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ROMANS 13:11-14

Romans Series: How God Changes People

Open your Bibles with me to Romans 13. I just want to say that next week in our message we're going to talk about legalism and when a person has a black and white kind of thinking. You probably know these kinds of people – black and white, it's either right or wrong, and so then they start telling other people they got to do this or that and the other thing. You want to be here next week because we're going to dissect all of that. God has some specific instructions about how we view these things as matters of conscience and how we address these personally and with others. We'll talk about that more next week in Romans 14. But today we're in Romans 13, the last part of the chapter, verses 11-14.

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Lord, we just pause before you, needing that quiet time in our own hearts to get away from the challenges, the busyness, the stimulation of life to just center our hearts on you. So Lord, during the next few minutes as we look at your word I ask that you would enable each of us to do that. To somehow pull away from the things that are going on and focus on you, in some respects to get recharged for the day or the week, but in other ways just to affirm and confirm our commitment to you and our love for you. Bless this time now. We want to be receptive to your word. In Jesus' name, amen.

Most of the passages that Paul has written in his books are divided into two sections, so Romans is like that. But if you look at books of the Bible that Paul has written, they are divided into two sections. The first section is theological (getting to know a little more about salvation or about God or about how God works in our lives and so on) and then the last part of the book is more practical. That is true in the book of Romans as well.

Romans 1-11 talk about how to become a Christian, what it means when you are a Christian, and how things happen judicially in God's kingdom plan, and how everybody needs salvation. That's all the theological part. But starting in chapter 12 it moves to be very practical. That's why over the last several months we've taken the passage not only verse by verse, but word by word. We've gone through it very distinctly looking at the ingredients of those chapters because it's all practical. So we've taken our time through chapter 12 and then in chapter 13 we've sped it up a little bit, but we're still trying to understand what's there. Because the last half or the last portion of this book is very practical, giving us specific ideas of how to live our lives right now. So in this last section of chapter 13, that's what he's going to emphasize. That's what you want to put it into practice.

I'm really enjoying this particular part of the passage because this is the "take Jesus home" part. One of the things I like to emphasize about our church is that we take Jesus home. When we leave here we don't just have it in our heads, but we go and we do something about it.

Paul is making this appeal to the people now to go and do something about it, don't just get it in your head. So I hope today when you leave you'll be stimulated to take your faith into other areas of your life, whether it's you're expanding your view of God through the worship or through maybe something God's doing in your life, that you'll do something different. I think that's the call that we're going to see in this passage.

I'm going to read verses 11-14 and then we're going to take them apart and look at them in a little more detail.

Verses 11-14 say this: *And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. 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. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.*

Let's look at the first phrase in verse 11. *And do this, understanding the present time.* The idea of *do this* means that you're doing something about it. You're taking Jesus home, you're putting into practice the things that you're reading in the scriptures or you're learning from the Lord.

I'm convinced that when you're applying theology into your life it affects every area of your life. It affects how you dress, how you drive, where you park, where you spend your money, what groceries you buy. It affects everything that you do. It's in the details of our lives and we want to work our faith into those very details. There's nothing that's outside of God's realm.

I like talking to children and asking about computers. Do you think God understands computers? That is a really fun question to ask children because sometimes they think computers must be out of God's realm somehow because they're more modern than God is or something like that. When they realize that God is the one who designed everything, then of course He understands computers. But that's not just for kids. Sometimes we live our lives as if God isn't a part of that and we haven't brought God into that part of our lives. So he's saying *do this, understanding the present time.*

Now the word *understanding* is the word *oida*. The word *oida* means to know or to get it. "Oh I get it." Now what are we getting? We're getting *the present time*. When we understand this very important thing, we're aware of the time, then good things can happen.

He continues by telling us, "I want you to take note of this. This is really important. I want you to take note," and he's going to help us understand exactly what this time is. So look up from your busyness and you're working at your coffee or your note taking there, and you're looking

up, and you're saying, "Okay. Where's the clock and what is it saying?" Now he's going to tell us what the clock is saying in the very next verse.

Verse 11 says this: *The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.*

You've probably had this experience where you're lying in bed and you look at the clock and it jolts you because you go, "Oh no. I didn't know it was that late. I need to get up and do something about it." It's that sense of urgency that's being described here.

What is the clock saying? The clock is saying that your *salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.* So there's a sense of urgency. But if you look at that word *salvation* you might get confused because usually when we talk about getting saved we talk about coming to Jesus Christ and accepting Jesus Christ to come into your life. But the Bible uses the word *salvation* in three different ways. I want you to see this because it will help you get a fuller picture of the theology of salvation.

Certainly the first part that we talk about has already been talked about in Romans 10:13. It says, *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* So if you're here today and you haven't accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior that's the first part of salvation you want to catch. You need to make a personal decision that says, "I want Jesus Christ in my life. I want to live my life for Christ." When you do that we call that justification. That's the theological term that describes the open relationship we have now before God that sin isn't in the way because we have a Savior that's taken that away. And so we accept the Savior Jesus Christ into our lives and we are justified.

That's the first use of the word salvation and that's how I normally use it in this church. When I'm talking about getting saved, I'm talking about accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. But the word is also used to refer to sanctification, which is the process of growing in your faith.

It's in 1 Corinthians 1:18 that Paul uses it that way when he says, *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* Do you see the idea of you're being saved? You wouldn't want to say in justification you're being saved. Justification is you're saved once and for all. You accept Jesus into your heart and you are saved. But once you get saved, God puts you at point A here and He's moving you to point B, which is to be more like Christ. That process of doing that is your life, that's your lifetime. Now the more you yield yourself to the Holy Spirit the more He's able to sanctify you and move you forward. So that's what he's talking about when he uses the term that way. That's the sanctification process.

But in our passage today, here's the verse again, he's talking about the glorification. When you see Christ finally at the end and you're there. When we see Christ face to face. He describes it in our passage in Romans 13:11 – *The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.* The idea is getting closer, the time when we're going to see Jesus face to face.

When you think about a deadline it motivates you to action. Especially when the deadline is closer. And that deadline is getting closer in the fact that Christ is coming back for us. When we have that sense of knowledge, of understanding, remember in the first line of verse 11 it says *do this, understanding*, or I get it. Oh I get it. Christ is coming back soon. Or we're in that dawning of this new day when Christ is coming back. Therefore I need to live differently. I need to do something differently because my salvation is closer now than when I first believed.

What we mean by that is when we experience that moment of being with Christ we have freedom from sin. Then we have perfect health. Then we're perfected in all kinds of areas of our lives. Every growth that our mortal body has is pointing toward that day when we will experience the sense of God close. We'll know Him. We'll be close to Him, and our life on this earth will be over because we'll be close to Him in that special way.

Now what that is doing is it's giving us this sense of urgency. I would suggest we all need that because we become complacent in our lives. As I was thinking about this, it's not just in the New Testament that we're taught this. In the Old Testament David was asking the same thing. In the psalm he says – *Show me, Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is.* Why? Because we get consumed with our lives and with everything that's going on and we think it's all so important. David's saying, "Give me some perspective, Lord, in the midst of this so I can understand what's going on."

Another psalm says this – *Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.* Now if you're a young person, you may think that seventy or eighty years is a long way away. I used to think that everybody over forty was ancient. I've changed my perspective since then.

I think that time is relative when we start looking at that. Two teenagers sitting in a car talking for two hours; that can go by in a blink of an eye. But for the parents who know those two teenagers are in the car, to us is like a lifetime, wondering what's going on in that car. It's relative when we start thinking about time. And so this idea of time is important for us because there's a danger for us to forget about the urgency of the moment and forget our mission because of prosperity, because of complacency, because of satisfaction or indifference. So we need to have this sense of urgency, this sense of anticipation, I would say.

Now let me ask you a question. I was trying to evaluate this week. When you have this sense of urgency in your own life about we've got to share the gospel with people, there are people dying and going to hell, or I really need to get my act together here, I need to work on this because bad things could happen to me or because Christ is coming back soon and I want to be growing in Him, now what motivates you? What is the emotion? Is it fear? Or is it anticipation?

Hopeful anticipation is I think what we need to do, but I think some people are motivated by fear partly because their view of God is that He's an angry God and they're going to see Him at some point. "Oh no. I've got to see God and He's going to be mad at me for all the things that I've done." That's bad theology. In fact the best theology is the theology of a Father who's longing to see us. So there's this sense of hopeful anticipation that we have as we come before the Lord.

But there's some people who view God as an angry Father. They put the two things together. That's really bad theology. So you have to change your theology in order to have this hopeful anticipation that God wants to work in your life and you're going to see Him. This anticipation is a good thing. God's going to do some great things in the midst of that.

The implication here in this passage as we've looked at it has to do with sleeping and being awake. So the implication is that if you think you're awake maybe you're not. And so Paul is trying to give us a wake-up call, jolt us a little bit. So we're asking the question, am I dreaming? I think we have to ask that question.

I don't know if you've had this experience, but you're sleeping and you're having this dream that you're awake and you're doing something, and then you wake up and you go, "Oh good. I'm glad I wasn't really awake." So you've got to ask the question about real life. This is the illustration that Paul is using. Are you dreaming? Are you living in a dreamland or dream world right now or are you awake? He's saying wake up. Live a life differently because you're awake now. That's the picture here. Maybe it's this idea of am I dreaming or am I awake.

I believe this: Everything in the world that does not awaken more of our faith is putting us to sleep spiritually. Most of the world thinks that it's awake when it's really sound asleep. We live in an entertainment-saturated society that often is in dreamland and not in touch with the realities of what's so important today in our own hearts, in our world, and what's going on. Paul's saying, "Wake up. This is important."

The word amusement is an important word. The word amuse is made up of two words – 'a,' which is not, and 'muse,' to think. So amusement is what we do. We don't want to think.

There are some people that are captivated by amusement and that's all they want. They want to be amused by this or that. That's the danger here. We want to be people that are focusing on the Lord and we want to be awake spiritually.

As I was pondering this in my own thinking this week and trying to figure out what to share with you in regards to this, I thought about sleepwalking and I thought I'm just kind of going to do some checking on this.

It's really interesting. I don't sleepwalk (I don't think), but there are people that do and have a real problem with this. I mean they have to barricade the door and all kinds of things because they're afraid they're going to get out.

I was reading that one lady was gaining weight and food was missing from her refrigerator. She's realizing she's eating while she's sleeping, not realizing it, and that's part of her problem.

One guy I was reading about would hide things that he needed for work. He'd wake up in the morning and couldn't find what he needed for work.

One woman said, "I go to bed with my clothes on because I never know where I'm going to wake up."

But here's an interesting illustration that I read. "I sleepwalk when stressed and I pay my bills. Once I paid off the entire loan on my car. I once paid my credit card off twice in fifteen minutes. Yep. They will take the extra money. The funny thing is that I have no recollection of the payment until I check my bank account or my checkbook and realize what I've done. I don't want to take meds for this problem. I'm not sure what to do. By the way, I have an excellent credit score." No doubt.

Now I think some people are sleepwalking in their lives. They're walking around as if they were awake, but they're not really awake. So Paul is addressing that and he's saying wake up. This is the wake up call that Paul is saying we need to live differently, and in doing that now he tells us how to dress. So you want to wake up and then you want to dress in the right kind of way.

So verse 12 let's go on there. It says, *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.* We're putting on this armor to fight the battle. Because we need to view the Christian life not as a playground but as a battleground that God wants to do work through us and we're fighting this battle that's so important here.

Now it's so interesting to me that as Paul is talking about this he doesn't just talk about it in negative terms. Night. Darkness. Evil. Death. That's all true because sin and pain and suffering all lead to those kinds of things. But that's no longer the main truth for us because he's saying the night is over, the dawn is coming. The new day is here so we're opening up into this new day and this day is dawning in a positive way. We're talking about light. We're talking about moving forward.

I would suggest as a Christian we have this positive view of life because we are moving forward into this new day. We're not plagued by all the... We're kind of in between the darkness and the light and God is moving us and helping us see it's daytime, wake up, put the clothes on that you need because, wow, this is a great day for us.

He gives us the instructions of what this should look like in verse 13 by saying these words – *Let us behave decently.* Four words. We could just take those and leave here. We got it. *Let us behave decently.* What does that mean to behave decently? – *as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness.*

There's three different categories here that we're going to look at. *Not in carousing and drunkenness.* That has to do with pleasure or being addicted to pleasure or addicted to drunkenness and carousing. So if you think of carousing and drunkenness what you're talking about is people who are addicted to pleasure. They're just going around from party to party. These are party animals. And so he's saying let us not get sucked into that particular problem.

Then he says next – *not in sexual immorality and debauchery.* So sexual immorality can be a problem in people's lives. And the third one has to do with anger or described here as *dissensions and jealousy.* Now we all know how this works. Whether you're male or female, you're young or old you know that if your mind dwells on certain bad things it starts to mess

with you and you start to move in the wrong direction. You must focus your attention on the day, on the light, moving in the right direction. We have to be moving in that way.

If you're struggling in any of these areas, any kind of addiction, you know that in order to overcome an addiction you must be thinking about the light. Because as soon as you start thinking about the dark you're attracted back to that particular problem. When I was a teenager I was told that there are three basic problems that people fall into in their lives. These are these three problems.

Now the first one is described as materialism to me, but the idea that I'm going to find pleasure from material things. It was suggested that early on in my life I should develop a plan for every one of these because it's very easy as your life continues on to get sucked into one of them. So young people develop during this in their lives.

You have to have a plan. You have to have a plan for dealing with bitterness or it will consume you. You have to have a plan for sexual immorality.

I work with young people and it is really hard today to be a young man growing up in our society when pornography is readily available. Pornography is dangerous, of course, because it damages your sexual relationship with your mate later on. But it's damaging to your health. It drains the maleness out of a person. Males who are addicted to pornography have a hard time leading. They just don't do well as males as God has designed them to do. It's a damaging thing to them. Every person needs to have a plan. So I'll encourage young men. I'll say, "Get a written plan. You should have a written plan that helps you deal with the temptations that you face all the time in regards to sexual immorality."

Pleasure is out there all the time. Advertising is always telling us that we need something else, we need to move to the next level, we've got to buy this particular product or wear these particular clothes. Pleasure addiction is one of those things that we can easily find ourselves attracted to. Most people struggle in one or more of these areas, and so having a plan is very important because we can become bored, or we become lonely, or you're discouraged, or things aren't going your way. It's easy to be attracted to some of those things that seem satisfying to you, and they are painful. It's not best to turn to relief from alcohol. It's best to turn to the light.

So Paul is saying don't turn to those things to soothe yourself. Don't look at those things to satisfy the needs that you have when things go bad. Don't even get involved in those things when you're bored or just attracted to those things are part of the world. Focus on where you need to go. You're in a new day and God wants to do some main things in your life to move you forward. It's like going to work in your pajamas. You don't do that. You dress with the armor of light is what he's saying here.

So in verse 14 he continues on by saying *rather*. In other words, instead of getting involved in those negative things, do this instead – *clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ*. Wow, that's really interesting. The day is at hand. What are you going to put on? You're going to put on Jesus on your life. You're going to live like Jesus lived. You're going to put on this armor of light that's described here because we're in a battle.

Now the passage is written to people who are already Christians. That's you and me. If you've accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, that's most of us in this room. We've accepted Christ. So he's writing to us and he's saying wake up and *clothe yourself with Christ*. So we do that in addition to the salvation that we have or we accept Jesus Christ into our lives. We live in a way where we're clothed with Christ and we're moving forward. That means we live differently, we dress differently in this spiritual sense and we fight the battle differently.

But I don't want you to think here for a moment that if you dress this way then you are a Christian. Just because you dress like a Christian or you fight the battle like a Christian doesn't mean you are a Christian. You start with justification. You start by accepting Jesus Christ into your life. It's the faith then upon which you build and then you clothe yourself. You don't clothe yourself to make other people think that you're a Christian. You first have that faith and then you're moving forward.

This clothing in Jesus Christ is I think strategic because it's not clothing yourself with imposition. Some people think, "I'm a Christian and all those rules. It's like putting on sackcloth and ashes as I walk around," and that's the clothing they're thinking of. Restricting clothing.

No. That's not the clothing we're seeing. We're putting on Jesus Christ because He's the parachute that allows us to land behind enemy lines to fight there. He's the high impact protective anti-explosive suit that allows us to deal with the attacks of the devil. It means that we put on the asbestos fireproof clothing so that we can rescue people from hell. It means we have the bulletproof vest so we can withstand the attacks of Satan in our lives. It's this clothing that admits us into the presence of God and all the benefits that are associated with it. It's like when you wear this certain clothes then you have benefits.

Every week when I get on an airplane they let us get on in order. There's a certain order in which you get on and one of the things they say is military personnel in uniform can get on first. That's what they do. It's a way on honoring our military. I think it's great.

My son is disappointed because the rule in the Marines is the Marines never travel in uniform. They don't travel in uniform. The Army does. Does the Air Force travel in uniform? Yeah. So they don't mind getting shot at. But the Marines don't want to be targets, so they don't dress in their uniform. But anyway what happens is you have special privileges if you're dressed in your military uniform. You get to get on the plane first.

When you're clothed in righteousness, you're clothed in Jesus Christ you have special privileges. You want this. You want to live this way because you walk around with this sense of "yes, I have privileges and I want to share them with you." That's the kind of thing he's talking about here.

Verse 14 ends the passage for us. It says *and lastly do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh*. So he's saying wake up, clothe yourself with Christ, and don't gratify the desires of the flesh. And notice he uses the word that describes how we gratify or how we start down that path. Notice it says there *do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh*. Don't think

about them. Because it's the thinking that gets us started down that path. So we need to have a plan about how to think.

I would suggest and I want to take you back to the first part of the practical section of Romans 12 where he gives us the same exhortation. As he moves from the theological section into the practical section he says this: *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed (how?) by the renewing of your mind.*

If you're addicted to things (pleasure or other things) or if you've got anger problems or if you've got sexual immorality problems, it's a thinking issue. That's where we start. We have to change the mind. And that's what God is saying. Let's change the mind first so we don't gratify those desires of the flesh.

So that's what he's saying in verse 14. *Do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.* We choose what we're going to think. We have the right clothes on and we're moving forward and God wants to do some great things and amazing things, I think, in our lives as we're trying to do that.

What does that mean when we clothe ourselves with Jesus Christ? Does that mean we do more for Christ? Well I think for some people it does. I think some people aren't doing enough for Jesus Christ and they need to do more. But I don't think everybody needs to do more. I think some people need to just do it differently because the way they're doing it just isn't clothed in Christ. And then I think there are other people who should be doing less because less would allow them to focus more on what the Lord wants to do in their lives. So the way you clothe yourself and what that means particularly for you is very important.

I think some of us just get plain overloaded in life. There's so much going on we can't even think about how God wants us to walk or live or be dressed. We just don't understand that.

As I was reading about being overloaded this week, I read this illustration, a testimony that someone shared. I want to read it to you because it was motivating for me and it may be for you as well.

This person says: "I will never forget the evening when Linda and I on our living room floor decided it was time to make substantive changes. Together we took out a pad of paper and sat down before the fireplace. 'Let's start by pretending everything in our lives is written on this paper,' I suggested, Every attitude, every activity, every belief, every influence, then let's erase it all. Tear up the paper and throw it in the fire. Wipe the slate clean, erase away all our beliefs, everything we have been taught by parents, friends, society, and church, remove all our hopes and dreams, remove all our possessions. Nothing should remain. And then let's give the pencil to God and ask Him to redesign in our lives with that which is fully and spiritually authentic.

It was an exciting evening. An exhilarating sense of freedom swept over us as we wrestled control of our lives away from the world. We felt the elephant slipping off our backs. As we turned and handed control over to God, no spiritualized elephant took its place. The Father we instantly sensed had in mind much more than our survival. It was an indescribable feeling. Our

new design for life was simpler. That decision reduced our income significantly. But the freedom, the time, the rest, and the balance have been well worth it. We've never looked back."

There's this sense of commitment that Paul is drawing us to now at the end of this particular section of his scripture, which is saying do something about this. Wake up. It's the wake up call that says I want to serve the Lord in my life. Many people have in their homes a sign and this sign is actually a scripture quote from Joshua 24:15 where Joshua is speaking to the people and saying – *Choose this day whom you're going to serve, whether the gods of the Amorites, and so on. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*

That's the commitment that Paul is calling us to here in our lives now in this passage that says let's do something about it. Let's wake up. Because oh I get it. The present age that we're in is the dawning of a new age. This is a new day. I don't have to live in the dark anymore. I can live in the light and God wants to do some powerful things in me and through me, and so we're blessed by Him in the midst of that.

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we are grateful that the life that you call us to live is one that you empower us to live as well. You don't leave us hanging, but you give us the strength to do the things that you call us to do. And we need that. We need to be challenged like this every once in a while. So thank you for the gift of your word that has the ability to convict our hearts. Lord, I pray that you would use your Spirit now in each one of our hearts to help us to know what you want us to change, what you want us to do, or how you want us to commit ourselves to you in a deeper way. We give ourselves to you now. In Jesus' name, amen.