

## THE ROMANS SERIES

# *“TIME TO WAKE UP”*

Romans 13:11-14

### **STUDY (38)**



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One of the most famous nineteenth century missionaries was Adoniram Judson. He left America in 1812 and pioneered a work for God in Burma. Judson laboured in the land of Burma for 38 years before he made his first furlough back to America. Great personal tragedy was in his life. His first wife died with his first child and later he remarried only for his second wife to die also.

Judson faithfully toiled in the heat and squalor of Burma for 6 years without a single convert. When a member of the Mission Board in America wrote, deprecating the lack of results, Judson replied, "The prospects are as bright as the promise of God." Singlehandedly, Judson translated the Bible into the Burmese tongue. God later blessed his sowing with a great harvest. For when Judson died in 1850, he left behind 7,000 members of the Burmese Christian church he had founded, along with 63 churches and 123 missionaries and pastors. Contemplating the passing of time, he once observed this truth,

A life once spent is irrevocable. It will remain to be contemplated through eternity...the same may be said of each day. When it is once past, it is gone forever. It is too late to mend the days that are past. The future is in our power. Let us, then, each morning, resolve to send the day into eternity in such a garb as we shall wish it to wear forever. And at night let us reflect that one more day is irrevocably gone, indelibly marked.

Judson lived every day as if it was his last. He used his limited time on earth to plan and work toward magnifying God in all spheres of his life.

## **OVERVIEW**

Paul has emphasized the relationship between doctrine and duty of a believer to God (Romans 12:1-2), to the individual (Romans 12:3-21), and to the state (Romans 13:1-7). He then explained the motivation for exercising these duties must be unconditional and unselfish *agape* love (Romans 13:8-10).

Now, in Romans 13:11-14 Paul will finish of this section by one final exhortation. He will urge us to live out these duties because of the reality of God's ultimate purposes in eternity. The end of this world and the brevity of our time here is a dominant theme of the entire Scriptures. The Bible views everything in light of God's final objective. Paul explains:

- (1) THE REALITY OF TIME (v11-12a)
- (2) THE WRONG USE OF TIME (v12b-13)
- (3) THE RIGHT USE OF TIME (v14)

### ***(1) THE REALITY OF TIME (v11-12a)***

All of us are intuitively aware of the reality of time. We know what it is, even if we struggle to define it. We are slaves to the demands of time with watches, calendars, and alarm clocks reminding us of schedules that must be met.

The devil has many lies that he likes to use to pervert our understanding of time:

- (a) "Time has no end" – the serpent used this one in the garden, "*Ye shall not surely*

- die*" (Gen. 3:4b).
- (b) "There is plenty of time left" – this is the lie behind the boast of the rich fool in Luke 12:19, "*And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.*"
  - (c) "This life is all there is" – this can be seen in Paul's observation, "*If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die*" (1 Cor. 15:32).
  - (d) "You are spending too much time on spiritual things" – the devil is always whispering into our ear to become less fervent and take things easier. But Paul exhorts, "*let us run with patience the race that is set before us*" (Heb. 12:1).
  - (e) "It is too late to change your life around as God does not want you" – yet, the Scriptures reveal the longing of the heart of God, "*All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people*" (Rom 10:21).

The Apostle Paul in Romans 13:11-12a gives us a very different insight into time. He explains, "*And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand.....*" In these verses, Paul tells us:

- (a) Time is real and linear, "*for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.*"
- (b) Time left is finite and is getting shorter all the time, "*The night is far spent.*"
- (c) Time is followed by the judgment and eternity, "*the day is at hand.*"

The passing of time leads many believers to slumber as Paul warns, "*that now it is high time to awake out of sleep.*" There is this tendency in all believers to grow cold, backslide, and become spiritually asleep as Christians. The NT is full of warnings about this. One writer explained the apostolic message as "to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable."

In Matthew 24 the Lord warned that this tendency will be prevalent in the last days, "*And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold*" (Matt. 24:12). We see sin abounding on a rapid scale today with the technological age that we live in. Alongside this, we are also witnessing the inward slumbering of many professing believers. All too many believers are sleeping like Samson on the lap of the Delilah's of this world. Like the foolish judge who "*wist not that the LORD was departed from him*" (Judges 16:20), they are also oblivious to their danger. They are like the self-satisfied and self-confident Laodicean church in Revelation 3 that boasts, "*I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing*" (Rev. 3:17).

To these "slumbering saints" the sermons are boring, the hymns have become dry, prayer is a chore, and the church is just a mere social club to exchange gossip and to increase their business network. They come to the services as merely spectators. The Bible is the last book that they read, if at all. God has become something incidental or optional to their lives. They are enjoying a prolonged "spiritual siesta."

Spiritual ease and contentment with material things has always been a temptation for believers. With our credit cards and creature comforts we imagine that we do not need God's help much. We have no thought of heaven as we are enjoying earth so much.

But Paul reminds us here that this ought not to be. He expected the Lord at any moment, "*the day is at hand.*" The truths that time is short, that time is running out, that the time for Christ's return is imminent should profoundly change our lives as, "*knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep.*"

We all should be living conscious of the sense of urgency of the Master who declared, "*I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man*

*can work*” (John 9:4). The Apostle Paul also only lived to please God with his time. He recognized the genuine threats of his physical wellbeing, yet triumphantly confessed, “*But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God*” (Acts 20:24).

The clock tells us of the passing of time, but the Bible tells us the way to live in these moments. Here in v12b-14 Paul reveals how the manner in which we should be living in light of the truths about time as well as how we must do it – through Christ’s righteousness. He begins in v12b by telling us the wrong use of time before in v14 describing how to use it right.

## (2) *THE WRONG USE OF TIME (v12b-13)*

All too many Christians are wasting their lives by wasting their time. The Bible is replete with examples of believers who wasted their time. David was misusing his time on the rooftop when he spotted Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11. Lot misused his time dwelling in Sodom. He even lingered when told to get out before God’s judgment fell. Samson was twenty years as a judge yet wasted his talents and time in running after godless Philistine women.

Here in Romans 13:12b-13 the apostle Paul begins by setting forth some examples of the misuse of time. He uses three negative couplets to illustrate how believers could be consumed with self-will and self-gratification by making provision for their flesh.

- (a) **RIOTING** – This word has the idea of drinking parties or unrestrained revelry.
- (b) **DRUNKENESS** – This word expresses intentional and habitual intoxication. These first two vices are closely associated iniquities, since the former is often the result of the latter.
- (c) **CHAMBERING** – This Greek word literally means a place of lying down but conveys the meaning of the desire for a forbidden bed for illicit purposes.
- (d) **WANTONNESS** - This word has more the idea of flaunted sensuality and debauchery. One sin of illicit immorality such as chambering leads invariably down a path of destruction to public shame. Of course all of these four vices are linked as drinking alcohol is often tied up in sexual immorality and open shame. We see a classic example of this in the life of Lot at the end of Genesis 19.
- (e) **STRIFE** - This has the idea of a bitter and sometimes violent conflict or dissension.
- (f) **ENVYING** – This last vice is tied up with the previous one as jealousy is often the precursor to strife (cf. Acts 7:9). These sins caused particular problems for the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 3:3). Envy is a particular heinous sin, as it is rooted in a rejection of God’s sovereign choice for a person’s life.

## (3) *THE RIGHT USE OF TIME (v14)*

There is a right use of time contrasted by Paul in v14, “*But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ...*” The verb “*put ye on*” here is in the middle voice and the imperative mood. This means that it is a command that we must do by ourselves.

In very simple terms the apostle commands us to be continually clothed with Jesus Christ's sanctifying righteousness so that He not only lives in us, but is seen through us and on us as well. It is an equivalent expression to being transformed by the renewing of our minds, as per Romans 12:2. So Paul is conveying the idea that we should be acting, talking, and thinking like the Master everywhere we go.

When two armies meet in a battle, their uniforms distinguish them. These mark out which side we belong to. Which uniform are you wearing today? Whose army do people think you have enlisted in? It is one of the greatest tragedies today that you would not recognise many professing believers unless they told you they were!

Why does Paul have command believers to actively put on Christ as their lifestyle? Because, frankly, so many Christians do not act or look like Christ. Was David like Christ when he committed adultery and murder? Was Noah like Christ when he was drunk? Was Lot like the Lord when he was living it up in Sodom? Was Job like His Redeemer when he questioned God? Was the devoted disciple Peter like His Master when he denied Him with oaths and curses?

#### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO PUT ON CHRIST?

Often preachers make statements without adequately defining them. There are a number of ways that we can put on or become more like the Master:

(a) By reading and meditating upon Christ as revealed in Scripture. The more you saturate your soul with the Bible the more like Christ you will become, "*But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord*" (2 Cor. 3:18).

(b) Prayer also makes us more like the Master who was the great intercessor. As we pray we obtain more grace, "*Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*" (Heb. 4:16). Such grace helps us to resemble the One who was "*full of grace and truth*" (John 1:14).

(c) Another way is to submit to the title here, "*But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.*" As we submit to His Lordship in every area of our life we are more and more clothed with Christ.

Paul also gives a negative contrast here in how not to put on Christ by declaring, "*make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof*" (v14b). So, the more we avoid making "*provision for the flesh*" the more we put on Christ.

There are many believers who blame the devil for every sin when part of the responsibility lies with them in making "*provision for the flesh.*" That means it is vital that, whenever possible, we must be actively engaged in avoiding sinful places and people. We should avoid watching that type of movie, listening to that type of music, we should avoid going to that pub or nightclub, we should avoid taking that glass of wine, and we should avoid hanging out with ungodly companions. Martin Luther put it well, "You can't keep a bird from flying over your head, but you can keep it from building a nest in your hair."

In writing to the Corinthians the apostle made this principle clear, "*Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners*" (1 Cor. 15:33). There are many professing Christians who act as if this verse is not in the Bible! But Paul says don't be deceived. Never underestimate the wiles of the devil and the lusts of the flesh. If you make the ungodly your closest friends, they will corrupt your behaviour. Samson would not have

found a Delilah if he had not been going down to the land of the Philistines.

The reason we have such explicit detail of the disastrous lives of believers such as Lot and Samson in the Bible is to warn us of the terrible consequences of making provision for the flesh. The way to deal with the flesh is to starve it. This is done by avoiding places and persons of temptation coupled with feeding on Christ from the Scripture and prayer.

## CONCLUSION

(1) It is easier and more comfortable to go on sleeping, but the words of Paul are like a spiritual alarm bell ringing for you today, “*And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep.*” We need to awaken from our spiritual slumber. Time is running out, as a new day is dawning. MacArthur is right to observe,

The Christian who is not living a holy and obedient life is a Christian who does not comprehend the significance of the Lord’s return. On the other hand, the believer who understands the coming judgment and is daily looking for his Lord to appear is a believer whose overriding purpose is to please and honor his Lord by consistent holy living.

Time is a gift to us. God did not give us this limited time to waste. The redeemed ones are to redeem the time. We were created for far more than simply wasting our lives in the things of the flesh and of this world.

Moses cried in Psalm 90, “*teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*” We need to consider how much time we have left. We need to consider how much time has already been wasted. We need also to consider that the day we must stand before God is nearer than yesterday. One of the most powerful things in the world is a good testimony. Do people glorify God through your good works and life (Matthew 5:16)? Are you a sleepy Christian? Have you been taking a short nap or spiritual siesta recently?

There is no time for apathy, complacency, or indifference. Every day you delay serving faithfully is another day of lost opportunity. There is a great work for Christ still to be done. The devil and his angels are not sleeping or easing up. Now is the time for you to waken up to the situation. A wise man recognizes his life is limited and lives in light of that. How are you living yours? Remember, we only get one go at life. That’s all! Don’t waste your life. As the poet aptly wrote,

*Lost, yesterday, somewhere between sunrise and sunset,  
Two golden hours, each set with sixty diamond minutes.  
No reward is offered, For they are gone forever.*

(2) The Bible never says that serving Christ with a fervent heart will be easy. It is costly to follow Christ. Paul is not promising here a smooth path to glory but is simply calling us to one in which our lives have not been wasted. The Chinese pastor, Wang Ming Dao was imprisoned for 25 years in China because of his faith. Shortly before his death, when asked what lesson he could share with the church across the world, he resolutely replied, “Tell them to walk the hard road!”

*Go, labour on; spend and be spent,  
Thy joy to do the Father’s will;  
It is the way the Master went;*

*Should not the servant tread it still?*

The Christian life is a marathon not a sprint. Runners in such a long race never joke or behave complacently. Only the tough, determined, disciplined and patient will run well to the end. The apostle Paul faced eternity confident that he had not wasted his life,

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. (2 Tim. 4:7-8)

(3) Unbeliever – Time is rapidly towards the end of your life. You are nearer hell today that you were yesterday. You should tremble at that awful prospect. The only way to avoid this eternal doom is to be clothed with the righteousness of Christ. You cannot put Him on you until His righteousness covers you. There is no time like today, as today is the day of salvation. Now is the time to throw of the filthy rags of your own self-righteousness and come to Christ alone for His righteousness. May God help you to come.