

Romans (86) **Wake up Time**

The apostle Paul had just given to the church at Rome instruction regarding the standard by which they were to govern their lives. They were to love one another, and thereby fulfill the law of God. In the next paragraph, which we desire to consider this morning, we read of an exhortation of the apostle for the Christians at Rome to give all diligence to order their lives in righteousness because of the soon and certain prospect of the Day of the Lord that was before them. Our English Standard Version (ESV) reads in this way:

Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. ¹²The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. (Rom. 13:11-14)

Now we might first say a word about the manner in which the ESV translated the Greek text into English. The opening words of verse 11, “besides this”, seem to suggest that Paul was giving a new and additional word of instruction to the readers. In effect it conveys the apostle saying, “And besides what I have already taught you, also do this.” But this is not a good way to translate what Paul was saying. The opening words, “Besides this”, should better be translated, “And this”, referring to what he had just written. In other words we might paraphrase Paul verse 11 in this way: “And do this, that is, what I have just taught you, because our salvation is now nearer than when we first believed.” Perhaps, then, the New King James Version is a better rendering than the ESV: “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.”¹

To what then, do the words “do this” refer? Perhaps they refer to what immediately precedes them, in other words, the content of verses 8 through 10. If so, then it would read like this:

⁸Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery”, “You shall not murder”, “You shall not steal”, “You shall not covet”, and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁰Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. 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.”

However, the words, “And this” may refer to everything that the apostle had written from Romans 12:1 through 13:10. This paragraph, verses 11-14, thereby serve as a fitting conclusion in which the apostle exhorted his readers to order their lives according to all of his instruction in the light of the soon coming Day of Salvation. As one expressed the matter:

It is preferable, however, to see a more inclusive reference in the phrase so that it refers to all of 12:1 – 13:10. The first part of the verse can then be paraphrased, “Put into practice all of the exhortations in Romans 12:1 – 13:10” in the light of the immanence of the end. Romans 13:11-14,

¹ When Paul used the two Greek words in other contexts, which are here translated “And this” in the NKJV (Greek: Καὶ τοῦτο), he was referring to what he had just previously written. See 1 Corinthians 6:6, 8; Eph. 28; Phil. 1:28.

then, comprehends all of the preceding exhortations and summons the readers to urgency since the end is on the horizon.²

Since this is what Paul was saying, then the Christian may understand the entire message of Romans 12 and 13, which contains practical instruction on Christian living, as being motivated in two major ways. The first motivation is to live as a Christian because of what God has done for His people in the *past*. The second motivation for Christian living is due to what God has promised to for His people in the *future*. And so, this major section of practical instruction (Rom. 12:1-13:14) opened with an appeal to what God had done in the past:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom. 12:1f)

And now in Romans 13:11 Paul gives the second basis of motivation with respect to the future:

Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.

We are to live as Christians because of what God has done for us in the past and for what God has promised to do for us in the future. The first gives us a reason to live as Christians. The second presses upon us a sense of urgency and responsibility to live as Christians.

Here is a good description of the larger picture of this passage of Romans 12:1 through Romans 13:10.

Paul brings to a close his general exhortations to the Roman Christians by focusing on the same point with which he began: a call for a totally new way of living in light of the eschatological situation. In 12:1-2, Paul urges Christians to give themselves as living sacrifices, adopting a lifestyle in keeping with the new era to which they belong. In 13:11-14, he exhorts Christians to clothe themselves with Christ Himself (v. 14) and with that behavior (v. 12b) fitting for those who live already in the light of the great “day” of final salvation that is soon to dawn (vv. 11-12a). The earlier text encourages Christians to look at the present in the light of the past: by virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection, the “old age” has been transcended by a new one. The Christian is to live out the values of that new age, appropriating the power available in the gospel to renew the mind and transform conduct. The text now before us shifts this perspective, encouraging Christians to look at the present in the light of the future. For, while transferred by God’s grace into the new realm of righteousness and life, Christians still await full and final salvation (cf. 5:9-10), “the redemption of the body” (cf. 8:23). The transformation that the gospel both demands and empowers flows from the work of Christ already accomplished. But it also looks ahead to the completion of the process on that day when we will be fully “conformed to the image of [God’s] Son” (8:29). Christians are not only to “become what we are”; we are also to “become what one day we will be.”³

Now as we look at this paragraph before us, Romans 13:11-14, we may discern two major parts. First there are statements of truth (indicatives). Then there are commandments in the light of the truths stated (imperatives).

I. The statements regarding “the time.” (13:11, 12)

² Thomas Schreiner, *Romans* (Baker Academic, 1998), p. 607.

³ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (William B. Eerdmans, 1996), p. 818.

“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 time” refers to the importance of knowing where we stand in relation to God’s purposes and promises. It refers to the sense that we ought to always have regarding what God is doing in history and the end to which all things are advancing. We are always to be aware of “the time” in which we are living. This will help us in prioritizing our lives and giving us a sense of direction and purpose. Knowing the time, therefore, is understanding Who God is and what He is doing in history. We read of “the sons of Issachar who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do” (1 Chron. 12:32). And so all Christians should understand the time, to know what God would have us do.

When Paul expressed the matter of “knowing” the time, he used a Greek participle to do so. You need not know what a participle is, but it may be simply described as somewhat of a verbal noun. Without becoming too technical, we should realize that a participle like this could be translated in any one of a number of possible alternatives.⁴ Here Paul is implying that *because* we know the time, we should do what God has commanded us.

The apostle then gives three statements regarding “the time.” The first is this: *“that now it is high time to awake out of sleep.”* The second is his statement that *“now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.”* The third statement respecting “the time” is the metaphor of the night, *“The night is far spent, the day is at hand.”*

The first statement respecting “the time” suggests that the Christian is to be characterized by being “awake” rather than at “sleep.” In other words, the Christian should always be aware and informed of what God is doing in history and how his view of himself and his life would be shaped by this knowledge. Being “awake” is set in contrast to one who is sleeping. The one who is sleeping is ignorant and inattentive to who God is and what He is doing. Sleep speaks of moral drowsiness. In other words, people who are “sleeping” think little of their sins that they commit. Paul wrote elsewhere, “So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night” (1 Thess. 5:6f).

The second statement respecting “the time” declares that the certainty and the nearness of our salvation should influence how we think and live. Here “our salvation” is set forth as a future prospect for the believer. It speaks of our deliverance from condemnation on the Day of Judgment. It also speaks of the final salvation of being delivered fully from the presence of sin as well as from these mortal bodies when our Lord resurrects us from the dead and we are given resurrection bodies that are suitable for an eternal existence. That our salvation is now “nearer” than we first believed, should move us to live in accordance to what we will one day receive and enjoy.

The third statement respecting “the time”, *“The night is far spent, the day is at hand”*, speaks of the importance and need to live in righteousness, not to be living as fallen people in the world who do not know God and live in ignorance of Him and His ways. It also intimates that the end of our world, the end of the history of this fallen world is coming to an end. We are to live accordingly.

⁴ For grammar “nuts” like myself: A participle may either be attributive or predicative. In other words, the participle as an attributive participle is translated as a noun or as an adjective (it is commonly translated as a relative clause). But a predicate participle is translated as a verb in a clause. When a translator comes to a participle clause, he decides how to translate the expression into English based on the context. A Greek clause, which contains only a participle for its verb, may be translated in any of the following ways if the context will permit it: temporal (“When/After we know the time”), conditional (“If we know the time”), concessive (“Although we know the time”), purpose (“In order that we know the time”, or circumstantial (translated just like another verb in conjunction with the main verb), or causal (“Because knowing the time”). The context of Romans 13:11 suggests that Paul was implying a causal idea by this participle “knowing.” In other words, Paul was saying that his readers should do what he was commanding them “*because* they knew the time.”

The metaphor of “the night” in this context is a description of the entire history of the world in its fallen existence.

For “the night” would have to be identified with “this age” and therefore with the whole period of world’s history prior to the advent. And we have good reason to infer that the apostle is reflecting upon the relative brevity of what is yet to run its course of the history of this world, that history is hastening to its terminus.⁵

The coming of the “day” of Christ sheds light upon us in the night in which we are living. We are children of the “day”, which informs us about the conditions of darkness of this world and this age.

“The day of Christ, though not yet come, is nevertheless throwing its light backward on the present. In that light believers must now live; it is the dawning of the day of unprecedented splendor. It is high time to awake to the realization of this fact, to be aroused from spiritual torpor, to throw off the garments of slumber, and to put on the weapons that befit the task of such a “season” in redemptive history. Each calendar day brings nearer to us the day of final salvation, and, since it is life in the body that is decisive for eternal issues, the event of death points up for each person how short is “the season” prior to Christ’s advent. As “we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10; cf. Rom. 14:10) and Christ is ready to “judge the living and the dead” (2 Tim. 4:1; cf. 1 Pet. 4:5; James 5:9), indulgence of the works of the flesh is contradiction of the believer’s faith and hope.⁶

A number of the terms used by Paul in this passage that seem to convey a sense of importance as well as urgency to live in obedience to God’s will because of who we are, where we are in history, and what will most certainly come to pass in the future through the intervention of God at the end of the age. Here is one description:

As, however, the words are metaphorical, it may be useful to consider the meaning: Ignorance of God is what he calls *night*; for all who are thus ignorant go astray and sleep as people do in the night. The unbelieving do indeed labor under two evils, they are blind and they are insensible; but this insensibility he shortly after designated by sleep, which is, as one says, an image of death. By *light* he means the revelation of divine truth, by which Christ the sun of righteousness arises on us. He mentions *awake*, by which he intimates that we are to be equipped and prepared to undertake the services which the Lord requires from us. The *works of darkness* are shameful and wicked works; for night, as someone says, is shameless.⁷

Our Lord taught His disciples in a similar way in Luke 12.

“Let your waist be girded and your lamps burning; ³⁶and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately. ³⁷Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them. ³⁸And if he should come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. ³⁹But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. ⁴⁰Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

⁴¹Then Peter said to Him, “Lord, do You speak this parable only to us, or to all people?”

⁵ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Eerdmans, 1959), vol. 2, pp. 169.

⁶ Ibid, pp. 169f.

⁷ John Calvin, Calvin’s Commentaries, vol. 19 (Baker, 1993), pp. 487f.

⁴²And the Lord said, “Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? ⁴³Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. ⁴⁴Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has. ⁴⁵But if that servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, ⁴⁶the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. ⁴⁷And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. ⁴⁸But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.” (Luke 12:35-48)

If the professing Christian fails or refuses to be mindful and watchful of “the time”, that is, if he fails to order his life in the prospect of Christ’s coming and the judgment that he will then face before the Lord, then the Lord Himself may cause that one to be sleeping when He returns.

It would seem to me that the apostle had on his mind the message of Isaiah. Isaiah is quoted many times in the Epistle to the Romans, and it is alluded to in many places where a direct quotation may not be found. Consider for example the passage of Isaiah 29. Here we see a similar need emphasized that the professing people of God were in need of being alert. But because of the moral and spiritual failure, God would see to it that they were rendered ignorant and insensitive of the time in which they lived and of the fact that the Lord’s judgment upon them was impending. We may begin to read with Isaiah 29:1.

“Woe to Ariel (another name of Jerusalem), to Ariel, the city where David dwelt!

Add year to year;

Let feasts come around.

²Yet I will distress Ariel;

There shall be heaviness and sorrow,

And it shall be to Me as Ariel.

³I will encamp against you all around,

I will lay siege against you with a mound,

And I will raise siegeworks against you.

⁴You shall be brought down,

You shall speak out of the ground;

Your speech shall be low, out of the dust;

Your voice shall be like a medium’s, out of the ground;

And your speech shall whisper out of the dust.

⁵Moreover the multitude of your foes

Shall be like fine dust,

And the multitude of the terrible ones

Like chaff that passes away;

Yes, it shall be in an instant, suddenly.

⁶You will be punished by the LORD of hosts

With thunder and earthquake and great noise,

With storm and tempest

And the flame of devouring fire.

⁷The multitude of all the nations who fight against Ariel,

Even all who fight against her and her fortress,

And distress her,

Shall be as a dream of a night vision.

⁸It shall even be as when a hungry man dreams,

And look-- he eats;
But he awakes, and his soul is still empty;
Or as when a thirsty man dreams,
And look-- he drinks;
But he awakes, and indeed he is faint,
And his soul still craves:
So the multitude of all the nations shall be,
Who fight against Mount Zion.”

⁹Pause and wonder!
Blind yourselves and be blind!
They are drunk, but not with wine;
They stagger, but not with intoxicating drink.

¹⁰For the LORD has poured out on you
The spirit of deep sleep,
And has closed your eyes, namely, the prophets;
And He has covered your heads, namely, the seers.

¹¹The whole vision has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one who is literate, saying, “Read this, please.”

And he says, “I cannot, for it is sealed.”

¹²Then the book is delivered to one who is illiterate, saying, “Read this, please.”

And he says, “I am not literate.”

¹³Therefore the Lord said:

“Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths
And honor Me with their lips,
But have removed their hearts far from Me,
And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men,

¹⁴Therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work
Among this people,
A marvelous work and a wonder;
For the wisdom of their wise men shall perish,
And the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden.”

¹⁵Woe to those who seek deep to hide their counsel far from the LORD,
And their works are in the dark;
They say, “Who sees us?” and, “Who knows us?”

¹⁶Surely you have things turned around!
Shall the potter be esteemed as the clay;
For shall the thing made say of him who made it,

“He did not make me”?
Or shall the thing formed say of him who formed it,
“He has no understanding”?

¹⁷Is it not yet a very little while
Till Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field,
And the fruitful field be esteemed as a forest?

¹⁸In that day the deaf shall hear the words of the book,
And the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity and out of darkness.

¹⁹The humble also shall increase their joy in the LORD,
And the poor among men shall rejoice
In the Holy One of Israel.

²⁰For the terrible one is brought to nothing,

The scornful one is consumed,
And all who watch for iniquity are cut off—
²¹Who make a man an offender by a word,
And lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate,
And turn aside the just by empty words.

²²Therefore thus says the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob:

“Jacob shall not now be ashamed,
Nor shall his face now grow pale;
²³But when he sees his children,
The work of My hands, in his midst,
They will hallow My name,
And hallow the Holy One of Jacob,
And fear the God of Israel.
²⁴These also who erred in spirit will come to understanding,
And those who complained will learn doctrine.” (Isa. 29:1-24)

Let us return to Romans 13. After describing the time, the apostle then set forth...

2. The commandments in the light of the truths stated (imperatives).

“Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. ¹³Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. ¹⁴But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.” (Rom. 13:12-14)

The works of darkness are sins that we commit. They are as defiled things that we need to “cast off” from us. Paul wrote in very similar terms in 1 Thessalonians 5. There we read:

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ²And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

³But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. ⁴Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. ⁵For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷Therefore do not become partners with them; ⁸for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹²For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. ¹³But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, ¹⁴for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Awake, O sleeper,
And arise from the dead,
And Christ will shine on you.”

¹⁵Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. (1 Thess. 5:1-17)

Perhaps the “works of darkness” that we are to “cast off” of us is an allusion to dirty or ragged clothing. In the place of the defiled clothing of the works of darkness that we cast off, we are to “put on the armor of light.” Verse 12 reads, “Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and **let us put on the armor of light.**” “Light” is a metaphor of knowing God and His ways and the knowing the importance of the time. This alertness and knowledge “of the time” will provide protection for you from sin. “Light” provides good “armor” for the Christian. It will preserve him from the sins that are commonly committed by people clothed in “works of darkness.”

Now after Paul wrote of “the works of darkness,” and the need to be clothed in “the armor of light”, he then described in more detail the nature of the works of darkness. Three pairs of vices are listed. Verse 13 reads, “Let us walk properly, as in the day.” And then here they are: (1) **not in revelry and drunkenness**, (2) **not in lewdness and lust**, (3) **not in strife and envy**. These are the “works of darkness” that we are to cast off from us. These are the kinds of things done by those “in the night.” The first speaks of wild parties of drunken revelry. The second speaks of sexual sin. The third describes the sins that divide people from one another, or destroys the community and the family.

Paul concludes this section of his epistle with the words, **“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts”** (Rom. 13:14). Augustine confessed that he had been converted to Jesus Christ while meditating upon this verse.⁸

In verse 12 we were told, “Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and **let us put on the armor of light.**” Here in verse 14 the same idea is being conveyed, only in reverse: Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfil its lusts.”

We are to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” How is this done? We are to make Him the object of our interest and attention, focusing upon Him to lead us and direct us in the manner that we think and live. We might say that to put on the Lord Jesus Christ is renounce the wicked works of darkness and to clothe oneself in the armor of light, but looking to Him for the reason for doing so and looking to Him for the power to do so. To “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” is to live as He lived, to the degree that we are capable by His enabling grace and inspired instruction.

In conclusion, let each of us take to heart the admonition and exhortation. May the Lord enable us always to have before us the prospect of our promised destiny of our full salvation. Although we have received much, we have yet to receive it all. But that day is coming. We should live as ones who expect to see the promises of God in Christ realized to us and in us.

Let us each realize and acknowledge that the Lord deals with us in this life so as to wean us from our attachment and from the allurements that the world and its ways has for sinful people. He so deals with us that we become weary of this earthly existence and we long for its end to come and eternity will be ushered in. Let us each be so aware of “the time” that it influences how we think, what we value, and what we do. May our Lord enable each of us who believe to be prepared to meet our Lord with joy. Even so, Come Lord Jesus.

“And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight-- if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven.” (Col. 1:21ff)

⁸ John Trapp, *A Commentary on the Old and the New Testaments*, vol. 5 (Tanski Publications, 1997), p. 513.