

In our last study we ended with verse 10, which states: "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the Law."

As believers in Christ we have all been called to love others as Christ loved us. And of course He loved us to the end, giving His very life for us that we might have eternal life by faith in Him. But to love others isn't something we do simply because it's a good idea. The love of Christ shed abroad in our hearts is to accomplish God's will in our lives and in the lives of others.

And we need to understand that there is a sense of urgency of reaching out to others with Christ's love because the time is short. This is what Paul has in mind in our text this morning.

Rom 13:11 "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."

"And do this." Do what? Love others because Christ first loved you, "understanding the present time." The present time? Are we talking about their time or ours? The Holy Spirit has both in mind. Their present time in Rome carried with it the reality that people were dying in their sins. Today people are dying in their sins.

There's a sense of urgency which God is giving us about the present time. You see, there's the trap of thinking we have all the time in the world. And with that attitude it's easy to become lethargic or even lazy about the work Christ has for us in being a part of extending His Kingdom through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This is why Paul also says in verse 11... "The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber." When Paul wrote to the Thessalonian church he had a similar message.

1Th 5:6 "So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled."

The Ephesians too, were given a similar warning....

Eph 5:13-16 "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, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil."

The days are evil. We must understand the present time and open our eyes to the reality of spiritual forces in this world which are trying to blind the eyes of people to the truth of God's word.

Our Lord is telling us that as we are willing to be used by Him, He will use us as instruments to shed light where there is darkness, as the Holy Spirit sheds light on the dark soul and heart of a person, as He takes the living word which brings life through Christ.

But Paul wants us to understand something about the times and why there is such an urgency. Why should we be so concerned about today as well as tomorrow as it relates to the eternal destiny of people and as it relates to our work in the Lord?

Paul gives the answer in verse 11.... "because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed."

Paul is saying that it's time to wake up to spiritual realities because Christ is at the door.

The time is short and there's work to be done. And please don't misunderstand me here. The work spoken of is work which Christ has called all of us to. It's not the Pastor doling out work orders, or giving assignments, but rather understanding that Christ Himself has called us to represent Him and walk with Him as He leads, and to obey Him in service.

Paul alludes to the fact that we will all stand face to face with our Savior shortly and we must be able to stand as one who is a faithful servant.

Some interpret this passage that our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed, to mean that our death from this world will soon put us in the presence of the Lord. Of course there's a sense in which that's true.

2Co 5:8 "We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord."

Again, Paul brings this sentiment out when writing to the Philippians.

Phi 1:22-24 "If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ,

which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body."

When you and I pass from this life we are immediately with our Lord if we have placed our faith in Him alone for salvation. Remember the promise Jesus gave to the thief on the cross when He told him, "today you will be with Me in paradise."

But there's more to this statement in Romans 13:11 that we should look at. For our salvation to be nearer than when we first believed means that we do not possess our salvation in total. It's near but not totally here.

What do I mean? All throughout the scriptures we are told that we receive salvation by faith in the Messiah. And yet we are also told that it has been placed to our account. The hope, the promise is secure, but the reality of our salvation has not been realized fully until we are face to face with our God in the fullness of His Kingdom.

This is why we must live by faith. You realize that there will not be the same need for faith in heaven. The writer of Hebrews points this out.

Heb 11:1 "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

You and I do not presently see heaven, nor the face of God. We trust that what He accomplished on our behalf in Christ is true. We believe and place our faith in His finished work on the cross for our sin which was an historical event in time. It is not some fairy tale to be embraced like a child hoodwinked into believing in a supernatural being called Santa Claus.

The apostle, whom Jesus loved, makes this statement regarding the reality of our Savior of whom he was a personal witness.

1 John 1:1-3 ^{NAU} What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life-- ² and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us-- ³ what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

This is the Christ whom we will one day meet in a physical world called the new earth where we will physically rule and reign in our glorified bodies. But that time, that part of our salvation is future.

You'll remember in 1Co 13:12 "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

Paul understood that though he was sealed for the day of redemption, and that his salvation was secure in Christ, he did not possess the full aspect of what salvation is all about, which is residing in the very presence of our Creator.

We do not presently reside in heaven even though we are clearly told in Phi 3:20-21 "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."

And it's this passage and other similar passages that give us a clear indication of what Paul meant in our text when he said that our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. What I find interesting is that the early church was waiting expectantly for the imminent return of Jesus Christ. They actually thought He could return in their lifetime.

And there was good reason for that. Teaching His disciples our Lord Jesus said this.

Joh 14:1-3 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

Christ's promise to come back for us is not an empty one. Paul would later encourage a Pastor by the name of Titus regarding this.

Tit 2:11-13 "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. 12 It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope-- the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,"

That blessed hope of Christ's glorious appearing was something the disciples of the first century longed for as well as Paul and the

apostles. Each day the Christians would look up and expect Jesus to come and rescue them out of this present evil age.

Paul even wrote to the Thessalonian church to encourage them because some of them evidently felt that those who died in Christ will not experience this blessed hope of seeing Christ return for His people.

1Th 4:13-18 "Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. 14 We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15 According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage each other with these words."

The early Christians expected to see Jesus come back for them. And yet here we are almost 2,000 years later and Jesus still hasn't returned. That burning flame which looked up for the Savior to come for us has all but gone out in the church today.

Yeah, some still talk about it and look for it, but unfortunately, most of the church has, over the years, decided to carry on as business as usual. And instead of realizing that our longing should be for our heavenly citizenship, which could come at any moment as Christ returns for us, the church has dug in and finds a comfortable home here on earth.

Priorities are mixed up and the things of this world have not grown strangely dim with much of the church in our age. I don't mean to suggest that we shouldn't be involved in the world, but our work should always have, at its heart, a heavenly reward as we do the work for Christ, eagerly awaiting His promised return.

And this is the context in which Paul urges the church to love with the love of Christ and to go forward with the work of the gospel knowing that our Lord's return is near.

Romans 13:10-11 ¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of *the* law. 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.

It's time to wake up to this reality. But only as we understand and appreciate the salvation that we have in Christ, and what its ultimate consummation entails, will we then be those pilgrims on earth longing for the blessed hope that Abraham hoped for in his wanderings in and around the Promised Land, which he understood symbolized the ultimate Promised Land with a city whose Architect and Builder is God. (Heb.11:10).

In other words, Abraham was longing for the new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells. This is what motivated him to live by faith and it should be what motivates us to live by faith and walk as faithful servants for Christ, all the while understanding that this present world is not our home.

Christ is coming back and though we don't know the day or hour we know the season and that season has been here for a while. These are the last days that Paul spoke to Timothy.

2 Timothy 3:1-5 ^{NAU} But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. ² For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.

Of course, "the last days" that Paul spoke of are the same last days that the writer of Hebrews spoke of that included the day in which that letter was written in the first Century.

Hebrews 1:2 ² in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

Again, these are the same last days that Peter spoke of as well in the context of the end of the world.

2 Peter 3:3-4 ³ Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking, following after their own lusts, ⁴ and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For *ever* since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation."

This “promise of His coming” is what Paul speaks of in our text. But this promise will only be fulfilled when He comes in glory on the last day when you and I in Christ will either be resurrected from the dead or caught up with the saints who are left alive when He returns for His people.

This is precisely what Paul addressed to the saints in Thessalonica.

1 Thessalonians 4:14-18 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. 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. 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. 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. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Some have mistakenly thought that there are two different events going on here in this letter, but the context makes it clear that the resurrection of the dead and the catching up of the saints who are alive at that time, what has come to be known as the rapture, are taking place at the same time. as both groups are meeting with the Lord in the clouds.

And we know when this resurrection/rapture takes place.

John 6:39-40,44,54 ³⁹ "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but ***raise it up on the last day.*** ⁴⁰ "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and ***I Myself I will raise him up on the last day.***" ⁴⁴ "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and ***I will raise him up on the last day*** ⁵⁴ "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and ***I will raise him up on the last day.***

It would be hard to dispute that the resurrection/rapture takes place on the last day. But on this last day a lot more will be happening. It is on this day, that is often referred to in Scripture as the day of the Lord, the great day of God, the day of God's wrath, that all men outside of Christ will be judged for their sin. This is also known as the Great White Throne Judgment.

Revelation 20:11-15 ¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. ¹³ And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one *of them* according to their deeds. ¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

It is on this last day that God makes all things right. And notice in verse 17 that John says that when he saw this great white throne and Him who sat upon it, that earth and heaven had fled away and there was no place found for them.

Earth and heaven will flee in the sense that the entire universe, both the heavens and the earth, will be destroyed on the day of the Lord, the last day. Peter demonstrates this in his second epistle.

2 Peter 3:10 ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

But something else takes place on this last day and that is the restoration of the universe as God restores His original creation by removing the curse and giving us new heavens and the new earth. He does this through fire and Peter resumes his thought in the same section of Scripture.

2 Peter 3:11-13 ¹¹ Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! ¹³ But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.

This is the point that Paul is making in our text.

Romans 13:11-14 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. 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. 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. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts.

The day is near, Paul tells us. And because the day is near our response should be the same one that Peter exhorts us to.

2 Peter 3:11-12,15 ¹¹ Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, ¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, ¹⁵ and regard the patience of our Lord *as* salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him,

When we understand our place in the world, in relationship to the coming of Christ in glory and judgment and the restoring of His creation that He will share with His people, as we rule and reign with Him in the inheritance He gives us in Christ, then the rhetorical question that Peter asks; *Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God?*; must be answered by us in the actions that Paul exhorts us to.

Romans 13:12-13 Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 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.

We must lay aside the deeds of darkness from which we've been delivered and put on the armor of light that can only be found in Christ in the power of His Spirit.

And as we humble ourselves to the fact that we deserved nothing from God but wrath, being children of wrath by nature, and as we look to the prize of Christ Himself who has given us His Kingdom, then we will be more prone to run the race in a way that honors Him in the process.

And what Paul does here in our text is to show how one thing must be replaced with another. It's not enough to doff the baggage without donning what is required. And this is the language that

Paul uses when he says, **Romans 13:12,14** let us *lay aside* the deeds of darkness and *put on* the armor of light. **14** *put on* the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts.

Laying aside and putting on requires effort. It requires a decision and our will to accomplish that task. Make no mistake however, it is not anything we can do in the flesh. We only have the ability to seek the things of the Spirit because of the Spirit first giving us life to see and hear the voice of God. But once we have been enlightened and given eternal life in Christ we now have the ability to make such a decision.

Putting on the Lord Jesus Christ is putting on His righteousness and living in that righteousness. Job was a man who understood this relationship to God and he expressed this way.

^{NAU} **Job 29:14** "I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; My justice was like a robe and a turban.

Job's righteousness was put on him by another and that is God Himself. But Job, in faith, wore that righteousness for all to see so that God might be glorified in his life and the Lord Himself acknowledges this in Job's life.

Job 1:1 ^{NAU} There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil.

This is what it means to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what it means to embrace the justice that we deserved but was poured out on our Savior, and to now wear His righteousness like a robe and a turban for all to see Him in us.

When Paul wrote to the church in Galatia I suspect he had Job's words in the back of his mind.

^{NAU} **Galatians 3:27** For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

Do people see the garments of Christ's salvation in our lives? Do people taste the love of God shed abroad in our hearts or do they see and taste something else?

Let me end with a passage from Colossians where Paul sums up the attitude we should have in light of the fact that the day of Christ's return is drawing near and where he answers the question

posed by Peter, what sort of people ought you to be in regards to this truth?

Colossians 3:12-17 ¹² So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; ¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. ¹⁴ Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity. ¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.