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YOUR PRESENT WALK AND THE COMING DAY

Romans 13:11-14

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September 9, 2012
Romans, Lesson 91

Your Present Walk and the Coming Day
Romans 13:11-14

Think back over this past week. How much of what you did was motivated by your conscious awareness of the coming of the Lord? If you're like me, you'll have to admit, "Not much." I often get so caught up with daily pressures and deadlines that I forget the big picture. I forget that Jesus is coming and that I should be living each day in light of that great future event.

Romans 12:1-2 exhorted us to live in the present in light of God's past mercies to us. Romans 13:11-14 exhorts us to live in the present in light of the future return of Jesus Christ. This is a frequent theme in the New Testament. Jesus warned (Matt. 24:42-44),

"Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think *He will.*"

In a paragraph that contains language and imagery quite similar to our text, Paul writes (1 Thess. 5:1-10):

Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. But since we are of *the day*, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a hel-

met, the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.

Many other verses also use the promise of the Lord's coming to motivate us to holy living (e.g., Phil. 4:4-7; Titus 2:11-13; Heb. 10:24-25; James 5:7-8; 1 Pet. 4:7-11; 2 Pet. 3:11-14; 1 John 3:2-3).

In our text, Paul begins with a short phrase that most scholars interpret as an imperative: "Do this." Then (13:11-12a) he gives some indicatives: "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 near." Then he gives more imperatives, calling us to action in light of the time (13:12b-14): "Therefore let us 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 provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts." To sum up, he is saying,

The approaching day of the Lord should cause us, in contrast to this evil world, to walk in holiness.

First let's look at the great contrast between believers and those who are in the world; then we'll look at the motivation for why we should live differently than the world lives.

1. There ought to be a great contrast between believers in Jesus Christ and those who are in this evil world.

Paul's phrase, "Do this" is literally, "And this." It gathers up all that he has been saying and sets it before us in one collective package before he adds something else. Paul uses the same phrase in Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God" "And that" refers back to the entire package of being saved by grace through faith. Paul gathers it into one phrase so that he can say, "*That* salvation by grace through faith is not of yourselves. Rather it is God's gift so that no one can boast."

So here Paul is saying, "All that I have been saying about presenting your bodies to God as a living sacrifice and not being con-

formed to this world and being transformed by the renewing of your minds, and all that I've been saying about living in love, do all of this in light of the time in which we live. The day of the Lord is near." And so as those looking forward to that great day, we should be distinct in our behavior from those who live with a temporal viewpoint only.

Paul uses several metaphors to make his point: Unbelievers are sleeping and walking in the darkness of night. Believers are supposed to be awake and walking in the light of day, because we are looking for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A. The world is characterized by the deeds of darkness.

Have you ever tried to walk in the dark? Maybe it was in the middle of the night and you got up to get something in the kitchen. You didn't want to be startled awake by the light, so you were groping your way along when suddenly your shin whacked against a child's chair that was not where it was supposed to be. Ouch!

The Bible often describes this sinful world and those who live in it as darkness. Satan and his evil forces are described as "the world forces of this darkness" (Eph. 6:12). His territory is the "domain of darkness" (Col. 1:13). Unbelievers are "darkened in their understanding" (Eph. 4:18) because the god of this world has blinded them (2 Cor. 4:4). Jesus said that men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil (John 3:19). He is the Light of the world. If we follow Him, we "will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life" (John 8:12; see, also John 12:35).

In contrasting believers with unbelievers, Paul asks rhetorically (2 Cor. 6:14-15), "What fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?" Peter draws the contrast by saying that God has called us "out of darkness and into His marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

It is crucial to keep this in mind, because the world always sells itself as enlightened, bright, and progressive, whereas it portrays Christians as being in the dark. According to the world, if you believe in moral absolutes, you're from the dark ages! Every educated person knows that moral standards vary from culture to culture. It's ignorant and arrogant to claim that your culture's stan-

dards are the only right ones. Or the world can't believe that any thinking person would believe in judgment and hell. How could a God of love judge good people who try to do their best? If you believe that an ancient book about Hebrew religious customs and beliefs has any relevance for these enlightened times in which we live, you need to get an education! So the world thinks.

But the Bible declares just the opposite. The world is in utter darkness *concerning God*. It does not know Him as He has revealed Himself in His Word (John 17:25). It is also in the dark *concerning man*. It assumes that men are basically good, whereas the Bible tells us that there are none righteous or good (Rom. 3:10-17). The world is in the dark *concerning our purpose for living*. It thinks that the goal in life is to collect all the money and stuff that you can so that you'll be happy. But Jesus says that even when one has an abundance, his life does not consist of his possessions. He says that the person who stores up treasures on earth, but is not rich toward God, is a fool (Luke 12:15, 21). The world is also in darkness *concerning death and eternity*. It thinks that death will usher us into a peaceful place and that almost all people will go there. But as Martyn Lloyd-Jones points out (*Romans: Life in Two Kingdoms* [Banner of Truth], p. 237), "The world would not go on living as it does for a second if it knew something about the judgment to come."

Paul spells out the world's deeds of darkness with three couplets of sinful behavior. These are not comprehensive, but representative. Also, the fact that he commands Christians to lay aside these deeds of darkness shows that we are not immune from doing them. As believers, we must be on guard so that we are not enticed by these sins.

First, the deeds of darkness consist in carousing and drunkenness. The Greek word translated "carousing" was used generally of "feasts and drinking parties that are protracted till late at night and indulge in revelry" (Joseph Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* [Harper and Brothers, 1887], p. 367). Many first century believers came out of backgrounds where they had "pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries" (1 Pet. 4:3). Paul lists drunkenness and carousing as deeds of the flesh (Gal. 5:21). But such things are not appropriate for believers.

I've always had trouble understanding why people go to wild parties and get drunk. To me such parties are superficial and stupid. But venturing a guess, it helps them, at least for an evening, forget about their troubles. From hearing them brag about how wasted they got, it must give them some sense of being cool, at least with their fellow drunks. And, it often lowers inhibitions and leads to sexual encounters, which appeal to those who do not have satisfying marital relationships. But I've known a few who claim to be believers, but they still go out partying and drinking. But these are deeds of darkness, not fitting for children of light.

Second, the deeds of darkness consist in sexual promiscuity and sensuality. The first word refers here to sexual intercourse outside of marriage. The second word means licentiousness and unrestrained lust. It is also a deed of the flesh (Gal. 5:19), characteristic of unbelievers, not of believers (Eph. 4:19-20). God has given the marriage relationship as the proper place for sexual relations. To engage in any sexual activity outside of marriage is to participate in the deeds of darkness (Eph. 5:3-12).

Let me remind you that no one who is walking in the light suddenly and without warning falls into sexual immorality. Sexual sin always begins when we toy it in our minds. We relish lustful glances by replaying them in our thoughts. We sneak a peak at pornography, which leads to more frequent and longer looks. Eventually, the temptation to flirt with a tempting woman comes and it sucks us into the fatal act (see Proverbs 7). The key to avoiding it is to judge every sinful thought as quickly as it happens and to make no provision for the lusts of the flesh. Much of our sin can be traced to the fact that we made provision for it by toying with it.

Third, the deeds of darkness consist in strife and jealousy. These are relational sins that we often shrug off as no big deal. But they are opposed to the second greatest commandment, which is to love others as we love ourselves. Leon Morris observes (*The Epistle to the Romans* [Eerdmans/Apollos], p. 473), "Both indicate a determination to have one's own way, a self-willed readiness to quarrel. All six of these vices stem from self-will; they are all the outreach of a determined selfishness that seeks only one's own pleasure." They are all a failure to love. By way of contrast ...

B. Believers are to be characterized by the armor of light.

Rather than calling it the *deeds* of light, Paul refers to the *armor* of light, which calls attention to the reality of the spiritual conflict that we face every day. As Paul points out in Ephesians 6:12-13, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm."

It's easy to forget this as we go about our daily routines, because it is an unseen battle. If our eyes were open to see the demonic forces that are trying to bring us down, we'd probably die of fright! But even though these hideous enemies are unseen, they are very real and dangerous. The fact that Paul gives this command to believers implies that we are not immune to the sins he has just listed. The lusts of the flesh still war in our hearts, even after we have walked with Christ for many years. And so we need to be aware of the enemy's schemes (2 Cor. 2:11) and put on the full armor of God (Eph. 6:14-17; 1 Thess. 5:8).

By calling it the armor of *light*, Paul is calling attention to holiness or righteousness. It is important to remember that the command to love one another (13:8-10) is not just an amorphous feeling. Love means obedience to Christ's commandments. He said (John 14:15), "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." It is not legalism to obey the commandments of the New Testament. Putting on the armor of light means that we walk in obedience or holiness. We turn from temptation and sin and we follow the teaching and example of our Lord Jesus Christ. If there is not a significant behavioral difference between you and the world, you need to engage in some sober self-examination. The difference between how the world lives and how Christians live should be as stark as the difference between night and day.

2. The motivation for walking in holiness is that we know the time and we are looking for the culmination of our salvation at the return of Jesus Christ.

A. Knowing the time should motivate us to walk in holiness.

The motivational factor is brought out by the *therefore* that begins verse 12. Note the flow of thought (Rom. 13:11-12): "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 when we believed. 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."

Paul's word for *time* denotes the present age, the time between the first and second comings of Jesus Christ. He came the first time to bring salvation for all who will believe. He will come again in power and glory for judgment on unbelievers and to consummate final salvation for us who believe. Thus "salvation is nearer to us than when we believed." The time in which we live is still dark, but the night (this present evil age; Gal. 1:4) is almost gone and the day (of the Lord) is near. The possibility that Christ could come at any time and the certainty that He will come at some time should motivate us to holy living right now.

Some have questioned the validity of Paul's view of the end times by saying that he mistakenly thought that Christ would come during his lifetime or shortly thereafter. It is probably correct to say that Paul did not expect the Lord's return to be delayed for 2,000 years. But neither did he teach that it *would* happen in his lifetime, but rather that *it could* happen in his lifetime (1 Thess. 4:17). Thomas Schreiner explains (*Romans* [Baker], p. 698), "He argued in light of the certainty of the end, and the possibility that it could come soon, that believers should always be morally ready." Henry Alford put it (cited by Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* [Eerdmans], p. 822, italics his), "On the *certainty of the event*, our faith is grounded: by the *uncertainty of the time*, our hope is stimulated and our watchfulness aroused."

When I was in seminary, Marla and I used to baby sit for some wealthy Dallas families while the parents went away for several days. We knew approximately when the parents would return, but we didn't know exactly when they would return. So as the time drew closer, we made sure that the house was in decent order. As believers, we know that Christ could come (or we could die) at any time, although we don't know exactly when. But knowing that we will be with Him when He comes should motivate us to clean up our lives so that we are ready for that certain day.

- B. Looking for the culmination of our salvation should motivate us to walk in holiness.

If you have believed in Christ, you have been saved in the past; you are being saved in the present; and you will be completely saved in the future when you meet the Lord. It is that third aspect of salvation that Paul refers to here when he says, "Now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed."

But to walk in holiness, we have to shake off spiritual drowsiness. Last week, Marla and I left our daughter Joy's apartment in central Asia at 4:30 a.m. Monday (3:30 p.m. Sunday in Arizona). Neither of us sleep well on airplanes, so when we arrived at our house at 10 p.m. Monday (it was then 11 a.m. Tuesday in Asia), we were exhausted. On the drive home from the Phoenix airport, I was beginning to swerve on the road and I couldn't keep my eyes focused, so I finally pulled over and let Marla drive, since she wasn't quite as groggy as I was. But we both were very drowsy!

Paul implies that his readers are prone to spiritual drowsiness. I confess that I'm often spiritually drowsy. I'm not alert when opportunities to share the gospel come up and so I miss them. I'm half asleep when temptation hits and don't flee or resist as I should. Or I waste time on trivial matters because I'm not alert to the shortness of time. But as Jesus said (John 9:4), "We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work."

In verse 12, Paul tells us to put on the armor of light. But in verse 14 he says, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts." The way that we put on the armor of light is, positively to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and negatively to make no provision for the lusts of the flesh. In one sense, we already put on Christ at the moment of salvation when we were identified or clothed with Him (Rom. 6:3-6; Gal. 3:27). But in another sense, we need to put on Christ moment by moment by yielding to His lordship. This means "that we are consciously to embrace Christ in such a way that his character is manifested in all that we do and say" (Moo, pp. 825-826).

Conclusion

Although this text is not directly evangelistic, it is the text that God used to save Augustine. He had been a promiscuous young man and had lived for some years with a mistress. He had come

under conviction of sin and wanted to be saved, but he had not yet gained assurance of God's forgiveness. He was weeping over his spiritual condition as he sat in the garden of a friend when he heard a child singing, "Take up and read! Take up and read!" He picked up a scroll that lay nearby and his eyes fell on the 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 lusts." At that point, he said (*Confessions*, 8.12), "Instantly, as the sentence ended—by a light, as it were, of security infused into my heart—all the gloom of doubt vanished away."

May the reality of the approaching day of the Lord weigh upon us every day, so that we trust in Him as Savior and walk in holiness before Him as Lord!

Application Questions

1. Many polls have shown that there is virtually no difference between the morals of evangelicals and the rest of the population. What conclusions can we draw from this?
2. How can believers be more cognizant on a daily basis of the reality and certainty of Christ's coming?
3. Does it strike you as odd that Paul would list strife and jealousy alongside carousing, drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, and sensuality? What can we conclude from this?
4. Practically, how does a person put on the Lord Jesus Christ when temptation hits? What does it entail?

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