

Pastor Daniel Waldschmidt – Advent 1 – Romans 13:11-14 – December 1, 2019

One commentator on this passage made a striking observation.¹ He said that very early in the morning, just before the sunrise, there is a moment when it seems like it is night and day at the same time. On the one hand, it seems like it is night because it is dark outside. On the other hand, it seems like it is day because the sun is just starting to send up its rays over the horizon. That is a good picture of the time in history that we live in. On the one hand it is still night. There is still sin around us and in us. On the other hand, the sun has started to send up its rays over the horizon. Jesus has already come the first time. He died on the cross for our sins. God raised him from the dead. And Jesus promises that he will come again. We live between the two advents of Jesus. It's still night, but we can see the day coming. And so today God says to us,

Walk in the Daylight.

- I. By putting aside the deeds of darkness.
- II. By putting on the Lord Jesus Christ.

First, walk in the daylight by putting aside the deeds of darkness. In the first eleven chapters of his letter to the Romans, Paul talked about the light that has shined on us because of Christ's first advent, his first coming. Paul said that **"God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement" (Rom 3:25)**. Because of this sacrifice, God declares us not guilty of sin. (Rom. 3:24) And because of this not-guilty verdict we have life in the place of death (Rom 5:18). Our passage for today is the conclusion of a section of Romans where Paul has been talking about the life of thankfulness that we live in response to God's grace. He says, **"Let us put aside the deeds of darkness." (Romans 13:12)** Paul then gives some examples of deeds of darkness. Some of these deeds of darkness which Paul lists tend to happen when it is physically dark outside. He says, **"Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness" (Romans 13:13)**. Sometimes people think about nights of drunkenness in their past and they laugh. But drunkenness is not something to laugh about. It is something to repent of. It is a deed of darkness. Another deed of darkness which Paul lists is **"sexual immorality."** Many people today want to enjoy the blessings of marriage without the commitment of marriage. God wants his gift of sex to be used only within the covenant of marriage. Sex before marriage is against the will of God. And Christians do not want to transgress the will of God. The next deed of darkness on the list is **"debauchery."** Debauchery refers to a complete lack of self-control. A lack of self-control can sometimes lead to sexual sin. Paul says, "Let us put aside all these deeds of darkness." So far Paul has listed deeds of darkness tend to occur when it is physically dark outside. Paul says the same thing in 1 Thessalonians 5. There he says, **"You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. ... those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love ... and hope" (1 Thessalonians 5:5-8)**. Since many deeds of darkness happen when it is dark outside, we need to be especially careful about what we do at night. Occupy your night with things that are spiritually bright. Other deeds of darkness are not necessarily done at night. Paul goes on to list other deeds of darkness that are commonly done during the daytime. He says, **"Not in dissension and jealousy" (Romans 13:13)**. "Dissension" refers to quarrelling and arguing. "Dissension and jealousy" are two deeds of darkness that arose within the congregation at Corinth. Paul is writing this letter to the Romans, but he is writing from the city of Corinth. The congregation in Corinth had problems with quarrelling and arguing among themselves. The congregation had split into parties that were opposing one another. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians to address this, he used the same two Greek words that we have here. In 1 Corinthians 3:3 Paul said, **"You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly?"** Quarrelling and dissension and jealousy are a mark of this world, not the world to come. They are deeds of darkness, not light.

And Paul says that we should put aside these deeds of darkness because Christ's second advent is coming. Paul says: **"And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up**

¹ Michael Middendorf, *Romans 9-16*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2016).

from your slumber” (Romans 13:11). It’s interesting that Paul says this to Christians. He says this to people who are already awake spiritually. But Christians also need to hear Paul’s call to wake up. We need to hear Paul’s call to wake up because the devil is constantly trying to lull us into spiritual sleep. That’s why Paul says, **“let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light” (Romans 13:12)**. Paul says “armor” because the Christian life is a battle against temptation. The Christian can become weary in this struggle against the darkness. But that’s why Paul encourages us by saying, **“Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed” (Romans 13:11)**. Notice that Paul emphasizes the positive side of the Last Day. The Last Day will be a day of judgment for unbelievers. But it will be a day of salvation for believers. Our salvation is coming! And Paul uses that as a motivation for believers to put aside deeds of darkness. This life is a battle against your sinful flesh. But every night you go to bed, you know that you’re one day closer to Jesus coming back. You’re one day closer to your salvation. **“Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed” (Romans 13:11)**. And the fact that your salvation keeps coming closer and closer, gives you strength to continue to engage in the battle. We have a hymn in our hymnal called “For All the Saints” and one of the verses says, **“And when the fight is fierce the warfare long, Steals on the ear the distant triumph song, And hearts are brave again and arms are strong, Alleluia, Alleluia.” (CW: 551:5, Text: William How)**. The fact that Jesus is going to come back to bring us salvation gives us the strength to walk in the daylight by putting aside the deeds of darkness, and, secondly, to walk in the daylight by putting on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul says, **“Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 13:14)**. Paul often uses the image of putting on clothing. For example, Paul says that when you were baptized you were clothed with Christ. In Galatians 3:27 he says, **“[F]or all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”** Jesus covers your sins so that when God looks at you he doesn’t see your sins. Instead he sees Jesus’ perfect righteousness. That’s why you’ll be able to stand before God on Judgment Day. You are covered in Jesus’ perfect righteousness. It’s like the hymn-writer said; **“Jesus your blood and righteousness, my beauty are, my glorious dress, Mid flaming worlds in these arrayed with joy shall I lift up my head.” (CW 376:1, Text: Nicolaus von Zinzendorf)** Other times Paul uses the imagery of clothing to talk about the attitudes that we should have toward other people. For example, in Colossians chapter 3 Paul says, **“clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (Colossians 3:12)**. Here in Romans Paul tells us to clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ. Our clothing is what people see. In your dealings with other people, let people see Jesus. This chapter is the conclusion of two chapters that have been about living the Christian life. In these two chapters Paul says things like, **“Be devoted to one another in love” (Rom 12:10)**. **“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse” (Rom 12:14)**. **“Do not take revenge” (Rom 12:19)** **“Overcome evil with good” (Rom 13:21)**. **“Love one another” (Rom 13:8)**. This is how we put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Clothe yourself with his humility and his patience and his love. Earlier in the book of Romans, Paul said that **“those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29)**. Ever since Adam fell into sin, people have been born in the image of Adam, that’s why were sinful. But through faith we are remade, not in the image of Adam, but in the image of Jesus.² That will be made perfectly complete at Christ’s second Advent, on the Last Day. But that work of conforming us to the image of Jesus is started even now. Walk in the daylight by putting on the Lord Jesus Christ. Luther said that we do this everyday by remembering our baptism: by drowning our Old Adam with its evil deeds and desire so that a new person can daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

There is a moment right before dawn when it seems like it’s night and day at the same time. But when you’re in that moment you know that the darkness will soon be gone. And the sun will soon be high in the sky. In a similar way, we know that our salvation is coming. It’s nearer now than when we first believed. It comes closer and closer and closer each day. So let’s walk in the daylight by putting aside the deeds of darkness and by putting on the armor of light. Amen.

² I owe this insight to, among others, Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 26.