

THE NOW GENERATION

by David H. Roper

Romans 13:11-14 will always be a very famous passage from the standpoint of church history. This was the scripture that brought Augustine, the great fifth century theologian, to Christ. He tells the story in his "Confessions." He was walking one day in his garden when he heard a group of children playing in a field. As they played, they were chanting in Latin. "Tole lege, tole lege," which he interpreted to mean, "Take up and read." He went back to the bench where he had been sitting, picked up a scroll of the book of Romans, opened it, and his eyes fell on this section of scripture:

Besides this you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, 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 gratify its desires.

Augustine had been distressed about the sin in his life and his feverish attempts to live the good life. He had found no power to live. But as his eyes fell on this passage he realized that the answer was in Jesus Christ. In his own words, he said, "The light shone upon my conscience and I realized that Jesus was the way." He found the way out of darkness. These were appropriate words in Augustine's time, but they are equally timely today. The world is getting increasingly dark and we need some precise instruction on how to live in darkening days.

I am glad that the scriptures are precise. There are no vague instructions to "Do the best you can," or "muster your resources and give it everything you have." No, the scriptures tell us *precisely* what to do.

In this passage Paul gives us two guidelines. He says first of all, there's something I want you to know, and then secondly there are some things I want you to do as a result of that knowledge. First of all, he says, I want you to know what hour it is. Do you know what hour it is? Do you know where we are in God's program? Christ said to his disciples, "You know how to interpret the weather." (They were fishermen--it was imperative that they knew how to interpret the weather because they could not afford to be caught on the lake in a storm.) "You can look at a cloud," Christ said, "and you can predict whether there will be rain, or whether it will be calm. But do you know how to interpret the times?" Do you know where we are in God's program? Paul says that this is a strategic hour because it is the period just before the dawn. "The day is at hand." The day when Jesus Christ is coming back in glory to set things right. As the prophet said, it is the time when "the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in his wings." It is near at hand.

He could come back today, he could come back tomorrow. We don't know when he is coming back. All we know is that every day we live takes us one day closer to the time when Jesus Christ will arrive in his power and presence and will set things in order. Paul says our salvation is just one day nearer than when we first believed. Not salvation from sin. That has already been taken care of in the cross, but the time when we will come to completion in Jesus Christ, when we will see him and be changed to be wholly like him. Paul says that time is near. Now Paul had to look at things through the eyes of faith because, historically, at the time when Paul wrote these words the church was moving into its darkest hours--a period of persecution under Nero and Diocletian. And he could not know that there would be 1900 years, at least, before Jesus Christ would come back. But he saw with the eye of faith because the Lord, at his departure, told him he was coming back, and Paul believed that fact.

If these words were appropriate for Paul at the time he wrote them, how much more are they so today. Because

you see, for every believer, the coming again of Jesus Christ and our ultimate salvation is only as far away as our death. I am convinced that Jesus Christ is coming back historically. And yet, in every generation every believer can say his personal salvation is nearer than when he first believed because, at any moment, when death comes he goes into the presence of Jesus Christ. It really doesn't matter whether he comes to us or we go to him. Every day brings us that much closer to the inevitability of the personal presence of Jesus Christ.

This means that our salvation is never linked with the preservation of our homes, our families, our nation, our retirement program or our educational institutions--as good as any of these things may be. We may lose them all--as believers did at the time Paul wrote these words--but it doesn't matter. Our salvation is linked to our relationship and reunion with Jesus Christ. Nothing can change that great unalterable fact. We are going to see him; we are going to be like him.

But regrettably, Paul says, this is only true for the believer. Verse 2 says, "For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first *believed*." These words are addressed to people who have believed in Jesus Christ. For the person who has never believed in Jesus Christ, every day is a step away from the power and presence; every step a departure from that Person. I remember vividly an incident that took place a number of years ago when I was working in Colorado. I set out after work one evening to fish. I hiked some miles and then after fishing for a while, decided I had better start for home before it got dark. I thought I knew the way, but as I came down the mountain, instead of going on the south side of a ridge as the trail dropped down the side of the mountain, I went on the north side. I didn't realize it, but after a while the trail had turned until I was going 180° away from home. I was lost, but I didn't know it. I was enjoying myself, and enjoying the scenery, and completely oblivious to where I was. I was having the greatest time until suddenly I began to realize I wasn't getting to my destination. I got a bit anxious and began to walk a little faster. I didn't see any familiar landmarks, so I accelerated my pace a bit more and began to run. I still didn't see anything familiar, and it began to get dark. And then I realized I was going the wrong way. I thought all along I was going home, but every step I took was taking me farther away from home. Then I realized that all this time I had been walking with my back to the sun and was going east instead of west, and there was nothing to do but turn around, retrace my steps, and get back on the right track.

For those of us who have entrusted ourselves to Christ, every day is a step closer to salvation, to our completeness in Jesus Christ. But for the person who has never placed his faith in Christ, though he may be completely oblivious of the fact, every step is a step away from this reunion with his Lord. This is what Paul wants us to know. The day of our salvation is at hand, and every day brings it closer. We need to have that truth firmly in our minds.

But that is not all Paul wants us to know, because Christian life is not just pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by. God intends us to be involved in life right now. And this knowledge of an ultimate salvation does not disengage us from the world, it ought to involve us even more deeply. Because, though we are in the darkness, and we are called upon to live in the darkness, we have a clear view of the light (Paul says we possess the light) and we are to be lights in the world. We are not to revere or to regret the past. We are not to look to the future with fear, nor to live for tomorrow. But in view of the fulfilled salvation that Jesus Christ has promised us, we are to live right now in the world, in the *dark* world, and be the kind of men that God intended us to be, right where we are.

There are three things Paul says that we are to do, and these are always the things that you do when day is about to break: 1) you wake up; 2) you get dressed; and, 3) you go to work. To fail at any point simply indicates that we don't know that the day is dawning. We're still living in the darkness.

Paul says first that we are to wake up, "...it is full time now to awake from sleep." The alarm has sounded, dawn is about to break, let's get up. I think sometimes we are like the people in these instant breakfast commercials. We have a hard time getting the engine going. We are so befogged by sleep and benumbed by the darkness that we can't get moving. As someone said, "I sleep well at night and I sleep pretty well in the morning, but I toss and turn all afternoon." But there is a sense of urgency about Paul's statement. Get up! The night's almost over. Don't let the darkness lull you to sleep. As Robert Frost said,

*The woods are cool and dark and deep
But I have promises to keep
And miles to go--I must not sleep.*

In 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul also speaks of the necessity for wakefulness in the darkness. He indicates that a wakeful spirit is a mutual responsibility. Believers are enjoined to keep one another awake. He says,

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

We need one another in order to wake up and stay awake. It is hard to wake up and stay awake and alert by ourselves. There is no such thing as a "Robinson Crusoe Christian." We are intended to live as a body. We need one another and we need to be exhorting one another and instructing one another out of the Scriptures, splashing a little water from the Word on one another to wake us up to the possibilities of life as God intends it. Paul says to the Hebrews, "Don't forsake the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhort one another, and so much the more, as you see the Day approaching." It is always darkest before the dawn. And as we see the day of Jesus Christ drawing near, how much more do we need to assemble together--not just in worship services like this, but as Christians meeting together out in the community and in our homes, encouraging one another to wake up and to be about the Father's business, to act in the world as the sons of light should act.

First we wake up. The second word is, to get dressed. That's the appropriate thing to do. No one wears his pajamas to the office. Get dressed. "Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light." We are to fling off our nightclothes and put on the clothing that we wear in the day, the armor of light. Paul tells us what that clothing is in verse 14 when he says, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ." It is significant, I think, that he uses his threefold title. As Lord, he rules; as Jesus, he lives; as Christ, he is the surety of all our hopes. So to put him on is to live in the power of his life. It is not a once-for-all thing; it is a walking continually through the day, manifesting the power of Jesus Christ, appropriating him for every situation, setting aside the unfruitful works of darkness, yielding not once to the lure of the flesh.

And then third, Paul says, go to work:

...let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy.

This phrase, "conduct ourselves," literally means, "to walk around." Having gotten up and put on the Lord Jesus Christ, we are to walk around in the world. The order of Scripture is very exact. You can't walk in the world as a son of light unless you wear the armor of light. You can't really do anything about the darkness unless you have access to the light. This is the problem with so many of the well-intentioned but inept attempts to do something about the situation in the world. Without the message of Jesus Christ, we have nothing to say to the world, no way to dispel the darkness. But given an appropriation of Christ, having put on the armor of light, we can live as men of light. Paul says once we've put on the armor, it is intended to be employed in the world. He expects us to walk around. It was never intended only to be used around the house, it is to be worn in the world.

What does it mean, specifically, to walk as children of light? It is clear that what Paul is saying is that having put on Christ we must *walk as he walked* in the world--be the kind of man that he was--manifest the life that he lived. There are four areas where the Lord Jesus exemplified the activity of a son of light. First, he walked in *perfect righteousness*. He obeyed the Father. No matter what pressures there were upon him he always obeyed the Father. John says, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light (still) shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." The darkness has never put it out. The Lord associated with every conceivable type of person. He was identified with corrupt businessmen, with vicious criminals, with coarse, brazen streetwalkers, and yet he was never corrupted by their lives. He always honored the Father in every circumstance. He was concerned about sinners, he lived with them, he identified himself with them, but he never became like them. They

never extinguished his light. And it is still inextinguishable as it shines in the darkness today and in individuals who are called upon to be lights in the world.

Paul says, in another place, that we are to be "Blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life,"--that is, holding fast the word of obedience. And by behaving as a son of God should behave, we become a light in a dark world.

Glen Plate was telling us of one of the fraternity houses at Stanford where the gospel gained entrance this past year. There is another house there where a group of students presented the message of Christ. Some of the students from the first house were there and they responded and a Bible study started. Their house was known on campus as an "animal house." Having been in that house, I believe it. There was absolutely no light there. These two or three men in the study determined that, by God's grace, they would be God's men in that house, and they began to do what was right. They obeyed the Father. Some weeks ago I was talking to one of the men involved in that group, and he said, "You know, the most amazing thing has happened. The whole house has changed. It is true that not many of the other men have become Christians as yet, but there is an openness to the gospel, and there has been a salting effect on the house, in the sense that the spread of evil has been arrested." Why? Because these men were lights in the darkness.

Secondly, our Lord was characterized by *loving deeds*. This is certainly a missing note today. I think we are so afraid of the social gospel that we have ignored the necessity for social concern and sensitivity to people's needs. Social action is powerless without the armor of light, but given an appropriation of Jesus Christ we can move meaningfully to do something significant about the physical, spiritual, intellectual and emotional needs of men.

A man came to Jesus once and asked, "What is the greatest commandment?" The Lord said, "Thou shalt love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength, and your neighbor as yourself." The man said, "I know all that. But who is my neighbor?" And Jesus' reply in essence was, "Your neighbor is the next person you meet who has a need." It may be a spiritual need, it may be a physical need. But whatever that need is, if it is in your power, you are to meet it.

The third characteristic of Christ's life was *proclamation of truth*--not only a personal righteousness, and an engagement in loving deeds. but bold proclamation of the truth about the Christ. He is the source of life, and we do need to lift that up before people. Men must hear the message of redemption in Jesus Christ. We are to declare him as the final and only source of light in the darkness around us.

Fourth, we are to pray, as he did. We are to give ourselves to prayer that God may dispel the gloom and the darkness of human minds, and enlighten them to the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Luke says that it was a custom of the Lord to go into the mountains, into the wilderness, and to pray. And the Greek tenses that he uses indicates that this was a continuing pattern--many prayers, daily, many wildernesses, many times. And if he was one that had no sin to confess, no separation from the Father that had to be bridged, how much more do we need to pray. I have discovered that prayer does something for me. It may not change the situation necessarily but it changes me. It gives me new perspective on what God is doing behind the scenes. I can see beneath the surface, the problems and the darkness, under this to what God is really accomplishing in the world.

This is how we are to walk in the darkness. We are first of all to realize the nature of this hour we are in, that our salvation is nigh, and given that knowledge we are to wake up to the possibilities of living as God's people in the world. We are to dress ourselves appropriately in the person of Jesus Christ, to put him on, and then we are to walk in the world. Wherever God has placed you, that's where you are to walk, to walk as he walked giving yourself to a life of personal righteousness, concern for the needs of others shown by loving deeds on your part, a proclamation of the truth of Jesus Christ, and a minister of prayer. Now that is what the church is called upon to do in the world today. No matter how dark things may become, we are not to be dislodged from this procedure.

One final word. Paul says we are to conduct ourselves in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in

debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Paul puts his finger on the two basic reactions of the world to darkness. In a world faced with hopelessness and no prospect for the dawn, people resort to two procedures: they either escape through drunkenness and licentiousness, or they give way to violence. Today we are seeing this on every hand; people turning to drugs and sex as a way out of the darkness, a way to give some meaning to the hopelessness of life, and to violence, the lashing out in anger at the darkness, a blind impulse to destroy. But we are not to give ourselves to such behavior--and certainly we need not. Rather we are to be God's men in the darkness, as he has instructed us.

With one final warning, Paul says. "Make no provision for the flesh." Take no forethought for the flesh, don't make it easy to fall back into the activities of the flesh. Don't even skin the edges. "Be God's men from head to foot and give no opportunity to the flesh to have its fling." Time is too short to play games. The possibilities are too great, the needs are immense. People all around us are looking for answers. We simply do not have time to play with the flesh, but we must be God's men from head to foot.

I was walking through one of the dorms at Stanford recently and I saw one of the posters that the partisans of a political candidate have been plastering on walls there. It said, "These are extraordinary days and we need extraordinary men." I thought, we believers should really know how extraordinary these days are. But the call is not so much for extraordinary men but for ordinary men who possess the extra ordinary life of Jesus Christ and who are willing to walk in the world as their Lord did, manifesting his power, sharing his life. He is the light of the world, the only solution for the darkness of this world. And I wonder what rebuke will be ours if we have been chosen to live and to minister in times of unusual need and opportunity, and we have lived as those who sleep.

Catalog No. 0176
Romans 13:11-14
David H. Roper
May 26, 1968

[Back to Dave Roper's Home Page at PBC](#)

Copyright (C) 1995 [Discovery Publishing](#), a ministry of [Peninsula Bible Church](#). This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.