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Sermon Notes

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Wake Up and Do It Now—The Time is Short

Romans 13:11-14

Introduction: Augustine and the Book of Romans

A long, long time ago, when the Roman empire was still in power, there sat in a walled garden in the city of Milan a professor of rhetoric and philosophy, weeping and in anguish. He had a godly mother who had prayed for years for his salvation, but instead he had spent his strength in immorality and debauchery, fathering a child out of wedlock and living for lustful pleasures still. Yet he felt within his soul the burning of God's just sentence against him, yet he also still felt the burn of his own uncontrolled lusts, and he cried out against his own wretchedness... he knew fully that he was a slave to sin and could not rescue himself, for he had tried time and time again to be free from ungodly lusts.

So, he cried out to God, saying "How long, O Lord, how long? Will it be tomorrow and always tomorrow? Why does my uncleanness not end this very moment?" In this manner he tore at his own soul, but could find no relief from his guilt and bondage to sin. For a moment, however, he grew still, for he heard the delicate sound of a child's voice wafting over the fence from the next yard. The child was chanting a rhyme in Latin... "*Tolle, lege. Tolle, lege. Tolle, lege!*" "Take up, and read! Take up, and read! Take up, and read!" For some strange reason, he felt a flicker of hope in his heart... he looked over to another place in the garden and there was a manuscript he had been reading earlier. He decided he would pick by random a place in the manuscript and see if it would help him... his finger came accidentally to a place in Romans, 13:14 "Not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to satisfy its lusts." At that moment, Augustine, for that was his name, was reborn into a personal faith in Christ. By one line from the Book of Romans was born perhaps the greatest theologian of the church since the Apostle Paul himself. He was baptized the next spring, on Easter Sunday in the year 387.

Later, speaking of his conversion in his great spiritual autobiography, *Confessions*, he described his greatest discovery of the power of the Christian gospel

Paul says

Romans 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes

Salvation from what?

From everything that sin does to us... from the wrath of God, from hell, from the spiritual and mental pollution of sin, from slavery to sin, from bodies dying because of corruption by sin

- Lust has a tremendous pull on us as sinners... we are surrounded by constant pulls to desire what we cannot have
- Lust for sexual gratification did not begin with Hugh Hefner and Playboy magazine
- Augustine said he came to Carthage “burning, burning, burning with lust”
- It was salvation from this that he sought from Christ
 1. Augustine, enslaved by passion & lust... could not escape
 2. Made a startling discovery
 - a. God commands sexual purity

Romans 13:14 “Not in orgies 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 sinful nature.”

- a. God commands sexual purity
- b. Through the Gospel, God gives the very righteousness He commands

[from Augustine’s Confessions, Book X, Chapter 29 NPNF 1:153]

And my whole hope is only in your exceeding great mercy. Give what You command, and command whatever You will. You impose sexual purity upon us, “Nevertheless, I when I perceived,” said someone, “that I could not otherwise obtain her, except God gave her me;... that was a point of wisdom also to know whose gift she was. . . . O charity, my God, kindle me! You command sexual purity; give what You command, and command what You wilt.

Augustine’s whole understanding of the Christian gospel began with this clear but impossible command

The whole Christian life is a call to constant repentance and faith in Christ as the only Savior from sin

Our text today calls on us to get serious about holiness NOW before it’s too late

... And it’s later than you think

I. The Call for Personal Holiness

A. “Do This”: Fulfill the Law

Context: verse 11, “And do this...” DO WHAT? Fulfill the Perfect Law of God by loving others

Romans 13:9-10 The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰ Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Paul is calling the Roman Christians to accelerate their holiness, their sanctification, because the end of the world is coming

1. The context:

a. Romans

Romans is the fullest expression of the gospel in the Bible... a comprehensive look at how God saves sinners from their sins

Salvation from sin is the theme of Romans... it is the purpose of it

Paul is here describing an element of the full salvation that God is working in us through Christ

Romans 1-11 is the theology of how the blood of Christ shed on the Christ removes our guilt before God, and enables Him to impute Christ's perfect righteousness to us by faith

It is also a description of how God causes His Holy Spirit to live in us so that we may live lives pleasing to Him in every respect

b. Romans 12-16: practical matters of the Christian life... the gospel applied; answering the question “How then shall we live?”

i) Section 1: Romans 12, living a godly life within the Body of Christ

ii) Section 2: Romans 13, living a godly life in this Satanic, sinful world

c. Romans 13:8-10

i) Paul has just finished talking about our continuing debt to love one another, and how love is the fulfillment of the law

ii) This is what Paul means at the beginning of verse 11

Romans 13:10-11 Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. ¹¹ And do this, understanding the present time.

- d. This whole section is a call to personal holiness in the pattern of obedience to the law of God
2. The Spirit-filled Life: Law's Requirements Fully Met in Us
- a. The power of the Spirit within us: to walk decently and orderly in this world... to fulfill the law in how we live moment by moment
 - b. Romans 8: the Spirit-filled life

Romans 8:7-9 the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. ⁹ You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.

- c. The path of righteousness laid out clearly in the law of God

Psalm 119:32 I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free.

Psalm 1:1-3 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. ² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. ³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

B. God's Holiness Our Pattern and Destiny

- 1. God's holiness: His defining characteristic

Isaiah 6:1-5 they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

- a. The only attribute of God listed three times in a row
 - b. The one attribute the powerful angels keep repeating to each other
 - c. It means perfect separation from His creation ("high and lifted up")
 - d. It also means perfect separation from all evil
- 2. Created in the image of God
 - 3. Recreated to be like God

Ephesians 4:22-24 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

C. Let Us Behave Decently

vs. 12-14 *The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.* ¹³ *Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.* ¹⁴ *Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*

1. This is the call in this section for holiness
2. A call to live a heavenly life while still on earth
3. A call to resist to constant pull of the world, the flesh, and the devil
4. A call to understand the significance of the brief time we have left on earth
5. A call to wake up, to clothe ourselves with our future perfection, Christ Himself
6. A call to be children of the light because God is light

1 Peter 1:15-16 *But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."*

II. The Urgency of Personal Holiness

A. Understanding the Present Time

Vs. 11-12 *And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.* ¹² *The night is nearly over; the day is almost here.*

1. A tremendous sense of urgency pervades this passage
2. Paul wants us to sense the fact that time is running out
3. Understanding time from God's point of view
 - a. God created time... time is connected to the story of redemptive history He is unfolding
 - b. Minutes, hours, days, months, years all serve God's redemptive plan
 - c. History is linear, moving from one point to the final destination
 - i) History not cyclical like the Hindus think... with endless cycles of reincarnation

- ii) Christianity sees history as a story unfolding with a beginning, middle and end... the Book of Revelation gives the clearest sense of this linear movement

Revelation 1:8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

Revelation 22:12-13 "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. ¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

- d. Paul's basic concept here: It is later than you think!!!

B. Crush Procrastination, for The Hour Has Come

1. Here we come to the issue of procrastination

Illus. Jonathan Edwards sermon on Procrastination

Procrastination; The Sin and Folly of Depending on Future Time

Proverbs 27:1 Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.

Subject: We ought to behave ourselves every day as though we had not dependence on any other day.

"The design of the wise man in this book of Proverbs, is to give us the precepts of true wisdom, or to teach us how to conduct ourselves wisely in the course of our lives. Wisdom very much consists in making a wise improvement of time, and of the opportunities we enjoy. This is often in Scripture spoken of as a great part of true wisdom; as Deu. 32:29, "O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!" And Psa. 90:12, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." So the wisdom of the wise virgins is represented as consisting much in this, that they improved the proper season to buy oil."

2. Paul is calling on Christians to seize the moment and act decisively in the matter of personal holiness
- a. The flesh is always making excuses and putting off to tomorrow what God is calling on us to do today
 - b. The Holy Spirit convicts you of a matter of holiness... He wants you to address it now
 - c. Perhaps it is a spiritual discipline He wants you to start... like memorizing a book of the Bible, or having a consistent quiet time, or resuming family

devotions, or setting aside a day of fasting and prayer with your wife for the direction of your family

- d. Perhaps it is a sin pattern in your life that you know is wrong, but you keep putting off addressing it: maybe overeating, or lust, or complaining, or
- e. Perhaps it's a matter of generosity, of giving generously to the Lord's work

Illus. Randy Alcorn's stunning example of a woman's intention to give away money

- f. Perhaps it is a matter of witnessing... someone that God has laid on your heart

C. Wake Up from Your Slumber

vs. 11 The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber

KJV: now it is high time to awake out of sleep

1. The slumber is a metaphor for the devil's work on our souls
 - a. The Greek word for slumber here is "hupnos"
 - b. From this we get the word "hypnotize"... as though Satan has hypnotized us from the proper alarm
2. Satan deceives us concerning the urgency of personal holiness
3. Satan deceives us concerning the urgency of evangelism... the salvation of lost people
4. He puts us into a slumber... a sluggishness, a sleep of sin

Illus. *The Hobbit*: Bilbo Baggins and the spider's sting... all the dwarves sleeping, waiting to be devoured

Illus. #2: *Pilgrim's Progress*: the "sinful sleep"

5. Christians underestimate the seriousness of sin, overestimate how much time we have to deal with it
6. We are acting sleepy when it is the time for urgent action
 - a. Urgent action in personal holiness
 - b. Urgent action in evangelism and missions

D. Our Salvation Nearer Now

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

1. Paul's logic: someday we will be fully saved from sin... every day brings us closer to that reality... so why keep sinning if we are getting closer and closer to freedom

Illus. POWs in Germany at the end of WWII... perhaps they had been collaborating with the Germans just to survive the prison camp experience... perhaps they had lost hope, and were sinking into a depressed languor; perhaps they were willing to make risky attempts to jump the barbed wire and escape. But when a smuggled short wave radio in the camp told them that the Allies had won major battles and were now only a few miles from the camp, they put off these insane behaviors and celebrated because their liberation was immediately approaching... it was getting closer and closer

2. Paul puts it positively: our SALVATION, not our CONDEMNATION
3. For both personal holiness and worldwide evangelization, our efforts will be successful, so we should be urgent and exert ourselves

Philippians 2:12-13 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed-- not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence-- continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

In other words, because our salvation is getting NEARER and NEARER, we should be exerting ourselves more and more in personal holiness... because this is the exact thing God is working in us

4. Vital lessons
 - a. #1: our salvation is INCOMPLETE... full salvation awaits a FUTURE FULFILLMENT
 - i) Still waiting for salvation from God's wrath on judgment day
 - ii) Still waiting for the completion of His saving work in us by the resurrection of the body
 - b. #2: time is unspeakably precious and there is less of it than you think, so make the most of every moment and every urging of the Spirit

- c. #3: every day we are making steady and sure progress to that future and final salvation
 - i) Christians should be hopeful and say “Every minute brings me closer to my destination, heaven, and my full salvation: perfection in Christ”
 - ii) There can be a certain sadness in seeing your children grow up or your body grow old... DON’T BE SAD!! Rejoice that we’re getting nearer and nearer our destination

E. The Night is Nearly Over (vs. 12)

1. The “night” here is the Satanic gloom of spiritual darkness Satan has spread over the whole earth
 - a. It is the age of darkness, of shadows, of death and sin

When Jesus was arrested, He said to the chief priests, guards, and elders:

Luke 22:53 Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour-- when darkness reigns.

Literally this is the era when darkness has power, authority to rule

- a. BUT that “Dark Age” is almost over... Satan’s time of rule is almost ended
 - c. Christ’s powerfully advancing Kingdom will soon finish Satan forever
2. Night also refers to the deception of concealment
 - a. Far more crimes happen at night than in the day
 - b. Night conceals evil deeds

Ephesians 5:11-15 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. ¹³ But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴ for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." ¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live-- not as unwise but as wise,

- c. The supposed concealment of darkness is a Satanic deception
 - i) Satan lies to people concerning the possibility of concealment and deception

“What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas” No it doesn’t!!!

- ii) Satan tells us that it is possible to sin and not be discovered

iii) The sinner believes Satan's lie that God cannot see what we do in the darkness

Psalm 10:11 He says to himself, "God has forgotten; he covers his face and never sees."

d. Christians need to understand by faith that true concealment is IMPOSSIBLE

Jeremiah 16:17 My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from me, nor is their sin concealed from my eyes.

Luke 12:1-5 "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. ² There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. ³ What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs. ⁴ "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. ⁵ But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.

Terrifying passage in Ezekiel in which God takes Ezekiel on a spirit-empowered journey into the deep recesses of the temple court where some Israelites were doing very wicked things thinking no one would see them:

Ezekiel 8:7-12 Then he brought me to the entrance to the court. I looked, and I saw a hole in the wall. ⁸ He said to me, "Son of man, now dig into the wall." So I dug into the wall and saw a doorway there. ⁹ And he said to me, "Go in and see the wicked and detestable things they are doing here." ¹⁰ So I went in and looked, and I saw portrayed all over the walls all kinds of crawling things and detestable animals and all the idols of the house of Israel. ¹¹ In front of them stood seventy elders of the house of Israel, and Jaazaniah son of Shaphan was standing among them. Each had a censer in his hand, and a fragrant cloud of incense was rising. ¹² He said to me, "Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the darkness, each at the shrine of his own idol? They say, 'The LORD does not see us; the LORD has forsaken the land.'"

The basic idea of temptation is that you can do something in secret that will never be discovered... but judgment day will uncover all men's secrets

Job 31:1-4 "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl. ² For what is man's lot from God above, his heritage from the Almighty on high? ³ Is it not ruin for the wicked, disaster for those who do wrong? ⁴ Does he not see my ways and count my every step?

Hebrews 4:13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

- e. By faith then we should live as though the light of judgment day is already here

F. The Day is Almost Here

Vs. 12 "The day draws near"

1. Paul says that the day of full revelation is coming
2. YES: When we will see God face to face, for which we deeply long
3. BUT ALSO: when we will have to give an account for how we have lived in the body
4. God's view of time is different than ours

Almost two thousand years ago, Jesus said

Revelation 22:20 "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

5. SOON AND VERY SOON

"Soon and very soon, we are going to see the King"

A key role for me as your pastor is to strengthen your vision of faith so that you can "SEE, FEEL, SENSE" the immediacy of your death and of Christ's coming and of Judgment Day

You can only receive this by faith, and it is by the preaching of the Word that your faith is given the solid food it needs to sense the immediacy of our standing before Christ

III. The Nature of Personal Holiness

Romans 13:12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

A. Negative: Putting Off

1. Slumber
2. Deeds of darkness (vs. 13 lists them)
 - a. Not in orgies and drunkenness
 - b. Not in sexual immorality and debauchery
 - c. Not in dissension and jealousy

3. These are some of the ugliest words in human experience
 - a. Rome was characterized by flouting of God's moral laws
 - b. Self-control is thrown out the window
 - i) Marital relations are not enough... they yearn for orgies
 - ii) A good meal is not enough... they yearn for gluttony, cramming their faces
 - iii) A small amount of wine is not enough... they yearn for drunkenness
 - c. A continual lust for more and more because sin does not satisfy

Illus. Adrift in the Pacific Ocean in a small boat, raging thirst, surrounded by immeasurable quantities of water, but unable to drink, because it is SALT WATER. Salt water gives an immediate sense of quenching of the thirst, followed by an even greater and more raging thirst

So it is with anyone who goes for a lifestyle of lust:

Nowadays, lust surrounds us like the Pacific Ocean surrounds that small boat... cyber-pornography stands like the harlot beckoning anyone who ventures to use the internet; fornication is accepted as merely "living together"

4. Paul's point: these things are DEEDS OF DARKNESS for which we will be greatly ashamed on Judgment Day
5. PUT OFF = like a filthy, disgusting garment

B. Positive: Putting On

1. Armor of light
 - a. Sanctification cannot merely be negative... we can't merely STOP doing bad things
 - b. Instead we are called to put on godliness like a beautiful, shining array of armor
 - c. "Armor" is a military term

Illus. Medieval knights wore extensive armor to protect them in battle

Modern-day soldiers now use body armor made of synthetic resins

All armor has the same function: to stop some offensive weapons from penetrating our bodies

“Light” is armor in that a Spirit-filled Christian cannot be penetrated by Satan’s filthy missiles because we are totally satisfied with Christ, with His perfect righteousness, and are thus not restless, roaming the earth for some emptiness to be filled

d. Ephesians 6: “Full armor of God”

2. Putting on Christ

a. Understand that Christ alone is our only hope for a holy life

b. He alone IS our righteousness positionally

c. He alone lived through this sinful world perfectly without ever sinning

d. As we spiritually “put on Christ” like a coat of armor, we are focusing our minds on Him, trusting in Him, relying on Him moment by moment

C. Negative: Make No Provision for the Flesh

ESV Romans 13:14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

1. Flesh = sinful nature tied to the body of sin

2. Flesh has drives, desires, yearnings

3. These drives take provision in order to meet their needs... there is EQUIPMENT for satisfying sin

a. The drunkard must have his supply of alcohol... he must go where it is sold and provide a supply

b. The lustful man must have his supply of lustful images to gratify his yearnings

c. The gossip has to listen carefully and ask questions so they can spread the juicy stories

d. The sluggard chooses not to set his alarm for his quiet time

4. Scripture here calls on us to not to procure the equipment of sin

5. The Greek word is literally “take no forethought for the flesh”... as soon as the thought pops up in your head, stomp it like a scorpion

6. Scripture calls on us here to frustrate the flesh in its drives

IV. Application

A. Don't Put Off Christ

1. Don't procrastinate!!!

Hebrews 3:7-8 "Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts

2. If you are not a Christian, trust in Christ today
3. If God is calling on you to grow, DO IT NOW
4. If God is calling on you to put a specific sin to death, DO IT NOW
5. It is later than you think... you may not get the chance to do what you thought to do
6. Good intentions are no substitute for actual obedience

B. Don't Rely on Your Obedience

1. No matter how zealous you are for holiness, your best days will be insufficient
2. In Christ alone is our righteousness

C. Don't regret the passing of Time...

1. Unbelievers around us are constantly lamenting how quickly time passes
2. BE GLAD that our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed