

Three Imperatives for 2011

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[0:00] Well, Happy New Year.

And I hope that it will be for you, and it can be.! Open your Bibles this morning, and if you wouldn't find Romans chapter 13.

Now, I've been preaching through Romans on Sunday nights, and I'm going to continue that. But I want to have us consider a text out of Romans this morning that's appropriate for the time.

The day. Right here, just a few days, a couple of days, on into the new year. Romans chapter 13, and I want you to look at verse 11, and I'm going to read verses 11 through 14.

Where Paul says, and do this. Knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep.

[1:10] For now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent. The day is at hand.

Therefore, let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day.

Not in revelry and drunkenness. Not in lewdness and lust. Not in strife and envy.

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ. And make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts. Interesting text of Scripture.

You know, for, I guess, some 2,000 years now, people have been attempting to set dates for the second coming of Christ.

[2:09] I'm not sure. I say that. I'm not sure that that was done in the first century. But I am sure not long after the first century, the dates started coming up.

The speculation started going around. About the second coming of Christ. And I am pretty sure that all the dates set up to today have come and gone without event.

Aren't you pretty sure about that? I don't believe Jesus has come back. Well, there are groups of people who think that His return will be invisible, and we won't know it, and so forth.

But I don't think He's come yet, all right? And yet, the dates continue to be set. The Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, have been playing the dating game for decades.

In fact, they started with the date, the year 1914. It said that Jesus was going to come back for His witnesses in the year 1914.

[3:13] Well, that day, that year came and went, and then they set it in 1918, and then they went to 1925, and then to 1975. And I'm not sure if they have reset or made any other predictions since 1975, but He didn't come in 1975, did He?

I don't believe so. There was a man who wrote a book some years ago entitled, 88 Reasons Why Jesus is Coming Back in 1988. And, of course, 1988 came and went, and Jesus did not appear.

A group calling themselves Mission for the Coming Days published a book some years ago, and I have it in my library, entitled, Are You Ready for the Rapture, October 28, 1992?

Well, we're still here, you know. So I'm pretty sure the true church has not been raptured. And I would also tell you, and maybe you remember, that even some evangelical Christian scholars went on record that the year 2000 would be significant in regard to the second coming of Christ.

And, of course, He did not come in the year 2000. And the date setting has been going on since, I guess, sometime after the first century of the church. And the speculation really tends to intensify on the eve of a millennium.

[4:43] Now, we're not on the eve of a millennium, but I'm just pointing this out to you. In fact, in the year 999, historians tell us that those Christians who had a knowledge of the numeric year, and many did not, that many of them, in December of 999, sold their earthly possessions and quit their jobs.

And some of them headed or attempted to head east to meet Jesus at Jerusalem. And buildings went unrepaired, and work went undone, and crops were left unharvested, and criminals were set free from the jails in the year 999 in December.

But the calendar year turned over to A.D. 1000, and nothing happened. A similar flurry of speculations occurred in the year 1999.

And a lot of us here today were alive in that year. We might remember that, all the speculation, all the date setting, or if not dates, at least many were thinking that the year 2000 would be it.

One minister wrote, and I quote, The names of the people and organizations that have called for the return of Christ at the turn of the century is too long to be listed. He wrote in 1999, by the way.

[6:10] And he went on to say, he said, I would say that if there is a day that Christ cannot come back, it must be January 1st, 2000. I mean, to come at an unknown time means an unknown time.

He said, I think January 2nd, 2000, will be the more likely day for him to call his church home right after the big letdown. Maybe that might be a lesson for the date setters.

And when we hear of a date set, maybe we ought to be looking for the day after that. You know. I don't know. And so now, it is the year 2011.

I was telling someone, a couple of people earlier, I've seen science fiction movies that did not go that far. 2011. Can you believe it?

2011. It's incredible. And the predictions, by the way, concerning the second coming of Christ, continue on. Jack Van Impey, for an example, went on record some years ago, speculating that the year 2011 would be the year of the rapture of the church.

[7:20] Some of you are familiar with Jack Van Impey. The rapture, in his projection, he used 51 years as the length of a generation.

And he says, if you add 51 years to 1967, the year Israel recaptured Jerusalem, you get 2018 for the second coming.

And once you subtract the seven-year tribulation, then you have the rapture of the church occurring in 2011. Isn't that good news? Well, what if he's right?

What if he's right? What if he's right? What if 2011 proves to be our last year on planet Earth before the rapture of the church?

What if he is right? Now, I'm not trying to set a date, okay? I'm not trying to suggest to you that this is going to be it. This is the year. I'm not doing that.

[8:25] I would not dare do that. But for the sake of argument, or healthy argument, let's just say Jesus is coming in 2011.

Or maybe I really ought to put it in the form of a question, what if Jesus comes in 2011? Now, I believe that is a worthy consideration.

Though I'm not suggesting we set dates. And I'm certainly not suggesting what some have done at the turn of the millennium, the last couple, that we ought to sell our goods and quit our jobs and, you know, move up to the roof of our homes and put some lawn chairs up there and just kick back and wait till it comes.

I'm not suggesting that at all. But I think it is worthy of consideration that Jesus might be coming this year.

Because I believe that what Paul would have us consider in this text that I read a moment ago. And really, it's a perfect text for this holiday, this season, this time conscious of holidays where, you know, the death, there's the death of the old year and the birth of the new year.

[9:48] And we really are at a time of the year where we are conscious or mindful of the time, as Paul said. We are now more than any other time of the year aware or acknowledging or remembering things in the past and we are perhaps looking to the future with the desire to change some things in our lives.

And I'm not going to mention that awful word, New Year's resolution. I just mentioned. So we're in that kind of mode in our thinking, aren't we?

This time of the year, we just always are. No matter how much you would try to resist that and say that we really ought to be thinking in these terms every day of the year and we don't need a time of the year to make resolutions.

There it is again. It still is something that we all do. It's a time conscious holiday.

New Year's. And so the Apostle Paul, I think, calls upon us to do that. That's why I'm using this text this morning.

[11:01] To be mindful of the time. And in so doing, he gives us some instructions here. They're not so much put in the form of commands, though he says, let's do this.

Do this. So that's enough for me. These are maybe a little bit stronger than just instructions or admonitions. These, I think, we ought to take as imperatives.

There are three of them here that I would like to point out. I want to give us this morning three imperatives for the year 2011.

Alright? You can call them resolutions if you'd like to. I'm going to call them biblical commands.

Alright? For the year 2011. Now here is the first one. Imperative number one.

Right from the text. Wake up. That's the imperative. Wake up.

[12:05] Isn't that what he said there in verse 11? Look at it again in case you've forgotten. My introduction may have been too long and it's already out of your mind. Verse 11. And do this knowing the time that now it is high time to awake out of sleep.

That means wake up. Wake out of sleep for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. So, wake up.

It's high time. Now, the word time here in our text does not mean time on the clock. Although I forgot mine this morning. Aren't you glad?

And somebody broke my clock down here so I don't have any idea what the time is. Alright. Okay, thank you. What we need is somebody down here with a little card set of cards, you know, 15 minutes, 10 minutes, 5 minutes, 1 minute, time to stop.

But anyway, the word time here in the text is not referring to time on the clock or a certain time of the day. The word *chronos* is the word that refers to that aspect of time.

[13:23] But the word here in the text is not *chronos*. Paul used another word for time and it's *kairos*. *Kairos* and it does not mean time on the clock.

It means a season of time or an age. And that's really how we ought to understand that. It's an age in which we live. An age, a season.

And so what is Paul saying? Well, first we need to determine what this age or season is of which Paul speaks. And he tells us in verse 11. He said, our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.

That's what he's talking about when he talks about the age, the season. Now, it's salvation here in the future tense. You understand that, don't you? That salvation, our salvation has three tenses. There is salvation past, present, and future and every born again believer can say I have been saved. That's justification.

[14:29] That's a point in time, an event that took place by the grace of God. I have been saved. That's in the past. And we can all say as born again believers that I am being saved.

Do you understand this about salvation? Three tenses of salvation. I am being saved. That's sanctification. That's the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in your life, conforming us, transforming us, making us more like Jesus.

And we can all say that. I have been saved. I am being saved. And every born again believer can say I will be saved. That's glorification.

salvation. Now, if you're a born again believer here this morning, then the first two tenses that I mentioned there, the first two tenses of salvation are already a reality to you.

That is, you have been saved and you are being saved, but you and I have yet to realize the final work of salvation, which is glorification.

[15:31] And that's glorious. And that tense of salvation, that future tense of salvation will come at the resurrection of the body.

It will come at the coming of Christ for his bride, the church. And so what is Paul saying here? It's really very clear. He is saying that we are living in a certain age in God's redemptive history.

It is the age of grace. it is the age of the church. And that age is what Paul is saying. That age is coming to an end one day.

It is. It's not going to go on forever. It's coming to an end and it will end with an event. It will end with using Paul's words.

It will end with our salvation, our salvation in its future tense, in its fullest or salvation in its fullest sense that we have yet to experience.

[16:39] So this age, this season, this time in God's redemptive history is coming, is drawing to an end and it will end with our salvation.

Our salvation. Actually, I think we ought to think of it in these terms. our salvation with a capital S is coming. Do you understand what I mean?

That is, Jesus is coming. It will end when he comes. And that time, Paul says, is closer now than ever before. Now, we can all agree on that, can't we?

Don't have to set a date and say he's going to come this year, next year. And we can just simply admit that it's closer now than ever before. Right? I mean, you're reasonable, intelligent people. Amen. Paul was writing to first century believers. And you and I here today, if you're a born again believer, you and I today are 21st century believers.

[17 : 54] And so, if the Lord's second coming was nearer for those first century believers than when they first believed, then I think you can admit it must be closer, even closer for us today.

Some 2,000 years closer today. Right? And that is precisely Paul's point. That's what we need to get from this text.

And the point is, time is running out. And every word here in the text shouts urgency. Can you see it?

Nearly every phrase conveys the idea of urgency. Look at it. He said, now it is what? High time to wake up.

That sounds pretty urgent to me. He says, our salvation is what? Nearer. He said, the night is far spent.

[18 : 59] The day is what? At hand. The urgency of that. And by the way, the word night here in the text is a reference to the age in which we live right now.

We're living in the night. So to speak. We live in the night. It's the age of man's rejection. Certainly it's the age of grace, the age of the gospel, the opportunity to respond in faith to the good news of Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior.

Certainly it is that age, but it is more descriptive of night. Our night is more descriptive of it. It's the age of night, man's rejection of the gospel.

The word day, we don't live in yet. The word day here in the text is a reference to the coming age. The coming of Christ.

And it's the age of God's intervention. And one day that's coming. You know, there are many signs that point to the end of the age, aren't there? I mean, let's just admit it, there are some signs, clearly.

[20 : 10] And there are signs all around us that suggest that Jesus that is coming is soon. I think we could all agree with it, though we don't really know.

We don't even know what soon is to God. For one thing. And yet all the signs seem to point to it being soon. I mean, we're living also in an age, a time when it seems that all prophetic truth is kind of coming to fruition, coming to a head.

But let me remind you that as Christians, we're not to be looking for signs. Though they are there, we can read the Bible and we can see what God has said and the prophets have said and we can see that unfolding and those prophecies being fulfilled.

And yet, we're not to be looking for signs. We leave that to the wicked and adulterous generation. we're to be listening for a shout. We're to be looking for King Jesus to come.

That's what we're to be doing. And yet, I would quickly say that the events around us do help us in a sense to, as Paul said in verse 11, to know something.

[21 : 32] They help us know. Know what? The time. To understand the time. Things were in place and things were occurring and Scripture was being revealed to Paul's first audience and they helped them to know something.

The time. But to know what about it? I believe to know the urgency of it. The urgency of the time. And so, what is Paul telling us to do?

Wake up. I'm not suggesting you're asleep. This is what Paul's telling us to do. Wake up! And obviously the implication here is that many of God's people are asleep.

Isn't that the implication? If Paul has to write in a letter to a group of people there, these Roman believers, if he has to write a letter, it's high time that you wake up, then it must be that some were asleep.

Right? And there are some today asleep. The encyclopedia defines sleep as a state of inactivity with the loss of consciousness and a decrease in responsiveness to events taking place.

[22:57] That's an interesting definition because that seems to apply to a lot of people, doesn't it? I mean, just kind of take that definition and plug that in.

A state of inactivity. That is, inactive when it comes to the cause of Christ. Many of God's believers are inactive.

Or loss of consciousness. That is, unconscious when it comes to deeper spiritual things. Many of God's people are asleep.

Or, the latter part of the definition, decrease in responsiveness. Unresponsive when it comes to the urgency of our times. Paul said something similar to the Ephesian believers.

I'll not have you turn to it, but Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 14, he says to the Ephesian believers, awake, you who sleep.

[24:07] Arise from the dead and Christ will give you light. See then that you walk circumspectly. That is, be careful how you live your life. Not as fools.

Don't live your life as fools, but as wise. And then this phrase, redeeming the time. Or, making the most of every opportunity you have.

And why? Well, Paul says because the days are evil. That is, we live in the night, as he said here in Romans. So, that is the first imperative for our new year.

Wake up. But there is a second one. And it too is right here in the text. And the second one is cast off. Pretty clear, isn't it?

This is very simple. Wake up. Cast off. Verse 12, look at it. He said the night is far spent.

[25:15] That means the age of grace is drawing to a close. The day is at hand. That means Jesus is coming at any moment. Closer now than ever before.

Therefore. See, this is so simple. You don't need a commentary. You certainly don't need this knucklehead.

You can just look at the scripture and it just unfolds so clearly. The night is far spent. The day is at hand. Therefore. Therefore, let us cast off the works of darkness.

Because even believers can live and be active in works of darkness.

He's speaking to believers. And he says to us not only to wake up, but cast off the works of darkness. I mean, listen, since you understand the time is short, that the coming of your salvation with a big S, the coming of Christ is now nearer than ever before.

[26:30] Therefore, cast off the works of darkness. holiness. That's what he's saying. You know, for a believer, and Paul again is talking to believers, there is a holiness that believers have right now.

There is a holiness. It's a position. It is a standing that we have before God as we stand in Christ. And we did not earn it.

We did not work for it. We did not take certain steps to deserve it. We were granted that holy standing in Christ when we were saved.

And our holiness is not so much in what we do, not in this sense, but in who we are. Right? Who we are by the grace of God.

And so when you and I were saved, God gave us a new standing. He placed us in Christ. He placed us in His holiness. Another way of putting it would be to say, we have been made righteous.

[27:33] That's how the Bible puts it. We have been made that way. That's our new standing before God. I love Romans chapter 4, verse 6. God imputes righteousness apart from works.

That is, He deposits, He credits your account with His righteousness. That's what He's done. And He says, Paul goes on to say, in Romans 4, 6, blessed are those whose lawless deeds, that is, their iniquities, are forgiven and whose sins are covered.

And so there is a holiness that we have right now as born again believers. We have that right now.

But there is a holiness that we must pursue. There is also a holiness we must pursue.

there is a righteousness that we have before God that was not earned, it was not worked for, and yet there is a righteousness that we must strive for.

You need to understand that from Scripture. Both are there. And it is that of which Paul refers. Cast off works of darkness.

[28:48] And then Paul lists six categories of sin. In fact, he really lists three pairs, couplets. But there are six, six of them.

And it is interesting that four of the six are connected to sexual impurity. Isn't that interesting? Four of the six. By far the majority of these sins that Paul is saying, giving as an example, that we should

cast off, pertain in some degree or another, some way or another, to immoral sin, sexual sin.

That's interesting. Look at them there in verse 13. Let us walk properly as in the day, not, and then he lists them, in revelry and darkness, drunkenness rather, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.

That's why I say there are three couplets here. There are six. Six works of darkness. That Paul says that we're to cast off, cast off, all six of them.

So, he says, first of all, cast off revelry. What is that? Revelry. Well, interestingly, the word Paul used here means sexual orgies.

[30 : 12] Hmm. Yuck. That's what the word means. But it's used here to refer to any activity, even conversation, any activity, any conversation that might arouse impure, unclean, sexual passions in us.

That's what he's saying when he says, cast off revelry. We're to get rid of any activity in our lives that would stir up sexual passions in us that are immoral, unclean.

We're to cast off any, even any conversation. And we might even add to that any imagination that would serve to stir up sexual impurity in our lives.

God help us. We are surrounded by the allurements of sexual impurity. Surrounded by it.

Everywhere we turn, it is almost impossible to escape.

And if any of that activity is in your life, then, Paul says, cast it off. Cast it off. And then, he mentions drunkenness.

[31 : 37] Now, we think we know what that is, and we do. Remember, this is paired with revelry.

And so, the drunkenness refers to intoxication that is associated with revelry, sexual impurity.

And so, it is speaking to the habitual using of any substance that would serve to dull the senses and thus weaken or even destroy God's given inhibitions in our lives.

We cast that off. Whatever it may be. And then, he says, cast off lewdness. Now, that word has kind of taken on a meaning in recent years that typically just applies to the way a woman dresses.

But it's much more serious than that. The word lewdness here speaks to sexual promiscuity. That is, committing immoral acts of any kind with someone of the opposite sex outside the bounds of marriage.

he says, cast that off. And then, Paul says, cast off lust. Lust. King James uses the word wantonness.

[33 : 06] And that is so antiquated, we have no idea what that is. And lust has taken on so many different meanings that we don't really know what that is. In today's language, it would be sensuality.

Sensuality. And it is speaking to the setting of our eyes on anything that would cause us to fantasize about immoral things.

This is, Paul's getting into hardcore things. You see how the two go together. Revelry is the act and drunkenness is what leads us to that act.

Lewdness is the act and lust is what leads us to the act. And we're to cast these things off. You know, we're not to feed our minds with unclean thoughts and unclean images and unclean desires that have the potential to lead us to unclean acts.

That's the idea. Now, it's clear to anyone who's honest that most Americans live for these things. I mean, our culture is, I don't know if saturated is a strong enough word, so utterly polluted with these things that even the church is kind of accepting.

[34 : 47] In fact, research shows that there is very little measurable difference statistically when it comes to these things between non-believers and professing Christians. Now, let's not leave out the other two sins mentioned by Paul, strife and envy.

Do you see those there? We don't need a lot of explanation there, but to me they almost seem out of place, don't they, among all these sexual sins.

But strife and envy. But, but you know, possibly the one thing that plagues the work of Christ, the work of the church more than anything else, the one thing that is most responsible for hindering and in some cases utterly short-circuiting the kingdom work of the local church is strife and envy.

Or to use some other more descriptive words, contention, quarreling, self-centeredness, gossip, jealousy among God's people.

And so the imperative for 2011, if you understand the season, and Paul is saying, you do know it, you do understand it, and I think we do too, if you understand the season, if you understand that

Christ's coming is closer now than ever before, then wake up and cast off anything in your lifestyle that is even remotely linked to the works of darkness.

[36 : 35] Now, the good news is in Philippians 3.20, Paul encourages us to eagerly wait or to literally look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We're to eagerly wait for Him to come and look for Him to come. And he says, who will transform our lowly bodies that it may be conformed to His glorious body according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

And that's glorious, isn't it? And that's what we have to look forward to. That's in our future. But until then, we must daily deny the sins of the flesh.

We must not give them any opportunity of expression or we're to cast them off. Cast them off. So, three imperatives for the year 2011.

2011 may be our last year on planet earth, at least planet earth as we now know it. Prior to the rapture of the church, it may be the last year. I don't know. You don't either.

[37 : 40] Jesus may come this year. He may come today. So, wake up and cast off any works of darkness. And then finally, and this is right there in the text too, what do you imagine it is?

Put on. Put on. Wake up, cast off, put on. If, let's just be reasonable, if we are to cast off the works of darkness, then we must put on something in its place.

And not just one time, on, continually, daily, putting on, and keep putting on something. And Paul tells us what it is in verse 14.

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, before we really get into that, I want you to notice something Paul says at the beginning of verse 13.

Would you look at that again? He said, let us walk properly as in the day. Properly. What does that mean? Well, I've already said that the word day refers to the day of the Lord, that is the day of His second coming.

[39 : 01] And I think we all know that the word walk, the word walk here refers to the way we live our lives. But the word properly means appropriately.

Appropriately. In what way? When we put all that together, what is Paul saying to us? He's saying that we, are to live our lives in such a way that everything we do, everything you do, everything I do in life is consistent with your belief that Jesus may be coming at any moment.

moment. In the context of the passage, that's what he's saying. Now, it ought to be consistent in a lot of other ways too, but in this context, he's saying that we ought to live our lives in a way that's consistent with our rock-ribbed solid belief that He may be coming at any moment.

Let me just ask you, would you behave differently if you knew for certain Jesus was coming today? You say, well, no, I would live godly like every day.

Now, let me ask you again. Would you behave differently today? if you knew for sure that Jesus was coming today?

[40 : 36] Of course we would. We all would. Listen, we're children of the day. That's who we are. And we are God's children who are living, really living in the constant possibility that our Savior may be coming for us at any moment.

That today, may be the day of the Lord. Has Christ come yet? No, not yet He hasn't. Will He be coming this year? I don't know.

Is today the day of His return? I don't know. But we're to live as though it were. That's the challenge. We're to conduct our lives today with the idea that before the day is over, we shall see Jesus. And by the way, did you know that the Bible links holy living with our hope of the second coming of Christ?

In Titus chapter 2, let me read this real quickly. Titus chapter 2 and verse 11, listen to this. For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lust, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for, we're to do all that, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

[42 : 16] That's exactly what Paul says here too. We're to live righteously, do all these things, and at the same time looking for, constantly looking for the return, the appearing of our Lord and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yeah, we would behave differently if we knew that Jesus was coming today. But now, again, it's not enough just to cast off the works of darkness.

Paul says we're to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. We're to put Jesus on. It's not hard to understand what Paul means here.

The imagery of taking off and putting on clothing is very vivid. And simply put, we are to clothe ourselves with all Jesus is.

That's what he means. Clothe ourselves in what Jesus, all Jesus is. We should want to be more like Jesus.

[43 : 22] so much so that we take deliberate steps to be more and more like Jesus. Deliberate steps. Figuratively, it's like clothing, clothing, clothing ourselves with Jesus to think more and more like he thinks.

To love more and more like he loves. To obey the Father more and more like Jesus always obeyed the Father. To be just like Jesus. To be just like him. so that if he were to come today, we would not be ashamed to stand before him.

These are the imperatives. Wake up. Wake up, church. Jesus may be coming today. Cast off any works of darkness principles and put on Jesus.

Put him on. Put him on. Clothe yourselves in him every day. Thank you.