

New Years 2025

Rm 13:8-14, *Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," [] and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." [b] ¹⁰ Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law. And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already 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 carousing 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 flesh.*

Our text this morning is Rm 13:8-14. It is always a promising idea to start the year off with a reflective thought. Renee and I are both doing hot yoga during the week to try to improve our balance, flexibility, and core strengthening. Before starting each session, the instructor asks us to set an intention or have some focus for the hour. In other words, what do you want to accomplish with your time here. My intention is usually just to finish and not to groan too loudly. But the principle of looking ahead and assessing where you are is a good thing to do. And this is what we want to do this morning: to look ahead to 2025 and do some self-assessment. Some of what I will say stems from an article by the late Adrian Rogers. So, this is not all original with me. But some of it is my musing so please take it as such.

Rm 13 is the government chapter but at the end it deals with godly living, and it is here we want to focus our attention. And I am going to deal with verses 11-14 first then 8-10. Paul gives the church at Rome four admonitions to ponder.

Wake Up!

Rm 13:11-12a: *And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already 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.*

There are three components to this command: the first is found in verse 11a: we are to understand the present time. I take this in two ways. The first is what I call a micro interpretation. It refers to the reader in time. In other words, you are to understand where you are chronologically in life. Both physically, but more importantly spiritually. Physically because our bodies over time will not allow for things we could do earlier. For example, a mission trip to build houses or dig wells is much easier done when you are 40 than when you are 80. So, the lesson here is to seize opportunities that physical age and health allow (Solomon understood this principle: note Eccl 11:8-12:7). But it is also important spiritually. John, the apostle, addressed believers in various stages of their spiritual walk: some as children, some as young men, and some as fathers. Ps 1 says we are like trees planted by streams of water bringing forth fruit in due season. The psalmist is saying there are seasons to our lives, and we are to be aware of them and use them for God's kingdom. In the life of a tree there is a planting and nourishing stage, a growing stage, a pruning and production stage, and a harvest stage. Here is a word picture for most of us in this

room. Your life is full of the fruit of experience and a long walk with the Lord. Most of us are in the harvest stage. Fruit on a tree is to be picked and eaten, otherwise it begins to fall and rot. Who is picking and eating the fruit of your life?

But there is also a macro understanding of the times in which you live. It is to see and understand the bigger picture. To understand we live in a culture antagonistic to spiritual truth. To understand our country is morally, financially, and spiritually bankrupt. Do not get me wrong, there is no place I would rather live than in America, but we are not to be ignorant of its problems and the forces we find ourselves fighting. Following the end of WW2 Winston Churchill authored a book called the Gathering Storm. It detailed the events in Britain and Europe that led up to Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939. Churchill notes one reason the war broke out is how so many failed to heed the warning signs of Hitler's imperialism and chose to either appease or ignore him. That European generation failed to understand the times in which they lived, and the consequences were catastrophic.

The second component is found in verse 11b. We are to wake up because *your salvation is nearer now than when we first believed*. In other words, you do not know how many days you have left in this life. Your life is marching along and someday this week may be your graduation day. You do not know, so make the best of each day so you have no regrets. Paul said *I finished the race*. I ran every part of it.

The third component is in verse 12a in which he states, *the night is nearly over, the day is almost here*. We are to wake up because our lives are very short! Ever get up super early in the morning like 3 or 4 am. It is still dark, but the day is almost here. Paul is saying this is your life. The night part: in which we wrestle with sin, our fallen bodies, a cursed world, is so short. The dawn is almost here. Your deliverance is soon. The word *slumber* means spiritual indifference. Do not just drift through life. Wake up!!! Make the most of the fleeting time you have. Life is short and fragile.

In summary, wake up: Understand the times and assess where you are in them today, then make the most of each day, and understand your time is short. As Paul notes to the Ephesians in 5:16, *Redeem the time for the days are evil*. Use the gift of time wisely.

Clean Up!

The second admonition is given in verse 12b, so *let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light*. We are to clean up. If we are going to be spiritually awakened, then Paul says we are to live our lives in a Godly fashion. Let us behave decently and put aside the *deeds of darkness*, as Gal 5:16 says, *we are to walk by the Spirit and not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever [e] you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.* ¹⁹ *The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to*

Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking, and envying each other.

For me it is not so much the acts of the flesh that I wrestle with, it is the thoughts of the flesh that result in acts, which do me in. It is a fight for me every day and I venture most of you struggle with the same. Paul says it is time to clean up. Now I cannot say I have this solved, for it will not be solved till I am free of my old nature. But I do use a different approach. In the past, I would try not to think of things I should not think about. But then I would just think more about them. It was the same problem Paul had in Romans 7. *We know that the Law is right and good, but I am a person who does what is wrong and bad. I am not my own boss. Sin is my boss. ¹⁵ I do not understand myself. I want to do what is right, but I do not do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ When I do the thing I do not want to do, it shows me that the Law is right and good. ¹⁷ So I am not doing it. Sin living in me is doing it. ¹⁸ I know there is nothing good in me, that is, in my flesh. For I want to do good, but I do not. ¹⁹ I do not do the good I want to do. Instead, I am always doing the sinful things I do not want to do. ²⁰ If I am always doing the very thing I do not want to do, it means I am no longer the one who does it. It is sin that lives in me. ²¹ This has become my way of life: When I want to do what is right, I always do what is wrong. ²² My mind and heart agree with the Law of God. ²³ But there is a different law at work deep inside of me that fights with my mind. This law of sin holds me in its power because sin is still in me. ²⁴ There is no happiness in me! Who can set me free from my sinful old self? ²⁵ God's Law has power over my mind, but sin still has power over my sinful old self.*

Here is the new approach. I began to see that living the Christian life is the same as coming to be a Christian. What do I mean? When I became a believer, I saw there was nothing I could do to help with my salvation. No words to say, no deeds to do, no pilgrimages to make, nothing but believe by faith that Christ died for my sin. I was helpless. And God saved me by grace. So, it is with our battle with sin. There is nothing you can do in your flesh to fight it. Your old nature is too strong. You cannot control it. But God can. Just as he saved you by grace, so you can live by grace. Here is what I mean; as believers we now live with two contrasting natures each with their own desires and animating power to accomplish those desires: desires and power that spring from our old nature, and desires and power that spring from our new nature, the Spirit of God that now dwells within us. Our minds are the battleground where these two natures meet. I do not know when an evil thought will suddenly appear in my mind, for my old nature is a seething cauldron of desire and it bubbles up at the most inopportune times. Someone has said our minds are like hotel lobbies. You cannot control what comes into the lobby, but you can control to whom you give a room key. In other words, we have a choice: We can take an evil thought and indulge it, or we can refuse it. But here is the key to the refusing. You cannot do it on your own. Just as you could not help yourself with your salvation, you cannot help yourself with godly living. It is only by God's power and grace that you can banish and not act on that evil thought. It is to say, Lord I am helpless before my evil nature, I need your grace to fight it because I cannot do it. This is the liberating news of Romans 8. Paul said who will deliver me from this body of death? God can! This is why Paul says in Romans 8:2, *The power of the Holy Spirit has made me free from the power of sin and death.* He goes on to say in verses 5-14, *Those who let their sinful old selves tell them what to do live under that power of their sinful old selves. But those who let the Holy Spirit tell them what to do are under His power. ⁶ If your sinful old self*

is the boss over your mind, it leads to death. But if the Holy Spirit is the boss over your mind, it leads to life and peace. ⁷ The mind that thinks only of ways to please the sinful old self is fighting against God. It is not able to obey God's Laws. It never can. ⁸ Those who do what their sinful old selves want to do cannot please God. ⁹ But you are not doing what your sinful old selves want you to do. You are doing what the Holy Spirit tells you to do, if you have God's Spirit living in you. No one belongs to Christ if he does not have Christ's Spirit in him. ¹⁰ If Christ is in you, your spirit lives because you are right with God, and yet your body is dead because of sin. ¹¹ The Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead. If the same Holy Spirit lives in you, He will give life to your bodies in the same way. ¹² So then, Christian brothers, we are not to do what our sinful old selves want us to do. ¹³ If you do what your sinful old selves want you to do, you will die in sin. But if, through the power of the Holy Spirit, you destroy those actions to which the body can be led, you will have life. Paul is asking all of us to take a spiritual shower. Clean up and let the grace and power of God help deliver you from your old sinful self.

Dress Up!

The third admonition comes from verse 12b and verse 14. We are to *put on the armor of light and clothe ourselves with the LJC*. As we are to wash ourselves with the Spirit of God, and once we are clean, we then are to put on the armor of light and clothe ourselves with the LJC. What is Paul saying here? He is simply emphasizing the Spirit powered life. If we have a choice of either being animated by our old nature or our new one, Paul says choose the new one. As Romans 8:13 states, *if you do what your sinful old selves want you to do, you will die in sin. But if, through the power of the Holy Spirit, you destroy those actions to which the body can be led, you will have life.* Galatians 5:18-24 states, *But the fruit that comes from having the Holy Spirit in our lives is: love, joy, peace, not giving up, being kind, being good, having faith, ²³ being gentle, and being the boss over our own desires. The Law is not against these things. ²⁴ Those of us who belong to Christ have nailed our sinful old selves on His cross. Our sinful desires are now dead.* After God saved you, He is now in the business of transforming you into the image of his Son. He is doing it through the power of His Spirit. It is not us. He is manifesting and expressing Himself through us. And it is all by Grace.

Love Up!

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," [] and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." [b] ¹⁰ Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.

The last admonition is given in verses 8-10. It is to Love Up. Paul is saying the great command of Lev 19:18 is to love your neighbor as yourself. This commandment is the fulfilment of all God asks of us. But to love, to seek the best for those around us, requires us to wake up and understand our times, to clean up and dress up by the power of God's Spirit, so that God can express himself through loving others in any way we can. The days are short, and the times are evil. May we redeem the time and finish the race the Lord has for each of us. Amen!

