

Romans 13: 11-14; “Now our Salvation is Nearer”, A Sermon for the Coming New Year, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on December 31st, 2023, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

Whenever we come to the end of the year, our minds are drawn to think of the passing of time. We are now at New Year’s Eve 2024, and next week we will have to get used to signing checks and dating our papers by getting used to writing the different year in the date. Many mistakes may be made until we get used to it. This is a pretty harmless mistake, but here in our text there is something that we need to receive, that is of much greater importance for every Christian as we enter into the New Year. It is that every Christian should awake, for their complete salvation is nearer than they think.

Your object, as a Christian is to do Your Master’s will so that when He returns, and asks you for an accounting, that you will be able to give it to Him with a clear conscience. Hopefully you will have sincerely tried to improve upon all that He has given you in terms of grace and truth. When you are doing this you are awake. When you are not doing this, if you are living as a worldling, thinking that heaven is to be found upon this earth, then you are really sleeping spiritually. To awake, then, is to come to the spiritual sensibility that you need to get up and do certain things in relation to Christ and his kingdom. That is, in your heart and in your actions.

So the question that I think we should ask ourselves is this – What are the definite responsibilities which the Christian should be fulfilling in light of the Day of Christ which is most certainly coming? What is it that you should be doing, knowing the time? And the answer which comes to us from these verses is that the responsibilities that you should awake to, knowing the time, are these:

1st of all – That you would awake to the fact that time is going by.

Our text says – “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.” I think that it is hard for many of us to think of how much time passes by in our lives unnoticed by us, and sometimes even forgotten by us. For many of us, whole years and even decades are gone by now, never to return to us. Everything that we have done or left undone has been written down by our great God, who has expected us to use our time wisely. And the question that should come to us now, with some power is this: Have I used my time wisely? Or has much of it been frittered away in doing things which have no relation to my eternal state and reward, either for myself or for other people around me? For if I have wasted time, especially as a person who knows the Lord, I must come to understand that this is not a good way to live life.

And that is what the Apostle Paul is writing to the Christians at Rome about, here in Chapter 13. He is saying that there are certain things that we should be doing as Christians, knowing the time. Christians are to be those who need to be paying close attention to the passing of time in relation to the things that they do, so that their life will not been wasted in terms of what has been done for Christ. Only one life, ‘tis soon it is passed. Only what’s done for Christ will last You may have wasted much time before this, and there is now nothing that you can do about that, except to confess it as sin, and make a sincere and thoughtful resolution to do better by God’s grace.

This is what Paul is exhorting us to. But now, knowing the time, it is now “high time to awake out of sleep”, Paul says. What does Paul mean when he says that we should awake out of sleep? I think that he means that you should always be living your life in light of time passing. You should awake out any state of sleep that you have fallen into, concerning its passing, realizing that the Day of Christ is at hand. Since you know that He is coming, you should know that you have definite responsibilities to fulfill before that Day arrives.

The Day of Christ is the day of our complete salvation. It will be the Day of when eternity begins. It will be the Day when the brightness of Christ’s glory and His light will shine upon your life and it will reveal everything you have lived for. Now is the time of night; the time when things

related to the judgment of men and their hearts is not clear to us, or to other people around us. This “night” is far spent, in the sense that at any time Christ may come for us in death. It is far spent in the sense that even the longest life is still short when it is over. And so, we need to slap ourselves awake spiritually with this truth.

2nd – You should awake to your responsibility to love your neighbor. (verses 8-10)

I take this from the words, “And do this, knowing the time”. These words are referring us back to the words are found in verse 8, which talk about our owing no one anything except to love one another. We are to see love as we see all of our debts, as something which is to be discharged, something to be worked at, something that we owe to people around us. This doesn’t mean that we simply love other Christians. We are to love all men, especially those of the household of faith. This verse 11 that we are studying however, shows us that sometimes love can be neglected in our Christian life, even to the place where we do not see it as our responsibility.

But verse 11 also says that it is “high time that we awake out of sleep”. We ought to know the time, that now is, is the time to love one another. Not some time down the road when things happen to be going extremely well for us. All the commandments of God are summed up in this saying, namely, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love, as it begins in your heart, for your neighbor, is the spiritual fulfillment of the law. It does no harm to a neighbor. If you love, you do not commit adultery in your heart.

You do not commit murder in your heart. You do not think of stealing from your neighbor in your heart. You do not speak that which is not provably true in your heart about your neighbor. You do not covet or desire anything that belongs to your neighbor, first of all, in your heart. It is high time, my beloved brethren, that we awake to the fact that sin begins in our heart. And yes indeed, the righteous acts of love begin in your heart before they ever result in any action that you will take. Each of us must ask ourselves whether we are asleep or whether we are awake to this commandment of love.

This commandment of love is to not only that we will have the attitude of love, but that we will also seek to do the acts of love. It is that we will treat our neighbor as we would want to be treated ourselves. We are to think of the real needs of others, both materially and spiritually, so that they truly benefit from the time that we spend with them, and the things that we do with them, and for them. Ask yourself now, if you are awake to this? Do you really love people? Do you really think about, and care for people? What do you do about it? God takes notice of it, and certainly they will take notice of it.

Some of you may live in a neighborhood where your next door neighbor is an ornery person. What can you do to show them kindness and show them that you care? Many of you have relatives that may not at all care for your faith in the Lord Jesus. And they do not want to talk about it with you. But do they know that you love and care about them, even though they are not believing in your Jesus? Perhaps they will see the love of God in you. This year, you ought to resolve to become a better listener to your husband or wife, or anyone who is speaking with you. You will do this because you love them.

This is, I believe, a tangible way to show love; to listen, and not to interrupt someone else, while they are talking. Show them that respect. It is a form of love in your speech. Be one who does things for other people because you truly care about them. This is surely glorifying to God.

3rd – A Christian should awake to his responsibility to walk properly as in the day. (verses 12 and 13)

In order to do this, verse 12 states that the Christian has to cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. To walk properly, you have to be able to see where you are going. You have to stay “walking in the light” in order to stay on the path of righteousness. 1st John 1: 9 says, “If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another; and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin.” The works of darkness are the works of sin. They are fleshly lusts which lead us towards acting out that sin toward other people around us. They are

those works which are not only not pleasing to God, but they are dishonoring to Him. And His righteous Being loathes them.

All sin is displeasing to God, but especially those works which show that we have not taken into consideration that God is Light, that He is living, and that He is watching and evaluating your life to give to you according to your works. The darkness and the light are alike to Him in that He can see as well and as clearly in both. But the Christian cannot. The Lord has called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light. It is the light of truth and righteousness. It is the light of grace and the truth of the Bible which leads to good works.

Darkness always makes it confusing for you to know how to walk, where to place your feet so that you will not stumble. You cannot see clearly to walk or to do anything. But light is revealing. It drives and dispels the darkness wherever it comes. The Christian is light in the Lord. And yet the Christian may think that he can dabble in the shadows of sin, or actually wander off the path of righteousness into the darkness, and attempt to participate in the unfruitful works of darkness. But in verse 13 Paul warns against this.

Of the works of darkness that the Christian may be tempted to do, he says, “Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy...” These are works of darkness. These must be cast off. In Ephesians 5: 8 we find the answer to these temptations to go back into the darkness of sin. It says there – “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.” “Walk as children of light.” (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.” “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.”

“For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.” “But all things are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light.” “Therefore He says: ‘Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.’” This is perfectly in agreement with our text. The Christian must wake up and not allow himself to be lulled into sin. I hope that you will reprove yourself, O Christian, when you sense that the darkness is coming over your soul, and that you are going to sleep on your watch.

Pray for the Holy Spirit’s help. Turn the light of God’s Word on your sin, and expose your sin, and make it manifest to yourself what it is. Let the light of God’s Spirit bring it home to you in all of its awfulness, and do not let sin envelope your soul in darkness. It is that abominable thing which God hates. Cry out to God that you will not partake of the unfruitful works of darkness, no matter who is attempting to get you to participate, no matter how great the pull is.

In Matthew 6: 23 and 24 Jesus says – “But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.” “If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!” Jesus is saying – The light that is in you, O Christian, must expose the sin. It must make manifest, and cast out the works of darkness! Is this something that you are doing? It is your solemn responsibility to do so. Do not dodge it, but take up the light of truth as your armor. Christ himself gives you this light. His light will lead you to participate in good works which come from the good things that you are storing up in your soul. Pray that your light will so shine that men will see your good works and will glorify God.

Brethren, we cannot let time get away from us in this regard. We must take up the armor of light. Ephesians 5: 15 says – “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” And 1st Thessalonians 5: 5-8 says – “You are all sons of light and sons of the day.” “We are not of the night nor of darkness.” “Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.” “For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.” “But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.” These are the armor of light; our faith hope and love.

Then 4th – You should awake to your responsibility to put on the Lord Jesus Christ.
(verse 14)

“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.” Here we are instructed in what we should do, both positively and negatively, to awake to righteousness. Positively, we are to clothe ourselves with Christ; that is with His imputed righteousness which is a clean and perfect spiritual garment. God is the One who justifies us when we exercise faith in Christ. When we believe in Him we are clothed in His righteousness; we are seen as righteous by God. But the exhortation is being made to you to clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ in the way of your being righteous in all your behavior, as well. Remember that you are doing your works of righteousness in the sight of God.

This does not save you from your sins. But this is the evidence that Christ’s grace is truly at work in your soul. It is certainly true that God the Father clothes you with the imputed righteousness of Christ when you believe in Him. But, from that position of completeness, you still have the definite responsibility to also put on Christ. You clothe yourself with Him every day. Imputed righteousness is the gift of God, but you must put it on. God clothes you with the garments of salvation. This is your salvation.

But, you must also clothe yourself with the imparted righteousness of Christ which is His grace. You are to be strong in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Since He is holy, you must resolve by His grace to be holy. You must clothe yourself with the zeal of the Lord Jesus to strive against your sin. And make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts. You must strive to go about doing good, even as He went about doing good. You must clothe yourself with humility in order that God will not oppose you, but rather give you greater grace.

God is opposed to the proud, but He will grace to the humble. When you put on the Lord Jesus Christ you will consciously think of what He was like when He was here upon the earth. And you will pray and seek to be like Him. Negatively, you will make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. The flesh is a living entity in you still, even though its power is broken. Paul is saying here that you need to determine not to supply the remains of your corrupt sinful nature with anything that will satisfy or fulfill its lusts. Let us remember that this corrupt part of you will someday be utterly taken away at the last; at the day of your death. Why feed it now? Why try to prolong its life by making it a strong part of your being. You will regret it at the last.

He who would save his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake, Jesus says, shall find it. Only by your putting on Christ will you be successful in not sowing to the remains of your sinful nature. Will you resolve today that you will put on Christ in this coming year? Will you resolve to pursue peace with all men and that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord? Will you resolve that you will become more like Christ by His precious grace? When you believe in Christ, you are heading toward glory. You are marching toward Immanuel’s land. Since this is the case, then will you resolve that you will live as a citizen of this heavenly city and country? Awake! Your salvation is nearer than when you first believed!