

We live in a time of procrastination. We always want to put things off, to do them later, because there's always something we can do on the Internet or on our phones or on Facebook or whatever it may be, rather than getting to what we should be doing right now. We love to do things later instead of now. But Christians, being a Christian is something that can't wait. Being a Christian is something that happens now. We need to follow after Jesus now. We need to be like him now. Because waiting to be a Christian is a dangerous thing. Waiting to do what God wants us to do is a dangerous thing, if only because we don't have nearly as much time as we think we do. The time will soon be gone. So let us follow the Lord now and not later. This is the point that Paul wants to drive home in our reading for tonight.

And Paul uses several different pictures to make this point, the first one being in Romans 13, verses 11 and 12: "Besides this, you know the time, that the hour has come 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." And so the picture that Paul is using is of the very early morning. If you've ever gotten up before the sun, you'll know what he's talking about here. That time when you can see light on the horizon, but the sun has not come up just yet. This is a time that we know from experience isn't very long. It's usually no longer than a half hour or so until the sun finally appears. But Paul is talking about people who were still in bed at that time, because, of course, back in those days, you got up with sun. You worked with the sun. You went to bed with the sun. Everything was ruled by the sun. And even if we are ruled by clocks, we can still understand what Paul is trying to say here. The day is beginning. The sun will soon be here. The time to get up out of bed, he says, is now. Because if we stay in bed too long, if we keep hitting that snooze button, the day will be wasted. To be a Christian means to get up, to greet the coming day, to get out of bed and do what needs to be done, because the Lord is coming soon. The day of the Lord will soon be here. Christians, will you still be in bed when the Lord comes? Will you be unprepared for the day of the Lord? So don't put off what God wants you to do. Don't wait till later. Don't hit the snooze button. The time is quickly passing, and the Lord will soon be here.

The second picture that Paul uses is also in verse 12, where he says this: "So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light." Now he's using a picture of changing clothes, of taking off your old, dirty clothes and putting on something clean. That's what he wants us to see here. But it's not just getting ready in the morning that he's talking about, because he says we are to put on the armor of light. The picture is of a soldier who is putting on armor, a soldier who is getting ready for a battle that is about to happen. He needs to put on his armor now. Because, Christians, we are heading into a spiritual war. We are facing a battle. A war with evil, a war with spiritual forces, a war with our own sin. And we are called to put on the whole armor of God, the whole armor of light to resist all the attacks of the devil and of the world. If we don't put that armor on now, we will not be prepared. Because a soldier can't decide to put his armor on once the battle has already started. The time to put it on is now. And if we hold on to the works of darkness, then we're going into battle unprepared. So we need to get ready. The battle will not wait. Put off your old clothes. Put on the new. There is no time to wait. The Lord is at hand.

The third picture that Paul uses is in verse 13, where he says this: "Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy." So he is comparing two kinds of people: those who live for the day and

those who live for the night. The kind of people who want to live it up, the kind of people who want to indulge in pleasures of every kind, they do it at night. They don't do it during the day. A party, for example, where you might have a lot of alcohol is not something you do during the day. Even in our day and age, it would still be considered very weird to do it, because it's something you do in the evening. It's something you do at night. Because the day is the time of work. The day is the time of restraint, the time to do what is right. The night becomes the time you do things you wouldn't otherwise do. But the night will also soon be over, Christians, and if we are not ready for the day, we are going to be hung over, unable to do what needs to be done.

And Paul even shows us a picture of what this nighttime looks like. It consists in orgies and drunkenness, a complete lack of self-control. It consists in sexual immorality and sensuality, living only for pleasure. It consists in quarreling and jealousy, treating one another like the world and not like Christians. If we live this way, if we walk in the night, we will be hung over when the day comes. And there is no time to be hung over. The Lord is at hand. So now is the time to sober up. Now is the time to put these things away. The Lord will soon be here.

The last picture that Paul uses is in verse 14: "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." So the picture again is of putting on clothes, to get ready for the day, to get ready for what is to come. But it's a picture of putting on Christ and making preparations for him. We should get dressed for Jesus. We should prepare ourselves for what God wants us to do. And what we must not do is be prepared for the flesh, to gratify its desires. To be ready for the flesh is to be not ready for God, and to be ready for God is to not be ready for the flesh. It's one or the other. Which one are you going to prepare for? Which way will you go? Because there's no time for us to be ready for both of them. The Lord will soon be here.

But how then do we get ready for the Lord? How do we put on Christ? We put on Christ by loving one another as God first loved us. Because when we love one another, we are walking in the way of God. This is who he has created us to be through Jesus Christ, his Son. Because Paul says in verse 8: "Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law." He makes it sound like getting ready to pay off a debt. Not a debt to God. That debt has already been paid through Jesus Christ. But a debt which I owe to my brother, a debt to love him, a debt which can never fully be paid. I will never be able to say "I have loved you enough," because we are called to love one another always through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

So we cannot say, then, Christians, "I'll do what God wants me to do later." There is no later when it comes to love. There is no later when it comes to being a Christian. If my brother in Christ needs something, I cannot wait. If my brother in Christ needs me to do something, I must not wait. If my brother in Christ needs me to care for him in some way, I need to do something now. Because if I do wait, if I put it off for later, what's going to happen to him? Christian love is something that happens now, not later. Christian love is something that we are called to do now, not later, because the dawn will soon be here. The Lord is at hand.

So Christians, love God and love your neighbor. This is the fulfillment of the law. Don't put it off. Don't wait to show that love to one another. Love each other in Christ now, because that is who you are created to be in him. Don't wait. Don't put it off. Love each other in him. The Lord is at hand.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have first loved us through Jesus Christ, your Son. Help us to love one another now, that we may do what is pleasing in your sight, knowing that you will soon be here. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.