

### Living in Light of Christ's Return (13:8-14)

- Romans 13:8-14 exhorts us to live in the present in light of the future return of Jesus Christ. There is a day coming when Christ is going to come and reveal Himself to us (cf Matt 24:42-44; 1 Thess 5:1-10; Rom 11:25-27). The Lord's soon return should motivate believers to godliness and service. We are to watch, wait, and work until He comes, whenever that might be.

#### 1. The Soon Return of The Lord (13:11-12)

- Every day we are drawing nearer and nearer to the time that Christ is coming again, and that "time" (or, season/opportunity) is going to be over soon. Paul uses 2 metaphors to describe the soon return of the Lord.
  - "*Salvation is nearer than when we believed*" (v11b). Our "salvation" refers to our future and final salvation. There are three stages to salvation. At the moment of conversion, we were saved from the penalty of sin. We are being saved daily from the power of sin. We will be saved eventually from the presence of sin. Our salvation will be completed when we see the Lord face to face and are made fully like Him. This is also called the "day of redemption" (Eph 4:30; Rom 8:23). The day when our salvation shall be completed is nearer today than it was when we first believed in Christ. Every day brings us one day closer to eternity.
  - "*The night is far spent, the day is at hand*" (v12a). The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. The term "night" here refers metaphorically to the spiritual and moral darkness of this world. The Bible often describes this sinful world and those who live in it as darkness. This world and time as we know it will not last long (1 John 2:8).
- Paul understands that the present age is the final one – the last before the appearance of our Lord. In that sense, the night is far spent, and the day is at hand. It is the same idea as the term "last days" (2 Tim 3:1; 2 Pet 3:3). It covers the entire period from Paul's days until the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of the Lord. Jesus' coming is ALWAYS near, at hand. When we put things into perspective, we only have a short time on this earth.

#### 2. Living in Light of the Lord's Return (13:8-14)

- 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 (Ps 90:10,12).
  - (i) *Love Others, 13:8-10*
    - "*Owe no man any thing, but to love one another....*" 'Don't owe anybody anything but owe everybody love!' The Bible does not prohibit borrowing. Both the law of Moses and our Lord's personal teaching made provision for this (Ex 22:25; Matt 5:42). What Paul objected to was failing to take care of our obligations. Paul is telling the Roman Christians that they are to meet every

social or financial obligation without failing. As we are to repay our obligations to the authorities, so we are to repay all other debts. The exhortation to owe no man anything ought to be a warning to Christians not to go so deeply into debt that they cannot pay their bills (Prov 22:7).

- On a personal level, the only “debt” we are to carry is the “debt” to love one another – this is a perpetual obligation we owe to God and each other. Since we can never exhaust the debt of love, we must keep working to pay it off (cf 12:9-21). It should be noted that the essence of true love is caring action, not simply kind words (1 Jn 3:18). Love fulfills the (or, the requirement of the) Law. Paul quotes the last 5 of the 10 Commandments to show that if one loves, these commandments will be fulfilled (cf Lev 19:18; Matt 22:37-40). Paul is making a very important statement, a statement which Jesus underscores – if you live by the law of love, you will fulfil or obey the law of Moses.
- The 10 commandments can be summed up by the 2 Commandments found in Matthew 22:37-40. These 2 Commandments can be summed up by one word, “LOVE” (Gal 5:14). If we love, we will be fulfilling the commandments. This appeal to the Decalogue proves that the Decalogue is permanent and of abiding relevance. *“Love worketh no ill to its neighbor”* - it is impossible to sin against our fellowmen if we love them.
- When the Bible says, *“Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,”* it presupposes that you do already love yourself. The measure of our love for others is whether we love them as we love ourselves – with the same kind of love and care. There is no commandment to love yourself (Luke 9:23; 2 Tim 3:1-2). There are only two great commandments, not three: love God and love your neighbour.

(ii) *Awake Out of Sleep, 13:11*

- *“Now it is high time”* adds a touch of urgency to Paul’s exhortation. Time is running out. Knowing the time will spur us to *“awake out of sleep.”* The word “sleep” is used here metaphorically of spiritual sleep, ie. awake out of our lethargy and spiritual slumber. Many believers cruise lazily through life not even considering the fact that Jesus might return at any moment.
- It’s time to wake up! The dawn of day, the approaching light of the morning, is the time to rise from slumber (John 9:4). We are to seize the opportunities that we have now. How do we stay alert spiritually? We must cultivate the right priorities (Col 3:2; Matt 25:1-13). This should not lead to date setting but that we should order our lives in view Christ’s soon return.

(iii) *Casting Off Works of Darkness, 13:12-13*

- Paul picks up on the day & night contrast and uses it to describe how we should live. The illustration is from taking off and putting on clothes.
  - We must cast off (or, put away) before we can put on. In view of Christ’s return, we are to cast off the “works of darkness.” “Darkness” is the natural

habitat of evil (Eph 6:12; Col 1:13), so that the “works of darkness” are wicked works and as such are to be decisively put away.

- Instead, we are to put on the armour of light. Putting on the armour of light means that we walk in obedience or holiness.
- We should be living with a new urgency. Those who understand this fact will change the way they live.
  - Walk in Honesty. *“Let us walk honestly”* or in a “decent” or “becoming” manner; in a manner appropriate to those who are the children of light. If we say we are saved, we should live as though we are saved.
  - Walk in Holiness. We must also know how we should not live. Paul mentions 6 sins of the flesh that were no doubt prevalent in his day.
    - *“not in rioting and drunkenness”* - “rioting” means revellings or “carousing.” The Greek word translated “carousing” was used generally of feasts and drinking parties that are protracted till late at night and to indulge in revelry.
    - *“not in chambering and wantonness”* - that is sexual promiscuity and shamelessness.
    - *“not in strife and envying”* – that is dissension/contention and jealousy. These sins are not appropriate for Christians who have come out of darkness into God’s light.

(iv) *Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, 13:14*

- It closes with a highly practical admonition: *“But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.”* You either make provision for the flesh or you put on Jesus Christ.
  - To “put on” Christ is a strong and vivid metaphor referring to the most intimate union with Christ and being clothed with all the graces which are in Christ (Eph 4:24; Gal 3:27). When we put on Jesus, we are putting on the capacity to love.
  - Paul says never at any time make provision for your flesh. What Paul is saying is, “don’t make plans for satisfying the desires of the flesh.” If we don’t want to fall into sin, we must avoid making any provision for sinning. May the reality of the approaching day of the Lord weigh upon us every day, so that we trust in Him as Saviour and walk in holiness before Him as Lord!

Notes