

IT'S TIME (PART 1)
ROMANS 13:11-14

Larry Walters had always dreamed of flying, but because of poor eyesight was unable to get into the US Air Force. So he made his living with another kind of transportation service — driving a truck. But he would still frequently think about flying.

At some point, he came across the story of Al Mingalone who in 1937 tied 32 weather balloons to a parachute harness, put on the parachute and ascended to about 700 feet in altitude and shot some footage for Paramount Pictures. The story made Larry Walters think, “I wonder...”

So in 1982 Larry purchased 45 balloons and on July 2 he filled them with helium and attached them to his lawn chair, tied ballast to the chair, grabbed a pellet gun, some sandwiches and a two-liter coke, a CB radio, and a camera, climbed into the chair, and his friends cut him loose.



He ascended quickly — to 16,000 feet and federal airspace and the flight descent path for LAX. Though he eventually dropped his pellet gun, after 45 minutes he was able to shoot out enough balloons that he began descending and landed 45 more minutes after that. Reporters quickly gathered around him and asked him the obvious question — “Why?...” He responded, “It was something I had to do. I had this dream for twenty years, and if I hadn't done it, I think I would have ended up in the funny farm.”

He couldn't just sit there anymore. He had to act. There comes a time when a man has to act. And there comes a time when the man of God must act. When we consider what we have in Christ, and the goal that Christ has for us, we cannot be apathetic about our salvation. We need to act on our salvation, which is what the Scriptures teach in multiple places, and is Paul's emphasis in Romans 13:11-14 —

IT IS TIME TO INTENTIONALLY ACT ON THE SALVATION WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN.

In this passage, Paul calls us to three actions and provides us one extended motivation for our actions. We will consider the first action, and the motive for acting this morning, and the final calls to action next time.

1. **It's Time to Do SOMETHING (v. 11a)**
2. **WHY We Should Take Spiritual Action (vv. 11b-12a)**

- ✓ Act, Because You Know What **TIME** It Is (v. 11b)
 - ✓ Act, Because This is No Time for Spiritual **LETHARGY** (v. 11c)
 - ✓ Act, Because It's Almost Time for Our Final **SALVATION** (v. 11d)
 - ✓ Act, Because It's Almost Time for Christ's **RETURN** (v. 12a)
3. It's Time to Put Off **SINFUL DEEDS** (v. 12b, 13)
4. It's Time to Put on **CHRIST'S ARMOR** (v. 12c, 14)

IT IS TIME TO INTENTIONALLY ACT ON THE SALVATION WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN.

1. It's Time to Do **SOMETHING (v. 11a)**

- Following what he has said about loving one another in the church body (vv. 8-10), Paul says, **do this**.
 - ✓ Paul has already connected loving others in the church to fulfilling the OT Law of God. We love others because we can honor God and obey His commands (**8:4**).
 - ✓ And Paul is about to provide a further motivation for loving others. Why should we love each other when it is so costly and hard?
- But when Paul says **do this**, I believe he is talking about much more than just loving the church. He is talking about everything that he has spoken of in 12:1 – 13:14.
 - ✓ He is referring to the submission of the believer to the government in **13:1-7**
 - ✓ He is referring to the believer's relationship to those who are opposed to him (**12:14-21**) — and his trust in God to resolve any unrighteousness
 - ✓ He is referring to the believer's relationships in the church (**12:9-13**)
 - ✓ He is referring to the believer's use of his spiritual gifts (**12:3-8**)
 - ✓ And he is referring to the process of sanctification that he brings up in **12:1-2**. The themes of not being conformed to the world but being transformed to Christlikeness echo closely the themes of these four verses, particularly vv. 13-14.
 - ✓ It's also helpful to remember that everything he is telling the believer to do is based on the reality of our spiritual condition that he has explained in **chs. 1-11** —
 - The pervasiveness of our sinful condition (chs. 1-3)
 - The provision of our salvation (3:21 – 4:25)
 - The process of our sanctification (chs. 5-8)
 - The power of God's sovereignty in our salvation (chs. 9-11)
 - Because of God's work in all these areas for us, there is a fitting response — that we would be sanctified in every area of our lives (chs. 12-15). That is what he is summing up with **do this**.

- At the end of this section (vv. 12b-14), Paul will be more specific with what that should look like, but for now, let's just notice that Paul is calling and exhorting us to sanctification. Our salvation should produce genuine change and transformation in our lives.
 - ✓ What Paul is doing in this section is drawing out specific implications of what he taught about sanctification in chapter 8 — cf. especially 8:11-13 — if we have been given the Spirit of God, then He will sanctify us, and we will cooperate with Him in the process of our sanctification.
 - ✓ There is no such thing as an unsanctified believer; sanctification is not instantaneous and complete and it is not a straight line towards Christlikeness, but it is *towards* Christlikeness. There is not *perfection*, but there is a clear *direction* towards Christ. Here Paul is implying purpose/intention:

“No man coasts into Christlikeness....Neither does anyone become a more faithful man of God by accident. No man grows in godliness who does not intend to. More than intentionality is needed, but unless [one] deliberately pursues holiness, he will suffer the spiritual decline and the ministry-destroying effects caused by the gravity of worldliness.” [Jason Allen, *Portraits of a Pastor*.]

- One more perspective we should notice about our sanctification is the motivation (vv. 11-12) — and the motive for our sanctification is the doctrine of eschatology — our knowledge of God's future plans. Everything Paul has revealed as God's will for the way we live (12:1ff) is based on our understanding of the times in which we are living and the time that is coming (*knowing the time*)...

2. WHY We Should Take Spiritual Action (vv. 11b-12a)

Act, Because You Know What TIME It Is (v. 11b)

- ✓ Paul builds on his call to sanctification by providing a motivation — *knowing the time*.
- ✓ There are at least two things we should notice in that phrase:
 - The word *time* is not a reference to chronological time — it is a reference to the season and character of the times in which you are living (e.g., Eph. 5:16-17).
 - We should *know* — understand — the time in which we are living, and live accordingly. Paul has previously connected our knowledge to particular actions (5:3; 8:28-29). *Act* because you *know*.
- ✓ Jesus also emphasized the importance of being attentive to the season in which His followers lived so that they would repent and be holy (cf. Mk. 1:15; Mt. 16:1-3).
- ✓ *What time are we living in?* Two answers:
 - We are living in a time of darkness, sin, and depravity. E.g., 1:28-32; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2. And that is a reminder that not only will this time on earth not satisfy, but if we pursue it, we will be accountable to God and destroyed (3:19-20).
 - We are living in a time of God's sovereign rule and authority and coming Kingdom (5:17; 6:11, 22; 8:18; Eph. 5:8-9). The world around us is dead, but we are alive and live in light and hope.

- ✓ Paul is appealing to the Romans to be changed because of their knowledge of God’s timeline for the future. This is a typical appeal (e.g., 1 Thess. 5:1-11; Js. 5:7-11; 1 Pt. 4:7-11). When we understand the shortness of time on this earth and the importance of eternity and what God has for us in eternity, it compels us to sanctified living (1 Jn. 3:2-3).
 - This is also based on what Paul said about sanctification in 8:18ff — because the believer knows what is coming in salvation, he longs for that salvation and works out that salvation (8:23, 25).
 - Sometimes, we are bored and easily give up on the process of sanctification now because we are bored with and have given up on Heaven. We are not captivated by Heaven and the glory of God and Christ that will be revealed to us there, so we aren’t concerned to be holy here.
- ✓ There are two competing feelings about our time on earth —
 - *It feels like it will never pass* — as if we have limitless time available to us. We are tempted to think this way when we are young or when we are suffering particularly severely (or feel the weight of sin’s battle). For two different reasons (joy and pain), time on earth seems endless.
 - *It feels like it has passed too quickly* — as if we haven’t actually had the 60 or 80 or more years that God has given us (Js. 4:14), or our suffering has been too great and we have missed the joys of life (2 Cor. 4:16-17).
 - For both of these scenarios we need to know the time: we need a reminder that our life here is only a foretaste of our life in Heaven with Christ and that Christ is coming to fix things and make them well (2 Cor. 4:18). We need to know the time in which we are living: we are created beings headed quickly for eternity and we want to be as sanctified as possible as we head into Glory.

• Act, Because This is No Time for Spiritual LETHARGY (v. 11c)

- ✓ Because we live in a dark world, and because eternity is coming soon, Paul says ***it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep***. Here is another time for which we need to set our alarms.
- ✓ Here is another “hour” — a time of life in which we should be vigilant, awake, and alert.
- ✓ When he uses the terms ***awake*** and ***sleep***, the implication is that some (like the sluggard of Proverbs) are slumbering — they have become apathetic and lazy in doing what is right in their calling as believers. They should have loved better and should have persisted in mortifying sin — the season of life demanded it. It was no time to sleep in Paul’s day; it is no time to sleep in our day.
- ✓ What Paul is really talking about here is a sleepiness that is actually being “awake” toward the world and the flesh — and that “awakeness” produces a sleepiness toward and forgetfulness of God.
- ✓ The flesh is inclined to be alert to and tantalized by the world; that will put us to sleep spiritually.
- ✓ There is also a sense of urgency here: it is ***already*** time to awaken. There is no time to lazily preparing; it’s time simply to get into action and start working.
- ✓ The implication is that some of Paul’s readers might be tempted to slumber when they should be awake and alert and pursuing sanctification (akin to the three disciples, Mt. 26:40-41ff).

- ✓ Where have you become lazy and apathetic spiritually? What discipline have you given up? What pet sin are you continuing to indulge? What have you stopped fighting against?
- ✓ We will see it in vv. 12-14, but the spiritual life is *war*. It's not easy. It's not for the faint of heart. It takes getting up early and working hard and being attentive; it will at times leave you exhausted.
- ✓ Consider the analogies of **2 Tim. 2:4-6** and the summary in v. 3. If you are giving up because it is hard then you have also fallen asleep at the wheel and you *will* crash.
- ✓ (Let me also encourage you that when you fight for your spiritual life and stay alert, the Lord will also give you everything you need to persist in that fight, **8:26, 31-32**).
- ✓ If you've fallen asleep and aren't alert to the pervasive evil in the world and the overwhelming power in Christ, then consider this a wake up shake and call.

● **Act, Because It's Almost Time for Our Final SALVATION (v. 11d)**

- ✓ There is another reason to persist in pursuing sanctification — ***now salvation is nearer...***
- ✓ That is, we are marching closer, ever closer, to the end and culmination of our salvation.
- ✓ He is not speaking as much about our death, as he is about the completion of God's eternal salvation plan by the return of Christ. He is talking about the fulfillment of our yearning in **8:23ff**.
- ✓ He wants us to understand that the day of evil is nearly completed and the time of Christ's return is imminent and close. We are about to see all the wonders of Glory — it's close for all of us (**Tt. 2:13**; 1 Thess. 5:8; **Js. 5:8-9**; **Rev. 22:20**). It could be at any moment (and it's always been that way).
- ✓ The reality of Christ's soon return should have a sanctifying and purifying effect on our lives.
- ✓ When we are lazy and apathetic about loving and about persisting in the fight against sin, it suggests that we believe death and Christ's return are a long way away and of no concern to us. Time is short. We must live in light of that awareness.

● **Act, Because It's Almost Time for Christ's RETURN (v. 12a)**

- ✓ The final motive that Paul gives is related to the previous, but is more specific: ***the day is near***.
 - By ***the day*** he is referring to a specific day, and it is clear that he wants us to understand this as "the day of the Lord" — the day of Christ's return and the establishment of His Kingdom.
 - This was a common OT phrase and it referred to both God's final wrath against sin and the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom (e.g., **Jer. 30:8-9**; **Obad. 15-17**; Is. 30:25-26).
 - The NT writers refer to it similarly: "'the day of the Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Cor. 1:8); 'the day of our Lord Jesus' (2 Cor. 1:14); 'the day of Jesus Christ' (Phil. 1:6); 'the day of Christ' (Phil. 1:10; 2:16); 'the day of the Lord' (1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2); 'the day of redemption' (Eph. 4:30); 'the day of wrath' (Rom. 2:5); 'the day when God judges' (Rom. 2:16); 'the evil day' (Eph. 6:13); 'that day' (2 Thess. 1:10; 2 Tim. 1:12, 18; 4:8); 'the day' (Rom. 13:12, 13; 1 Thess. 5:4)." [Moo]
 - "The day" is the day of Christ's return — and that should motivate us to sanctification (**2 Pt. 3:11**)

- He puts this day in contrast also to ***the night*** which ***is almost gone***. This age and this time on this world are nearly finished. This age of the world is short and moving steadily and progressively forward toward its end. (And doesn't it particularly feel that way?)
- The new age is about to peak over the horizon. Light is dawning. Cf. **16:20**; Satan's end is soon and Christ's eternal Kingship is just as soon.
- ✓ Here the motive for pursuing sanctification is clear: God's judgment against sinners is coming soon. And God's rest for His saints is also coming soon. Alford: "On the *certainty of the event*, our faith is grounded: *by the uncertainty of the time*, our hope is stimulated, and our watchfulness aroused."
- ✓ He is coming and He will set all things right for all eternity. Let's prepare for that coming.

CONCLUSION:

One Saturday morning in January, I saw the mail truck stop at our mailbox up on the road.

Without thinking, except that I wanted to get the mail, I ran out of the houses and up to the road in my shirt-sleeves. It was bitterly cold—the temperature was below zero, there was a brisk wind from the north, and the ground was covered with more than a foot of snow.

I opened the mailbox, pulled out the mail, and was about to make a dash for the house when I saw what was on the bottom, under the letters: a Burpee seed catalog.

On the front were bright zinnias. I turned it over. On the back were huge tomatoes.

For a few moments I was oblivious to the cold, delivered from it. I leafed through the catalog, tasting corn and cucumbers, smelling roses. I saw the freshly plowed earth, smelled it, let it run through my fingers.

For those brief moments, I was living in the springtime and summer, winter past.

Then the cold penetrated to my bones and I ran back to the house.

When the door was closed behind me and I was getting warm again, I thought how my moments at the mailbox were like our experience as Christians.

We feel the cold, along with those who do not share our hope. The biting wind penetrates us as them....

But in our cold times, we have a seed catalog. We open it and smell the promised spring eternal spring. And the firstfruit that settles our hope is Jesus Christ, who was raised from death and cold earth to glory eternal.

[Joseph Bayly, *The Last Thing We Talk About*, 122-3.]

What would Paul have us understand in these verses? Our calling to salvation is also a calling to act on our faith and the realities of what God has done for us — and what He will do for us. We not only are to become what we are, we are also to "become what we one day will be."

The time is past for us to just sit here. It is the time for us to act. It's time for us to do something about the faith that we have received.

BENEDICTION: **Rom. 11:33-35**