

Night and Day

August 20 – Romans 13:8-14

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Day 232 – 133 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

In the last several days, Paul has focused on Christian behavior in his letter to the Romans. So far, he's explained how we should relate to God (12:1, 2), to the church (12:3-8), to other believers (12:9-21), and to the government authorities (13:1-7). Next, he explained how we should relate to our neighbors, specifically non-believers (v.8-14).

First, Paul wrote, "Owe nothing to anyone..." (v.8). We must remember he has just finished talking about civil authorities and "rendering all that is due them" (v.7). Thus, we must fulfill our obligations to them, as well as to anyone else. God's people should practice responsible, biblical finances and be as independent of others as possible (*Prov. 22:7*), without being a burden to anyone (*2 Cor. 11:9; 1 Thess. 2:9*).

Second, the only obligation Paul said we have to others is love (*Rom. 13:8*). God gave Israel the Ten Commandments and 612 subsequent laws. When asked which of the commandments was the most important, Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God... and love your neighbor as yourself" (*Mk. 12:30, 31*). He basically summarized the entire Mosaic Law by saying, "Love God and love others." But notice that love begins both of those commands. Love, then, summarizes the entirety of the law. In essence, love fulfills it (*Rom. 13:8-10*). Paul said it best, "Love does no wrong to a neighbor" (v.10).

Next, Paul said to "do this" — love — "knowing the time..." (v.11). What time did he mean? The time of Jesus' return, when we "awaken from our sleep" (resurrection, v.11). He continued, "For now, salvation (or rescue) is nearer to us than when we believed" (v.11), meaning Jesus' return is closer now than it was then. "The night is almost gone," he said, referring to this present world, "and the day is near," meaning the day of Jesus' second coming and kingdom (v.12). But Jesus didn't return then. True. But since we don't know the timing of His return, it

is still as imminent now as it was then, so we continue to eagerly wait.

While we wait and anticipate Christ's return, Paul said to "lay aside the deeds of darkness" (listed in v.13), and "put on the armor of light," meaning the new life in Christ. What does it mean to "put on the armor of light"? First, it means to love our neighbors as ourselves and, second, it means to "behave properly as in the day," meaning the day of Christ's return and kingdom (v.13).

Another way to describe behaving properly is "to put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (v.14). That phrase is a perfect summary of sanctification, which is God's conforming us into the image of His Son (*Rom. 8:29*). Basically, Paul is saying let's not wait for the day when Christ returns to behave properly. Let's do so now. Let's love others and live like Christ today, no longer giving in to the flesh and its lusts (v.14).

Daily Reflection

Since the Lord saved us from the night and has brought us into the light, let us live like we are of the day and not as if we are of the night (*Col. 1:13*). When we obey God's Word — loving our neighbors unconditionally and living in a Christlike manner — our lives will be as different from the world as night and day. Remember the Lord's words, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (*Matt. 5:16*).

Consider the list in Verse 13 and any other lusts of the flesh. Is there anything in your life that is "of the night," that you need to surrender to "the day"? What do you think it means, "Make no provision for the lusts of the flesh"? (v.14).

Non-Essentials

August 21 – Romans 14:1-23

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Day 233 – 132 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We have been reading the second half of Paul’s letter to the Romans, in which he explained how Christ-followers should conduct themselves (*Rom. 12-16*). He’s described our relationship with God, with the church, with believers, with civil authorities, and with non-believers. Now, before he closed his letter, Paul turned his attention to the important matter of unity in the church (*14:1-15:13*). This discussion has two parts — the importance of unity (*14:1-23*) and instructions for how to keep it (*15:1-13*).

We know that unity in the church is very important. It was important to Jesus (*Jn. 17:20-23*), so it should be important to us. However, promoting unity does not mean promoting uniformity. Unity allows diversity in a group, while uniformity does not. With unity, different people focus on common ground and agree to join for a cause (*Rom. 12:4, 5; 1 Cor. 12:12, 13*). But with uniformity, there are no differences. Everyone must be the same. In our passage today, Paul encouraged unity with diversity, not uniformity.

Rupertus Meldenius, a German theologian living in the early 1600s wrote in a tract on unity this now-famous quote, “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty, and in all things, charity.” This statement simplifies Paul’s teaching here. There are matters upon which believers should agree and find unity, like gospel essentials (i.e., Jesus is the Son of God). **But there are other matters — non-essentials — about which we should allow freedom to differ, matters that are not worth dividing or destroying the church.**

The matters which Paul addressed we have seen before — eating meat sacrificed to idols and adhering to special calendar days (*Rom. 14:1-6*). Each person has his own convictions, Paul wrote, and should not judge others’ convictions (*v.5*). **If all believers live for Christ, then that is their common ground** (*v.7-9*). Besides, judgment is coming for everyone (*v.10-12*).

Daily Reflection

How many churches have been destroyed for unnecessary reasons — the color of the carpet, the style of worship, a program, or a political issue? We must be above such petty disputes and see the bigger picture. We should expect unity in the essentials. That’s it, and even that line is blurry at times. **But we must know that the enemy will use the non-essentials to divide and derail us. That is unacceptable.**

“The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (*v.17*). “We must pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another” (*v.19*). Having our own convictions about certain non-essentials is perfectly fine, for example smoking, drinking, drugs, gambling, tattoos, political parties, movies, and more (*v.22*). **But we must not let our convictions destroy the church.** “Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food (*v.20*).

What are some other issues on which Christians often disagree?

People leave churches for various reasons, but are they related to essentials or non-essentials? What about you? What are those essentials over which you will not compromise? What are those non-essentials with which you need to practice liberty, rather than expect uniformity?

Unity in Christ

August 22 – Romans 15:1-13

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 234 – 131 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul is nearing the end of his letter to the Romans. Today, he finalized his teaching on the importance of protecting church unity (14:1-15:13). He hoped that the Romans would focus on the gospel essentials, rather than get tangled in the web of the non-essentials. “Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food,” he wrote (v.20). “For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking” (v.17). It’s much more than that, and so should our attention be on much bigger things.

In the second part of his teaching on unity, Paul focused on how we (believers) should promote and achieve it. He mentioned two ways. First, “We should not just please ourselves, but each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification” (15:1, 2). There’s that word again — edification — that which builds others up. It’s one of our goals as Christ-followers — glorification (of God) and edification (of others).

Paul wrote, “So then, we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another” (14:19). Then, he used Jesus as an example, “For even Christ did not please Himself” (v.3). He bore all the physical abuse, insults, and lies for us, not Himself (v.3).

What does that look like to please our neighbor and not just ourselves? Paul provided a specific action step in earlier verses. “Let us not judge one another anymore but determine this — not to put an obstacle or stumbling block in a brother’s way” (Rom. 14:13). He continued, “It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God” (v.21, 22). In other words, it’s okay to have your convictions about non-essentials, but keep them to yourself and God and restrain yourself so as not to offend someone else or cause them to stumble.

“Accept one another,” Paul wrote, “and become a servant” like Christ (v.8).

The second action step Paul offered to promote unity in the church was to “be of the same mind with one another according to Christ” (v.5). Strive to be “of one accord” and to speak with “one voice” (v.6). **Simply put, Christ is our common bond. Christ is our focal point, our unity, our glue.**

Daily Reflection

Every one of us — Jew and Gentile — has a salvation story of how Christ rescued us from our former manner of life, as well as our path to condemnation and hell. Jews, Jesus has affirmed the truth of God and “confirmed the promises given to your fathers” (v.8). Gentiles, Jesus has grafted you onto God’s tree of life (Rom. 11:17-25). He has shown Gentiles great mercy (15:9), and He foreshadowed your salvation through Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalmist (v.9-12).

Like a triangle that has two corners at the base and which come together in one location at the top, so we (Christians) must set aside our individual differences and preferences and strive to be more like Christ. **As we all aim for the top of the triangle, we will find that we are “of the same mind and voice.”** Let us accept one another with all our flaws, passions, and preferences, and let us unite for the cause of Christ! He has done great things!

What things have caused a rift between you and someone else, or between you and the church? If you all have the same goal — the glorification of Christ — then why can’t you “be of the same mind and voice”?

Preaching the Gospel to Ourselves

Today in Your Reading

We have reached the end of Paul's letter to the Romans. His gospel instructions were complete. Next, he transitioned to expressing his plans (15:14-33) and offering his final greetings and comments (16:1-27).

Regarding Paul's plans, he shared with the Romans where he had been, where he was, and where he hoped to go next. First, Paul said that he had "fully preached the gospel from Jerusalem round about as far as Illyricum" (v.19). This was Paul's concise way of saying that he had traveled from Jerusalem to northern Palestine, to Asia Minor (Galatia), to Macedonia, and to Greece.

Second, Paul shared his current location, which we can deduce was Corinth, where he wrote the letter to the Romans. "But now," he wrote, "with no further place for me in these regions," he wished to move on (v.23). "These regions" referred to Greece, what he called Macedonia in the north, and Achaia in the south (v.25).

Finally, he made clear that his plans were to visit Rome on his way to Spain, which would've been the furthest west he could travel in the empire (v.24, 28). His desire was to take the gospel to places yet unreached (v.20). Of course, those plans depended on his success in Jerusalem, where he first intended to deliver the contributions that churches had raised for the deliverance of the saints there (v.25-27).

Paul closed this section by asking the Romans to pray for him (v.30-32). He was concerned for his safety in Jerusalem, as there were tensions regarding unruly Jews who sought and persecuted Christians (v.31). He also hoped that God would bless the saints there with the funds that had been raised (v.31). He asked that God would allow him to make it to the Romans and that while there he would be refreshed in their company (v.32). As we shall see, the Lord will answer all four of these requests.

Daily Reflection

Besides his plans and prayer requests, Paul added a few other comments that I think are helpful for us. First, though Paul had explained the gospel thoroughly to them (*Rom. 1-11*), he was not insinuating that they were ignorant of it. In fact, he wrote, "I am convinced that you are full of goodness and knowledge, and that you are able to admonish each other" (15:14).

In other words, **Paul shared the gospel with the Romans, not because they were unbelievers who needed to be saved, but because they were believers who needed to be reminded (v.15)**. As Christians, we often believe the lie that we no longer need to hear the gospel, that the plan of salvation is only necessary for those who are lost. But that is far from the truth. **We should regularly preach the gospel to ourselves, even if we've been a Christian for decades.** Why?

Paul also said that by preaching the gospel to the Romans, he was fulfilling his duty as an apostle. He used Old Testament imagery to describe his work, as a priest giving an offering to the Lord. The Gentiles (which included the Romans) were his offering, and he had hoped that his work was pleasing and acceptable to God. We would do well to follow His example. We shouldn't strive to please men, but God.

Finally, Paul wrote that if his work was pleasing to God, he could only give credit to Him for its success. "For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me" (v.18). God has work for us to do. He empowers us to do the work, and if it is successful, we owe Him thanks for its success.

A Team Sport

August 24 – Romans 16:1-27

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Day 236 – 129 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We finished Paul's letter to the Romans. In typical fashion, he closed with a list of acknowledgments, greetings, and a few summarizing comments. After such tremendous teaching on the gospel and its application, we would expect an ending unlike his other letters, and Paul did not disappoint. However, often when we see a list of names, we tend to gloss over them and skip to the "better" parts, but **we don't want to miss the purpose of Paul's inclusion of these cherished believers.**

First, Paul opened with a commendation of a faithful, godly woman named Phoebe (v.1, 2). Remember, it was a common practice to send a letter of recommendation ahead of or with someone, to vouch for his or her credibility. So then, why would Paul be recommending Phoebe to the Romans? Most likely, she was carrying Paul's letter to them. What an honor!

Second, in his greeting section (v.3-16), it is amazing to note how many Romans Paul knew, having never visited Rome. Either he had heard of them, or he had interacted with them on his journeys. With so many friends and fellow workers from Rome, we begin to understand Paul's desire to visit there.

While most of the names are unfamiliar to us, we should recognize some of them, Priscilla and Aquilla, for example (v.3-5, from *Acts 18*), and Rufus, who was one of the sons of Simon of Cyrene, the man who helped Jesus with the cross (*Mk. 15:21*). Notice, too, that Paul not only mentioned their names, but he also added reasons for doing so. Epaenetus, he said, was the first convert to Christianity in Asia (Roman province) and must have been living in Rome (v.5). **Some on the list had suffered with Paul, others had earned great reputations for their service, and all of them were beloved.**

Before Paul moved to his acknowledgments, he inserted a warning to the Romans (v.17-20). As

he had done with his other letters, he cautioned the Romans to be alert for divisive false teachers, smooth talkers who "deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting" (v.18). While the Roman Christians were known for their faithfulness and obedience, it would not be long before Satan would infiltrate their congregation. However, Paul reminded them that Satan cannot overcome the Church of Christ (v.20).

As all authors do in their books, Paul acknowledged those to whom he was indebted for their help. We should recognize his assistants, Timothy and Lucius (Luke), but maybe not the others. Jason was from Thessalonica (*Acts 17*), Sosipater from Berea (*Acts 20*). Tertius was the scribe who dictated his letters. Gaius was the one who opened his home for the church in Corinth (*1 Cor. 1:14*); and Erastus was a converted city official.

Finally, Paul added a beautiful closing that summarized the themes of the letter, which were the gospel and its application (*Rom. 16:25-27*). He gave God glory for revealing the gospel to us, like a mystery that had been hidden for so many years (v.25). He also praised God that this gospel had led to the "obedience of faith" in the Romans (v.27).

Daily Reflection

As we close this incredible letter, I don't want us to miss the point of this chapter. While Paul was called as an apostle of Christ to share the gospel and plant churches, he was not alone. **This list of names is an indication of how God was working through him, yes, but also how God was raising up faithful servants to assist him.**

Paul was one man, and he would soon be removed from the picture. It would take a host of godly men and women to carry the torch after his departure. **The church does not rely on the work of one but the united efforts of all. We are part of this work and have a valuable role to play. The work of ministry is a team sport.**

Death to Life

August 25 – Acts 20:2b-12

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 237 – 128 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We transitioned from Paul's letter to the Romans back to the book of *Acts*. Paul had written *Romans* during his three-month visit to Corinth (v.2, 3). Evidently, a contingent of Jews planned to kill Paul on the boat to Syria. When he discovered the plot, he decided to go by land instead through Macedonia (v.3). Eventually, Paul and his teammates met across the sea in Troas in Asia Minor (v.4-6).

Luke, the historian and author of *Acts*, listed Paul's traveling party (v.4). Again, we are tempted to skip over such verses, but it's important for us to recognize that Paul was building a ministry team to help him plant and encourage churches. Notice these men were from Berea, Thessalonica, Derbe, and the province of Asia. Not only were they assisting Paul in the propagation of the gospel and the planting of churches, but he was also pouring into them, discipling and equipping them for the work of ministry. Can we say the same? Who are those people in whom we are intentionally investing for the Lord's sake?

Once in Troas, Luke recounted a story of a boy named Eutychus who fell asleep in a windowsill and plummeted to his death (v.7-12). No doubt, Eutychus would not be the last person to fall asleep in church, but this incident raises a question. Why would Luke include it in his book? Well, if you were a journalist, and a boy died in the church and was brought back to life, would you include it in your paper? Of course! The headline might read, "Church Member Resurrected After Long Sermon!"

The event was significant for several reasons. First, an obvious observation is that **Paul's role as an apostle of Christ was confirmed**. Dead people are not resurrected every Sunday at church. This event was unusual, and God allowed it to verify His calling on Paul's life. Miracles often occurred in the early church age to bring attention to the gospel.

Second, **this event marked Paul's last visit to Troas**. Circumstances would prevent Paul from returning. He probably knew he would not be back. He only had a week with the believers there and wanted to take advantage of his time with them (v.6, 7). The situation with Eutychus certainly made an indelible impression in their minds. It would be a night they'd never forget.

Third, **we can't forget that our spiritual enemy is always afoot, seeking to disrupt what God is doing**. Remember, Paul left Corinth, and even changed his travel plans, because of a plot to murder him (v.3). The enemy tried to get Paul then, and no doubt the enemy tried to distract Paul's teaching in Troas with Eutychus' death.

Finally, **most Bible stories are rich with symbolism, and this one is no exception**. Notice the timing and numbers. The feast of Unleavened Bread had just passed, which for believers would've been the remembrance of Jesus' death and resurrection (v.6). How fitting, then, for this story to include Eutychus' death and resurrection. He fell asleep (a symbol of death) and was raised again to new life (rapture) by someone from the third floor (third heaven). Notice, too, what the church did after Eutychus was resurrected. They went back to the third floor (heaven) and "broke bread and ate," meaning celebrated the Lord's Supper (marriage feast of the Lamb).

Daily Reflection

It would be easy to draw out a lesson here about spiritual drowsiness or being bored at church, but that would miss the point. **God used an obviously negative event for His good**. Who wouldn't be horrified by a child dying at church? Yet, Paul told the attenders that night, "Do not be troubled..." (v.10). Luke even ended the story with these words, "They took the boy away alive and were greatly comforted" (v.12). How appropriate, after coming out of *Romans*, to see that **God works all things for good to those who love Him**" (*Rom. 8:28*).

Shrink Not

August 26 – Acts 20:13-38

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Day 238 – 127 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul gave his farewell address to the elders of Ephesus, for he would not “see their face again” (v.17, 25, 37, 38). He was on his way to Jerusalem, hoping to be there by Pentecost (v.16). Even though he knew that there were “bonds and afflictions” waiting for him in Jerusalem, Paul pressed on, saying he was “bound by the Spirit” (v.22, 23).

In other words, Paul knew that going to Jerusalem was the Lord’s will, and he didn’t back down from it. He wanted to be faithful. **Faithfulness to God was more important to him than life and death. He knew what he was supposed to do, and he wanted to “finish his course” (v.24).** This determination reminds us of Jesus, when He prayed, “Not my will, but Yours be done” (Matt. 26:42).

Simply put, Paul did not shrink from his duty. To shrink means to draw back or withdraw, to shrivel, contract, or recoil. Twice in his address, Paul said that he “did not shrink from his duty” while in Ephesus, both times referring to sharing the whole message of the gospel (v.20, 27). In his conscience, he fulfilled his duty and could not be held liable for “the blood of any man” (v.26), meaning he did all he could to save souls from an eternity apart from God.

Then, Paul turned to the elders and challenged them to do the same — **fulfill their duty.** His challenge came with a warning, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock... against savage wolves who will not spare the flock but draw away disciples after them” (v.28-30). The wolves here are false teachers, agents of the enemy who sought to devour the believers. Like soldiers on a wall around the city, the elders were to “be on the alert,” to sound the alarm, and to remain faithful to the Word (v.31, 32).

Paul has not said a lot about elders in his letters yet, but he will. As Paul planted churches, he left them in the care of elders, also called

overseers, pastors, and shepherds (v.28). Elders were models of the Christian life, appointed by the congregation to four tasks — leading (v.28), feeding (v.20, 21, 24, 32), caring for (v.35), and protecting the church (v.28-30). Paul, of course, was a good example of an elder, but now he was passing the baton to these men to carry on the duty.

Eldership is a God-ordained, Spirit-called office of the church that requires qualified men of character (v.28; 1 Tim. 3; Ti. 1). Their duty is not light, but necessary for the health of the church. **They must not shrink from their responsibilities but “guard themselves and the flock” by relying on God and the Word (v.28, 32).** **Shrinking elders jeopardize God’s people.**

Daily Reflection

Your pastor(s) or elders have a difficult task, part of which is not to leave you and the rest of the flock vulnerable to attack. Are you praying for them to fulfill their duty and shrink not?

Notice that Paul told the elders to “guard themselves” (v.28). Whether we are parents, pastors, employers, or teachers, guarding others requires us to guard ourselves first. How do we do that? Paul commended the elders to “God and His Word” (v.32). That is a great place to start. The best thing you can do for others is to nurture your relationship with God; and the best way to cultivate your relationship with God is to spend time in His Word.

What is it that God is calling you to do? What does He expect? Are you fulfilling your duty, guarding yourself and others, or shrinking back?
