

## How We Should Relate to Time and Our Thoughts

Romans 13:8-14

October 9, 2011

There is nothing better than life in the light of the cross. Hope is found nowhere else. The power to change, not only our lives, but who we are is found nowhere else. It is only in the cross that we can become the people we want to be. It is only in the cross that we find a future and a hope. This is Paul's point through these chapters. Being in Christ, having kneeled at the foot of the cross, changes us and changes our lives. We are now in his discussion of how.

We saw that it begins with no longer being conformed to the pattern of this world. Instead we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Changing how we behave begins by changing how we think. We stop thinking of things the way the world does and we start to see life and the world through God's eyes. As we read the Bible it changes the way we think about the world around us. This renewing of our mind lies at the root of this morning's passage.

Last week we looked at the way we are to relate to the government. Paul told us to be good citizens. As we looked at the end of that passage Paul told us to give to each person what is due. He wrote, *"If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor."* (Romans 13:7) As this was written the chapter and verse numbers were not there. The heading titles were also absent. Paul went directly from verse seven to verse eight. The idea of being indebted to people, and being a good citizen by

paying those debts reminded Paul of one debt in particular, so he addressed it next.

*"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another . . ."* (v.8) We are to pay off all our debts. We are to regularly give to others what we owe them. If we owe them respect, then we are to respect them. If we owe them honor, then we are to honor them. This reminded Paul of the two greatest commands, as listed by Jesus. The first is *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."* (Matthew 22:37) Having been asked for the greatest commandment, Jesus didn't stop there. He went on and volunteered, *"And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."* (Matthew 22:39,40) We are commanded to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. We have seen hints of this in the commands to not view ourselves more highly than we ought, and to bless those who persecute us.

Jesus suggested that all of the law can be wrapped up in loving God and loving our neighbors. For Paul, loving our neighbors is a **debt** that we owe, and one that can never be paid off. We must daily work on paying it down, yet it will always be an outstanding debt. Paul encourages us to make certain it is the only outstanding debt.

Like Jesus, Paul sees paying on this debt in terms of living out the law under the new covenant. Look with me at the rest of verse eight through verse ten. *" . . . for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. 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.' Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.*" (vv.8-10) With Jesus, Paul says that whoever loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law, at least in regard to the ways in which we treat and live with each other.

Many people say that since we are under grace and not the law, the Old Testament law no longer has any standing. Yet, neither Jesus nor Paul said that the law to love our neighbors replaces the old law. Instead they are both careful to say that it fulfills the old law. Jesus dying on the cross for our sins does not give us cover or permission to commit adultery, murder, steal, or covet. No, Jesus and Paul point out that, if we truly love our neighbors, then we won't do those things. The point of the law code was to get us to treat one another with the proper respect as people made in the image of God. If we love one another, then we will treat each other with respect naturally. If we love our neighbor we will not want to steal from him or covet her things. We will not want to murder her. If we love our spouse, current or future, we will not want to shame and dishonor them by having sex with someone else.

Paul does not let it end here. He points out that he has only given us a sample of a few laws. By saying, "and whatever other commandments there may be," he points out that he has the whole law in mind, at least in regard to how we treat one another. We are to behave in a way in keeping with the instructions in the Old Testament, not out of fear of punishment, but because we love one another and treating each other in the ways

outlined there is the best way to express our love for one another. The Old Testament laws about how we treat one another really can be summed by in the command to "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm. It seeks good for the one loved. It rejoices in the truth. It hopes, trusts, and perseveres. When all the ways of the world fail, **love** stands firm and does not fail. To truly love our neighbors, to think about them and act toward them in the right ways, is to fulfill the law about how we are to relate to them.

So, if we are in Christ, our minds are renewed, changing the ways in which we think which changes our behavior and allows us to love our neighbors. Without this work of the Holy Spirit in our minds and hearts loving our neighbors in this way would be impossible. This is our great motivation to be good people. We want to please God. We want to live in keeping with our new nature. If we are in Christ then the sinful ways of the world are foreign to us. We may continue in some of them out of habit, but they are no longer part of us.

As Paul looks at living the new life God gives us, however, he finds another motivation. All the things we have been called on to do, from having our minds renewed to loving our neighbor, are done because that's who we are in Christ. Yet Paul finds another motivation. Look with me at verse 11. "*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.*" We do not have an unlimited amount of **time**. Our days on this earth are numbered and few. It may seem like a long time to us,

but we do not have nearly as much time as we so often think we do.

Paul tells us to wake up from our slumber. It is still night. We still live in a darkened world which is under the control of the evil one. But those who are in Christ are not children of the darkness. They are children of the light. We have to stop coasting through life and actively fight the evil influences in our lives that lead us to sin. We do not know when the end will come. Jesus' return will be like a thief that comes in the night. It will be surprising and will catch us by surprise. May it not also catch us unprepared. One thing is certain, each day Jesus does not come back carries us one day closer to His return.

*"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."* (v.12) Many have made a big deal out of the fact that Paul often talked as if he expected Jesus to come back in a few years, if not months. That is not necessary, however. It is enough to know that Paul expected Jesus to return when the time is right, and that Paul knew that he didn't know when that would be. Jesus taught that we must always be ready for His return because we do not know when it will be. Paul is encouraging us to be ready and expectant. We must live as if the day were about to break at any moment, and the things we are doing will be exposed. If we are in Christ, then the pattern of our lives must be the setting aside of the shameful sins done in darkness, and the putting on of the light of Jesus Christ in our attitudes and behavior. How can we say we belong to Jesus and are ready for His return if we act like the world? We can't because the

people who belong to Jesus and are ready for His return don't act like the **world**. They live like Him. They live in grace. Their love for God and for their neighbors keeps them in God's will and leads them to act in accordance with the law.

As he did with the law that is fulfilled in loving our fellowmen, Paul gives us examples of the deeds of darkness we are to set aside. *"Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy."* (v.13) We must at all times act in ways we would not be ashamed to have exposed. If you would be nervous to have your father or mother find out about it, it is probably a sin. Remember, God already knows. There is nothing that is hidden from Him. Speaking of God's knowledge of us, Psalm 139 says, *"If I say, 'Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,' even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you."* (Psalm 139:11,12) When you think the sin you are committing is okay or that God won't know, be assured it is not okay and God already knows. We cannot hide from Him, nor can we hide what we do.

So, what are the examples Paul gives? Paul's society was a lot like ours and sexual sins often topped the list. Orgies are first, followed by drunkenness, other sexual immorality and debauchery, dissension, and jealousy. One is tempted to say that about covers it, and it does hit on many of the major ones, but it is certainly not an exhaustive list. Orgies were a problem for Rome. Behavior in the public baths got to the point that even the pagan emperors saw the need to separate the men and

women into two different areas. Still today we have a society largely ruled by sexual desire and not by what is right and proper. From popular music to television shows and movies, right on through advertizing we live in a society devoted to sex and sexual satisfaction. Paul calls on us to live free of it all and in purity.

Part of not giving into the lure of sensuality is not getting drunk. Christians are sober people. To the extent we give ourselves over to the control of chemicals, we are not following Christ. We are to keep our heads. The only thing to which we are to give up control isn't a thing at all. He is a person—the Holy Spirit.

When it comes to sex, it's not just public acts that Paul has in mind. As a rule, we need to learn to keep our pants on. Having sex outside of marriage is not something God's people do.

Those who are in Christ will also not conduct themselves in debauchery. That is, Christians do not give themselves over to what feels good. Rather, they give themselves over to the one Who makes them good.

Paul's short list of examples ends with dissension and jealousy. Those who belong to Jesus do not start fights and quarrels. They seek peace and unity. They stand for the truth, but they do so in a way that, as much as it depends on them, seeks to be at peace with those around them. They also are not jealous, but they rejoice in the blessings and good fortune of others. We are not to give ourselves over to wanting what others have. We are to be content with what God has given us and to strive to work hard to provide for ourselves and those dependant on us.

At the end of this mornings passage we read, *“Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”* (v.14) Instead of living in the darkness we are called to **clothe** ourselves with Jesus Christ. Bishop often points out that we do not go to bed in the clothes we wore all day. I would add that we don't leave the house looking like we did when we woke up. We get changed. We take off the old, dirty, wrinkled clothes and we get cleaned up and put on new, clean clothes. In the same way, the Christian life involves the daily decision to seek forgiveness for our sin, set that sin aside, and be covered again by the blood of Jesus Christ. If we continue in our sin, then how can we ask God to forgive it? We must think about Jesus and the salvation He has offered and not about how to satisfy the sinful desires that still rage within us. We must be filled with the Holy Spirit and the word of God or we will be filled with sin.

All of this is only possible for those who are in Christ. I've said that many times this morning in several different ways. Paul assumes those reading this letter are filled with the Holy Spirit and seeking to do what the Spirit says. It will only work, life will only work, if we first say with Jesus to God, “Not my will, but Yours be done.” Without the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and minds, all we can do is frustrate ourselves. Once He gets a hold of us, however, he begins the work that needs to be done. Let Him do it. If you are not in Christ, stop fighting and believe.