: "Live as if you were before the Lord in the day of the Lord." He's telling us in verse 13 that we must live in accord with the new world order which is established by Jesus Christ. The order that the judgment is going to bring in full. Listen to what he says, "Let us behave properly as in the day." You know that in the New Testament, that *day* is often coupled with the phrase, *in the day of the Lord*. So, this points forward to that day of the coming of the Lord and here again Paul calls us to conduct appropriate to a Christian, but he does it negatively. Notice what he says, let us behave properly. Not like this. Let us walk becomingly as in the day. Not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy.

So he describes proper Christian conduct and behavior and he enjoins it negatively. Don't act like this, he says. The acts that he mentions here are all evidences of gracelessness. They are essentially sins of self-indulgence and self will. In verse 13, you see carousing and drunkenness, the abuse of strong drink, sexual promiscuity, sensuality, and all a manner of sexual sins. Strife and jealousy, self-preoccupation, self-will, and selfishness that leads to contention.

You see, all six of these vices stream from self-will. They are all the outreach of a determined selfishness that seeks only one's own pleasure. So many of the first century Christians were from the dregs of society and the Apostle Paul could not ignore the types of behavior which were generally practiced and tolerated in their midst, and so he aims at those behaviors. And he's mindful of these struggles in their past and he warns them against a relapse into that way of living. My friends,

it strikes me when I read these words of direction, not that they are the particular sins of a particular segment of society, but what strikes me is how unbelievable common they are in the midst of the best of our society.

The Apostle Paul says, "Not like that." Notice his call in verse 13 is to behave, or literally, walk appropriately. He often uses the metaphor of walking to indicate that the Christian life isn't a sprint, it isn't just one burst of energy, but it's a steady, long walk. It's a long obedience in the same direction. The behaviors of the old order, Paul says in this passage, those things are to be eschewed and instead we are to live and act appropriately as Christians. So we are to live, and we are to love, and we are to behave in light of the day.

IV. Christians, fundamentally, must put on Christ, that is, strive after the moral transformation that flows from union with Christ.

One last thing in verse 14, he gives us this fourth directive: Put on Christ. Make no provision for the flesh. He's saying that Christians must fundamentally put on Christ. That is, strive after that moral transformation that flows from union from Christ. "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ," he says, "make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lust." At the very heart of Paul's epic is not simply grace, not simply the work of the Holy Spirit, but especially union with Christ. It is the work of the Spirit to establish that union with Christ, and all the graces of growth in the Christian life flow from the source of that union with Christ and it is a perennial emphasis of Paul's writings that we are united in Christ. This is what enables us to walk in newness of life and it is expressed here in these words, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ." Clothe the soul with the disposition and the habits of Christ. The Christian identifies himself with Christ in baptism and in his profession of faith. These things signify his union with Christ, but it is in actual union with Christ in regeneration and faith and repentance that the believer is actually clothed with Christ. Yet Paul here is not even referring to that initial experience of union with Christ with conversion. He's referring to the ongoing growth in grace in sanctification which flows from our union with Christ, and he's telling us to avail ourselves of the means of grace and put on Jesus Christ, to walk in accordance to our profession. The person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ are the ground of our salvation. Union with Him is the source of our grace growth in Christian life. So, when we are called to love in hard circumstances, Paul calls on us to love in light of that grand transforming reality of union with Christ.

By the way, when Paul says, "Make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lust," he's warning us against a wrong use of the body. Beware of indulging the desires of the flesh because they may lead to further, and even more entrapable, sins. Do not plan for sin, give it no welcome, kick it off your doorstep, refuse it a place in your house. There is no point in the Christian life when the flesh and its desires no longer constitute a danger for the believer. Here as elsewhere in the Christian life, the price of freedom is eternal vigilance. Paul is calling us to

beware the desires of the flesh and see them as a potential foothold for the domination of sin in our life.

This is a word of exhortation to Christians, but it is also a word which has evangelistic significance. Do you know that this was the passage that the Lord used to convert a young man from North Africa named Augustine, who was, at that time, in Milan. It was the summer of the year 386, Augustine and his companions had gone to Milan to hear Ambrose preach. His friends had tired even of the orations of the great Ambrose and went back to Rome. Augustine stayed on, wrestling deeply and spiritually. Augustine was a fornicator, he was an indulger of the pleasures and the desires of the flesh, and though he had grown up in a Christian home, he did not know God. Yet, in the mercy in God, he had a faithful praying mother and the Lord had placed him under faithful preaching. Ambrose had been expounding the book of Genesis and Augustine was out in a garden praying. Beside him on a bench where he was praying, there was a copy of Paul's epistles. He wasn't able to keep his interest in the passages that he was reading, so he threw himself on the ground next to the bench in the grass and he began to cry. He heard the voice of children somewhere over the courtyard wall. He never could say if it was little boys or little girls, but over and over they were repeating the Latin phrase, "Tolle, lege; tolle, lege", take up and read, take up and read. He picked up the epistle to the Romans of the Apostle Paul, opened it to Romans 13b and 14, and read these words: "Not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lust." He was converted.

His story shows that the domination of the flesh in our lives can reveal the power of sin and damnation, and by the Spirit it can drive us to Christ to seek His grace from relief from the domination of sin and the expectation of damnation. That is the relief that Augustine found and it is still the relief that you can find if you're under the domination of sin and you cannot find the power to really love in the face of difficult circumstances. God's grace can enable you. Paul is telling us here to live and love in light of the end, in light of the warfare, in light of our union of Christ. May God help us to do so. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we thank You for the richness of your word. We ask that You would bring it home to our heart and grow us in grace and in love. In Jesus name. Amen.

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