

Living in the Light

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[0 : 00] You guys take a seat if you would for a little bit and I'd like you if you have your Bibles with you to open them up to Romans chapter 13.

We are finishing up chapter 13 of Romans before we begin a new series of sermons for the month of December that will focus upon the person of Jesus and the work of Jesus as we approach Christmas.

And so this morning though before we do that we want to finish Romans chapter 13. I told you I was going to try to finish Romans before the end of the year and you all laughed at me and you were right to laugh at me.

You physically laughed at me the first time I said it to you and you were right. We'll jump back into Romans in January in chapter 14. But here we are at the end looking at verses 11 through 14 here. And I want to ask you guys to stand to your feet in honor of the word of God as we read it together. Apostle Paul writes, Besides this, you know the time that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep.

[1 : 14] For salvation is nearer to us now than we first believe. 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.

Let us walk properly as in the daytime. Not in orgies and drunkenness. Not in sexual immorality and sensuality. Not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

And make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires. We give you thanks for this word, Father. And ask that through these verses you would teach us.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. You guys take a seat. I hope you all enjoyed your Thanksgiving week. For some people it's a break. For some people it's a time of resting because you don't have to go to work.

You don't have to do as much for others. It's actually a busier time because not only do you have work, but you've got to travel and you've got to get ready for Thanksgiving. You've got all sorts of things to do. I hope that though, regardless of whether it was a time of resting or a time of busyness for you, that you had a good Thanksgiving.

[2 : 16] That you were able at some point in time to hit the pause button and spend some time giving thanks to the Lord for all the good things that He's given you and that He's done for you.

Because even when we suffer, even when we have a bad year and things go poorly, in the midst of that we can see that God is at work in the lives of His people to do good things for us and to bring good things out of those things.

So if you look back on this year and you think, not the best year. Or if you look back on this year and you think, a great year. Either way, you have reason to give thanks to the Lord because He's at work in all of those things.

So I hope that this week you've been able to do that. I had a little bit of time this week. The boys were out of school and so they were at home a little bit more often. And so we took a little bit of time to go hunting this week.

And we don't have to go and stay anywhere. We have a friend who owns some land about an hour away. And so as long as we leave about an hour before we need to get there and get started, then we can hunt whenever we want during deer season and not have to be gone for a whole week or for a whole weekend.

[3 : 20] And that's kind of nice. So we went, I think, three different times. I took different ones of the boys and we would go and sit in the stand. And we didn't shoot anything. We didn't even see anything worth shooting. But it's fun to just be there with the kids and to spend some time there.

We went twice in the evening and once in the morning. Now, the thing about going in the evening, though, is that you get there and you get there before the sun goes down. And obviously it's still daylight and you can still see.

And you're sitting in the stand and it's getting darker and darker as time goes on. And the kids inevitably at some point in time, they say, Is it time to go, Dad? Time to leave? Are we ready? Are we done? And my answer is always, no, we're not leaving until I cannot physically see the feeder anymore.

Once I can't see it anymore, I will accept that it's dark and I can now no longer sit here away from the rest of the world. And so at nighttime, it's just you're moving towards that moment when you just can't see anymore.

But the mornings are much better because you get there normally when it's still dark. And you know that sunrise is at a particular time, but you also know that before the sun actually rises, before the top of the disk of the sun actually breaks the horizon, the light from the sun is going to come through.

[4 : 32] And my favorite time of the morning are those few minutes. And it's only a few minutes, but you have plenty of light to be able to see. But the sun hasn't yet come up. It's still technically dark.

It's still technically nighttime. And that's a great moment to be sitting in a deer stand with one of your kids, just enjoying it when it's cool but not cold, as it was this week when it's cool but not cold.

And it's just nice. You have that moment. It's still technically nighttime, but there's enough light to see, and the sun has not yet broken the horizon.

I think that that's what Paul was describing in these verses. As I sat in the stand one morning this week, also meditating on the passage that we would be looking at this morning, I thought how great that God would bring these two things together, that I would be able to see and experience the very thing that the Apostle Paul is describing here at the end of chapter 13.

I want you to look at his words. Notice exactly what he says to us in verse 11. He says, salvation, in the middle of verse 11, salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.

[5 : 37] And then he elaborates on it. He says, the night is far gone. The day is at hand. Now what he says quite literally here is that the night is coming to an end.

The night is drawing to a close. He's not saying the night is over yet. The night is not quite over yet. That's not what he says. He doesn't say the night is in the past. And he doesn't say that the daytime has arrived.

He says literally the day is near. The daytime, the light, the sun is near. And so I think he's describing that period of time in which technically it's still a bit dark, it's still a bit hazy, but you know the sun is about to break the horizon because you can see the light streaming over the horizon and you know it's almost daytime.

That's what he's describing here. But for the Apostle Paul, the terms night and day have significant meaning. He's not just describing literally that it's almost the next day.

They have significant meaning for him. You can understand that meaning better when you look at what he says right before that that we read where he says that salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.

[6 : 46] That there is some sense in which the completion of our salvation has drawn nearer to us now at this moment at which he's writing that letter or at the moment in which his readers are reading the letter.

Salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed, than when we first trusted in Christ, than when we were first declared righteous by God on the basis of faith. Now salvation, ultimate, the finishing, the completing of salvation, it's nearer to us now.

And you ask, what does that look like? We know what it looks like to talk about salvation having been a thing of the past, accomplished for us. We know that because we've seen it over and over as we've been walking through the book of Romans for almost two and a half years.

We've seen Paul talk about what it means to have been saved. He uses this term justified to describe that. And we know that the moment that we put our faith in Jesus Christ and repent of our sins, God justifies us.

He says, you're righteous in my sight. We know that. That's in the past for those who have believed. But there's still an aspect of salvation that draws nearer the further we move away from the moment in which we believed and were declared to be righteous by God Himself.

[8 : 00] What is that thing that draws nearer? What aspect of salvation is it that dawns with the day? What is it that we ought to be looking for expectantly with the kind of expectation that a person who has been lost and stumbling in the darkness looks for the rising of the sun?

What is it that we ought to be looking forward to and hoping in and clinging to? It's coming. It's almost here, Paul says. You can get a better idea if you'll just turn back a few pages in your Bible to Romans chapter 8.

I want you to see this as clearly as you can. In Romans chapter 8, Paul speaks of a future glory that awaits those who belong to Him, who have been adopted into God's family through faith in Jesus. And I want you to listen very carefully to what he says beginning in verse 20. He says, the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it.

So you could say, all the world was plunged into darkness. If we were to use the language of Romans 13, the end of Romans 13, we would say, the world was plunged into darkness.

[9 : 09] It's night time. And then he says that there is hope, verse 21, that someday the creation itself will be set free from its bondage from the darkness, from its bondage to corruption, and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

That's what we await. There is a freedom that belongs to the children of God that awaits us in the future. He goes on to describe it even more clearly. He says, for we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now, and not only the creation, but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

In other words, there's a final aspect of salvation that awaits all of those who belong to Christ. Yes, he's already said we have been adopted, but there's a sense in which we will one day be fully and finally adopted.

We will see our Heavenly Father. We will behold the Son. We will behold Jesus Christ Himself in all of His glory, and there will be a kind of freedom, a freedom from corruption, a freedom from death, a freedom from sin, a freedom from all the things that would drag us back and tear us down.

We will be fully and finally set free from all of those things, from the things that belong to the darkness. I think that's what Paul means when he says our salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.

[10 : 47] And what he does here at the end of chapter 13 is he draws for us a contrast. A contrast between the world in which we once lived that could be described by night or darkness and the world that we await that could be described as light, as daytime.

But for those of us who are following Jesus in the here and now, we are living in this little sliver of time that Paul says it's as if the night is done, it's spent, it's practically over with and the day is near, it's almost here so that we see the light and we know the light as well and we have the hope of light and yet, there are still dark corners that surround us.

At that moment of time when we're sitting in a deer stand, I can only see a certain distance before things grow dark once again. And I can only see in certain directions.

If I look towards the woods in one direction where the sun is not rising, it's darker around the corner, it's darker behind the trees where the light is being effectively blocked because there's not quite enough light to shine through the trees just yet.

And that's our life as followers of Christ. We know that the light is out there. We've seen the light. We've beheld the light. But we're surrounded by darkness still.

[12 : 08] as long as we are in this life and living in this fallen world. So that really, in reality, all of Romans chapters 12, 13, and 14 are telling us how to live in that time period.

How do we conduct ourselves? How are we supposed to survive? How are we supposed to make it? What are we supposed to do in this time period? And now here at the end of chapter 13, he's kind of reaching a crescendo, kind of showing us this is what you are to do.

And he draws a contrast for us between the life we once lived and the life that we ought to be living now by hope in the day that's about to dawn. So I want us this morning to look briefly at the contrasts that he draws and try to understand more fully what those contrasts are and then try to understand what can we do to be a people who are not overcome by the darkness on the edges but who cling to hope to the light that's dawning so that we can live in a way that honors Christ and brings glory to our Heavenly Father.

So let's look at the contrast here. First, he speaks in terms of night and day which we have already seen. The night is far gone, the day is at hand. And so he begins this paragraph though by telling us it's time to wake up.

The hour has come, the time has come for you to wake up from your sleeping. In other words, you need to be more aware. You need to know what's around you. You need to be aware of what lies ahead but also aware of the things that surround you.

[13:40] And then he moves on not merely night and day but also darkness and light. Notice verse 12, Then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.

Let us walk properly as in the daytime. So there are works that belong to the darkness and then there is armor that belongs to the light.

He lists for us some of the works of darkness. You can see what they are. It's kind of a list of what you might describe as just the height of living in the darkness. He says we're not to walk in orgies and drunkenness and sexual immorality and sensuality and quarreling and jealousy.

All of these things are the exact opposite of what it means to walk in the daytime. So that for the Apostle Paul, the night and the darkness is characterized by immorality of all sorts.

Now this list here is a fairly short list. But you can get an even clearer list. I want you to hold your place in Romans 13 and turn over to Ephesians 5 where Paul uses the same language and much of the same imagery.

[14:47] Light and darkness. He speaks of awaking from your sleep in Ephesians 5. And he gives us another list of some of the sins that characterize the darkness.

Ephesians 5, verse 8. At one time you were darkness before you trusted in Christ, before you knew Him. But now you are light in the Lord.

Walk as children of the light. For the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. And try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.

That's the same kind of language. The works of darkness. And if you'll just look up a few verses to verse 3, you can see some of them. Sexual immorality, impurity, covetousness.

He talks of filthiness, foolish talk, crude joking. He says that those things ought to be in fact replaced by thanksgiving. He speaks again of being sexually immoral, of being impure.

[15:50] He speaks of those who would deceive with empty words. All of these kinds of things, both our outward activity and the speech that we use, the things that come out of our mouth, all of these kinds of things that He's describing throughout Ephesians 5, the first few verses of Ephesians 5, they are the works of darkness.

It's not just the gross immorality of Romans 13. It's also crude joking, deceptive speech. It's any number of things that we could say that does not please God.

It's anything that couldn't be described as good and right and true. Those are the things of the darkness. And if we are honest with ourselves and one another, we will admit that there are many times when our lives bear the fruit of darkness even though they shouldn't.

There are many times when we are drawn into those dark corners. And we say things that we then regret. We do things.

We hurt other people. We compromise our own testimony before others because of the ways in which we live, of the kinds of relationships in which we are engaged.

[17:06] One of my kids said to me not long ago that they had done something. It really wasn't even that big of a deal. All right. But they had done something and they came and they said, I feel shaky inside.

That's what they said. I feel shaky inside. And I said, well, and what they were, I think they were expecting was a little bit of comfort. Oh, it's okay. Don't worry. Which they got a little bit later. But my initial reaction was, well, you feel shaky inside because what you did was sinful and wrong.

You feel shaky inside because that's called guilt. That's called conviction. And they looked at me like, oh no, you know, what am I supposed to do?

And I simply said, so there's only one thing to do right now. You need to talk to God, ask Him to forgive you, and then you're okay. And everything will be fine because the Bible promises us that because of Jesus, God always forgives us when we ask Him to.

But it's that sense of shakiness inside that can be a warning and an alert that we have reached into the darkness. We have grabbed hold of a piece of the darkness and pulled it back toward

ourselves.

[18:17] But the darkness has no place among those whom the Apostle Paul calls the children of light. Rather than reaching out into the darkness and grabbing a piece of it, Paul says we are to put those things away from us.

Push them away. He says literally, we are to take them off as if they are a kind of clothing that we're wearing. We are to take them off and put them away from us and they are to be replaced by something else. Look back in Romans 13 again and notice what he says we are to replace them with.

So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. It's putting on the armor of light that enables us to do what he says in verse 14 to walk properly as in the daytime.

The armor of light is the means by which we are able to actually live as those who belong to the light and not keep reaching out and grabbing pieces of the darkness and producing things that fit with the darkness.

But what's the armor of light here? What does he mean specifically by this particular phrase?

Because sometimes we get lost in the imagery. It sounds wonderful, it sounds great, but we don't pause to think, but what does that mean?

[19:27] What am I actually supposed to... What do I do with that? I don't know how to put on armor of light. What is that? I don't understand that completely. The word that he actually uses here for armor is one that has a much broader range of meaning.

Even in Paul's writings, even in Romans, it has a broader range of meaning. It normally refers to any kind of instrument that you would use in warfare. Anything that you could personally use as a combatant in war to fight against your enemy is what this word is used to describe.

And this is not the only time we see this word used in the book of Romans. Turn back a few more pages to Romans chapter 6 and this will give us a better idea of what it means to put on the armor of light.

In Romans chapter 6, Paul says in verse 12, speaking of very similar themes that we're dealing with now, Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body to make you obey its passions.

Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness. Now underline that word instruments. It's the same word. It's something used in warfare. That's why some translations put it as weapons here.

[20:38] Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life and your members to God as instruments.

There's the same word again as armor. Alright? As an instrument or as a weapon for righteousness. So here in Romans chapter 6, the weapons, the instruments of righteousness are actually the parts of your body, whether it's your eyes, your hands, your feet, but they can be put into service for unrighteousness or for righteousness.

And it's the other half of that. It's the weapons in service of righteousness that I believe that Paul has in mind here in Romans chapter 13 when he says, put on the armor of light.

Put on, clothe yourselves with weapons that are characterized by the things of the light, that which is good and right and true.

So that to put on the armor of light is not merely to use a flowery metaphor for describing good Christian living. It is to clothe yourselves in knowing and understanding what God defines as good and right and true.

[21:53] How do we do that? We do that mainly and primarily through the Word of God. I mean, that's how we know what's good and right and true.

There is a basic sense that God has put into everyone of good and right and wrong. That is absolutely true. Paul says that the law of God is written upon all of our hearts.

Christian, non-truthers, everybody who's a descendant of Adam has the law of God in some sense written upon their hearts which is why murder is illegal worldwide. It's not sort of an American thing, right?

It's not just a Christian thing. Everybody knows that murder and stealing and those things are wrong. So we do have sort of an innate sense of right and wrong. But that's oftentimes buried beneath sinful desires which is why we find ourselves doing things that are wrong.

Which is why we find ourselves explaining away our lifestyle and our behavior that we know is wrong. We have a sense of it. We know it but we explain it away. We excuse it.

[22 : 56] We try to make it okay. We do that because we bury the law of God written on our hearts under sinful desires. We hide it in the darkness so that we can't see it anymore though it's there.

But the Word of God exposes all of those things. The Word of God brings to light what God says is good and right and true. How do you put on the armor of light?

You put it on chiefly by prayerful time spent in God's Word. There are a lot of times in fact most weeks honestly as a preacher that I I want very badly to to come up with something new and fresh for you guys.

Something that something something that will that you haven't you haven't heard yet you haven't because it'll grab you and it'll it'll be something new that you could take home with you and maybe put into practice but the reality is that the truth doesn't change from week to week and the reality is is that the things that we need to do in order for us to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ they don't really alter they don't really change we just need to get better at them and so one of the most basic disciplines of the Christian life is to spend actual time reading studying and thinking about what God says in His Word.

You know if you were to discover some sort of artifact some sort of scroll or some sort of book that told you all sorts of amazing things that scientists had not yet discovered how to produce endless energy without actually using up any energy with no need for any sorts of fuel or how to produce things that could fly us with ease to the edge of the solar things that scientists wish they could do things that we put in our movies that really can't be done alright if you found some sort of book some sort of artifact that explained to you all these hidden gems of knowledge that had somehow been lost to humanity and suddenly you had at your fingertips the ability to see and know and understand things that the greatest minds on earth just could not quite comprehend you would pour over it you would you would hide it away so that it wasn't lost you would make sure that you memorized as much as you could and yet we have in our possession on a regular basis a book that tells us about who our creator is it shows him to us it displays his goodness and his glory it tells us what he has done it even tells us in some ways what he's going to do it tells us how to live in ways that are pleasing to him this book sheds light for us and if we are to be among those who clothe ourselves with the weapons of the light with the armor of the light so that we are guarded and protected against the darkness that surrounds us then we have to be a people of God's word look back upon the past year of your life just mentally quickly you're supposed to do that during Thanksgiving week to think of the things that you're thankful for but I want you to specifically just kind of think back about if you had to summarize what did you read this year in the Bible what did you study this year in the Bible what did you what portion of scripture what themes in the Bible did you really spend some time thinking about reading chances are several of you started the year with a plan to read through the whole Bible and at some point in Leviticus or in Numbers you just lost it you picked up the ball four or five more times throughout the year but the reality is weeks months went by which that plan was abandoned or weeks maybe months went by in which you didn't open your Bible at all think about it really think about how much of this book did you read and then ask yourself how much of this book did you pour over that you meditate upon and think about how much of it because it contains endless treasures for us how much how devoted were you to it

[27 : 25] I've noticed a trend particularly among younger followers of Christ today but I've noticed a trend where more time is sometimes devoted to listening to your favorite preacher through their podcast than reading your Bible in conversations with a number of folks about their study habits or their reading habits when it comes to scripture many times their answer comes back well I like to listen to so and so's podcast on a regular basis they might miss this three or four podcast or sermon cast that they like to listen to which is a good thing is not a bad thing but when that's your answer to what you've done with your Bible that means you haven't done anything with your Bible right we have we have a means by which we gather together corporately to hear the Bible taught by a preacher on a regular basis at least once a week right we have that right here right now you have the rest of your week to open it yourself and spend time in it and that's not happening if all you do with your spare

Bible time is listen to other people talk about the Bible what you need is to encounter God himself in the Bible and not to hear of someone else's encounter with God in the Bible and when you do that you will have clothed yourself with the armor of God which will enable you verse 13 to walk properly

as in the daytime not in all the ways that he describes here but to walk properly and ultimately what it results in is verse 14 put on the Lord Jesus Christ you can't put on Christ unless you're in this book because you don't know anything about you don't know anything about Jesus apart from this book you just don't whether you're just talking about pure historical information there are a few random historical references to

Jesus and other Greco-Roman writers but you don't learn anything about who Jesus is what he was like apart from the Bible and the gospel stories about him you don't learn anything about who Jesus is in eternity past or in the future apart from the writings of the apostles themselves you don't know Jesus you don't encounter Jesus and therefore you cannot clothe yourself with Jesus devote yourself to the one whom this book aims to reveal you begin to put on Christ to become more like him to conduct your life in ways that befit those who claim to be united to him and then as a result of that you make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desire you know most of the Christian life is a battle over desire but that's that's what most of it is it is a battle over desire we all have various desires within us we all have conflicting desires we do we have we still have until we obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of

God until that happens until the day when our salvation is made complete we still have some sinful desires to wrestle with and to deal with they are there they are present at all time for us and yet we also have new desires being created by the spirit of God who lives within us and much of the Christian life is a battle between those desires and so in any given moment the question is not going to be what do I randomly happen to do in that moment when I'm faced with temptation the question is going to be in that moment for what do I have a greater desire do I have a greater desire to please my own sinful nature what Paul calls the flesh or do I have a greater desire to honor Christ glorify Christ treasure Christ to see Christ uplifted in my life in every moment of every day we are engaged in a battle of desire and the only way to throw the weight toward our desires for Christ is to have our minds fundamentally transformed so that we know him more and see him more and love him more that's where this entire section of the book of Romans began you guys remember all the way back in Romans chapter 12 verse 2 do not be conformed to this world so don't let your life produce the works of darkness but those away from you do not be conformed to this world and the alternative is this but be transformed by the renewal of your mind be transformed why so that by testing you may discern what is the will of God what is good and acceptable and perfect so that you will then be capable of seeing and knowing what is actually good in God's sight and treasuring that which is good in God's sight and therefore having a stronger desire for it and in the moment when temptation arises choosing rather than the unfruitful works of darkness choosing to display

[33 : 02] Jesus to actually be as Paul says we are children of the light approaching Christmas time and we say every year well Christmas is ultimately about Jesus say that and it's true it's not about all the other things that surround Christmas fun as some of those things may be I like Christmas lights I like to go see them I don't really like putting them up but I will but I do like to see other people put them up so that I can look at them for a month right I like that I like Christmas music I like to hear it I don't want to hear it in June I have no interest in Christmas music in June but I do like to listen to it I'm driving down the road in the month I like the trappings of Christmas I don't think that they're bad in and of themselves but we always say Christmas is about Jesus because we have a tendency to be distracted by all of those things and not to be focused upon Christ that's not a Christmas issue that's a

Christian life issue every day of the year every month of the year it is always a fight to see and to savor Jesus in all of his glory so that at Christmas time this year I would encourage you to not simply say we're going to focus on Jesus but to say we're going to see him in his word and to say at the turn of another new year not to simply say I'm going to try to read the whole Bible this year but to say I'm going to open my Bible on a regular basis and I'm going to see God there that's what I'm going to see I'm going to see God in the Bible that's what I want not to not to finish a plan not to not to mark off on my checklist oh I read the whole Bible good oh I read the hard parts good but to say I'm going to read it every day as often as I can anytime it occurs to me not because I have to fulfill some list of things to do but because I just want to see Christ displayed in all of his honor in all of his glory so that my mind would be transformed my heart chain and my desires for him outweigh my desires to reach into the dark right voy voy