

“Wake up!”
Romans 13:11-14
Dr. Jerry Nelson

About 10 years ago Stephen Levine wrote a book that got a fair amount of press at the time.

It was titled, *A Year to Live – How to Live this Year as if it Were Your Last*.

I’m not recommending the book because I think John Piper’s book titled, *Don’t Waste your Life* is far better.

But Levine’s title is intriguing and he said that from his experience even those who know they are dying often find that death catches them unawares. (from the book jacket)

After seeing many people on their deathbeds, Levine noted a common regret for time wasted, unrealized dreams, and disputes between family members never resolved. Levine decided to address these issues in his own life before it was too late, to live for a year as if it were his last. http://www.alibris.com/booksearch?S=R&qwork=7342481&qsort=p&siteID=Pw2LQAj_zJk-EpTUGXFsr0TWVNPsf4qWg

18th Century British author, Samuel Johnson wrote, “when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.”

On a website called “Yahoo Answers,” the question was asked, “If you had one year to live, how would you spend your final time on earth?”

Several people responded

I’d travel the world and charge it all on credit cards.

I’d spend every minute I could with my family.

I’d do all the things that give me pleasure.

I’d make amends with anyone I’ve hurt.

I’d be depressed and spend the year in bed.

<http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20070401170107AA48cix&show=7>

How we live, and **why** we live that way, are the issues before us in our text from Romans today.

The Apostle Paul wrote, “And do this, understanding the present time.”

God’s instructions for life are given in the context of a reality far different than what most people understand.

Too many people live as if this life is all there is.

The current issue of “Christianity Today” has a humorous cartoon that I think captures the surprise too many will have in the end.

Two men are sitting in the midst of flames with the devil standing guard.

One man says to the other, “I was under the impression that what happened in Vegas stayed in Vegas.”

Reality is quite different than many imagine.

So let’s read the context of Paul’s statement about “understanding the present time.”

Romans 13:11-14 “And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has 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 orgies 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 sinful nature.”

From the 2nd half of the 12th verse through verse 14 Paul describes **how** we are to live.

He contrasts “night and dark” living with “day and light” living.

But before doing that he gives the reason.

In verse 11 he writes, “wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.”

Something is happening that makes godly living the only reasonable response.

But before looking more closely at that, I want us to see what “this” is when Paul writes, “Do **this**...”

“Understanding the present time” is **why** you will do this, but what is this?

It seems to me “this” is all that Paul has written from 12:1 through 13:10.

Back in Romans 12:1-2 Paul began his application of previous chapters, 1—11, this way, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. ² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Notice the motivation he mentions in verse 1 – “in view of God’s mercy.”

I want you to live this way, because of God’s mercy - I want you to offer your bodies as living sacrifices.

When we truly understand who God is and what he has done for us in Christ, our response is gratitude and the worship of him **with our lives**.

Then beginning in 12:3 all the way through to our text, Paul spells out what that response of grateful obedience looks like:

12:3-8 V5 “so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others – there he spoke of humility and service.

12:9-21 V10 “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.

V14 “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

13:1-7 V1 “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities

V7 “Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

13:8-10 9 “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

With all those instructions in mind, we now know what the “do this” of 13:11 is about.

But it’s the motivation for doing “this” that I want you to see.

Back in 12:1 Paul appealed to our understanding of the mercy of God.

Now in 13:11 he appeals to our “understanding the present time.”

What do Christians understand that others don’t?

13:11b-12 “The hour has 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.”

Christians live in two worlds at the same time; the seen and the unseen, the obvious **and** that which is only spiritually discerned.

There is more happening in time than meets the eye.

As I said earlier, too many think we are born, we live and we die.

Even if they think there is something beyond this life, it is so vague as to be largely irrelevant now.

Even many if not most religious people live as this life is all there is.

But Paul says, “our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.”

He’s talking about Jesus’ Second Coming.

He’s talking about when the Kingdom of God is **fully** actualized; when sin and death are completely defeated and done; when with resurrected bodies we live in the presence of our God on the new earth for eternity.

Listen to Paul elsewhere on this subject:

Romans 8:23 “Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

1 Corinthians 15:24-26 “Then the end will come, when (Jesus) hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

When Paul says that our salvation is “nearer than when we first believed,” he is not only saying the obvious as when we say Tuesday is nearer to Wednesday than Monday is.

He is implying an immanency – The end of this age, could happen at any time now.

But it is more than simply waiting for the end.
Christians are “understanding the time.”

As I said, Christians live in two worlds - the already but not yet.

The Scripture speaks of “this age” and “the age to come.”
What Christians understand is that those two ages overlap.

Because of Jesus, the age to come has reached back in time to the present, to this age.

When Jesus came the first time he ushered in the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God is God’s sovereign righteous rule over all.

Listen to the Bible on this subject:

Matthew 4:17 “From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near (not near in time, but close in proximity).” The Kingdom of God had arrived in Jesus.

Matthew 4:23 “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom.”

The Bible teaches us in the gospel of John that when we trust in Jesus Christ we become part of the Kingdom of God (John 3); we become part of the new age, the age to come.

2 Corinthians 5:17 “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

Colossians 1:13 “For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,

- In the believer, sin now no longer has the control it once had.
- Death is no longer the end.
- The Spirit of God takes up residence in us as the guarantee of our resurrection.

These are simply a taste now of what is to be but they are real and they are part of the age to come, **experienced now**.

Lacking an adequate illustration let me give you an insufficient one.

A mother and father tell their young children that in three months they are all going to Disney World.

The lives of the children change with that news.

For the next three months the children live with the reality of that future event.

- They pack clothes long before they need to.
- They tell their friends, they make plans, and they save money.
- They still have to go to school, do their chores around the house, put up with the bully next door and pick up after the dog but they know they are going to Disney World.
- Their excited lives are geared around that yet future event.

They are living in the time of already but not yet.

So it is with us believers, we live in both worlds but it is that world to come that controls our thinking.

There is something else the Christian understands about the time.

This Kingdom of God, the age to come that has invaded the present, is not for only a few who hang on to the bitter end.

In Matthew 13:31-32 “(Jesus) told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. ³² Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.”

And in Matthew 24:14 “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

In the world today, God is doing a work that is often unseen. He has called us to be part of that work that will have world-encompassing implications.

Christians, “understanding the present time,” know they are part of something far bigger than themselves, far bigger than all of us together – this is a God thing with eternal consequences.

Now when a person knows that, how does he live?

I am about finished with my third reading of Dominique LaPierre and Larry Collins book, *O Jerusalem*, the story of the 1948 birth of present-day Israel.

It is a fascinating and instructive telling of a people with a firm vision of the future and a self-sacrificing commitment to it.

Some of those people lived for years in the “already but not yet” reality of a new nation.

They were procuring arms in Europe, raising funds in the U.S., staging ships and planes and other resources anywhere they could, all with an eye to that day when they would declare their independence and face the onslaught of their enemies.

They risked their lives and in many cases gave their lives, for what they believed the future held.

Do I live now in significant anticipation of what is to come?

Does understanding the present time drive my decisions, my life?

Are we Christians living for the “already but not yet” Kingdom of God or are we simply dying to go to heaven?

The believer isn’t supposed to merely looking for relief from the difficulties of his life; his goal is the glory of God in the Kingdom of God – God’s rule over all.

That’s why we pray, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

In verse 11 Paul issues a call – a warning?

“The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber,

I know this is negative, but Paul speaks to a condition that may be ours.

Christians are sleeping.

Paul uses a different word, but I almost titled this sermon, “Somnambulant Christians.”

I like words.

Somnus, somnia – It is Latin for sleep.

Ambulant – ambulatory, - It is Latin for walking.

Sleep-walking Christians.

I had an uncle who lived on a farm.

More than once, my uncle got up in the middle of the night, hitched complicated farm equipment to the tractor, and drove to the fields, all while completely asleep.

Have you heard of sleep-driving?

Once while going to school in the daytime, dating my girlfriend in the evening and working the graveyard shift, I drove one morning from Minneapolis, 70 miles past the exit to my school with no awareness at all.

I woke up, completely lost and had to ask directions.

How many of us Christians are living life without understanding the present time – unaware of the reality of the already but not yet Kingdom of God?

Let me suggest some characteristics of a spiritually asleep person.

When a person is asleep they are largely insensitive.

Have you ever known a sound sleeper?

It seems that a cannon could go off near them and they'd sleep through it.

The Spiritually asleep person is spiritually insensitive.

Nothing rouses him anymore.

God's people sing but it leaves him cold.

He goes through the motions of prayer but it's hollow.

The desire has gone out of his spiritual life.

He's more excited by the purchase of a new car than the prospect of a new convert.

Secondly, the asleep Christian is subject to illusions or dreams.

They begin to dream that maybe God doesn't even exist or that maybe they don't really belong to him.

Conversely they might dream that it doesn't really matter how they live, because after all God is in his heaven and all's right with the world. They have plenty of time to sleep.

Thirdly, the asleep Christian is inactive.

Can't you see him there on the couch – mouth hanging open and one arm slung across his chest and the other hanging off the couch nearly touching the floor – barely breathing.

How many Christians are like that?

- Once they delighted to teach Sunday School but now that's too much work.
- Once they yearned to help people in need, but now they're too tired.
- They may have two-dozen irons in the fire at work but **spiritually they're asleep.** (the three-fold description above came from old notes and thus I do not know the source)

Paul says, "wake up!"

One reason why you need to wake up is to make certain you aren't dead!

In Matthew 24 and 25 Jesus tells several parables that describe people who look like they are Christians but aren't.

Charles Spurgeon wrote, "The rags of his lust are rotting under the raiment of his profession. This will never do; Christ has not come to save you in your sins but from your sins. Anger and drunkenness, and such like, must be got rid of; Christ never came that you might christen your anger by the name of (passion), and your drunkenness with the name of liberty. I have heard of persons...who have misunderstood this doctrine of grace so grievously that they have thought of believing in Christ **and** continuing in their evil ways. That attempt will be their ruin." Spurgeon #1614

How long have you been asleep?

How long have you carelessly lived your life as you choose?

How long have you been unconcerned about your relationship with God?

How long uncaring about the kingdom of God?

How long living a mediocre religious life while indulging in your petty sins?

Are you really asleep or are you dead?

If God's Holy Spirit is giving you ears to hear from him right now then listen.

And if God has graciously warned you and called you to repent of that way of life, do so.

Ask his forgiveness; turn to him NOW!

"The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber..."

So first in these verses Paul gives us a reason, a rationale for acting - we are to understand the time.

Secondly then Paul calls us to wake up.

Now lastly in verses 12b-14, Paul tells us again how "awake," "understanding the present time Christians" act.

Romans 13:12b-14 “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 orgies 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 sinful nature.”

Paul uses the metaphors of dressing and walking.
He says, be done with certain things and begin to do other things.

First, look at the negatives – that which we are to put aside or be done with:

In the last part of verse 12 he summarizes them all: “Put aside the deeds of darkness”

These things are of a different world, not your new world.

They are characteristics of the kingdom of darkness – the kingdom of death.

I agree with others that here there are three pairs of words in the last part of verse 13 that can maybe best be understood this way:

not in orgies or drunkenness or **drunken revelries** – this is a self-indulgent loss of self-control.

not in sexual immorality and debauchery or **lewd immoralities** - this is an idolizing of sex and sensual pleasure that objectifies others and is a sin against our own bodies.

and not in dissension and jealousy (envy) or **envious dissentions** – this is the opposite of love for one’s neighbor.

But look also at the positive:

- In verse 12b “Put on (clothe yourself with) the armor of light.”
- In verse 13a “Let us behave (literally “walk”) decently as in the daytime.”
- In verse 14a “Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.”

The best defense against the seductions of the world and the discouragements of our own sinfulness is “light” – the truth.

Each new day we consciously remind ourselves of the truths of Christ and his Kingdom.

I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.
And in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord.

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried.
He descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead;
He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of the Father
Almighty;

From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Christian Church, the communion
of saints, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

Understanding the present time, knowing the already-but-not-yet
reality of the Kingdom of God, I will put off the deeds of darkness and
clothe myself with the Lord Jesus Christ.

I will step out each day knowing that Jesus is closer to me and more
a part of my life than the clothes on my back.

Romans 13:11-14 “And do this, understanding the present time. The
hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our
salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is
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clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about
how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”

“On the **certainty** of the event (of Christ’s return), our faith is grounded; by the **uncertainty** of time our hope is stimulated and our watchfulness aroused.” (Alford in Moo, 822)

“The time which is left is time in which watching for Christ’s Second Coming with alert minds – with proper eagerness and a proper sense of urgency, and with all the active and resolute engagement in the tasks of faith and obedience and love which these involve – is the whole duty of Christians.” (Cranfield, 333)

John Bunyon in *Pilgrim’s Progress*, Stage 9

“I then saw in my dream, that they went on until they came into a certain country whose air naturally tended to make one drowsy, if he came a stranger into it. And here Hopeful began to be very dull, and heavy to sleep: wherefore he said unto Christian, I do now begin to grow so drowsy that I can scarcely hold open mine eyes; let us lie down here, and take one nap.

CHRISTIAN: By no means, said the other; lest, sleeping, we never awake more.

HOPEFUL: Why, my brother? sleep is sweet to the laboring man; we may be refreshed, if we take a nap.

CHRISTIAN: Do you not remember that one of the shepherds bid us beware of the Enchanted Ground? He meant by that, that we should beware of sleeping; wherefore “let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.” [1 Thess. 5:6](#).

HOPEFUL: I acknowledge myself in a fault; and had I been here alone, I had by sleeping run the danger of death. I see it is true that the wise man saith, “Two are better than one.” [Eccl. 4:9](#). Hitherto hath thy company been my mercy; and thou shalt have a good reward for thy labor.

CHRISTIAN: Now, then, said Christian, to prevent drowsiness in this place, let us fall into good discourse.

HOPEFUL: With all my heart, said the other.

CHRISTIAN: Where shall we begin?

HOPEFUL: Where God began with us. But do you begin, if you please.

CHRISTIAN: I will sing you first this song:

When saints do sleepy grow, let them come hither,
And hear how these two pilgrims talk together;

Yea, let them learn of them in any wise,
Thus to keep open their drowsy, slumb'ring eyes.

Saints' fellowship, if it be managed well,
Keeps them awake, and that in spite of hell.”

Matthew 24:36-44

“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

³⁸ **For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark;**

³⁹ **and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away.** That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

⁴⁰ Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left.

⁴¹ Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

⁴² “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

⁴³ But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into.

⁴⁴ So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

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