

Children of the Light

Livin' Like You're Leavin' – Part II

Romans 13:11-13

Introduction

In our last session, I introduced a series called, “Livin’ Like You’re Leavin’”. I made the comment that it sounded like the title of a Southern Gospel song. Afterward, I had several people tell me that they were sure there were songs with that title.

I did an internet search and did not find any songs with that exact title. However, I did come up with a number of songs that had one or both of the words “livin’” and “leavin’” in them. These included:

- Neil Young, “you’re leavin’ me just yet”;
- Van Halen, “they’re sayin’ that you’re leavin’”;
- Franz Ferdinand, “you’re the reason I’m leavin’”;
- Puff Daddy, “don’t ask me how I’m livin’”.

Trust me, I do not want to know how Puff Daddy is living. And, trust me, I am not getting any sermon titles from Puff Daddy – whoever he is!

The closest song lyrics that I can find, which, in a rather despairing way, summarize the idea of our series, are in a song by Tim McGraw. It is evidently, a top song on the secular country stations around the country.

The lyrics talk about a terminally ill man who tells him that he is dying and as a result, he is going to start doing some things while he is living. He is going to do things like: “sky divin’, rocky mountain climbin’, wild bull ridin’, loving deeper, speaking sweeter, and forgiving others more”.

What is his reason? Because he was going to start “livin’ like he is dyin’”.

There is some truth in that. Even the world feels its truth. Life is short, and it’s slipping away – faster and faster all the time.

I have mentioned in the past, my attempt to physically remind myself of this very truth.

David, the Psalmist, said that in order to have a wise heart, we should,

... ***number our days*** ... (*Psalm 90:12*).

Literally, count the number of days you have lived and have yet to live. Assume the best – that you will live the average lifespan in this country, which is around 75 years of age. How many years do you have left?

- If you are 25 years old, you have approximately 18,000 days left;
- If you are 35 years old, you have approximately 14,000 days left;
- If you are 45 years old, you have approximately 10,000 days left;
- If you are 55 years old, you have approximately 7,000 days left;
- If you are 65 years old, you have approximately 3600 days left;
- If you are 75 or older, you can smile real big!

One of our own church members, who lived to be 101 – and we sang, “Happy Birthday,” to her when she turned 100 – went to be with her Lord just a few days ago.

Most of us will not live to be 101, so do not count on that. But what if we live to be 75?

I have, on the pulpit today, a vase filled with green marbles. Each green marble represents one month that I have left in my life, if I lived to be 75. This vase sits on the windowsill of my office in this church. I have counted the remaining months left and all I have is 328 months to go.

Each month, I take a marble out and throw it away – an action that reminds me that it is gone. Did I invest it well or waste it?

I brought this vase home with me yesterday, to recount the marbles and make sure I had an accurate count. It is hard to believe there are 328 marbles in this vase, isn't it?! I was sure I had forgotten to take one out during one or two months.

I have already warned my staff not to take any marbles out when I am not around. To make me think I have less time left would be a cruel trick!

I counted the marbles and there should be 328, but there are only 249. I am missing 79 marbles. Someone wants me out of here – sooner than later!

Then, I thought, “Maybe this is a sign from the Lord . . .” – I am teasing! However, I figured out that 249 marbles mean that I have until the age of 68. If I live to the age of 68, these are all the marbles I have left.

In a very real sense, I am in the process of losing my marbles! In fact, I am losing them faster than I thought! And so are you.

I want to be reminded, though! I want to number my days and months and years, so that I will have a heart of wisdom.

Now, for the believer, the fear of dying is not an incentive for living right. The fact that we will live forever in the presence of our Lord and Savior is an incentive for living and pursuing a holy life. And:

- the fact that we will give an account before Him is an incentive;
- the fact that we have a permanent home in heaven is an incentive;
- the fact that we love the Father is an incentive;
- the fact that we desire to please the Father is an incentive.

That is the exact point of the paragraph we are discussing in Romans 13. The apostle Paul, in verses 8-14, wants to communicate a perspective on living, as well as a challenge to our purity in living.

Our Perspective on Living

Let us look at Romans 13, beginning in verse 8 through verse 12a.

Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.

For this, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed.

The night is almost gone, and the day is at near. . . .

In other words, this is your incentive for obeying the word and living in this way.

Paul says, “You need to take note of the time!”

When Paul uses the word “time,” in verse 11, he is not referring to chronological time (“chronos”), but to “kairos,” which means time as in an era; an epoch of time; an age.

This term is frequently used in Scripture. Paul is referring to this particular era – this age – this, as we could use it to refer to, dispensation of redemptive history.ⁱ

Paul is saying that the era – the age – preceding the coming of the Lord is almost over.

Understand that Paul, and the other New Testament writers, never anticipated a two thousand year pause between the first and second coming of the Lord.

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about the rapture of the church – the catching up of the believers – that we would not go up before the resurrected bodies of the believers who have already passed away. He wrote,

Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air . . . (I Thessalonians 4:17)

Paul was saying, “When the rapture of the church occurs, I’ll still be alive.”

He further said, in I Corinthians 7:29, that time was short!

If they thought Jesus Christ was going to rapture the church two thousand years ago, how much closer are we than ever before?!

Paul also wrote to the Corinthians that the Old Testament had been written for the New Testament believers instruction,

. . . upon whom the ends of the ages has come. (I Corinthians 10:11)

In other words, Paul believed that Christ's temporary departure, while the Holy Spirit empowered the church to announce the gospel to the rest of the world, did not seem to imply a lengthy period of time.ⁱⁱ

In Philippians 4:5, Paul wrote,

. . . The Lord is near.

The writer of Hebrews put it this way,

not forsaking our own assembling together, . . . but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:25)

James wrote in chapter 5, verse 7,

Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. . . .

In James 5:8, he wrote,

You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.

Peter wrote, in I Peter 4:7-8,

The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.

The incentive for loving and forgiving and sound judgment and a wise spirit is related to the coming of Christ.

John wrote, in I John 2:18,

Children, it is the last hour . . .

Jesus Christ Himself said, at the end of the Bible, in Revelation 22:20,

. . . Yes, I am coming quickly. . . .

His coming for the church is imminent – that is the next thing to occur on the prophetic calendar. The coming of the Lord for the church could happen at any moment.

As far as Paul, Peter, John, and the writer of Hebrews were concerned, they were going to be alive when it happened!

If this was their perspective on living, and if they were urgent and expectant, we should be urgent and expectant as well.ⁱⁱⁱ

Do you know what it is like to expect a package to arrive? The more you want it to arrive, the more often you check the mailbox – and the slower the mail carrier seems to drive!

Are you an expectant mother? You cannot wait, can you?! Take heart, Mom, you know you will not have to carry that baby forever, praise God! However, you are still not exactly sure when the baby will announce, "This will be my birthday."

The closer you get to the due date, the more often you lay down at night and wonder whether you will make it through the night. Who knows, maybe you will be a new mom sometime tomorrow.

As far as the apostles are concerned, we are to live as an expectant mother, thinking, "Maybe today! Maybe tomorrow! Who knows, maybe I'll be in heaven sometime tomorrow!"

It may be sooner than we think! One day, someday, will be the last day before Christ comes to take up His Bride.

Rapture or not, the truth remains for every one of us – one day, someday, will be our last day on earth.

Paul writes, in Romans 13:11, paraphrased,

Look at the time . . . surely it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep – from passivity, disobedience, apathy, complacency – for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed.

In the New Testament, salvation is in three tenses:

- as it relates to the past, we have been saved from the penalty of sin;
- as it relates to the present, we are being saved from the power of sin;
- as it relates to the future, we will be saved from the presence of sin.

Every day we live, we are one day closer to that future salvation. Someone put it this way, "Every day we pitch our tent a day's march closer to home."^{iv}

So, "Wake up! Wake up! Don't be sleeping at your post. Don't waste your life away. He is almost

here! Wake up to your spiritual opportunity and discipline. Wake up! The journey is almost over.”

If you have had children and have traveled more than thirty minutes away from home, you have heard your child say from the back seat, “Are we there yet?”

Then again, soon after, “Are we there yet? Huh, Mommy? Are we there yet, Daddy?”

I remember those days, “Are we there yet? Are we there yet?”

Finally, I would say, “Yea, we’re there.”

It would get quiet for a minute, and then I would hear, “No we’re not!”

I would then say, “You knew the answer all along! You’re right!”

Do not follow my example on this one – although it did work.

The believer should live with the perspective on life that asks the Father, not with impatience, but with true longing, “Are we almost there? Are we almost there?”

This was Paul’s perspective on living – he lived in light of leaving. He wrote,

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation . . . [and] instructing us to . . . live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, (Titus 2:11-13)

Now notice Romans 13:12a.

The night is almost gone, and the day is near. . . .

In other words, the night of man’s spiritual darkness is almost over, and daytime – the imminent return of Christ – is just about to dawn.^v

This is our perspective on living.

In light of this perspective, Paul will now speak about our purity while living.

Our Purity in Living

Paul informs us that there is something to put away and something to put on.

Notice Romans 13:12b.

. . . Therefore, let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

We are to put away the deeds of darkness, which Paul will uncover in a moment.

First, however, we are to put on the armor of light.

This armor of light is a reference to the full armor of God and also, a reminder that we are at war.

These are terms of warfare. We wear the armor delivered to us by faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul described the armor in Ephesians 6. Look at verses 11-12.

Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness . . .

This is referring to the strategies of Satan’s dark kingdom that move the world of unbelievers in their blindness to do his bidding.

Then, in Ephesians 6:13, we read,

Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

Charles Spurgeon delivered these words to his congregation in London, England,

You may sleep, but you cannot induce the devil to close his eyes . . . you may see evangelicals asleep, but you will not find falsehood slumbering. The prince of the power of the air keeps his servants well up to their work. If we could with a glance see the activities of the servants of Satan, we should be astonished at our own sluggishness.^{vi}

At the height of the cold war, Robert McNamara, who was at the time, the Secretary of Defense, said that he always had to remember that “when we are sleeping, the other two-thirds of the world is awake and up to some mischief.”^{vii}

Something to put on – the armor of light

Let us look at the pieces of armor needed for the believer to ward off both sluggishness and mischief.

1. First, our loins are to be girded with truth (Ephesians 6:14).

This piece of armor was more like a short apron that tied at the waist and came down to the thigh. It was the central piece – in fact, the breastplate would attach to it and the sword would hang from it. It all hinged upon the truth.

In a generation where truth is trumped by “whatever you happen to feel is right for you,” it is little wonder that the words of God are ignored and even Christians are falling prey to incredible error and false teaching.

The apostle John focused often on this piece of objective, inspired armor. He began his second epistle by writing,

The elder to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in truth; and not only I, but also all who know the truth, for the sake of the truth that abides in us . . . grace, mercy and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the son of the Father, in truth and love. I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth . . . (II John 1:1-4)

Five times in four verses, he refers to the truth.

John began his third epistle by writing,

. . . I was very glad when brethren came and testified to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth. I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth. (III John 1:3)

This is the piece of armor that keeps the breastplate of righteousness covering and protecting the heart.

2. Secondly, the believer’s armor also includes shoes of the gospel (Ephesians 6:15).

What is the gospel? The truth about Christ!

There will always be other gospels – some, Paul implied, delivered by angels – but they are false.

Both Islam and Mormonism are both rapidly growing religions in the world – and both of them are dependant upon beliefs they claim were delivered to mankind by angels.

If you are going to stand in this dark age; this dark era, you must be wearing your armor, and that includes the shoes of the gospel in which you take your stand.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the gospel that he delivered to them, having received it, not from an angel, but from the resurrected Christ. He wrote,

Now I make known to you . . . the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand. (I Corinthians 15:1)

3. Thirdly, the believer’s armor also includes a shield of faith, a helmet of salvation, and the

sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Ephesians 6:16-17).

You are in a war – do not forget who you are.

When our twin sons were around six years old, I had taken them with me to the airport to pick up my mother-in-law who was coming to visit. As we were waiting, soldiers, dressed in full battle gear – fatigues, helmets, guns, boots, everything – disembarked from the same plane that she was on. They were an intimidating, striking sight. We just stood there as they walked by, and my boys were awestruck. We were standing right by the door, and they filed right past us. One of my sons looked up at me and said, “Dad, there’s those army men.”

One of the soldiers walking past, heard him, stopped, looked down at him, and said, “Boy, we’re not army, we’re marines.”

Paul says, in effect, “This is who you are – know who you’re fighting with and what you’re fighting for; know what your uniform stands for; know who your commander is.”

You are in a war – put your armor on.

Paul uses the phrase, “armor of light” to categorically describe the believer. The world is darkness – the believer is light.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians and reminded them,

. . . you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (Ephesians 5:8)

We are like little light bulbs moving through our dark world. Imagine that.

Is it any wonder then, that the believer should not act like darkness? How does darkness act; what are the deeds of darkness?

Obviously the list could be very long, but Paul mentions six sins. Notice Romans 13:13.

Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy.

When you read a list like this, you might be tempted to think, why would Paul ever need to warn the believer of these kinds of sins? Why would Paul need to warn the Roman believers of such wicked acts? The question you should really ask is, why does Paul include himself in the warning?^{viii}

Perhaps today, we should join the ranks of honest believers and in humility, circle the words,

- . . . ***let us lay aside the deeds of darkness . . . (verse 12);***
- ***Let us behave properly as in the day . . . (verse 13).***

The honest believer knows he can behave horribly. He is aware of his own potential of sinful thinking and acting. It does not do the believer good to think he or she is above or beyond any sin.

The believer who thinks that way, in fact, is already in great danger, for the Bible says to,

. . . let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. (I Corinthians 10:12)

This is why Paul speaks frankly to the believer – this is not an epistle to the Roman senate, this is a letter to the Roman church. The Roman church will read the Bible and discover the Bible is reading them.

We talk about discovering the word – and when we do, we find that the word discovers us. When we bring the truth of God’s word to light, God’s word will bring the truth about us to light. An honest look at the word reveals that we are capable of sinning horribly.

This is the reason that Paul warns the Colossian believers, as well, to,

. . . put . . . aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, (Colossians 3:8-9)

The tense of the verb indicated they were to continually put away these actions.

When we choose not to put them away and sin, we put our dirty rotten clothing on, as it were, covering over the armor of light and disallowing the world to see the distinctiveness of who we are as children of the light.^{ix}

The writer of Hebrews also tells the believer to, ***. . . lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us . . . (Hebrews 12:1)***

Peter tells us to,

. . . [put] aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and slander, (I Peter 2:1)

James adds that the believer is to,

. . . [put] aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, and in humility receive the word . . . (James 1:21)

Now, in Romans 13, Paul says the same thing to the believers living in Rome, Italy.

We are capable of doing all of the above, but because,

- we belong to the God of light,
 - we have been brought into the kingdom of deliverance and light,
 - we are now the children of light, living out the gospel of light in a world of darkness that desperately needs the light,
 - at any moment the Lord of light will come for us –
- there are some things we should not be doing.

Something to put away – deeds of darkness

Six sins are listed by Paul in Romans 13:13. They are in three pairings, since they are similar and usually go together. Let us look at these.

1. Carousing is first, which comes from the Greek work “komos,” which refers to reveling, or literally, to having orgies.

The followers of the god Bacchus, the Roman god of wine and intoxication, had a festival on March 16 and 17. The Bacchanalia were orgies in honor of him. By the time of Paul, these wicked celebrations had become notorious for their open public sexual perversion.

No doubt believers in Rome had a past life in the carousing of Rome in March. This is much like believers today, living with the memories of some spring break from college days or a trip to Mardi Gras or a fling in Las Vegas or some sweatshop in San Francisco. These are twenty-first century seasons and places that mirror the first century festival of Bacchus, where immorality comes out in the open.

Paul pulls no punches in saying that these are the activities of the children of darkness, not of the children of the light.

2. Paul adds secondly, and not surprisingly, drunkenness. The world is aided in losing its inhibitions sexually by the use of alcohol.

A few weekends ago, my family and I went to the Charlotte Arena for a five hour concert of gospel music – led by gospel quartets and trios and soloists. It took us two hours to get out of downtown Charlotte after the concert, which lasted until just past midnight as the new year began.

We had two hours of sitting in traffic, as all the new year parties emptied out of buildings and into the streets. At one point, I passed a building where there were about a hundred police officers in riot gear. They were holding shields as revelers poured out of the downtown building and into the street. The people were shouting and laughing and most of them were obviously intoxicated.

I could not help but think it interesting that the children of darkness who party have to be controlled by riot police. Yet we, 10,000 strong, just a block away, having our version of a party, had no need of intoxicating help to make it enjoyable. And we did not need riot police to control us after the party was over.

What a distinction between the children of darkness and the children of light. It goes all the way back to the first century.

3. The third and fourth sins that Paul emphasizes are sexual promiscuity and sensuality.

These specifically refer to sexual relations outside the bonds of marriage.

Sensuality could better be translated “shameless,” in the context of this pairing. This Greek word “*aselgeia*” refers to someone not only captivated by lust and sexual immorality, but lost to shame. While most people try to hide their immorality, this person does not even try. He flaunts his sexual sin, he boasts of his exploits, he does not care who he destroys or hurts, he does not give any thought to who might see him – he is shameless in his sin.

This is perhaps, a digression of darkness. Paul seems to be implying a downward digression as it relates to sexual sins.

First, a person joins a party, then he gets drunk, then he commits some sort of immoral act, and ultimately, he does not care that he did, and he seeks another opportunity to sin again.

4. The last two sins the children of light are to put away are strife and jealousy.

Another progression that Paul may have in mind is the outward acts that ultimately, form deep within the heart of man.

The word “strife” refers to someone who does not want to be passed or ignored. Their personal

power and prestige are utmost in their mind. This is Diotrephes, who loved the preeminence in the church (III John 1:9).

Add to that sin the jealousy of the human heart that not only wants to be first, but looks with jealous eyes on every blessing someone else in the church might have.

Let us not be so quick to comment on sexual sin and overlook the hidden sins of the proud heart that demand to be first and preeminent and blessed above all others.

So, how do we avoid reverting back to the deeds of darkness? What if we already have? The answer is clarified even further in the next verse in Romans 13, which we will save for our next discussion.

Conclusion – Three Things to Remember

Let me summarize the gist of Paul’s exhortation, warning, and encouragement. There are three things to remember.

1. Remember we do not belong in the dark!

That is the reason we are so miserable hanging around the children and deeds of darkness. We are children of the light! What fellowship has light with darkness?

2. Remember Christ is coming back.

It could be this afternoon – right in the middle of the Carolina victory over the Chicago Bears.

3. Remember we are in a war.

You must never go out for a moment without your armor on.

Would you drive without a seatbelt?

Would you play a basketball game in a suit and dress shoes?

Would you rappel without a harness?

Would you skydive without a parachute?

Not on your life?!

Well, this *is* your life. As for me, I have 328 months to go – and by the grace of God, I want to walk in the truth all the way to the tape.

So do you. So wake up! Do not waste another month – do not waste another moment!

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 1/15/2006 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ John MacArthur, Romans: Volume 2 (Moody Press, 1994), p. 258.

ⁱⁱ Kenneth Boa and William Kruidenier, Holman New Testament Commentary: Romans (Broadman & Holman, 2000), p. 411.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid., p. 412.

^{iv} John Phillips, Exploring Romans (Moody Press, 1969), p. 229.

^v MacArthur, p. 261.

^{vi} James Montgomery Boice, Romans: Volume 4 (Baker, 1995), p. 1710.

^{vii} Ibid.

^{viii} R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Augsburg, 1936), p. 807.

^{ix} MacArthur, p. 264.