



# ROMANS Part 122

Chapter 13:11-14

## Putting off acts of darkness.



**This, also, do, being aware of the era, that it is already the hour for us to be roused out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believe. 12 The night progresses, yet the day is near. We, then, should be putting off the acts of darkness, yet should be putting on the implements of light. 13 As in the day, respectfully, should we be walking, not in revelries and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and jealousy, 14 but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and be making no provision for the lusts of the flesh.**

“This, also, do” refers to those things mentioned previously, the poor practices (“do avoid these things”) namely: adultery, murder, false witness, coveting. Forget the law because the Mosaic dictates never came to the nations; it is simply a good idea, says Paul to the Romans, to not murder people.

Then of course there is the positive declaration from the previous verse, which in fact accomplishes the heart of the law of Moses without directly applying it: “You shall love your associate as yourself.” This seems easier than loving enemies, but for some people it’s difficult. Thank God that Paul temporarily unhands his “love your enemies” mantra and begins discussing specific acts of darkness. “Love your enemies,” held against my own life, shows me how far I yet am from the God’s love being perfected in me. But it also shows me progress.

### A DECIDED LACK OF MURDER

As an aside, I’m now wondering if not murdering an enemy counts as loving him. I’m now thinking that it does. Perhaps I have been too hard on myself then. Not a single of my enemies has died by my hand. I am thinking now that this must count as rendering them a kindness. Surely God takes note of it. I have always thought that I must do something *positively* to love an



enemy, such as buying him dinner or shoveling snow from his driveway, but maybe loving him can be as simple as not murdering him. After all, the law said, “Thou shalt not commit murder.” Not murdering either my associate *or* my enemy counts as loving my associate as myself, for I have yet to murder myself. When God asks, therefore, “What have you done for your enemies lately?” I can say, “I have not murdered them, not a single one. Same with my associates. And I have continued to not do this every day this week.” But perhaps this would be better cast in a positive light: “I let my enemies live, Lord. Each day that passes, I grant my associates *and* my enemies a fresh lease on life.”

And the Lord will say (I believe that He will), “Well done, good and faithful, non-murdering servant.” And it

will be announced to the universe, “Here is a man who has, every day, granted another day of life to friend and foe alike.” I will answer, “Does this make me God-like?” And the Lord will say, “Yes, after a fashion. You have no idea how many jerks I allow to continue to walk upon the planet.”

I hope that the Lord does not discover my *true* motive, namely, that letting my enemies live is the worst possible revenge that I could possibly wreak upon them.

#### THE SNATCHING AWAY

Paul talks here as though he expects the snatching away to occur before lunch: “This, also, do, being aware

of the era, that it is already the hour for us to be roused out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believe.” The apostle covers his bases, for sure. For truly, it is impossible that our salvation could be *farther* away than when we first believed. It’s still nice to hear that time marches forward, not back, and that Paul gives us credit merely for tucking another day (heck, another *hour*) under the buckles of our life-worn belts.

When people ask me how soon the snatching away will be, I will now imitate Paul and tell them, “It’s closer today than it was yesterday; *much* closer than last week.” I can’t be wrong. It will be said of me, “Zender is a spiritual genius, for he speaks accurately, every time, concerning the snatching away of the body of Christ.”

Why is now a good time to be roused from sleep? *Every* time is a good time to be roused from sleep. Again, Paul exhorts the saints with an exhortation that works no matter when one exhorts it.

#### NIGHT IS THE FIRST PART OF DAY

“The night progresses, yet the day is near” is something else that is always true, and this is how we’re supposed to think of the day. In the Jewish arrangement—dictated to those people by God—night precedes day. The Jewish day starts at sundown. This is helpful. Sadly, our day begins at sunup and progresses toward night. This is depressing. I do normally feel sadness in late afternoon, say around four o’clock. It’s easy for me to get depressed around four o’clock, especially four thirty. What is needed is an adjustment of thinking. The old thinking at 4 p.m. is, *the day is coming to an end*—but in fact it’s not. It’s just beginning. What I ought to be thinking is, *a new day is about to start*. The phrase, “It’s the dawn of a new day” is wrong. What we ought to say is, “Day displaces night, and this is what we’re all living for, and expecting.” Then when afternoon comes, we ought to say, “Here comes another repeat of the lesson that good will one day displace evil.” This is what the day/night cycle day is—an example of how good displaces all evil; light comes after darkness, and not vice-versa. The heavens and the movements of the bodies there provide many object lessons, this being one of the most important.

#### ACTS OF DARKNESS

As a result of thinking correctly concerning the day, we ought to put off acts of darkness. These things belong to our past. Our old humanity was crucified together with Christ (Romans 6:6). Here was the ultimate night: when

Christ died, He took all of our failings with Him into death. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was the best part of the day: sunup. At this time, Jesus rose from the dead without our sins. Thus, we ought to be presenting ourselves to God as if alive from among the dead (Romans 6:13). We ought to be walking with Him on the leeward side of resurrection and stop obsessing over our failures, for this belongs to light.

Elsewhere, Paul calls us “children of the light” (1 Thessalonians 5:5; Ephesians 5:9). At some point it dawned on us (probably while reading Romans, chapter 6) that, because of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, God no longer reckons our sins against us. When we “put off acts of darkness,” therefore, we refuse to allow our acts of darkness to drag us down into condemnation, discouragement and death. “Putting off acts of darkness” can and should be interpreted as, “Try not to do any dark things. See this list of dark things? Don’t do anything on the list.” But there is also this deeper aspect just mentioned.

The list of commandments listed previously are not there as a laundry list of things for us to do or not do, for we, the people of the nations, never received the Mosaic law and so neither are we obligated to do it. These things are listed for the sake of those who, by a happy default of self-love, have not wreaked any of them upon themselves,



and who thus inadvertently fulfill the demands of the law simply by respecting their own flesh.

“Putting off the acts of darkness” certainly includes avoiding dark deeds. In a deeper sense, it concerns a refusal to feel guilty over manifested acts. In other words, here is an act of darkness that you have just *done*. Now, instead of letting the thing condemn and kill you, put it off of you. Do not let the thought of the thing cling to you. Do not obsess over an act of darkness that has just been wrought to the point of letting it sabotage your peace. This act that you have just committed can no longer lay claim to you, for Jesus Christ your Savior left it in the grave. Thus, here is an exhortation, not only about how to avoid sin, but also about how to avoid the guilt associated *with* sin. A sin is something that you have failed at. Nothing infuriates Satan more than when a person sheds guilt over sin. And nothing pleases Christ more than to see us relegating our failings eternally to the tomb—to the tomb that He occupied for three days—for what could possibly give Him more credit for His work on the cross against the very failings that continually beset us?

#### PUTTING ON THE IMPLEMENTS OF LIGHT

I’m pretty sure that Paul is talking about thoughts here, as in Philippians 4:8—

For the rest, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is grave, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is agreeable, whatever is renowned—if there is any virtue, and if any applause, be taking these into account.

I like the suggestion of thoughts as implements. We think of thoughts as nebulous things having no power, but “as a man thinks, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). Our thoughts ought to be centered on God and His Word, especially the letters of Paul, and especially this book of Romans, which contains the blueprint of our salvation. The Word of God is elsewhere spoken of as a weapon (Ephesians 6:17—“And receive the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, which is a declaration of God”), which is good reason to “...let the word of Christ be making its home in you richly, in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing yourselves; in psalms, in hymns, in spiritual songs, singing, with grace in your hearts to God” (Colossians 3:16). This provides you with an arsenal against deception.

The thought of “putting on” the implements of light addresses what I always like to say, that the presence of

Christ is not only in us, but it’s a protective sheen around us. The presence of Christ is real—in the form of Christ’s spirit—but the real practical help comes from the words of Christ, given us by Paul. These words are implements of light, words like “we are justified by faith” and “having peace toward God” (Romans 5:1) and “nothing, consequently, is now condemnation” (Romans 8:1), and “God has not appointed us to indignation” (1 Thessalonians 5:9). We ought to be wielding these like light sabers. Words like these, when mulled upon, are not only an offensive stroke against Satan’s lies, (*you’re not justified; you can’t have peace; condemnation is still possible; you’re going through the Tribulation*), but also against people who try to get you into church—oops, sorry for the redundancy.

#### SPECIFIC ACTS OF DARKNESS

**“As in the day, respectably, should we be walking, not in revelries and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and jealousy, 14 but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and be making no provision for the lusts of the flesh” (Romans 13:13-14).**

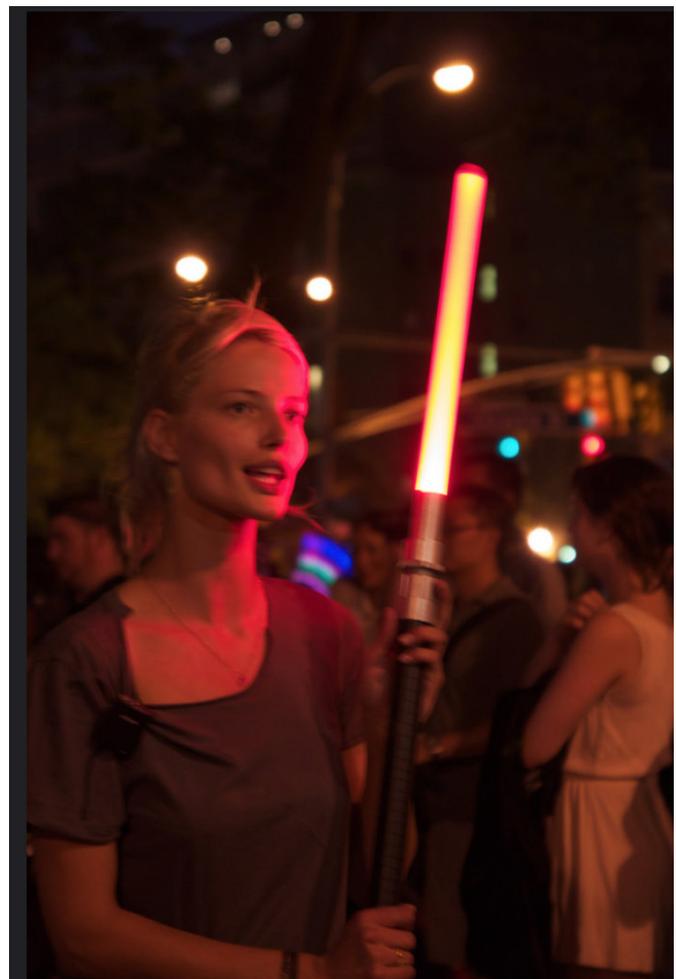


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I would not want any of you, or myself, doing these things. Note how these acts of darkness are *not* listed; they're not listed individually as: revelries, drunkenness, chambering, wantonness, strife, jealousy—as though each element were sold separately. Rather, Paul bundles them in three pairs: 1) revelries and drunkenness; 2) chambering and wantonness, 3) strife and jealousy.

Revelries can be fun—birthday parties, bachelor parties, anniversaries, graduations—but not when combined with drunkenness. A warning against drunkenness is not a warning against alcohol, but against the overindulgence of it to the point that a person does not know what he or she is doing.

“Chambering” is going to bed with people. There is nothing inherently wrong with this—in fact it's a great comfort—unless it is done in combination with “wantonness,” that is “leading or going away by stealth when the moon is not shining.” This definition is developed from the Greek word *aselgeia*, whose English elements are UN-MOON-LEADING. The Zenderized version of this unwieldy phrase would be: “sneaking around.” Don't sneak around on people. Don't cheat on people. Don't lie to people in order to lie with people. Don't steal people from other people. Chambering (sleeping with people) when you have to sneak around to do it (“wantonness”), is an act of darkness.

Strife for the sake of the evangel can be productive. After all, Paul struggled (his word) to present every human in the body of Christ mature in Christ Jesus (Colossians 1:28-29). But jealousy is the devil's workshop. Don't let jealousy be the kind of strife you're bent on. Jealousy is the resentment of good things that other people have. It is a brand of selfishness that would seek to destroy the joys of another in order to build up oneself. Jealousy is a devouring worm, a true darkness. It not only kills relationships between people, but between people and God.

## PUT ON THE LORD

“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and be making no provision for the lusts of the flesh.”

Putting on the Lord Jesus Christ is pretty much the same thing as putting on implements of light. It's all a figure of speech for the fact that Jesus Christ and His Words are, for us, a formidable power. These things are not *nothing*. They are not mere *concepts*. Such power terrifies our enemy, Satan, and guards us against his accusations. This will not only keep us from acts of darkness, but will protect us from guilt and condemnation should the occa-

sional act of darkness overcome us.

We must always keep in mind that we are in the “behavioral section” of Romans, which began in chapter 12. None of Paul's exhortations to avoid acts of darkness are really worth anything apart from the revelations concerning our personal justification from sin and our peace with God, laid out for us in chapters three through eight. If you've forgotten about those, you'll get lost here. Forget the earlier chapters of Romans, and you'll start imagining that Paul is merely throwing law in our faces. Heck no. He would never do that after being so careful to explain to us that we are justified by faith and not by works of law (Romans 3:28).

Good acts and an avoidance of bad acts are the logical consequences of people in remembrance and appreciative of their complete freedom from sin and deliverance from any possible condemnation. Until we realize (“put on” the truth) that nothing is now condemnation (Romans 8:1), we will resent any exhortation to right behavior.

True freedom leads one into bond service to Christ, where the yoke is light. —MZ (*To be continued.*)



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