

Romans 13 (2017)

- Tonight we reach the final ring in Paul's structured view of sanctification
 - This ring represents our final priority of sanctifying effort: our righteousness within society
 - Obviously, every society is made up of believers and unbelievers
 - And we know these two groups have been addressed in earlier rings
 - So we might assume this teaching will be redundant
 - But this ring addresses unique institutions and customs of society
 - Regrettably, a Christian worldview can lead to living within society in ways that are counterproductive to righteousness
 - For example, a Christian learns in scripture that our country is not of this world and that our citizenship is found in Heaven
 - And then we might misconstrue these truths as license to disobey authority on earth in the meantime
 - Or we may think that since we have overcome the world and have a different eternal future than the rest of society, that we are not under obligation to respect society's rules
- These views are wrong and unhelpful to the Church's mission
 - So Paul explains the proper view of our relationships with these institutions

Rom. 13:1 Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

Rom. 13:2 Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

Rom. 13:3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same;

Rom. 13:4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

Rom. 13:5 Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake.

- Paul opens discussion on the fourth and final ring of sanctification saying Christians are to be in subjection to governing authorities
 - Paul's statement is clear and unequivocal
 - Notice Paul says every person, meaning God intends and expects all humanity to live under a government – including Christians
 - Government has a proper role in society and in the life of every believer
 - The value of government is easy to understand
 - People living together in society are restrained in their behaviors and guided in their choices by the judgment of a few
 - How those decision-makers are chosen and how their rule is regulated, if at all, is an obvious concern
 - But regardless of these details, government holds potential to bring both great benefits and unparalleled risks for society
 - In an ideal situation, sensible rulers will ensure peaceful and just coexistence for everyone
 - In the worst cases, government becomes an instrument for evil hearts to oppress society on a mass scale
 - In practice, most governments fall somewhere in between these two extremes
- But because governments hold so much power over us, the topic of obedience to government, especially ungodly governments, prompts strong reactions among Christians
 - When we agree with the governing authorities' decisions, we support the policies and obey them enthusiastically
 - But when we object to their decisions, we tend to act in opposite ways
 - The world does the same too of course

- For example, following the election of Donald Trump, many on the left objected to his presidency by declaring, “He’s not my president”
- But for a Christian, the temptation to reject governing authorities is especially high when they stand opposed to our biblical worldview
 - In the worst cases, Christians may take our personal objections as license to act contrary to the law
 - While there are times when acting in disobedience to the law is appropriate, these situations are rare
 - And scripture guides these situations using the structure of Paul’s bull’s-eye, which we will look at more closely in a moment
- But first, notice where Paul begins his discussion – he doesn’t start with exceptions but with the rule: obey the government
 - Our Christian duty requires we seek every opportunity to obey, rather than seeking for exceptions that permit us to disobey
 - We ought to maintain the same attitude toward obeying laws that we expect our children to maintain toward our rules
- We expect our children to do everything they can to obey the spirit of our rules, even when there may be times that doing so is difficult
 - We realize there will be exceptions on occasion when our rules must be bent or broken for a greater good
 - But in general, we want our children to have hearts that seek to obey rather than looking for ways to get around our rules
 - Likewise, Paul’s opening statement anticipates that a Christian’s heart is directed toward obedience as a rule, not toward seeking exceptions
 - We only disobey when law comes into conflict with the demands of righteousness in areas of greater priority
- At the end of v.1 Paul defends his order saying that obeying government is tantamount to obeying God Himself
 - Paul says there is no authority (on earth) except those that have been established by God Himself

- In other words, no one gets elected into an office except that God Himself selected that leader
- This is one of the strongest statements of God's sovereignty in all the New Testament
- It's on par with Joseph's words from Genesis, when he declared that his unlikely rise to power in Egypt was a result of God's hand

Gen. 45:7 "God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance.

Gen. 45:8 "Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

- As He did with Joseph, the Lord sovereignly decides who enters into power today
 - The Lord raises up new governments and nations and He destroys the same
 - That's true regardless of the form a government takes, whether a democracy, monarchy, or totalitarian regime
 - And it's true regardless of how righteous that government turns out to be
- Therefore, righteousness within society requires that we respect our rulers knowing they are God-appointed
 - We don't have to vote for them
 - We certainly don't have to love them
 - But we must respect their authority knowing they were appointed by God for some eternally good purpose
- Therefore, to oppose governing authorities in unlawful ways is sin against God's authority, Paul says
 - In v.2 Paul says that any person, Christian or otherwise, who resists authority is opposing the ordinance (or decision) of God
 - We are fighting against God's judgment, which I hope everyone recognizes is both foolish and useless

- God will get His way regardless of whether we support or oppose it
- So the only thing our opposition to government will achieve is our own condemnation, Paul says in v.2
 - Paul is referring to condemnation that comes to us on earth, not an eternal condemnation of our soul
 - He's making the obvious point that the Christian who makes a habit of rebelling against governing authorities will suffer the penalty of law
- To quote the great philosopher, Eric Clapton, "I fought the law and the law won"
 - So if you violate the law, even if it's in the name of righteousness, you should expect the authorities to respond
 - The law will condemn you justly
 - And when it does, you will be experiencing the judgment of God acting through government
- Paul reminds us in v.3 that rulers (or government) exist for the good of all society, which is why God brought government into existence
 - Government originated immediately after the flood of Noah
 - As Noah exited the Ark, the Lord granted man the right to rule over other men and enforce law
 - He even permitted men to enact harsh punishment for law breakers, including taking life

Gen. 9:5 "Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man.

Gen. 9:6 "Whoever sheds man's blood,

By man his blood shall be shed,

For in the image of God

He made man.

- God brought about this change because the world was entering a new period of history

- God had just promised that He would never repeat the judgment of a flood to address mankind's sin
- Yet sin would continue and so would its negative effects
- Therefore as mankind repopulated and refilled the earth, God needed a new way of responding to the sin of the human heart
 - Beginning with Noah's family, men would now have the right to rule over others and punish evil
 - God was prepared to work through human government to regulate man's sin and prevent the unrestrained evil that led to the flood
 - Therefore, Paul says we are obliged to respect this institution recognizing God's good purpose in ordaining it
- So Paul says that if we obey government, we should expect to have praise from society and vice versa
 - Obviously, vs.3-4 are a general truth
 - Usually if we obey government, good things result
 - Just as usually when we disobey government, we are working contrary to righteousness and we should expect its wrath
 - In that way, God works through government giving us incentive to restrain our own evil desires so that all society benefits
- About now, we will begin to ask questions about exceptions, especially immoral governments that don't operate according to these principles
 - For example, if we lived in Nazi Germany would we obey the government of Hitler?
 - Or if we lived in North Korea today, would we obey the dictator running that country?
 - Aren't we free to disobey the government when it does evil?
 - First, if we assume that a "bad" government gives us just cause to ignore its authority, consider where this leads
 - Who decides when a government is too evil to obey?

- Wouldn't everyone set their own limit according to their own desires?
- In fact, what government could be *good* enough to justify our obedience?
- Imagine a world where everyone was free to disobey when it suited them based on their own assessment of good and bad
 - It would be a world where everyone thought they knew better than their rulers what was right
 - Wouldn't we end up in the same trouble that Israel suffered from during the time of Judges?

Judg. 17:6 In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.

- There would be no rule at all, and therefore there could be no governor on sin
- It's not news to acknowledge that government is imperfect and often unrighteous, but it's still better than the alternative
 - The absence of government is always worse than a bad government
 - Sin left unchecked always leads to far worse injustice than those created by government
 - If you think corrupt government causes evil, look at what happens in places where government breaks down entirely
 - For example, Nazi Germany caused great evil, but its evil deeds would pale in comparison to a world with no government
 - And as bad as North Korea's dictator is (and he's cruel beyond description), people would suffer even more if there was no government
 - Because even the deeds of the worst despot can't compare to the unrestrained sin of millions of people doing what's right in their own eyes
 - Government will never be perfect, but in that respect it's no different than any other dispensation God gave men prior to Christ
 - Following the sin of Adam and Woman, God has given the world a series of measures or dispensations of His grace to combat sin

- God gave us the dispensations of human conscience, the rule of patriarchs, human government and even God's own Law given to Israel
- Each dispensation served a role in God's economy, and God required that men respected each for what it was intended to accomplish
- Yet each dispensation ultimately failed in its own way to completely address the problem of sin
 - None had the power to reign in man's rebellion much less to put an end to it altogether
 - Each dispensation failure only served to demonstrate the necessity for our new spiritual birth in Christ
 - Because only the dispensation of God's grace in the Person of Christ has the power to solve our sin problem once and for all
 - And even then only after we shed this sinful body and enter our Heavenly eternal state
- In a day to come, in the Kingdom, we will experience a truly perfect dispensation of grace
 - In that day, we will have a perfect conscience
 - We will have a perfect patriarch leading our family in Christ
 - We will have a perfect government and perfect ruler with a perfect law
 - And we will experience sin ruled in perfect justice
- In the meantime, we have human government with all its flaws
 - God raises up imperfect rulers to accomplish His will
 - And we submit to these rulers because we have complete faith in God
 - We trust that God can achieve His good and perfect will using even complete idiots and despots
 - So scripture requires that we maintain a heart inclined to obey government, not one seeking to find excuse for disobedience

- So that even in the worst cases like Nazi Germany, we seek for ways to live in harmony with the government
- Knowing that in doing so, we are respecting God's judgment and His plans
- Remember, God used Hitler's atrocities to establish the conditions under which the nation of Israel could re-emerge in the world after nearly 2,000 years of exile
 - Though many Christians felt justified in opposing his rule, history teaches that God worked through the man for eternal good
 - Remember scripture tells us that before the Kingdom of God appears, Israel must first be regathered in her land
 - So our entry into the Kingdom depended on God finding a way to bring Israel back into Palestine...and God used Hitler to make that happen
- So when do we have liberty to disobey the governing authorities?
 - The answer is to follow Paul's priority scheme in his bull's-eye
 - If governing authorities demand we do something that violates inner rings, we must disobey government
 - For example, if the government prohibits sharing the word of God, we must decline to obey as the apostles themselves did

[Acts 4:18](#) And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

[Acts 4:19](#) But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge;

[Acts 4:20](#) for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."

- Peter and John refused to obey their governing authorities when ordered not to speak the name of Jesus or teach about Him
 - Clearly, this is a priority in both the second and third rings
 - We must teach Jesus to our brothers and sisters
 - And we must speak His name to the world of unbelievers
 - And so these men disobeyed government

- But even then, they were still inclined to obey government in the sense that they submitted to the penalty that came for violating the law
 - When they disobeyed the command to be silent, they were prepared to to suffer the consequences
 - Later in Acts 5 they are re-arrested for speaking in public about Jesus, and they willingly go into prison
- At a point, they appear before the Jewish authorities and say this:

[Acts 5:27](#) When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them,

[Acts 5:28](#) saying, “We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.”

[Acts 5:29](#) But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.

- These apostles give us the perfect example of the tension between obeying government and maintaining obedience to God
 - At all times, we seek to obey God
 - Obeying government *is* obeying God...until it isn’t
 - And when obeying government is contrary to obeying God, then we disobey government in order to obey God
- But then just as quickly, we return to obeying the government by accepting the consequences for our earlier disobedience
 - In other words, we willingly submit to the government’s punishment for disobeying
 - We do this understanding that our circumstances are a result of the will of God at work in our lives
 - If we end up in prison as a result, then this is God’s will
 - So we go willingly knowing He has some good purpose in us ministering from inside prison
- Ironically, the Jewish authorities that persecuted Peter and John recognized this truth too

- After arresting Peter and John the second time, a prominent Pharisee, Gamaliel, the man who taught Paul said this:

[Acts 5:38](#) "So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be overthrown;

[Acts 5:39](#) but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God."

- We ought to adopt the same perspective when it comes to opposing government
- If the orders of government runs contrary to God's desire, the government will not prevail in the end
- And if it is part of God's plan, then we cannot stop it
- So in general, we only disobey government when it runs contrary to commands found in earlier rings of Paul's bull's-eye
 - And even then, we willingly submit to the consequences of disobedience
 - We don't commit further crime by avoiding prosecution
 - On the other hand, we are not prohibited from opposing government in lawful ways
 - You can vote the bums out of office, engage in lawful protests, lobby your congressman, etc.
 - And if a rebellion breaks out or a coup removes your current leaders, you make a choice of where to place your allegiance
 - This very thing happened during the Civil War in the United States
 - Christians must decide what is the lawful government deserving their allegiance and then submit to it accordingly
 - These are personal decisions of conscience, so do as you feel you should – but always with an attitude of submission
 - As Paul says at the end of v.5, we obey government to avoid its wrath and to keep a good conscience

- Living this way advances the mission of the church, while ignoring Paul's commands hurts our mission
 - If believers commonly break the law on religious grounds, our opportunity to win souls for Christ will be severely compromised
 - There is nothing righteous in disobeying the government on issues of property rights or prayer in schools, etc.
 - Or disobeying court orders so we may preserve public displays of the Ten Commandments on the front lawn of public buildings
 - These actions may seem righteous to us because they are connected to religious observances, but in reality they are sin
 - Moreover, when we take these stands, we offend law-abiding citizens thus giving them little reason to respect or admire Christ
 - We're just using the Church as cover to get our own way politically rather than submitting to God's will
 - The Lord doesn't need a stone replica of the Ten Commandments to remind Him or the world what is righteous
 - And He isn't depending on us establishing prayer in public school to ensure He can reach the hearts of children
 - So the Lord isn't benefiting when His people rebel against meaningless rules of governments that only serve to make a spectacle of our disobedience
 - The only time lawbreaking works to the advantage of the Gospel is when we are persecuted for our faithful obedience to God
 - Persecution always has the effect of strengthening the church
 - The early martyrs brought great respect to the church when they were unfairly treated for simply following their faith quietly
 - But even then, the martyrs didn't revolt against Caesar
 - Christians submitted to the edicts of Rome, enduring painful deaths by wild animals or fire
 - They accepted these things as God's decree, and He used the martyrs to bring more people moved by their piety to the faith

- Contrast that with those today who gain notoriety for opposing the government over meaningless disputes
- Paul moves forward now on this theme of living in a Christ-pleasing and mission-advancing way by elaborating on some specific situations

Rom. 13:6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.

Rom. 13:7 Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

Rom. 13:8 Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.

- Historically, the most challenging aspect of our obedience to government is in the area of money; specifically paying taxes
 - Paul sets the issue to rest quickly saying we must pay taxes
 - This should come as no surprise, since it's like any other law
 - When in doubt, refer to Rule #1: obey the government
 - Historically, the pious have often drawn the line in obeying government with their money
 - This should tell us something about the hearts of many so-called religious people
 - They love money more than obeying God
 - Even in Jesus' day we see the tension in the Gospels
 - The Jewish religious authorities frequently objected to paying taxes to the Roman government
 - They objected on the basis that they were supporting an evil government, or so they claimed
- When they put this dilemma to Jesus, He acknowledged that government has different priorities than serving God
 - When asked about paying taxes, Jesus famously said render to Caesar what is due Caesar
 - But then He added render to God what is God's

- Jesus' point was that governments do what governments do, namely take people's money to fund their desires
- This is to be expected and we don't serve the purpose of righteousness by opposing this course
- Instead, if we want to further righteousness, we should focus on giving our obedience to God
 - Including obeying His command that we respect the government authorities He places over us
 - Which means we pay taxes
 - So ironically, refusing to pay the government taxes isn't pleasing God, it's sinning against God
- And this is true even when the government uses our money for unholy purposes
 - Remember, those authorities are from God, and He holds each person accountable for what they do
 - You are not accountable for what governing authorities do with your tax dollars
 - You are simply accountable to God for your obedience to the government
- For the same reason, Paul says those who work for the government in collecting taxes must be respected as servants of God
 - In Paul's day, tax collectors were usually singled out for being unrighteous and agents of evil
 - This perception was partly earned, since tax collectors were often unscrupulous extortionists
 - They made their income from the extra money they could extract from those under their charge
 - Nevertheless, Paul asks us to consider these people to be servants of God
 - Have you ever considered that the IRS is a servant of God?
 - As in Paul's day, most of us probably assumed the IRS was working for the other side

- But Paul says we need show these people – and all government servants – in a better light
 - If God has raised up the government and is using it for His purposes, then those who operate within it are His servants
 - That’s a helpful thing to remember when you’re fuming while standing in that slow-moving line at the DMV
 - Or when you’re getting the run-around over the phone by the Social Security Administration
- Treat these people with respect, Paul says
 - Because they have devoted themselves to serving God even if they don’t know it
 - And even if they aren’t doing it particularly well for your sake
- In fact, Paul says take this attitude of respect with you everywhere you go in society
 - Render to each person what is due to them, he says in v.7
 - To render means to pay what is owed
 - We’re not talking about showing them a favor or courtesy
 - Paul’s asking us to do what is expected and justly required whether by law, custom or honor-bound
 - So pay your tax dollars to the government as required by law
 - Give the policeman the respect they deserve as required by honor
 - Stand up and put your hand on your heart when you hear the national anthem as required by custom
 - Replace your neighbor’s tool if you borrow it and break it
 - Pay your laborer a fair wage
 - Give the customary tip for good service
 - Keep your word

- None of these things are “extras” or favors...they are simply giving someone what they are due
 - In doing these things, you preserve opportunity for the Gospel
 - You don't wish to cause offense or cast shame on the name of Christ
 - As Christians, we never want to be known for doing less than what unbelievers commonly do for one another
- Paul takes this idea of rendering one step further in v.8, asking us to owe nothing to anyone except love
 - The way this command is rendered in my English (NASB) Bible isn't helpful because it obscures Paul's meaning
 - The better rendition is found in the NIV:

Rom. 13:8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.

- Paul asks us not to leave our debts unpaid
 - So make sure that if you borrow you repay
 - The Bible isn't prohibiting borrowing altogether, but it is prohibiting failing to repay debt
 - Even in circumstances when legal avenues exist for walking away from debt, we should endeavor to do better
- But in the case of love, Paul says we should always strive to place others in “debt”
 - So while we deal fairly on areas of money, custom, law, etc., we don't take that transactional attitude when showing love to others
 - So if a policeman doesn't return our respect with consideration, we don't hold it against him...we let the debt of love remain unpaid
 - Or if our neighbor breaks our tool but doesn't replace it, we forgive that debt in love

- We show love to others with no expectation of being repaid, which is exactly what Christ did to His enemies
- Paul says when we live this way, we're truly living the second command Christ told us to live by –
 - We are loving our neighbors as we love ourselves
 - And ultimately, this is the point of the Lord having His church living in and around the unbelieving world
 - We are to think, say and act the way Jesus did, showing righteousness to the world through these interactions
 - In v.9 Paul quotes from the Law, specifically the Ten Commandments, to illustrate His point
 - He lists those commandments that deal specifically with our relationships with other people
 - And then Paul says these laws (and any other of the same kind) are the essence of loving your neighbor
 - This teaching is strikingly similar to Jesus' words to the rich young ruler in Luke 18
 - Paul's point is also similar...true righteousness will be reflected in our treatment of the world
 - The overriding priority for demonstrating righteousness in society is showing love to others and thereby fulfilling the law
 - We work to put people in debt to us by showing them love, yet without an expectation that we receive anything in return
 - Love does no wrong to a neighbor, Paul says in v.10
- So the summary of the fourth ring is three-fold
 - First, we respect and obey government as an instrument of God for the sake of righteousness
 - We respect the institution and those who serve within it
 - We only disobey government when government demands we disobey God

- Secondly, we respect society's customs by showing honor to those who are due honor
 - Respect the conventions of your society
 - Maintain a respectful attitude
 - Fulfill your obligations
- Finally, show love to everyone by doing for them what you would have done for yourself
 - Practice this love expecting nothing in return
 - And so doing, protect Christ's reputation and honor among all people



SUMMARY OF SANCTIFICATION ROMANS 12-13



Righteousness In our Person

Theme: Seeking Christ's holiness in our person

- Daily sacrificing our fleshly desires as the Lord directs
- Renewing our our mind in God's word to live according to His commands



Righteousness Among the Church

Theme: Loving others in humility with eyes for eternity

- Play an active role in the church according to gifting in humility
- Take advantage of the safety of church to practice loving others
- Do good, reject evil, favor one another over the world
- Find hope in the resurrection, don't let trials lead to discouragement
- Pray consistently, help brothers in need and be available to unbelievers



Righteousness Before the World

Theme: Living strategically and selflessly as Christ's ambassador

- Turn the other cheek to gain opportunities for the Gospel
- Build relationships with unbelievers by identifying with their ups & downs
- Associate with the world's lowly, remember your own faults
- Be blameless and win the world's respect; seek peace, not compromise
- Take no revenge; do not become like the world; win them with good



Righteousness Within Society

Theme: Maintain a respectful place in society to preserve our witness

- Obey government as a means of obeying God
- Render respect and honor to society's law and customs
- Show love to the world without expecting repayment

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- With that Paul ends the chapter and the bull's-eye with a final argument that's part exhortation and part warning

[Rom. 13:11](#) 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.

[Rom. 13:12](#) The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

[Rom. 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.

[Rom. 13:14](#) But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

- Paul begins with a warning of sorts
 - He says we ought to live in these ways, referring to the entire bull's-eye, knowing that it's already the hour for us to awaken from sleep
 - Sleep refers to death
 - And awakening refers to our resurrection, the moment we receive our new eternal body
 - This is a cryptic reference to Christ's return for His Bride, an event known as the rapture
 - Paul's reminding us of the imminent nature of Christ's return for the church
 - And of the judgment that follows immediately thereafter
 - Paul describes it this way in his letter to Thessalonica

[1Th. 4:13](#) But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.

[1Th. 4:14](#) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

[1Th. 4:15](#) For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

[1Th. 4:16](#) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

[1Th. 4:17](#) Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.

[1Th. 4:18](#) Therefore comfort one another with these words.

- Notice Paul uses the term “sleep” to refer to the death of believers awaiting the rapture
 - These souls are not truly sleeping, for they reside fully conscious with Christ even now
 - In a future moment, they return with Christ to receive new bodies
 - And we who are alive will join them in that moment in the clouds, Paul says
- Paul says that hour is already here, in the sense that the return of Christ for the church is an ever-present possibility
 - We don't know when it will happen, and since it doesn't depend on anything, it can happen at any moment
 - In fact, we can't say it *won't* happen in the next hour
 - So in a sense, the hour is always upon us, ready to happen at any moment
 - Paul reminds us of the imminence of the rapture at the end of v.11 saying our salvation is nearer to us now than when we believed
 - He's saying that even though we don't know when we will see Christ, every day our rapture is one day closer than before
 - In this context, salvation refers not to the moment of saving faith
 - Rather, it refers to the moment we receive eternal life in the form of an eternal body – again the resurrection
 - Using a different metaphor in v.12, Paul says the night period of history is almost gone and the day period of the Kingdom is almost here
 - Jesus uses a similar metaphor to refer to the period between His first and second comings

John 9:4 “We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work.

John 9:5 “While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world.”

- Jesus is the Light of the world, so while He was on earth, the world was experiencing a period of “light”

- It was witness to the light of the glory of God
- And when Jesus departed, the world returned to a period of dark, when the glory of God was absent for a time
 - In a day to come, Jesus returns to set up His Kingdom
 - When this happens, the world will see His light again
 - So in that sense, the night is soon to give way to the light of Christ's return
- Knowing these things, how ought we to live in the meantime?
 - What kind of student do you become when you hear that a pop quiz is coming soon?
 - What kind of child do you become when your parents phone to tell you they are on their way home?
 - What kind of employee are you when the boss is looking over your shoulder?
 - The point Paul's making is one we can all identify with if we understand it
 - Paul is saying that Christ's return is imminent and so is His judgment of His Church
 - And therefore we ought be concerned with who we've become and how we're living for Christ
 - Paul says we ought to lay aside the deeds of darkness, of the sinful fallen world
 - And in their place, we should put on the armor of light
 - That's a reference to the full armor of God, which Paul gives us in Ephesians 6
 - It's a reference to living in the Spirit, taking full advantage of all the spiritual strength Christ gives us through the disciplines of the faith
 - Making your sanctification your life's priority, readying yourself for your Lord's return and His review of your service to His name

- And if you're still distracted by deeds of the flesh, living like the unbelieving world, then now's the time to put that aside
- It's time to get serious, to be prepared for Christ
- In v.13 Paul gives a few examples of the sorts of things that typify living in the darkness of the world and which contradict living for Christ
 - Carousing is a Bible word for partying
 - Partying is the modern term for debauchery or other forms of out-of-control self-indulgence
 - It's wasting time by satisfying the flesh
 - It's a contradiction with our purpose in living for Christ
 - It's not preparing us for Christ's return, and should He return while we're in the middle of this activity, it will be to our shame
 - Closely associated with carousing or partying is drunkenness, which is self explanatory
 - Any addiction holds the potential to derail our lives and set us up for a bad result come judgment day
 - We're giving our already powerful flesh even greater control over our spirit
 - And in that way, we're putting our sanctification at great risk
 - The next two items are also grouped for obvious reasons
 - Promiscuity and sensuality are more ways to enflame the desires of the flesh, which serves to interfere with our spiritual progress
 - Promiscuity is literally the Greek word for "bed", as in the place of marital relations
 - It refers to someone given over to seeking sexual satisfaction by whatever means necessary
 - Sensuality is lewd behavior in any form
 - Today, these two words would be comparable to fornication (i.e., sleeping around) and pornography

- Once again, when we allow ourselves to become captivated by sexual desires, we're returning to a slavery Christ has freed us from
- We're becoming mired in something that wastes our time, corrupts our witness and destroys our testimony
- When Christ returns, we'll regret that time spent in such fruitless pursuits
- Finally, Paul lists strife and jealousy
 - The problem is the same – distractions that impede our sanctification
 - Strife is settling scores, getting even, winning arguments
 - It's a contentiousness that cares more about our power and respect among people rather than before God
 - And jealousy in any form is covetousness: desiring for things others have that we wish we had
 - Today this is usually seen in unrestrained materialism or career pursuits
 - Yet another way we can get distracted from serving Christ and pursuing our sanctification
 - Instead, Paul says do two things
 - First, put on the Lord Jesus, living in His commands and by His spirit
 - Learn what He taught, live as He commanded, seek to please Him
 - Secondly, make no provision for the flesh and its lusts
 - This means taking whatever steps you need to take to prevent the flesh from gaining the upper hand in your life
 - As Jesus said, if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off (not literally)
 - That is, take measures to guard yourself from your own flesh's lusts
 - It's worth doing because what we stand to gain in return is so great

- We stand to gain our sanctification
- And with greater sanctification comes opportunity for greater reward
- That's what this whole bull's-eye is about...a strategy to succeed against our own flesh for the purpose of pleasing Christ
 - The degree to which we implement this plan is the degree to which we will succeed in our eternal goals
 - The Spirit living in us does the hard work of convicting us and training us concerning what is right
 - We only need to yield to Him by giving the flesh no provision
 - Follow this prescription and await your reward, for the hour is upon us all