

“Weapons of Light”

Romans 13:8-14

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SERMON 1954

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Our sermon text is from Romans 13:12, “The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness (τὰ ἔργα τοῦ σκοτοῦς) and let us put on the armor of light (τὰ ὅπλα τοῦ φωτός).”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we think of good works, we definitely think of them as work. They are difficult things which we must do. They require a restraining of our sinful desires and a giving of ourselves for the benefit of others. Whether the good work is doing the dishes or helping your neighbor or maintaining the church property, it takes effort. It takes time. These good works don’t just come naturally, but require a commitment as if your regular job required it. Thus good works are truly work!

But when we think of sins, we don’t think of them as “work.” They rather come easily. Laziness in regard to life, requires nothing more than not moving from the couch. Selfishness is naturally easy. I don’t even have to be aware of what my neighbor is doing or needs. Organizing your day around what I want to do and what pleases me, seems enjoyable and effortless. Our old Adam considers sins so enjoyable that we never think of them as work.

However, in today’s Epistle, St. Paul tells us to cast off the “the works of the darkness(τὰ ἔργα τοῦ σκοτοῦς).” He does, in fact, use the word “work” to speak of sinful acts. Darkness is a reference to the realm of the devil and enmity against God. His use of the word “work” is not so much a reference to the hard effort it takes to accomplish, but that the darkness—or rather the force of evil—is producing those sins by using us.

In Romans 13, St. Paul is directing us to finally and completely “cut off” those works which come from the influence of Darkness. The sense of the verb (aorist) is that it is a one-time act in which we finally once-and-for-all separate ourselves from these sinful works. Like a smoker who decides to quite smoking, there are attempts to quit one after another. But the goal is to make that decisive break with nicotine, so that you can live a life from its effect. Here St. Paul is directing the Christians that they do not become comfortable with the works of darkness. Put an end to doing the works which come from the power of darkness. You are a child of light and thus it is time to “walk properly, as in the day.”

The Scriptural doctrine of original sin teaches that we are born with and carry within ourselves a sinful nature that desires to sin all our life. That is true, but this doctrine is not to be used as a crutch, in which we become comfortable with our sin or excuse it. We wrong think, “I’m a sinner. That’s just the way I am. God likes to forgive and I like to sin, so we get along quite well.” No, no, no.

Though even the Christian has sinful desires, St. Paul says that we are to cast off the works of darkness. Though there are other places in which St. Paul speaks of the

daily confessing of sins and daily trusting in God's forgiveness, here St. Paul is not speaking about the daily sins of weakness, but the deliberate sins which tempt even the Christian. He has just mentioned adultery, murder, stealing, lying, and coveting. Christians are not to live in these sins. Christians are not engage in them. They should not be found among those who are reckoned among those called Christian. In Ephesians 5:3, it says, "But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints;" And then in Ephesians 5:12, it says, "For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret."

I would compare this distinction of sins to that of a married couple. The husband and wife are required by their marriage union to be true to each other. There is a certain level of marital behavior that is completely off-limits. When you are married, you once-and-for-all put away the sins of adultery. This doesn't mean that a person doesn't catch themselves lusting after another. And yes, even that sin must be suppressed and confessed. But certain acts would in fact break the marriage apart. A faithful marital life includes a decisive putting off and a diligence not to return when the temptation arises.

So also St. Paul says, "Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness" and a little later he says, "and make no provision for the flesh." This decisive break involves burning all of your bridges, so that you provide yourself no way back to the works of darkness.

Now let us consider **the second part** of St. Paul exhortation. He says, "Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness **and let us put on the armor of light** (τὰ ὅπλα τοῦ φωτός)." St. Paul doesn't continue with a parallel sentence construction or he would have contrasted the "works of darkness" with "works of light." If he had done that, we might have thought that outward good works were the opposite to works of darkness. This is, in fact, what many think. They think that God doesn't want us to do bad works (sin), but instead wants us to do good works. Thus God appears to be only concerned with us doing good works. St. Paul particularly avoids that contrast. **The Holy Spirit leads St. Paul to say not "works" but "let us put on the armor of light."**

Two things are of importance, one again **this is a one-time decisive act of the Christian.** "Let us put on" and thus always be living with this armor around us. We don't put on the armor to attend church, but then take it off in order to live a life open to sinful advances and temptations. We are to put this armor once-and-for-all so that we are always to be found wearing the decisive dress of a Christian. You are a Christian, so always be dressed as a Christian. You might consider this one-time act to be your baptism into Christ. And thus St. Paul is directing us to finally and always live in our baptism as a child of God.

Second, the word "armor" needs to be explained. On the one hand, the English word "armor," **seems to imply first of all that this is only wearable clothing. That is distinction is not found in the Greek.** In Ephesians 6:10-20, St. Paul says that the Christian is to "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." As St. Paul goes on to describe this panoply of armor it includes, a belt of truth, a breastplate of righteousness, shoes, a shield of faith, helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. **The word "armor" includes a sword** among other things. And thus that term is used in 2 Corinthians 10:4, to refer to "weapons" as in "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds...."

We clothe ourselves with armor, but that is not purely defensive stuff. The whole armor of God is not that we just stand there and take it. We are to do battle as a soldier. **The opposite of the works of darkness is NOT the works of light but being clothed in the weapons of our warfare.** In Romans 6:13, it speaks of the armor or weapons as instruments. It says, “And do not present your members as **instruments** of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as **instruments** of righteousness to God.”

Therefore, St. Paul is exhorting the Roman Christians that they remain firm in the faith. We are beginning a penitential season of Advent. This emphasis on repentance is seen in the return of the purple paraments. If in your diligent study of the Word of God you find that there is still a besetting sin which clings to you.... If you find that you are still allowing that pet sin to stay around in case you wish to play with it again.... If you have not decisively removed that work which comes from the power of the darkness, then “Now it is time to awake out of sleep.” Your view of reality is only a sleepy dream. No Christian continues in his sins. Wake up. Cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light!

What our Lord desires is not just good works, but faith in Christ which by definition does produce good works. Furthermore, where there is faith in Christ it also casts off the works of darkness. Note carefully, St. Paul says, “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.” There will be lusts, but do not make provisions for them. Do not leave a way for them to turn into actionable sin. First of all, God class us to faith in Jesus Christ! We trust not in our own works, but in the atoning work of Jesus Christ. God has promised to save all believe in the promise of forgiveness through His Son.

When St. Paul says, put on the armor of God, he is saying that the Christian engages in battle. Our Triune God has provided the instruments, the whole armor of God, as the means by which we can and do resist the works of darkness. St. Paul is encouraging Christians so that they do not become careless or even negligent in their Christian life. God is giving Christians the means or instrument by which we resist the works of darkness, and stand firm in the Christian faith.

St. Paul exhorts Christians to decisively live in their baptism. If there has been any friendship or concession to the works of darkness, now is the time to “cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armor of light.” I conclude with Ephesians 5:8-12, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹(for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), ¹⁰finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. ¹¹And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. ¹²For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.”