

Romans 13:11-14 continues Paul's – and the Holy Spirit's --theme of encouragement building on the first eleven chapters. Let's read and then ask the text to speak to us...

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. ¹² The 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. ¹³ Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

For most, if not all, of Paul's ministry he was intensely looking for the return of the Lord Jesus. Paul was a classically trained scholar with regard to the Old Testament and parallel literature. When we compare his writing to the OT we can see for ourselves. There is a massive body of truth taken from Isaiah. With regard to his expectation of the return of Jesus we hear Isaiah **“Thus says the LORD: “Keep justice, and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come, and my righteousness be revealed.”** (Isaiah 56:1). “Soon” is a word often used with regard to Jesus' return. Here the Prophet sees the time when Jehovah God would settle the problems of the world. “Soon”, for Isaiah, refers to 700 years in the future and at least another 2000 years to bring it up to today. That is, if we believe Isaiah was seeing the coming of God's salvation.

Jesus, Himself, warned the people while he was on the Earth, (Luke 21:25-28) **“And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, ²⁶ people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ Now when**

these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

I believe the first letter to the Thessalonians is the first written by Paul. The letter is written to encourage the new believers. I believe he was on his second missionary journey when he preached in Macedonia, where Thessalonica is located. He had been unable to complete the establishment of the church there. He sent Timothy back to carry on the work he had begun. Timothy brought him good news about their faith and love. That report prompted Paul to write 1st and 2nd Thessalonians. Part of Paul’s reason for writing was to inform them about his expectation that Jesus would return soon. He did not want to frighten them. Clearly, he believed in the soon coming of Jesus. In chapter 4 verse 15 he told them **“we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord”** is evidence of his own expectation. The letter to the Romans was written about 7 or 8 years later and the urgency is no longer there.

He had told the Romans that **“Salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.”** (Romans 13:11). Those words still hold. With regard to Jesus’ second coming most of us no longer say “soon”, but we can say “surely” — he will come. Just as Christ’s first coming was at the right time so will his second coming be. At the right time in the right way.

Remember, we owe a debt of love. Our love for Christ is related to our obedience to him. John, after recounting the story of Nicodemus, tells us when we believe in Jesus we have eternal life. (John 3:36) That love will be reflected in obeying Jesus. No one can claim to be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ unless they are living in obedience to him. Now, how can we live out that love? What is our responsibility as we wait on the coming King?

R. K. Hughes, in his commentary, *Romans: righteousness from heaven*, tells us this story to illustrate the power of love in our world:

This principle was dramatically illustrated on the human level in the life of Kathryn Lawes.

When Louis Lawes became warden of Sing Sing Prison in 1920, the inmates existed in wretched conditions. This led him to introduce humanitarian reforms. He gave much of the credit to his wife, Kathryn, ... who always treated the prisoners as human beings. She would often take her three children and sit with the gangsters, the murderers, and the racketeers while they played basketball and baseball. Then in 1937, Kathryn was killed in a car accident. The next day her body lay in a casket in a house about a quarter of a mile from the institution (prison). When the acting warden found hundreds of prisoners crowded around the main entrance, he knew what they wanted. Opening the gate, he said, "Men, I'm going to trust you. You can go to the house." No count was taken; no guards posted. Yet not one man was missing that night. Love for one who had loved them made them dependable. Of course this should be infinitely truer in relation to God's love for and through us. God's sacrifice for us, his love lavished upon us, ought to make us completely dependable in our showing love to the world.

How wonderful it would be if the majority of the Church began to do this. Surely such love would be so amazing that it would engulf whole continents.

We need to cultivate a sense of our debt of love. Just as when we owe someone money that debt is the first thing we think of when we see him, so should it be with our debt of love. We need to enlarge our definition of neighbor as, "My neighbor is not necessarily someone like me. My neighbor is any person God has put in my way whom I can help."

When a lawyer asked, "Who is my neighbor? Jesus illustrated his answer in the story of the good Samaritan, told by Doctor Luke chapter 10 verses 30-37. **"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed**

by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴ He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" ³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

It seems obvious to me that Jesus carefully picked out his characters for the story. He doesn't tell us anything about the man who was stripped, beaten and left for dead. We have no idea how he felt about Samaritans. Nor, do we know what he felt about the religious leaders of his day. In this story Jesus chooses to have a priest go by, look over the man, and decide to pass by on the other side of the road. The priest might have thought through the problem that he would be unclean if he touched this man. After all he was on his way to Jerusalem where he would undoubtedly go to the temple! The second man to arrive was a Levite. That meant that he would have been an assistant at the temple. This gave him the same problem the priest faced. Jesus chose to introduce the person who gave help — a Samaritan! We're not told what kind of feelings the priest and the Levite had toward the man in the ditch. The feeling the Samaritan had was compassion. He immediately helped the man without any consideration for the consequences. He not only set out to provide the man's immediate needs he also provided for his long-term care. The Samaritan showed love for this battered traveler. He left with the innkeeper an amount of money that would have paid for roughly two months in the Inn.

The debt of love that we owe will never be paid. We cannot earn our salvation. No one can! We are saved by grace through faith that is the gift of God. A gift cannot be earned but it should stir in us a desire to please the one who gave it. We must remember that we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works. The God who saves us and implants faith into our character also has good works prepared for us to do. This is explained in Paul's letter to the Ephesians chapter 2, verses four through ten. In order to express our gratitude to God we must cultivate a sense of the time—"It is later than it has ever been before."

Our salvation will be completed when Christ returns. While we wait on him we need to consciously put away things that are detrimental to our spiritual growth. Paul called them the works of darkness. In Paul's letter to the Colossians chapter 3:8-9 Paul again uses the term "put away". Let's look at that passage. **"You must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices."**

Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ should never, ever let these actions govern their lives: anger — do you ever lose your temper? Wrath — a step beyond simple anger! Malice — wickedness or evil! Slander — an evil attitude without a basis in reality. Obscene talk — our world is filled with it today! These things should never, ever be a characteristic of a Christian believer. Believers will not lie to one another. Lying is a characteristic of Satan as we no longer follow his direction. Jesus, on the other hand, is the epitome of truth.

And we have put on the armor of light. The world around us is sunk in sin and therefore is a world of darkness. Jesus identified himself as the light of the world and he extended his light to his people. John told us about our relationship to the light. He quoted Jesus: **"The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in**

the darkness does not know where he is going. ³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.” John 12:35-36.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus had told his people, Matthew 5:14-16, **“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.**

In the beginning of John’s Gospel we are told that Jesus had life in himself when he came into the world, and that life was the light of men.

Looking back to Romans chapter 13. Paul continues. We must put off the work of darkness and put on the armor of light. We are to live our lives in a manner that is honest. We must put aside all the things that represent the darkness.

Our passage for the day tells us how to avoid the passions of the flesh. We do that by putting on Lord Jesus Christ. We need to feed spiritual values and starve the desires of the flesh. When we find ourselves tempted to fall back into the world’s way of self-gratification we need to immediately, and consciously, put on the Lord Jesus Christ! Remember, when Jesus was tempted he quoted Scripture to Satan! Seems to me we should do the same. Now, how are we gonna do that? We need to be familiar with the teachings of the Bible so we can throw scripture back in the face of whatever is tempting us! Read, meditate upon and memorize the word of God and you will be able to put aside works of the flesh and walk in the light with Jesus Christ our Lord.

First, be certain you have a living relationship with Jesus. Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord! Believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead! And you will be saved! Dig into the word on a daily basis. Faith comes by hearing the word of God. So I remind you: read the word, meditate on the word, and memorize the word! It will give you the road to victory!

All scriptures quotes are from: *The Holy Bible: English standard version*. 2001. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.