

A Proper Walk  
Romans 13:11-14

Colossians 3:1-13

Colossians 3:13-25

Responsive Psalms 31:1-8

This morning we are going to be finishing up chapter 13, looking specifically at verses 11:14 as our focus this morning. As I mentioned a few weeks ago as we are coming to the end of this letter that Paul has written to the believers in Rome we are starting to see application and practical teaching from the groundwork that he laid out in the earlier parts of his letter. One of the questions that we must answer as believers, as followers of Christ, is now that we have identified has a child of God, how then shall we live? Paul, and the other authors of the New Testament books have answered this question and in the church there is predominately two views to this question. The short and simple answers, is that you either relate to God through the Law, or through the Spirit. But as Paul, and others have pointed out rather explicitly in their writings, the law brings condemnation and death. So as Christians, as believers, we have only one true answer to the question...how then shall we live? We live by faith, through the spirit. As Paul wrote previously in chapter 8, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the spirit.

The Christian life is not a life of merely outward reformation, it is not merely a striving to better ones self, the error that many make I believe is they are trying to force an inward reality with an outward expression. By that I mean, in striving in a sort of law keeping, do this, don't do that, there is an attempt to create a sense of holiness. As Jim said last week, the type of teaching he grew up in, and I am sure many of us grew up in was focused upon that outward work, to be right with God. What can you do, what have you done today to be right with God. Such a teaching and idea is starting from a false assumption that it is our actions that can make us right with God. As Paul has been telling us, his readers.. we who are in Christ, are now, at this very moment, at any given time, right with God. There is no earning, or striving for this state of holiness before God...we merely are because it is God who has claimed us to be, by his son, through his blood. Again, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the spirit." And what Paul has been laying out in chapter 13 that we have been working through, is what this walking in the spirit looks like.

As I had mentioned before a few weeks ago, many people look at these writings of Paul and seek to make these examples he gives here as a new form of law, but that is not what Paul intends as he is merely pointing out what being a follower of Christ will look like. The simple reality is that these things which he writes here, if you are Christs, should be the natural out flowing works of a heart who loves God. Again there is this tendency to want to make these things requirements, and in a sense they are but not in the way many make them to be. You can not do these things to make yourself right with God, you do these things because you already are. So when Paul writes in chapter 12 verse 1. "I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." What he is actually saying here, is for those who are in Christ, such things are already a reality, be encouraged, and stand strong to live it out. Is there an action on our part? Yes, of course there is...Paul is not arguing for complacency, or inaction..this is not a let go, and let God sort of situation.

In Verse 2 of chapter 12 he says, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable will of God.” This renewing of the mind, so that we strive after God is an action on our part, through prayer, through worship, through the reading of the word, our hearts and minds are renewed, transformed, focused upon God, but the difference here is that an individual who loves God, will do these things not because of duty but because they love God. The actions, the works, in the life of a believer flows outward from a heart changed by God, and it is the ministry of the spirit which acts as the rule and guide in our lives as we look to the word of God, as we go to him in prayer, it is the spirit's indwelling which grants us understanding of the word, and works in us faith to believe. The key to understanding Paul's application to the first half of this letter, is that these things he speaks on, flow outward from a heart who loves God. It is not a list of, do these things and you shall be saved, it is a, you do these things because you are saved. Which then also brings forth the opposite truth, if you do not do these things, then the spirit is not in you, and if the spirit is not in you, then you are not saved.

And I think that is where the breakdown of understanding occurs sometimes, these things become duties, they become a new law because there is an understanding that If certain actions and works are not a part of a persons life, there is no faith so there is a striving to do these things to make this faith a reality. It becomes a teaching that you must do these things to be right with God, coming from a false assumption that you can do anything to be right with God. The biblical truth, is that those in Christ, are already right with God, therefore these things will manifest and these things will show themselves not to make oneself right, but rather to to prove that internal truth that they already are. So, there is this dichotomy where you must have these traits, there must be a reflection of the fruits of the spirit in the life of a believer that Paul lists in his letter to the Galatians if not, the spirit is not in you. The flip side is the individual who reads these things and takes it as a list that can be performed to gain anything. So while we must have such traits, there is no merit in forcing them. Which brings us to our text this morning, which is verses 11-14, but since we are finishing up chapter 13 this morning let us go ahead and read it in its entirety.

So the first thing that Paul says here in verse 11, is an exhortation to do something, And do this! Speaking of what he had said before, obey the governing authorities understanding that they have been appointed by the true king maker, the sovereign God of the age who raises up kings, and takes down kings for his good pleasure and his good purpose. And likewise, do this, love your neighbor as yourself, in a selfless, true love not looking for repayment, not trading favor for favor but sacrificially give of yourself to those around you out of a pure love which flows from the heart, as the spirit moves, convicts, and ministers to you to will and to do these things. This faith is not a faith of inaction, and though for the past few weeks I have been saying that there is nothing we can do to gain merit before God, that these things which Paul instructs here is not a new set of laws and regulations, there must be these actions in a believer...we must Do, what we believe. But the great part of that, with the command to Do, comes the ability to do so. For we have been given the spirit of God, our lives have been changed and we have been created in a new image of Christ to reflect the love that he has first given us. Throughout all of scripture, with the command of God, comes the power to do. So, this exhortation of Paul, to go and do what he has spoken of, is not a new command, but rather expressing that we are to be a people of action, who seek to do the will of the father, who seek to find what that is, and strive to love our neighbors, love our enemies, in the hopes that they may, by our lives see Christ, and through the preaching and sharing of the gospel come to understand and believe.

Nothing ruins a gospel testimony like a life that is no different from anyone else in the world. Though we are still yet in this flesh, though we fall, we sin, we make mistakes and errors, largely our life should be a reflection of Christ to the world around us so that we do not appear to be hypocrites making claims of Christ, but living a life caught up in the futility of this world. Paul in chapter 12 said Do not be conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable perfect will of God. So, in this exhortation in verse 11, to Do these things there is an assumption attached, you must be among the world, you must be in the world to reflect Christ to the world. No Christian is an island, there is no biblical standard for Christians to cut themselves off from the world, not precedence for creating walled off communities as we see with some other religions. A Christian can not be a light to the world from the safety of their basement, or the tranquility of nature. By that I mean, we have all heard the phrase... I am close to God when I am out fishing then I am in any church gathering. First off, if that is true, you need to reassess where you are going, if that time of corporate worship, fellowship, and the preaching of the word is not bringing you closer to God, then you need to find somewhere else.

But the point is here, we must be around people, we must interact with people to Do these things that Paul says is our good and necessary service, these things which reflect the faith that we have, into the world around us. And God has given us each a measure of this, some are more apt to talk to strangers, some are more reserved some may deal with social anxieties, but either way we are to reflect Christ in our conduct to everyone that he brings into our lives. And Paul here says we are to Do these things, knowing that the time is now, there is an urgency to this gospel calling. As the Author of Hebrews wrote, quoting David, "Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." There is a real and true urgency to the gospel for today is all we have. No one is guaranteed tomorrow and there is a two fold aspect to this urgency. One, that we are who are of faith, are faithful to minister and share this hope we have in Christ, and 2, is the urgency to believe because again, today is all we have. I knew someone who's response to the gospel was, I will believe when I am on the hospital bed about to die. No, today Is the day for you may never be given another chance. Paul says, Now it is high time to awake out of sleep, do not be complacent, wake up, there is a world of lost and dying people who need Jesus and we, as the adopted children of God, are to be the ministers of Christ.

In his letter to Timothy, Paul tells him, to be ready in season and out of season to share the hope and message of the gospel. We must be prepared to share the gospel at all times, no matter the circumstances. Paul, while in chains, in house arrest, preached the gospel to all those around him, his visitors, and the guards. And as we see from his letters some of the guards came to know Christ through the ministry of Paul while imprisoned. His circumstance did not hinder his ministry, but he took full advantage of who God placed before him to minister to. Understanding this call to urgency, that the time is now, the day is today, repent, believe, and follow him. Because as he says in verse 11. "for our salvation is nearer then when we first believed." Each day draws closer to the end, not just closer to the imminent return of Christ, but in our own individual lives as well. As the days pass, as time continues forward we age, we grow weaker, and eventually we die. The realization and culmination of my salvation is closer today then when I first believed as a young kid. Our time here is limited, and I think Paul is imploring is readers to redeem that time that they have, be ever vigilant, and urgent in your walk with Christ, for he says in verse 12 "The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light."

We as Christians are to live lives, transparently. That is our lives being a reflection of Christ to a dark world should reflect that light and at no time should we slink away into that darkness again to dabble in sins. Paul here shows a dichotomy between darkness and light, saying that the night is far spent, it is passing, and believers are to live in the light of day. Let no one have a secret life practiced in darkness, the example that came to mind is the people who attend Sunday worship each week, yet when they leave the gathering of the church and go back to their home they become entirely different people. They have a Christian front they put forth, and then they let it down when not gathered with a group of believers. That not ought to be in the life of a believer, we are to strive to be like Christ, not only when we are being watched and people are looking, but in the privacy of our own homes, in our own lives. For this salvation brings about true change in the life of the believer, which becomes a part of their life no matter the circumstances we find ourselves in.

Paul has spent this chapter instructing believers in the positive, do these things, as much as it depends on you, live peaceably with all men, respect the authorities put over you, and love one another with a fervent and true love born out of a love for Christ. But here in the last few verses, he instructs in the negative, do not do these things for we are to walk properly as those who walk in the light, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.. It is a doubling down on the reflection of a Christian life, what we as the adopted children of God should be like. Again, this isn't a new set of laws and requirements but more of a, lets say..measuring stick. This is what Christian conduct in the world, and to one another should look like, and this is the very nature of believers because it flows from a heart that loves God, therefore these things should by nature be defining factors in the Christian life. There is always the danger of being deceived, whether lead astray by false teachers, or out of our own sense of pride and arrogance. This salvation is serious business, our standing before God through Christ is a life and death situation not to be taken lightly. Jesus was very straightforward and at times very harsh to the leaders in Israel, because they had been deceived, they were so close but rejected the promised one who came to bring salvation.

It seems to be the trend in churches today to sort of soothe, comfort, and encourage the ungodly that they are indeed right with God. But they are doing so at the detriment of their people, for I believe many are deceived, many believe a false gospel and many are like the Jews of Jesus time, religious, with an appearance of morality, but inside are full of deadmens bones, death and decay for they have not yet been renewed truly by the blood of Christ. We combat that, by preaching the gospel, sharing not only the work that Christ has done, but the dire need of each and every one of us for that sacrifice. So many people struggle with assurance of faith, I spent years struggling, doubting whether or not I was a believer...I wanted so badly to be, but never felt sure that I was. Largely that sense and feeling came from some misunderstood beliefs, built upon false presuppositions, that I by my will and power could choose God. I think, there was 3 times in my life where I "accepted Jesus as my saviour." Once in Sunday school, once in bible school, and one time sitting down and talking with my mom. I always struggled with the thought...maybe it didn't take, like it was something I could do, and maybe I did it wrong. It wasn't until understanding the work of God in salvation that the peace of knowing I am his settled in. Resting in the fact that it is God who works in each and every one us salvation, and without that work there is nothing we can do to be saved.

So my salvation doesn't rest upon whether I recited a certain prayer properly, but it rests on the work that Christ had done on the cross, and the calling through the spirit to repent and believe. Then there was always the external pressure to be what I thought a christian should be, but again that comfort, and assurance came when through the teaching and preaching of the word I learned I don't have to really try all that hard to be a Christian.

For if I am, then I will act like one because it is a part of my nature, it is a part of who I am, and this understanding opened up a whole new world of freedom, and assurance. Now, I strive to live as I do, not to gain favor, for I have already been given everything in the blood of Christ, but I strive to live as I do because of my love for the one who gave his all for me. And in the end, it is our love for Christ, which keeps us from sin, it is our love for Christ which causes us to strive to live peaceably with one another, to love one another, and to walk properly in the faith so that we may be a reflection of this hope and joy that we have in him. I don't need to stand here week after week telling you how to live your lives, that is the job of the holy spirit, as it convicts and guides you through your daily walk. My Job each and every week is to encourage you in the faith, remind you of the one who's love was so great that he died for you, and if he laid down his life for you, will he not also take care of you? Each and every one of us has our struggles, we have our needs, we have our desires..and God knows them all. And he loves us with such a great love that he sent his son to die so that we may know him. Do not think for one second that God doesn't want what is best in your life, even times of strife and difficulty is what is best for you at the time, for it is a time of growth and reliance upon God's mercy and provision.

So, the call goes out, repent and believe, rest in Christ, the one who is our sabbath rest, "it is finished he said, from the cross as he drew his last breath." because salvation had been brought to mankind by his sacrifice, the punishment of our sins had been laid upon him and he took the full forced brunt of our punishment, for us. All there is for us to do, is to believe, and rest in the work he accomplished. And everything that Paul has been instructing his readers in, is to show the changed life of Christ's followers, because he works in the hearts and minds of individuals to be like him. Verse 14 "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts." We wage war against sin, by prayer, by reading the word, by fellowship with Christ and which each other, as we strive to be like him, in love, seeking to do his good pleasure and will, driven by the holy spirit to do so.

Christ has died, so that we through him might live, repent, believe, and follow him.