

Paul's Letter to the Romans:



THE PINNACLE OF
CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

Wake Up Sleepyhead...

Romans 13:11-14

Our text this morning is Romans 13:11-14. I would like for you to turn in your Bibles to Romans 13:11-14 and follow along as I read.

^{NIV} **Romans 13:11**...And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has 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 orgies 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 sinful nature.

I want you to imagine yourself not quite asleep and not quite awake.

I want you to imagine yourself in a nice warm bed. I want you to imagine this particular morning as one of those mornings when you have managed to arrange your bed covers just right. They are not too heavy. They are not too hot. They are smooth and soft and warm...perfect. I want you to imagine your face being cool and your body, snug under the covers, being perfectly and completely comfortable.

I want you to imagine yourself not quite asleep and not quite awake.

I want you to imagine your eyes being closed but being aware that it is no longer completely dark. I want you to imagine that your mind is sort of fuzzy; this will be easier for some than for others. I want you to imagine that your mind is almost working but not quite. I want you to imagine that you are sort of cognizant, sort of aware...but not really sure what it is you are cognizant of...that you are beginning to wake up but that you are unsure about whether or not you really want to do that.

I want you to imagine yourself not quite asleep and not quite awake.

I want you to imagine that your mind is telling you that it is no longer night but that it is not really day either. I want you to imagine being in that...in that, in between place, that nether world between light and dark, between darkness and dawn.

I want you to imagine yourself not quite asleep and not quite awake.

I want you to imagine yourself trying to remember why it was that you wanted to get up early but no being able to and not really minding that you are not able to because the bed is warm and you are comfortable.

And then I want you to imagine that someone playing with your eyelashes. They are not trying to torment you. They are trying to wake you as gently, as compassionately as they can. You know it is someone you love and somehow that makes it O.K.

I want you to imagine that you are finally opening your eyes and you are lying on your back under an open sky. As you turn your head to your right the sky is as black as ink but as you turn your head to your left, to the east, the sky...the black sky has the beginnings of an orange tint and that someone, you are not sure who, pushes a sword and a scabbard to you and says, **“Get up. Put this on. The time has come. The Lord Jesus Himself is descending from heaven. Hurry and get ready.”**

If you can imagine that, you will have a sense of what Paul is doing here in Romans 13:11-14. You see Paul is switching gears here in verse 11. He is making a wonderful point and he is doing it with wonderfully visual and dramatic language.

You see what Paul has been doing thus far in Romans is trying to make a connection in the minds of his readers. He has been trying to connect the dots between their justification in Christ and how they live. He has been trying to say, **“Alright, this is what has been done. You can see that can’t you? Now in light of what has been done, isn’t it about high time we live a certain way? Well, of course, it is and here’s what our lives ought to look like.”**

He started that backing chapter 12, verse 1. This is what he said.

^{NIV} **Romans 12:1**...Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship.

Now, Paul wasn’t trying to be mysterious. What he was saying was something like this, **“O.K., I’ve been going on and on about Christ’s justifying work and**

how we are now at peace with God, how we are now viewed through Christ's own perfect righteousness, how we are adopted in the beloved, how we are filled and gifted with the Holy Spirit and I know you are all dying to know what you need to do, so I am going to tell you. Present your bodies a living sacrifice!"

And then of course what Paul does in Romans 12:2-13:10 is tell the Romans what he means by **"presenting their bodies a living sacrifice"**. And what he says there is that **"to present one's body a living sacrifice"** is the same thing as **"to stop being conformed to this present evil age and to start be transformed by the renewing of our minds"**.

And then he goes on to give a list of things to explain what even that means. I love that. I love the clarity of that.

So here it is again.

In light of all God has done for us in the justifying work of Jesus on the cross, we ought to present our bodies as living sacrifices. That is our rational, logical response to our justification.

That means we ought to stop being conformed to this present evil age and start being transformed by the renewing of our minds and then we'll be better able to know and do God's will.

The way we do that is by:

Stop thinking so highly of ourselves and start thinking rightly as gifted individuals within the body of Christ. (12:3-8)

Stop being hypocritical or pretentious in our love for other believers but nurture them and treat them with kindness.

Stop trying to get revenge when we are persecuted by unbelievers but rather treat them with kindness in hope of wooing them into the faith.

Start submitting ourselves to the authorities appointed by God realizing He has instituted the civil magistrate for our good.

Fulfill every duty we have except the duty to love which is never-ending and by doing that fulfill the royal law of love which doesn't replace the law but rather summarizes the law.

Now in all of that Paul has been urging the Romans look back, to live in the present in light of what Christ has done for us in the past. He has been urging them to look back to what God has done for us in Christ and to respond in gratitude and faithful love for His tender mercies.

But like I said, right here in Romans 13:11, Paul switches gears and changes tactics. What he says is this, **"Psst, hey sleepyhead, wake up...look up...look forward...there's something up there...there's something's happening up ahead."**

You can see that I think starting in verse 11.

^{NIV} **Romans 13:11**...And do this, understanding the present time.

Now you can see that the he is no longer talking about the past. I mean that seems clear enough in that he is appealing to the Romans to consider the **"present time."**

But before we talk about that transition let's talk for a minute about that first little phrase, **"And do this..."**.

Now the **"this"** in that phrase includes all of the imperatives that we have been talking about over the last six weeks. In other words, Paul is saying, **"Now all the things that I have talked about so far...that long laundry list of things I have commanded you to do...do them...do this..."**

The **"this"** includes all of the stuff he has told the Romans to do in 12:2-13:10 as they attempt to **"present their bodies as living sacrifices."** But the **"this"** is especially related I think to the previous section that says they fulfill the royal law when they love one another. You can see that if you look back to verse 9.

^{NIV} **Romans 13:9...The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself."**

Do you see that little phrase **"this one rule"**? If you have a New American Standard it will be **"in this saying"**. If you have a King James Bible it will say **"is briefly comprehended in this saying."** Well the Greek is simpler than that. In fact, the Greek is **"in this word"..."this λόγος"**...and it seems to me that fits especially well with the beginning of 13:11...**"and this."** No I should tell you there is no word **"do"** in the Greek; the translators supply the word **"do"** to make the sentence make sense in English.

You see what he wants them to do is to make a quarter turn. He wants them to stop looking back for a moment and to place themselves in history in the right

way. He wants them to look not back but to the present. In a few verses, he will ask the Romans to make another quarter turn and look to the future but right here he wants them to stop and look at the present. And the reason, he wants them to do that is because they are in an historic time. Now the way he gets that across is by using a special word for **“time”**.

You see there are several words for time in Greek just like there are in English but the two most important are **καιρός** and **χρόνος**. The word that is used here in Romans 13:11 is **καιρός**. Now to help you understand the difference between the words and how they are used in the Greek New Testament, I want to borrow R.C. Sproul’s explanation.¹ What he said was something like this, **“If you want to understand the word **χρόνος** think of the word ‘historical’. But if you want to understand the word **καιρός** think of the word ‘historic’. You see **χρόνος** is interesting in an exact moment in time, that is why we sometimes call a watch or a clock a chronometer. But **καιρός** the word used to talk about the importance or value of a particular time.”**

Let me illustrate what I mean. Tom Landry, the only coach of the Dallas Cowboys, was born on September 11, 1924. It is an historical fact. You can go to a courthouse somewhere, it should be a shrine, and find a birth certificate that has an hour and minute notation of the exact moment in time he was born. All of that is **χρόνος** and all of that is important to Alicia Landry and the Landry children and it’s important to every real Cowboy fan who still feels that all other subsequent Cowboy coaches are actually pretenders to the throne.

But you know what. From now on as long as you live. When someone says September 11th, you won't think of Tom Landry, you will think of something else. Now it is not that Tom Landry's birthday is not important, it is. It's just that September 11th is no longer historical; it is now historic. Of course, it was an historical event that made it an historic day but it has moved from the realm of the mundane and forgettable to the realm of the unforgettable. Every one of us will remember the day and all that happened just as those of you who are as old as I am remember November 22nd, the day President Kennedy was assassinated. It was an historical event, *χρόνος*. But it also now an historic event...*καιρός*. Both things have moved from the realm of the mundane and the forgettable to the realm of the historic or unforgettable.

Now that is the sense Paul is referring to when he uses the word **"time"** here... when he says...

What he is saying is, **"Do this stuff. Obey this law in love, understanding this historic present time."**

Now I should tell you the word **"present"** is not in the Greek. They supply **"present"** from the tense of the participle used in the construction. But surely that is what Paul means. The actual Greek says this, **"And this knowing the time"**. You see it is very succinct. What Paul is trying to say is, **"Do all this stuff with an understanding of the importance of the time in which you live."**

see Paul thought the time in which he lived was very important. He thought the age in which he lived was historic. Now why would he think that?

There are some commentators, not in our tradition thank goodness, that think that both Jesus and Paul thought the Kingdom of God was going to be set up imminently and that the kingdom was going to be a material earthly kingdom and that when the kingdom failed to occur they were disappointed. I think Albert Schweitzer is perhaps the most famous proponent of the view that Jesus expected to set up the kingdom and that when He was arrested and crucified He went to His death bitterly disappointed that He had failed to usher in the kingdom.

Now I think that is just wrongheaded. It is bad theology.

I mean when Jesus was on the cross and said, **"It is finished"** he clearly thought something had been accomplished. I think it is clear that He thought He had secured this eternal Kingdom of God and the justification of sinners. He really and truly believed that He had done what He had intended to do.

In the same way, there are those that say that Paul thought the return of Jesus was imminent and there is a sense, I think, in which they are right. I do think Paul thought the return of Christ was imminent. Look for example at 1 Corinthians 7. I want to look at verse 29-31. Paul writes:

^{NIV} **1 Corinthians 7:29...** What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; ³⁰ those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; ³¹ those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.

You see I think Paul believed, deeply believed, that something historic was about to happen and it was that sense of being in an historic time and place that

motivated Paul to live the way that he did. I think you can see the exact same kind of thing in 1 Peter 4. Look there for just a moment, 1 Peter 4:7. It's a different New Testament writer, of course, but the sentiment is the same.

^{NIV} **1 Peter 4:7**...The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.

Then look at his next thought.

^{NIV} **1 Peter 4:8**...Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

Doesn't that sound Pauline? Doesn't that sound like Romans to you? You see that was Paul's point, "We are living in this historic time and because we are living in this historic time we have an obligation to live a certain way. Do you see what he means?"

Now, here's an important question. Was Paul's view that he was living in an historic time wrong? I don't think it was. The fact that the return of the Lord Jesus was delayed or didn't occur does not change the importance of the time. Paul lived...we live in the most important time in history, the time between the resurrection and ascension and the return of the Lord Jesus. It is an historic time and because of that brothers and sisters we have an obligation to live a certain way.

Now listen to what Paul says...to how he tries to get our attention. He does that in the rest of Romans 13:11.

^{NIV} **Romans 13:11**...The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

Now let me ask you a question. When he talks about waking up from your slumber is he talking about coming to faith? Can he possibly be talking about coming to faith?

Well the answer to that is, **"No!"** And the reason the answer to that is no is because he has been talking straight along since chapter twelve about the Romans living in light of their justification. He is assuming that he is talking to people that have embraced the gospel...that are justified in Christ. He has been pleading with them right along to live in light of their justification and he almost certainly would not have done that if the hadn't believed they were already justified.

Now, if that is true, what is he talking about? What does he mean when he says, **"Wake up!"** Is he talking about walking down an aisle or signing a commitment card? I don't think so. He's not talking about embracing the gospel for the first time at all. I think what he is talking...what he has to be talking about in light of the context is living a certain way.

You see that don't you?

All of the stuff he wants them to do...he wants them to do on the basis of what Christ has done for them and the way he expresses that idea is by saying, **"Wake up!"** Now why would he do that? Why would anyone want to challenge believers to wake u p out of their slumber?

I think the reason is...and I think this something we know intuitively is that our hearts tend to drift off to sleep. I think we know it is possible to cruise through our Christian lives sort of just half awake...half asleep...just driving along waiting for that day when we wake up in heaven, all spit-polished and finally glorified.

You see that is what Paul is calling out to the Romans, **“Wake up...wake up...stop being almost awake and almost asleep and be fully awake. Live a certain way and do that because you are in an historic time.”**

And you know brothers and sisters, because he says that so clearly I began to contemplate the time in which we live. Our country is in a mess. Don't you think? You don't have to watch television very much to realize our country is in a mess. I am so grateful that we have some brothers and sisters in our church who are willing to apply themselves to public service and to be thorns in the sides of those in office to stir them to proper thinking.

Brothers and sisters, keep going...don't be discouraged...don't stop. We need Christians in politics. We need to vote in every election. We need to vote wisely. I am not even going to tell which candidates to vote for but I am going to tell you that you have an obligation before God to vote for the right one.

But you know that is not the reason the church has been so impotent in our day. The reason the church hasn't made much of a difference in our generation is not because of the failure of Christian politicians, rather it is because the rest of us are asleep at the wheel. We are not living as Paul has asked...we are not living in light of our justification...as the gospel demands we live.

Now what Paul does in the remaining verse here in chapter 13 is explain how we ought to live. He reminds us one more time. Look what he says starting in verse 12.

^{NIV} **Romans 13:12**...The night is nearly over; the day is almost here.

Now that's a strange statement don't you think? What does he mean by that when he says the night is nearly over and the day is almost here? Now I think it is important for you to know that when the Scripture uses the word "**day**" in this kind of context, it is almost always a reference to the Day of the Lord...to the time of the return of the Lord.

Now the metaphor Paul uses is lovely. He is saying, "**Look the dawn is breaking. Christ is coming up over the eastern horizon. The horizon is turning and the day is just about upon us and because of that the night is passing away. Eternity is nearly upon us.**"

You see Paul is saying that we have this historic opportunity and time to affect the world in which we live and to proclaim the gospel through our actions and we ought to do it. Then in the rest of the verses he tells us how to do that. In verse twelve he starts off by talking about the kind of clothing we ought to wear. In verse thirteen, he talks about the kind of behavior we ought to model. And then in verse fourteen he talks about the attitude we ought to have, the direction in which we ought to focus. Now let's look at the clothing we ought to wear in verse twelve.

^{NIV} **Romans 13:12**...So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

Now brothers and sisters isn't that a wonderful picture. He is saying, **"O.K. take this garment of darkness you have and strip it away and put on the armor of light."** And what he means by that is that he wants to wear armor that reflects light...that shows holiness and righteousness and goodness. What he is saying is this, **"The gospel has to affect us in such a way in the present time that we are willing to lay aside our sinful behavior and to do act and live righteously, to actually...really and truly do deeds of righteousness."**

Now the reason we know that is what he means is because of what he says in verse 13 and what he describes there is the kind of behavior we are to have.

^{NIV} **Romans 13:13**...Let us behave decently, (and notice how he connects the dots to the previous idea) as in the daytime,

We ought to behave not as those ashamed of their deeds but as those who are willing to have their deeds fall under the light that is coming up over the horizon that will soon light us all. We ought to say, **"Let us just go ahead and act like it is day right now. Let's stop acting like those that skulk in the shadows between dark and light and live like we are people of the day."**

Then he tells us how to do that practically.

^{NIV} **Romans 13:13**...not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.

Yesterday, I was at a meeting of the North Texas Presbytery and the case of a pastor working here in the North Texas Presbytery came up before the men of the presbytery. This particular bother had already been removed from service

and was really only appearing to express his sorrow and shame and repentance. Here's why he had to do that. Over the last ten years of his relationship first to his fiancé and then even into their married life together, as he had been planting and growing a church, he had been secretly involved in pornography, in going to adult clubs, to bars that peddle flesh. He was doing to thing at once.

Now I want you to consider these two things. He was standing up on Sunday morning and preaching the gospel as the power of God unto salvation...but on Saturday night he was spending his time lusting over pornography. He was living in that dusky place, that nether world between darkness and light.

He was trying to do both things. He was not quite asleep and not quite awake as if neither thing was truly important.

Now this brother repented of his sin. He is being cared for by the North Texas Presbytery. He is not being allowed to preach nor should he be. He may someday be able to recover but he has a long way to go before he will ever be able to participate in any kind of vocational ministry again. I don't know if he'll make it.

But isn't that a tremendous illustration or example of how it's possible to hold conflicting views of light and darkness at the same time. I've known men and you probably have to who have sought and accepted positions of leadership in the church and yet treated their wives so poorly. They didn't love their wives as Christ loved the church and they really had no desire to bring their wives along in their sanctification. Some men don't have time for their kids. Some don't have time for prayer or reading their Bibles or even fellowshiping with other saints.

You see that they are doing is holding darkness and light in tension against each other...not quite awake and not quite asleep.

But Paul is out there tapping, gently tapping, quietly calling, **“Wake up...wake up...wake up. Can’t you see the light is coming? Christ is coming. How can you keep living that way? How can you keep hiding out in the shadows? Look what He did for us. Look at the historic time in which we live. Doesn’t the gospel strike your heart? Hasn’t it had in impact on you? Lay aside all this trash and put on the clothing of light.”**

That is what he is calling us to do and he is calling on us to do that because Christ is coming. We live in a time like no other group before us in history to impact our world and yet we are asleep, asleep at the wheel.

Then he concludes these three wonderful metaphors with this wonderful metaphor and you know it is such a wonderful figure. It is funny that he goes back to clothing again.

^{NIV} **Romans 13:14**...Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ...

You see he is talking to believers and he is saying make physically true that which is spiritually true. Let that clothing, the person of Christ, shine forth in your behavior and your actions. You’ve been covered in Christ’s righteousness now act like it. Now live that way. Pursue that kind of holy, righteous behavior. Now you know how I know that is what he is saying? I know it from the last part of verse 14.

^{NIV} **Romans 13:14**...and do not (even begin to) think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Don't even think about it.

I think we can all learn a lesson from Paul's emphasis here. A few years ago I was counseling a lot with a young man who was struggling with immorality. Now some of the stuff that he was doing was directly related to his computer...some of it was related to the kinds of emails he was ending back and forth to different people and he said to me, **"I just can't seem to break the cycle Tom. I just can't seem to get out of it."**

And I listened to him and then I finally suggested this, **"Why don't you take your computer and just rip it out of the wall and take it out and set it on the curb? Just get rid of it altogether."**

And he said, **"I can't do that. I can't do that."**

And I said, **"Why not?"**

And he said, **"Well I need it."**

And I said, **"Why? What you have told me is that this is the instrument Satan uses to get a foothold in your life and that you feel in complete bondage to it and that your spiritual life is going nowhere. Why not throw your computer away. Why not stop making provision for the flesh."**

And he said, **“I just can’t do that.”**

John Calvin wrote this:

As long as we are wrapped in flesh, we cannot rid ourselves of caring for our flesh; even though our citizenship is in heaven, we still sojourn here on earth. The things then, which belong to the body, must be taken care of, but not otherwise than as to help us along in our pilgrimage, and not that they may make us to forget our country.²

Don’t you love that?

You see darkness is fading away. Christ is coming and because that is true we have an obligation to live a certain way.

This passage before us this morning is a very famous passage. I don’t know how many of you are familiar with the life of Augustine but he was perhaps the most important man in the first thousand years of the church. Augustine lived in the fourth century and he renowned for his famous battle with Pelagius.

His most famous and most readable book was called *Confessions*.³ It is a biography, a spiritual biography, of his life in which he confesses God’s kindness toward him in redeeming him from his sin. You see when Augustine was a young man he was a reprobate. He had and lived with a concubine and he fathered a son by her.

But Augustine had a faithful mother who prayed for him for years to come to Christ to embrace the gospel and Augustine was so intellectual that he thought she was foolish and that the gospel was foolish and then the Spirit of God began

to move upon his life and burn into his heart and the witness of others began to impact him. Still he struggled with making that final commitment of faith to Christ and one day he was in a garden with one of friends and they sitting around talking about their spiritual struggle and their sin and how they longed to be done with it and to live righteously and they didn't know how to do that.

Both Augustine and his friend were crying, were weeping uncontrollably and there were some kids playing outside of the garden where they were and the kids were singing a stupid little song that included the words, "**Tolle lege, tolle lege, tolle lege**" which means, "**Pick up and read, pick up and read, pick up and read.**"

Augustine said he had never heard such a stupid song in his life. He had never heard the song before and he never heard it after that but it made him wonder if God were trying to speak to him so he went over and picked up the first scroll he came to and flipped it open and began to read and when he did he read this.

^{NIV} **Romans 13:11**...And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has 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 orgies 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 sinful nature.

You know at that point Augustine confessed his faith in Christ and the world was changed forever. His time became an historic time as he began to live out the gospel in his culture.

Now I wanted to tell you that because I have something to say to you. I have something to say to you as one of the pastors of this church. You live in an historic time. If you will live the gospel you can have such an impact that you will be astonished. You will be able to impact the world, your family and everyone you know and you ought to do that because it is time to wake up from your sleep and to live righteously for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray.

¹ R.C. Sproul, "Romans 13:11-14" taken from the Interact Audio Series.

² John Calvin, *Commentary on Romans*, 13:14. Freely paraphrased by me.

³ Aurelius Augustine, *Confessions*. Book 8. Chapter 12. He writes: "I was saying these things and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when, lo, I heard the voice as of a boy or girl, I know not which, coming from a neighboring house, chanting, and oft repeating, "Take up and read; take up and read." Immediately my countenance was changed, and I began most earnestly to consider whether it was usual for children in any kind of game to sing such words; nor could I remember ever to have heard the like. So, restraining the torrent of my tears, I rose up, interpreting it no other way than as a command to me from Heaven to open the book, and to read the first chapter I should light upon. For I had heard of Antony, that, accidentally coming in whilst the gospel was being read, he received the admonition as if what was read were addressed to him, "Go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me." And by such oracle was he forthwith converted unto Thee. So quickly I returned to the place where Alypius was sitting; for there had I put down the volume of the apostles, when I rose thence. I grasped, opened, and in silence read that paragraph on which my eyes first fell, — "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." No further would I read, nor did I need; for instantly, as the sentence ended, — by a light, as it were, of security infused into my heart,— all the gloom of doubt vanished away."