



# St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

The First Sunday in Advent, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2007

✠ **In The Name of The Father and of The Son  
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.** ✠

After chapters 1–11 of his letter to the Romans, Paul begins to unfold for us the kind of life that flows from the good news that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into the world to do for us what the law could not do, namely, take away our guilt and condemnation before God. Chapters 12 and 13 describe the kind of life people will live if they truly embrace Christ as the Savior, Lord, and supreme Treasure of their lives.

And the main mark of this life—this Christ-embracing, gospel-dependent life—is love. Owe no one anything except to love. Let every obligation, every duty, every job be an act of love. If you really love the way Christ loves, you fulfill the whole law. The law is summed up in this: love each other, and love your enemy.

And do this all the more, Paul says, because you know the time in which you live (v. 11). Knowing the time well helps you love people the way you should. What is this time? In brief, it's the time between Christ's first coming and his second coming. We live in overlapping times. The age of forgiveness and righteousness and life and peace and purity and health and light and joy has come with the arrival of Jesus Christ two thousand years ago. But the old age of guilt and sin and death and strife and sickness and darkness and misery still remains. We live in the overlap of these two ages. In Christ we are forgiven and accepted and empowered for holiness and love, but nothing is perfect yet on this earth. We still struggle with sin; we still get sick; we still die.

What then does Paul say about this time in which we live? He says in verse 12a: Look, "the night is far gone; the day is at hand." Don't set your mind on the darkness and how long it has lasted. Set your mind on the truth that the day of Christ's second appearing—

the sunrise—is at hand because the dawn of Christ's first appearing has arrived. The powers of darkness are broken. It is only a matter of time till they give way entirely to the sun of righteousness.

And he says in verse 11b: "Salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed." Your freedom from sinning, your perfect health, your perfect ability to enjoy Christ is getting closer every day. Every groan in this mortal body brings you closer to glory.

And he says in verse 11: "The hour has come for you to wake from sleep." This is not a time for glitzy sleepwalking. Be careful. Everything in the world that does not waken more faith in Christ puts you to sleep. Most of the world thinks it is broad awake when in fact it is sound asleep.

So we turn now to the last part of this paragraph where Paul tells us what to wear and how to live when we wake up from the sleepwalk of unbelief into the light of his presence and power. Start with me at verse 12: "The night is far gone; the day is at hand. *So then* let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light."

He uses the "put on" language again in verse 14: "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ." So we need to ask how the armor of light and the Lord Jesus Christ relate to each other.

I think the answer is given in 1 Thessalonians 5:7-8. Paul is using the very same language and addressing the same issues. He says, "Those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on [and here comes the "armor of light"] the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation." So the armor of light are faith, hope and love.

So we come back to Romans 13:12 and the meaning now becomes: “So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light,” that is, let us put on faith and hope and love. But that’s too vague. Faith in what? Hope in what? Love for what? And now we bring in the parallel of verse 14. Verse 12 says put on the armor of light. Verse 14 says, put on the Lord Jesus Christ. And the link between them now is faith and hope and love. So I take verse 14 to mean at least “Put on faith in Lord Jesus Christ; put on hope in the Lord Jesus Christ; put on love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Putting on Christ each day means wearing him as protection (trusting him) and wearing him as the supplier of all your future needs (hoping in him) and wearing him as your supreme treasure (loving him). And how do you do that? Well, faith comes from hearing, so put on Christ by listening to the word of God about Christ. Hope comes from promises, so put on Christ by remembering the promises of Christ. Love comes by the loveliness of Christ, so put on Christ by calling to mind his beauty.

But there is a signal in this text itself that confirms that we are on the right track in answering this way about how to put on Christ. Verse 14: “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” The word “provision” means literally “forethought,” and the whole sentence would go like this: “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and don’t let any thought in your head that would lead to a sinful desire—not just to the gratification of the sinful desire, but even the desire itself.

And we all know how this works—male and female, young and old. We know that by thinking certain thoughts we can awaken certain sinful desires. Sometimes just trying to resist them reminds you of them. The answer is not mainly by direct resistance—though that is very important. We should indeed say NO! to a rising thought that would lead to sinful desire. But the answer is mainly in putting on the Lord Jesus Christ—that is, calling to mind the words of God that awaken more faith in Jesus, and calling to mind the promises of God that awaken more hope in Jesus, and calling to mind the beauty of Christ that awakens more love to Jesus. This is the confirmation I was talking about.

Putting on the Lord Jesus Christ is not just the *alternative* to making provision for the flesh. It is the *way* we keep from making provision for the flesh. It’s the way we kill these sinful thoughts. It’s the way we keep them from even arising. When you put on the armor of light—daily (or hourly!) fresh faith in

Christ, hope in Christ, love for Christ—it is hard for the works of darkness to cling to you. They are pushed out by the light. If your eye is good (if you see Christ as your treasure) your whole body will be full of light.

Now let me close by reminding you that this whole paragraph is continuing the command of verse 8 to owe no man anything but to love. It’s about how you love other people. It’s about the motivation that comes from knowing that the day of peace and joy and righteousness have dawned and we are people of the day not of the night. And it’s about how love looks in this day of fading darkness and dawning light.

Very specifically, we learn from verse 13 that what God has joined together for our good, love does not tear apart.

When you drink or do drugs so that your mind ceases to be a faithful guide for the behavior of your body, you tear apart mind and body which God has joined together for our good. That is not what love does. When you cultivate sexual stimulation—whether in your mind or in your body—with a person with whom you have no marriage covenant, you tear apart what God has joined together for our good. That is not what love does. When you savor thoughts of one-upmanship or of your own preeminence or control, or when you brood over wrongs done to you, you are preparing for quarrels and jealousy and discord, and you tear communities apart. That is not what love does.

Rather love does the opposite. It keeps the mind clear by putting on Christ and rules the body. Love keeps the covenant of marriage clear as a picture of Christ and his church and rules the body. It keeps the community of Christ clear as a blood-bought blessing and subdues jealousy and quarreling by putting on Christ.

That is what verse 13 means when it says, “Let us walk properly as in the daytime.” So, St. Stephen’s: walk properly. The night is far gone. The day is at hand. Walk properly. Walk in love. Show Timonium this afternoon that sharing the light of Christ is what we love to do.

***To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now and Forever. AMEN.***