

Live in the Light of Eternity
Romans 13:8-14
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Why the pursuit of fame is wrong

A couple of weeks ago I wrote a blog lamenting the rise of Celebrity Culture in the Church. We now have Celebrity pastors and Celebrity churches. And sadly this trend has enticed some leaders to pursue fame.

One reason this is a tragedy is this: fame is dangerous because it heightens existing temptations and introduces new ones. No mortal human being can handle stardom....

Another reason the pursuit of fame is wrong is because fame is “what ***the present world*** thinks about us” whereas, we should be looking forward to ***the future***, and to what Jesus, the Judge of the world, will make of us. We should be seeking his future approval:

“...judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.” (1 Corinthians 4)

What Jesus thinks about us on the day of Judgement is what truly counts, not the opinion of lots of human beings. In a social media age, where hits, subscribers or “friends” make the world go round, let’s all keep our eyes on heaven’s judgement and heaven’s reward.

Living our lives in the light of future eternity is the dimension of Christian living Paul draws our attention to now, in his letter to the Christians at Rome.

Most of the practical part of Romans is dedicated to loving one another; here Paul returns to the theme:

“Let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt to love one another..”

Don’t be indebted to anyone: return everything you borrow whether its money, tools, books, utensils, whatever! The only debt you and I should owe to one another is the debt to love each other....

*“Let no debt remain outstanding **except the continuing debt to love one another..”***

Think of love as a debt we’ll never pay off! We are called to love one another all the days of our lives. We can never say “I’ve loved enough,” never say “That’s it, I’ve finished loving that person!” Is there a brother or sister you’re tempted to say “I’ve had enough of”? You can’t love any more?! Paul says, your debt to them never ends.

And notice the motive for this persevering love, verse 11:

*“Do this (keep loving one another) **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. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here.”*

One of the great motives that drives all Christian behaviour is “understanding the present time,” where we live in history. There are two markers:

Understanding the Present Time

(1) *Jesus is coming back soon!* “The night is nearly over; the day is almost here.” (verse 12) Paul is talking about the return of Jesus Christ, when he comes back in power and glory to judge the world, when God will renew the heavens and the earth, and clothe his people with new bodies that will dwell forever in a land that is brighter than day.

“You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”
(Luke 12:40)

“The end of all things is near” (1 Peter 4:7)

“Yes, I am coming soon” (Rev 22:20)

Jesus is coming back soon—we want to be ready and not ashamed, when he returns!

(2) *We’re getting one day closer to heaven.* “our salvation is **nearer** now than when we first believed.” (verse 11) Every day we live this earthly life we are one day closer to heaven! “our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.” Every passing day, inexorably, inevitably and gloriously my ship and your ship is sailing closer to the port of heaven! Even if Jesus does not return in our life-times, every day that passes is one day closer to home, “Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.”

And the knowledge of this rapidly approaching destination, should shine into our present lives and motivate us and empower our daily Christian lives! That’s the teaching of our verses today.

The return of Jesus ought to motivate every believer in three ways,

(1) Live a life of repentance “let us put aside the deeds of darkness”

First then, in the light of eternity, Paul encourages us to live a life of repentance: “Let us put aside the deeds of darkness”

Since the night—this present age—is on its way out, let's put aside the deeds that characterise this age. Paul goes on to list three pairs of behaviour that mark the behaviour of this world:

- “carousing and drunkenness” - wild, drunken parties
- “sexual immorality and debauchery” - the frequent outcome of out-of-control partying
- “jealousy and dissension” sins that divide and disrupt communities

These aren't meant to be an exhaustive list, but a characteristic list of sins that mark the moral darkness of the world we live in. “Brothers and sisters”, says Paul, including himself with the “let **us**”, as we turn our gaze towards heaven, let us “put aside the deeds of darkness, let us repent, turn away from, abandon, the sin that characterises this present sinful age: “Do not *think* about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” You still have a sinful nature (not in heaven!) don't allow your mind to dwell on how that sinful nature wants to be gratified.

Yvonne and I were watching a TV programme last night about an explorer who was making a very long trip through the wild Serengeti plains on foot! And as they do these days, during the Ad breaks, the channel kept advertising other TV programs they were airing in the weeks to come. And both of us commented on the wickedness of the content this TV channel were planning to serve up as entertainment. “Put aside the deeds of darkness.”

Am I speaking to a sleeping Christian? You think it's OK for a Christian to engage in “carousing and drunkenness”, “Sexual immorality and debauchery, “Jealousy and dissension”? Paul says you're morally asleep, “Wake up from your slumber.”

(2) Live a life of Christ-like holiness
“rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Instead of living like the people of this world live, live like people of heaven...

“put on the armour of light.” “Let us behave decently, as in the daytime.” “clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ...”

In Paul's day when Greeks said they were going to “clothe themselves in this or that person” it was an acting phrase, they meant they were going to play the character of that person in a play. One day, you and I will be like Jesus:

*“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, **we shall be like him**, for we shall see him as he is.”(1 John 3:2)*

Let's begin behaving like him, “clothing ourselves with him” today. What does that look like? The fruit of

Christ's Spirit within us is

"love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." (Gal. 5:22)

In the world to come we'll have no sinful nature to trip us up, no devil to tempt us, no world to attract: we'll live a perfectly holy life! Start living today like you'll be living then, "clothe yourself with Christ." In another letter Paul writes:

"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord" (Ephesians 5)

See what Paul is saying? Keep your eyes on heaven! Repent of the sin that marks this present passing age and put on the behaviour that marks the world to come.

Which brings us back, and finally, to the most defining attribute of that world of light, which is love.

(3) Live a life of love

"he who loves others has fulfilled the law"

Of the grand Triumvirate of Christians graces, FAITH, HOPE & LOVE, love is the greatest because love is the only one that continues beyond this world into heaven. No faith in heaven, for faith will give way to sight. No hope in heaven because we will possess what we hoped for. But love will continue in heaven.

Love says Paul, "understanding the present time." Love because you are closer to the age of eternal love than you ever were before. And if you want to know how to love your fellow believer go to the 10 commandments which give definition, content, explication, to love:

"for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbour as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law."

"Live a life of love" Ephesians 5:2.

We're going to end today's gathering with a song which for some reason is only sung at funerals—which is a pity since it is a wonderful hymn for a sermon on Christian love.

But before I close, I ask all of you who are not yet believers to consider this: you too are one day closer to eternity today than you were yesterday. Every day that passes is one less day to turn to Christ, one more lost opportunity to repent. Which is why the Bible says, "Today is the day of salvation." I urge you to turn to Jesus today. Amen.