

Rev. Robert W. Brown
Look At The Time!

Romans 13:8-14 The Message (MSG)

INTRODUCTION:

The Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans might be better named, *Paul's elaborate theological dissertation to the baby Christians living in Rome*. This persuasive treatise is an elegant and systematic explanation of the core gospel message. *Romans* has long been considered the gold standard of all theological writings and is arguably the most quoted epistle. If you want to know God's plan for the salvation of all humankind, according to Christianity, study *Romans*.

The first 11 chapters unfold a gospel of grace, unconditional love, suffering and sacrifice, which ultimately leads to forgiveness, harmony and restoration. He urges Christians to offer their whole bodies and very lives "as a living sacrifice" back to God.

Today we are reading from chapter 13 where we find practical and tangible ways to put into practice this sacrificial life that leads to transformation and a radically new way of understanding what matters to God.

Behave this way, Paul writes, and you will be on the path toward discerning what is the will of God.



Don't run up debts...except for the huge debt of love you owe each other.

When you love others, you complete what the law has been after all along.

You know the law code— don't sleep with another person's spouse, don't take someone's life, don't take what isn't yours, don't always be wanting what you don't have, and *any other* "don't" you can think of—

It finally adds up to this:

Love other people as well as you do yourself.

You can't go wrong when you love others. When you add up everything in the law code, the sum total is *love*.

But make sure that you don't get so absorbed and exhausted in taking care of all your day-by-day obligations that you lose track of the time and doze off, *oblivious* to God. The night is about over, dawn is about to break. Be up and awake to what God is doing! God is putting the finishing touches on the salvation work he began when we first believed.

We can't afford to waste a minute, must not squander these precious daylight hours in triviality and indulgence, in sleeping around and degeneracy, in bickering and grabbing everything in sight.

Get out of bed and get dressed! Don't loiter and linger, waiting until the very last minute. Dress yourselves in Christ, and be up and about!

The Word of God for the people of God...

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You've probably seen the bumper sticker... *Jesus is coming...look busy!* We place a lot of importance on staying busy, or at least *looking* busy. Living a demanding and hardworking life is celebrated as a noble quality. Energetic diligence, we are told, is the reliable ladder to success and a sturdy stairway to greater status and respect.

The writer of the bumper sticker clearly perceives God as transactional, implying that our busyness actually gains God's approval. So if bumper stickers can be trusted, we are good to go TriCon Church!

Let us pray...

*Spirit of the Living God, fill us with your wisdom and insight this morning. Quiet our busy minds. Wake us up to your radical way of living into a whole and vibrant life. And, may my words and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to you our Rock and our Redeemer. AMEN*

He was trying to enjoy vacation. It was his first in five years and if they hadn't *insisted* he probably would be at his Manhattan office this very moment. Venture Capital had been very lucrative and he knew the game better than most. So here he was, trying to be leisurely, taking a late morning stroll along the pier in a small fishing village in Costa Rica. At this time of day there was only one small boat tied up. A single fisherman was in the boat, resting on padded bench. Next to him were 2 large, freshly caught tuna. The tourist admired the catch and asked how long it took to land the fish. The fisherman replied, "only a little while."

“Why didn’t you stay out longer and catch more fish?” Asked the American.

“Well, I have enough to support my family. It’s all I need.”

The American was perplexed. “But what do you do with the rest of your time?”

The man smiled and said, “I sleep late, fish a little, play with my children, take siesta with my wife, stroll into the village each evening where I sip wine and play guitar with my friends... I have a full and busy life.”

The American took a moment to analyze the situation and decided to advise the poor fisherman – for free!

“I am a Harvard MBA and could really help you out. You should spend more time fishing and with the proceeds, buy a bigger boat, and with the proceeds from the bigger boat you could buy several boats. Eventually, you would have a fleet of fishing boats. Instead of selling your catch to a middleman you would sell directly to the processor, maybe even open your own cannery. You would control the product, processing and distribution. You could leave this small fishing village and move to the city, maybe even America where you would run an expanding and valuable enterprise.”

The fisherman asked, “But how long will this take?”

“If you work hard, I’d say about 15 or 20 years.”

“But what then?”

The American smiled knowingly. “When the time is right,’ he said in a hushed tone, ‘you would announce an IPO and sell your company stock and become very rich, you would make millions.”

“Millions? Then what?” asked the fisherman.

Never in his whole career had the American been asked such a silly question. He took a moment to think. “Then” he finally said with confidence, “you would retire. Move to

a small coastal fishing village where you would sleep late, fish a little, play with your kids, take siesta, stroll to the village, sip wine and play guitar with your amigos!”

How much is enough and how do we know when we have enough?

Let me see a show of hands. How many people here;

- Cook at least 3 full meals a week
- Grocery Shop
- Volunteer at school or church or somewhere else
- Coach a sports team
- Exercise regularly
- Work full or part time
- Are behind on the chores around the house
- Feel sleep deprived most of the time
- Does anybody feel the tension between needing more hours at the office and wanting more leisure time at home?
- Who is aching to spend more time with your kids... your spouse... your friends
- Who’s wondering, at this very minute, how long *this sermon* will last?

It’s clear that most of us want to live a more balanced life and we’re in a hurry to get there. So here is the question; how much is enough? Have you ever asked yourself that? We live in a society and in an economy that depends on you *not* asking it. It’s that feeling of “not enough” that fuels our overstretched, overbooked, frenzied life. “Not enough” is the cornerstone that supports the American idol, named, productivity, (aka) accomplishment or upward mobility. For many of us, our entire identity and self worth is measured solely by accomplishment, comparison and social acceptance. I wrestle with it all the time. There is so much to do, look at the time! And, were suppose to do it all, know it all, and worst of all make it look easy...even fun, all while appearing confident and looking great! No wonder there’s an opioid epidemic. This is poison!

In his letter to the Romans, Paul offers not only a theological underpinning to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus but also a very practical instruction manual and antidote to living an unbalanced, unrealistic life. In the prior chapters, he clearly articulates the stunning reality that you are already totally beloved of God. Grace overflows with unconditional love - for you - and there is nothing you can do or not do to change that. This is a game changer. In God’s eyes, you are already enough.

Is that your perception of God or do you understand God more like Zeus sitting on a cloud, hurling angry and judgmental lightning bolts in between keeping the list of

who's naughty or nice? I honestly think that most of us have been trained by society and the church to think that we must continually prove and improve our worth to God and everyone around us. We willingly buy into this enormous pressure of trying to publically demonstrate our value in the world. But God will have none of it. The Gospel teaches us that God's benchmark is measured purely and solely on our ability to love as God loves.

Paul writes, "When you love others, you complete what the law has been after all along... Love other people as well as you do yourself." We can all agree that this is a great concept, but to bring abstract to reality we first have to accept that God is, for real, actually FOR us – even when we make mistakes, even when we burn the cookies we're suppose to bring to PTA in a half-hour. Even when we wear mismatched socks to work or fall asleep in church! Living in this kind of grace is an incredibly liberating kind of self-acceptance. Living as a validated and approved person frees us from the bondage of perfectionism and struggle *for* acceptance. We no longer seek our identity through another's acceptance. Living in this humble freedom we find that we already have way more than enough and are way more than enough.

Today we begin a new program year, and most of you know that we are going to be very busy identifying our gifts, serving on committees, reaching out to a hurting world, binding up the broken and comforting the afflicted. It's what we do and we should feel good about that. But Paul cautions us to not "get so absorbed and exhausted in taking care of all our day-by-day obligations that we lose track of the time and doze off, *oblivious* to God." He want's to move us from the tyranny of fulfilling obligations to living purely and totally out of love, love of God, love of self and love of the other. This isn't an absolution of responsibility or license to languish in laziness. In fact there is urgency. He says we "can't waste a minute!"

He says to "clothe yourself in Christ." This means that we cover ourselves with the acceptance of grace. Jesus isn't coming, he's here among us and our busyness is no longer an anxious burden of obligation, it's loving response to grace. We don't live for acceptance, we live FROM acceptance.

Thomas Aquinas gives an excellent barometer for measuring our love:

Love feels no burden,  
thinks nothing of trouble,  
attempts what is above its strength,  
pleads no excuse of impossibility  
It is therefore able to undertake all things.

This is the good news of the gospel. We are enough, we have enough, and God's grace has already liberated us to live freely in this loving, sacred community that is TriCon church. We will not do everything during the next 10 months. Anything is possible but not everything! Mistakes will happen and we will allow for grace to follow. We will do only what we can - as we can as our love for one another dictates. There is a lot of work to be done, but we don't *have* to do it - we *get* to do it. We can't go wrong when we love others... Oh! Look at the time...