

An Exhortation to Good Works

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Romans 13:11–14 · Church Postil

1. This epistle lesson treats not of faith, but of its fruits, or works. It teaches how a Christian should conduct himself outwardly in his relations to other men upon earth. But how we should walk in the Spirit before God, comes under the head of faith. Of faith Paul treats comprehensively and in apostolic manner in the chapters preceding this text. A close consideration of our passage shows it to be not didactic; rather it is meant to incite, to exhort, urge and arouse souls already aware of their duty. Paul in Romans 12, 78 devotes the office of the ministry to two things, doctrine and exhortation. The doctrinal part consists in preaching truths not generally known; in instructing and enlightening the people. Exhortation is inciting and urging to duties already well understood. Necessarily both obligations claim the attention of the minister, and hence Paul takes up both.
2. For the sake of effect and emphasis the apostle in his admonition employs pleasing figures and makes an eloquent appeal. He introduces certain words – "Armor," "work," "sleep," "awake," "darkness," "light," "day," "night" – which are purely figurative, intended to convey other than a literal and native meaning. He has no reference here to the things they ordinarily stand for. The words are employed as similes, to help us grasp the spiritual thought. The meaning is: Since for sake of temporal gain men rise from sleep, put aside the things of darkness and take up the day's work when night has given place to morning, how much greater the necessity for us to awake from our spiritual sleep, to cast off the things of darkness and enter upon the works of light, since our night has passed and our day breaks.
3. "Sleep" here stands for the works of wickedness and unbelief. For sleep is properly incident to the night time; and then, too, the explanation is given in the added words: "Let us cast off the works of darkness." Similarly in the thought of awakening and rising are suggested the works of faith and piety. Rising from sleep is naturally an event of the morning. Relative to the same conception are Paul's words in First Thessalonians 5, 4-10:

"But ye, brethren, are not in darkness . . . ye are all sons of light, and sons of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep, as do the rest, but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that are drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, since we are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation. For God appointed us not unto wrath, but unto the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him."

4. Paul, of course, is here not enjoining against physical sleep. His contrasting figures of sleep and wakefulness are used as illustrations of spiritual lethargy and activity – the godly and the ungodly life. In short, his conception here of rising out of sleep is the same as that expressed in his declaration (Tit 2, 11-13): "For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." That which in the passage just quoted is called "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts," is here in our text described as a rising from sleep; and the "sober, righteous, godly life" is the waking and the putting on the armor of light; while the appearing of grace is the day and the light, as we shall hear.
5. Now, note the analogy between natural and spiritual sleep. The sleeper sees nothing about him; he is not sensitive to any of earth's realities. In the midst of them he lies as one dead, useless; as without power or purpose. Though having life in himself he is practically dead to all outside. Moreover, his mind is occupied, not with realities, but with dreams, wherein he beholds mere images; vain forms, of the real; and he is foolish enough to think them true. But when he wakes, these illusions or dreams vanish. Then he begins to occupy himself with realities; phantoms are discarded.
6. So it is in the spiritual life. The ungodly individual sleeps. He is in a sense dead in the sight of God. He does not recognize – is not sensitive to – the real spiritual blessings extended him through the Gospel; he regards them as valueless. For these blessings are only to be recognized by the believing heart; they are concealed from the natural man. The ungodly individual is occupied with temporal, transitory things, such as luxury and honor, which are to eternal life and joy as dream images are to flesh-and-blood creatures. When the unbeliever awakes to faith, the transitory things of earth will pass from his

contemplation, and their futility will appear. In relation to this subject Psalm 76, 5, reads: "The stouthearted are made a spoil, they have slept their sleep; and none of the men of might have found their hands." And Psalm 73, 20: "As a dream when one awaketh, so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou wilt despise their image." Also Isaiah 29, 8: "And it shall be as when a hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite: so shall the multitude of all the nations be, that fight against mount Zion." But is it not showing altogether too much contempt for worldly power, wealth, pleasure and honor to compare them to dreams – to dream images? Who has courage to declare kings and princes, wealth, pleasure and

power but creations of a dream, in the face of the mad rage of earth after such things? The reason for such conduct is failure to rise from sleep and by faith behold the light.

"For now is salvation nearer to us than when we first believed."

7. What do these words imply? Did we believe before, or have we now ceased to believe? Right here we must know that, as Paul in Romans 1, 2-3 says, God through his prophets promised in the holy Scriptures the Gospel of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom all the world was to be saved. The word to Abraham reads: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Gen 22, 18. The blessing here promised to the patriarch, in his seed, is simply that grace and salvation in Christ which the Gospel presents to the whole world, as Paul declares in the fourth chapter of Romans and the fourth of Galatians. For Christ is the seed of Abraham, his own flesh and blood, and in Christ all believing inquirers will be blessed.
8. This promise to the patriarch was later more minutely set forth and more widely circulated by the prophets. All of them wrote of the advent of Christ, and his grace and Gospel, as Peter in Acts 3, 18-24 says: The divine promise was believed by the saints prior to the birth of Christ; thus, through the coming Messiah they were preserved and saved by faith. Christ himself (Luk 16, 22) pictures the promise under the figure of Abraham's bosom, into which all saints, from the time of Abraham to Christ's time, were gathered. Thus is explained Paul's declaration, "Now is salvation nearer to us than when we first believed." He means practically: "The promise of God to Abraham is not a thing for future fulfilment; it is already fulfilled. Christ is come. The Gospel has been revealed and the blessing distributed throughout the world. All that we waited for in the promise,

believing, is here." The sentence has reference to the spiritual day Paul later speaks of – the rising light of the Gospel; as we shall hear.

9. But faith is not abolished in the fulfilment of the promise; rather it is established. As they of former time believed in the future fulfilment, we believe now in the completed fulfilment. Faith, in the two instances, is essentially the same, but one belief succeeds the other as fulfilment succeeds promise. For in both cases faith is based on the seed of Abraham; that is, on Christ. In one instance it precedes his advent and in the other follows. He who would now, like the Jews, believe in a Christ yet to come, as if the promise were still unfulfilled, would be condemned. For he would make God a liar in holding that his word is unredeemed, contrary to fact. Were the promise not fulfilled, our salvation would still be far off; we would have to wait its future accomplishment.

10. Having in mind faith under these two conditions, Paul asserts in Romans 1, 17: "In the Gospel is revealed a righteousness of God from faith unto faith." What is meant by the phrase "from faith unto faith"? Simply that we must now believe not only in the promise but in its past fulfilment. For though the faith of the fathers is one with our faith, they trusting in a Christ to come and we in a Christ revealed, yet the Gospel leads from

the former faith to the latter. It is now necessary to believe not only the promise, but also its fulfilment. Abraham and the ancients were not called upon to believe in accomplished fulfilment, though they had the same Christ with us. There is one faith, one spirit, one Christ, one community of saints; but they preceded, while we come after, Christ.

11. Thus we – the fathers and ourselves – have had and still have a common faith in the one Christ, but under different conditions. Because of this common faith in the Messiah, we speak of their act of faith as our own, notwithstanding we were not alive in their day. And similarly, when they make mention of hearing, seeing and believing Christ, the reference is to ourselves, in whose day they live not. David says (Ps 8, 3): "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers," that is, the apostles. Yet David did not live to see their day. And (Ps 9, 2): "I will be glad and exult in thee; I will sing praise to thy name, O Thou Most High." And there are many similar passages where one individual speaks in the person of another in consequence of a common faith whereby believers unite in Christ as one body.

12. Paul's statement "Now is salvation nearer to us than when we first believed" cannot be understood to refer to nearness of possession. For the fathers had the same faith and the same Christ with us, and Christ was equally near to them. Hebrews 13, 8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea and for ever." That is, Christ exists from the beginning of the world to all time, and through him and in him all are preserved. To him of strongest faith Christ is nearest; and from him who least believes, is salvation farthest, so far as personal possession of it goes. Paul's reference here is to nearness of the revelation of salvation. When Christ came the promise was fulfilled. The Gospel was revealed to the world. Through Christ's coming it was publicly preached to all men. In recognition of these things, the apostle says: "Salvation is nearer to us" than when unrevealed and unfulfilled in the promise. In Titus 2, 11, it is said: "For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation." In other words, God's grace is revealed and publicly proclaimed; though the saints who lived prior to its manifestation nevertheless possessed it.

13. So the Scriptures teach the coming of Christ, notwithstanding he was already present to the fathers. However, he was not publicly proclaimed to mankind until after his resurrection from the dead. It is of this coming in the Gospel the Scriptures for the most part teach. Incident to this revelation he came in human form. The taking upon himself of humanity would have profited no one had it not meant the proclamation of the Gospel. The Gospel was to present him to the whole world, revealing the fact that he became man for the sake of imparting the blessing to all who, accepting the Gospel, should believe in him. Paul tells us (Rom 1, 2) the Gospel was promised of God; from which we may infer God placed more emphasis upon the Gospel, the public revelation of Christ through the Word, than upon his physical birth, his advent in human form. God's purpose was concerning the Gospel and our faith, and he permitted his Son to assume humanity for the

sake of making possible the preaching of the Gospel of Christ; that through the revealed Word salvation in Christ might be brought near- might come – to all the world.

14. Some have presented four different forms of Christ's advent, adapted to the four Sundays in Advent. But the most vital form of his coming, that upon which all efficacy depends, the coming to which Paul here refers, they have failed to recognize. They know not what constitutes the Gospel, nor for what purpose it was given. Despite their much talk about

the advent of Christ, they thrust him from us farther than heaven is from earth. How can Christ profit us unless he be embraced by faith? But how can he be embraced by faith where the Gospel is not preached?

THE DAY OF GRACE.

"The night is far spent, and the day is at hand."

15. This is equivalent to saying "salvation is near to us." By the word "day" Paul means the Gospel; the Gospel is like day in that it enlightens the heart or soul. Now, day having broken, salvation is near to us. In other words, Christ and his grace, promised to Abraham, are now revealed; they are preached in all the world, enlightening mankind, awakening us from sleep and making manifest the true, eternal blessings, that we may occupy ourselves with the Gospel of Christ and walk honorably in the day. By the word "night" we are to understand all doctrines apart from the Gospel. For there is no other saving doctrine; all else is night and darkness.
16. Notice carefully Paul's words. He designates the most beautiful and vivifying time of the day—the delightful, joyous dawn, the hour of sunrise. Then the night has passed and the day broken. In response to the morning dawn, birds sing, beasts arouse themselves and all humanity arises. At daybreak, when the sky is red in the east, the world is apparently new and all things reanimated, In many places in the Scriptures, the comforting, vivifying preaching of the Gospel is compared to the morning dawn, to the rising of the sun; sometimes the figure is implied and sometimes plainly expressed, as here where Paul styles the Gospel the breaking day. Again, Psalm 110, 3: "Thy people offer themselves willingly in the day of thy power, in holy array: out of the womb of the morning thou hast the dew of thy youth." Here the Gospel is plainly denominated the womb of the morning, the day of Christ's power, wherein, as the dew is born of the morning, we are conceived and born children of Christ; and by no work of man, but from heaven and through the Holy Spirit's grace.
17. This Gospel day is produced by the glorious Sun Jesus Christ. Hence Malachi calls him the Sun of Righteousness, saying, "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in its wings." Mal. 4, 2. All believers in Christ receive the light of his grace, and righteousness, and shall rejoice in the shelter of his wings. Again in Psalm 118, 24, we read: "This is the day which Jehovah hath made; we will

rejoice and be glad in it." The meaning is: The natural sun makes the natural day, but the Lord himself is the author of the spiritual day. Christ is the Sun, the source of the Gospel day. From him the Gospel brightness shines throughout the world. John 9, 5 reads: "I am the light of the world."

18. Psalm 19, 1 beautifully describes Christ the Sun, and the Gospel day: "The heavens declare the glory of God." As the natural heavens bring the sun and the day, and the sun is in the heavens, so the apostles in their preaching possess and bring to us the real Sun, Christ. The Psalm continues: "In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strongman to run his course. His going forth is from the end of the heavens, and his circuit unto the ends of it; and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof." It all refers to the beautiful daybreak of the Gospel. Scripture sublimely exalts the Gospel day, for it is the source of life, joy, pleasure and energy, and brings all good. Hence the name "Gospel" - joyful news.
19. Who can enumerate the things revealed to us by this day – by the Gospel? It teaches us everything – the nature of God, of ourselves, and what has been and is to be in regard to heaven, hell and earth, to angels and devils. It enables us to know how to conduct ourselves in relation to these – whence we are and whither we go. But, being deceived by the devil, we forsake the light of day and seek to find truth among philosophers and heathen totally ignorant of such matters. In permitting ourselves to be blinded by human doctrines, we return to the night. Whatsoever is not the Gospel day surely cannot be light. Otherwise Paul, and in fact all Scripture, would not urge that day upon us and pronounce everything else night.
20. Our disposition to run counter to the perfectly plain teachings of Scripture and seek inferior light, when the Lord declares himself the Light and Sun of the world, must result from our having incurred the displeasure of Providence. Had we no other evidence that the high schools of the Pope are the devil's abominable fostering-places of harlots and knaves, the fact is amply plain in the way they shamelessly introduce and extol Aristotle, the inferior light, exercising themselves in him more than in Christ; rather they exercise themselves wholly in Aristotle and not at all in Christ.

"Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light."

21. As Christ is the Sun and the Gospel is the day, so faith is the light, or the seeing and watching on that day. We are not profited by the shining of the sun, and the day it produces, if our eyes fail to perceive its light. Similarly, though the Gospel is revealed, and proclaims Christ to the world, it enlightens none but those who receive it, who have risen from sleep through the agency of the light of faith. They who sleep are not affected by the sun and the day; they receive no light therefrom, and see as little as if there were neither sun nor day. It is to our day Paul refers when he says: "Dear brethren, knowing the season, that already it is time for you to awake out of sleep, etc." Though the hour is one of spiritual opportunity, it has been revealed in secular time, and is daily being revealed. In the light of our spiritual knowledge we are to rise from sleep and lay aside the works of darkness. Thus it is plain Paul is not addressing unbelievers. As before said, he is not here teaching the doctrine of faith, but its works and fruits. He tells the Romans they know the time is at hand, that the night is past and the day has broken.

22. Do you ask, Why this passage to believers? As already stated, preaching is twofold in character: it may teach or it may incite and exhort. No one ever gets to the point of knowledge where it is not necessary to admonish him – continually to urge him – to new reflections upon what he already knows; for there is danger of his untiring enemies the devil, the world and the flesh – wearying him and causing him to become negligent, and ultimately lulling him to sleep. Peter says (1 Pet 5, 8): "Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." In consequence of this fact, he says: "Be sober, be watchful." Similarly Paul's thought here is that since the devil, the world and the flesh cease not to assail us, there should be continuous exhorting and impelling to vigilance and activity. Hence the Holy Spirit is called the Paraclete, the Comforter or Helper, who incites and urges to good.

23. Hence Paul's appropriate choice of words. Not the works of darkness but the works of light he terms "armor." And why "armor" rather than "works"? Doubtless to teach that only at the cost of conflicts, pain, labor and danger will the truly watchful and godly life be maintained; for these three powerful enemies, the devil, the world and the flesh, unceasingly oppose us day and night. Hence Job (ch 7, 1) regards the life of man on earth as a life of trial and warfare.

Now, it is no easy thing to stand always in battle array during the whole of life. Good trumpets and bugles are necessary preaching and exhortation of the sort to enable us valiantly to

maintain our position in battle. Good works are armor: evil works are not; unless, indeed, we submit and give them control over us. Then they likewise become armor. Paul says, "Neither present your members unto sin as instruments of unrighteousness" (Rom 6, 13), meaning: Let not the works of darkness get such control of you as to render your members weapons of unrighteousness.

24. Now, as already made plain, the word "light" here carries the thought of "faith." The light of faith, in the Gospel day, shines from Christ the Sun into our hearts. The armor of light, then, is simply the works of faith. On the other hand, "darkness" is unbelief; it reigns in the absence of the Gospel and of Christ, through the instrumentality of the doctrines of men-of human reason-instigated by the devil. The "works of darkness" are, therefore, the "works of unbelief." As Christ is Lord and Ruler in the realm of that illuminating faith, so, as Paul says (Eph 6, 12), the devil is ruler of this darkness; that is, over unbelievers. For he says again (2 Cor 4, 3-4): "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled in them that perish: in whom the god of this world [that is, the devil] hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ . . . should not dawn upon them." The character of the two kinds of works, however, will be discussed later.

"Let us walk, becomingly (honestly), as in the day."

25. Works of darkness are not wrought in the day. Fear of being shamed before men makes one conduct himself honorably. The proverbial expression "shameless night" is a true one. Works we are ashamed to perform in the day are wrought in the night. The day, being shamefaced, constrains us to walk honorably. A Christian should so live that he need never be ashamed of the character of his works, though they be revealed to all the world. He whose life and conduct are such as to make him unwilling his deeds should be manifest to everyone, certainly does not live in a Christian manner. In this connection Christ says: "For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, lest his works should be reproved. But he that doeth the truth cometh to the light, that his works may be made manifest, that they have been wrought in God, 1 Jn 3, 20-21.

26. So you see the urgent necessity for inciting and exhorting to be vigilant and to put on the armor of light. How many Christians now could endure the revelation of all their works to the light of day? What kind of Christian life do we hypocrites lead if we cannot endure the exposure of our conduct before men, when it is now exposed to God, his

angels and creatures, and on the last day shall be revealed to all? A Christian ought to live as he would be found in the last day before all men. "Walk as children of light, for the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth." Eph 5, 9. "Take thought for things honorable," not only in the sight of God, but also "in the sight of all men." Rom 12, 17. "For our glorying is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom . . . we behaved ourselves in the world." 2 Cor 1, 12.

27. But such a life certainly cannot be maintained in the absence of faith, when faith itself – vigilant, active, valiant faith – has enough to do to remain constant, sleepless and unwearied. Essential as it is that doctrine be preached to the illiterate, it is just as essential to exhort the learned not to fall from their incipient right living, under the assaults of raging flesh, subtle world and treacherous devil.

"Not in revelling and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and jealousy."

28. Here Paul enumerates certain works of darkness. In the beginning of the discourse he alludes to one as "sleep." In First Thessalonians 5, 6, it is written: "Let us not sleep, as do the rest, but let us watch and be sober." Not that the apostle warns against physical sleep; he means spiritual sleep – unbelief, productive of the works of darkness. Yet physical sleep may likewise be an evil work when indulged in from lust and revelling, through indolence and excessive inebriety, to the obstruction of light and the weakening of the armor of light. These six works of darkness include all others, such as are enumerated in Galatians 5, 19-21, and Colossians 3, 5 and 8. We will divide them into two general classes, the right hand class and the left hand class. Upon the right are arrayed these four – revelling, drunkenness, chambering and wantonness; on the left, strife and jealousy. For scripturally, the left side signifies adversity and its attendant evils – wrath, jealousy, and so on. The right side stands for prosperity and its results rioting, drunkenness, lust, indolence, and the like.

29. Plainly, then, Paul means to include under the two mentioned works of darkness – strife and jealousy – all of similar character. For instance, the things enumerated in Ephesians 4, 31, which says: "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and railing, be put away from you, with all malice"; and again in Galatians 5, 19-21, reading:

"Now the works of the flesh are . . . enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, parties, envyings, drunkenness, revellings and such like." In short, "strife and jealousy" here stand for innumerable evils resulting from wrath, be it in word or deed.

30. Likewise under the four vices – revelling, drunkenness, indolence and lewdness – the apostle includes all the vices of unchastity in word or deed, things none would wish to enumerate. The six works mentioned suffice to teach that he who lives in the darkness of unbelief does not keep himself pure in his neighbor's sight, but is immoderate in all his conduct, toward himself and toward his fellow-man. Further comment on these words is unnecessary. Everyone knows the meaning of "revelling and drunkenness" – excessive eating and drinking, more for the gratification of appetite than for nourishment of the body. Again, it is not hard to understand the reference to idleness in bed-chambers, to lewdness and unchastity. The apostle's words stand for the indulgence of the lusts and appetites of the flesh: excessive sleeping and indolence; every form of unchastity and sensuality practiced by the satiated, indolent and stupid, in daytime or nighttime, in retirement or elsewhere, privately or publicly-vices that seek material darkness and secret places. These vices Paul terms "chambering and wantonness." And the meaning of "strife" and of "jealousy" is generally understood.

PUT ON CHRIST, THE ARMOR OF LIGHT.

"But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ."

31. In this admonition to put on Christ, Paul briefly prescribes all the armor of light. Christ is "put on" in two ways. First, we may clothe ourselves with his virtues. This is effected through the faith that relies on the fact of Christ having in his death accomplished all for us. For not our righteousness, but the righteousness of Christ, reconciled us to God and redeemed us from sin. This manner of putting on Christ is treated of in the doctrine concerning faith; it gives Christ to us as a gift and a pledge. Relative to this topic more will be said in the epistle for New Year's day, Galatians 3, 27:

"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ."

32. Secondly, Christ being our example and pattern, whom we are to follow and copy, clothing ourselves in the virtuous garment of his walk, Paul fittingly says we should "put on" Christ. As expressed in First Corinthians 15, 49: "As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." And again (Eph 4, 22-24): "That ye

put away, as concerning your former manner of life, the old man, that waxeth corrupt after the lusts of deceit; and that ye be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, that after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth."

33. Now, in Christ we behold only the true armor of light. No gormandizing or drunkenness is here; nothing but fasting, moderation, and restraint of the flesh, incident to labor, exertion, preaching, praying and doing good to mankind. No indolence, apathy or unchastity exists, but true discipline, purity, vigilance, early rising. The fields are couch for him who has neither house, chamber nor bed. With him is no wrath, strife or envying; rather utter goodness, love, mercy, patience. Paul presents Christ the example in a few words where he says (Col 3, 12- 15): "Put on therefore, as God's elect, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving each other, if any man have a complaint against any, even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye: and above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness, and let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to the which also ye were called in one body; and be ye thankful." Again, in Philippians 2, 5-8, after commanding his flock to love and serve one another, he presents as an example the same Christ who became servant unto us. He says: "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man."
34. Now, the armor of light is, briefly, the good works opposed to gluttony, drunkenness, licentiousness; to indolence, strife and envying: such as fasting, watchfulness, prayer, labor, chastity, modesty, temperance, goodness, endurance of hunger and thirst, of cold and heat. Not to employ my own words, let us hear Paul's enumeration of good works in Galatians 5, 22- 23: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control." But he makes a still more comprehensive count in Second Corinthians 6, 1-10: "We entreat also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain (for he saith, At an acceptable time I hearkened unto thee, and in a day of salvation did I succor thee: behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation) [in other words, For now is salvation nearer to us than when we first believed, and now is the time to awake out of sleep]: giving no occasion of stumbling in anything, that our ministration be not blamed; but in everything commending ourselves, as ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes,

in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings; in pureness, in knowledge, in longsuffering, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in love unfeigned, in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." What a rich stream of eloquence flows from Paul's lips! He makes plain enough in what consists the armor of light on the left hand and on the right. To practice these good works is truly putting on Jesus Christ.

35. It is a very beautiful feature in this passage that it presents the very highest example, the Lord himself, when it says, "Put ye on the Lord." Here is a strong incentive. For the individual who can see his master fasting, laboring, watching, enduring hunger and fatigue, while he himself feasts, idles, sleeps, and lives in luxury, must be a scoundrel. What master could tolerate such conduct in a servant? Or what servant would dare attempt such things? We can but blush with shame when we behold our unlikeness to Christ.

36. Who can influence to action him who refuses to be warmed and aroused by the example of Christ himself? What is to be accomplished by the rustling of leaves and the sound of words when the thunder-clap of Christ's example fails to move us? Paul was particular to add the word "Lord," saying, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." As if to say: "Ye servants, think not yourselves great and exalted. Look upon your Lord, who, though under no obligation, denied himself."

"And make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."

37. Paul here briefly notices two different provisions for the flesh. One is supplying its natural wants-furnishing the body with food and raiment necessary to sustain life and vigor; guarding against enfeebling it and unfitting it for labor by too much restraint.

38. The other provision is a sinful one, the gratification of the lusts and inordinate appetites. This Paul here forbids. It is conducive to works of darkness. The flesh must be restrained and made subservient to the spirit. It must not dismount its master, but carry him if necessary. Sirach (ch 33, 24) says: "Fodder, a wand, and burdens are for the ass; and bread, correction, and work for a servant." He does not say the animal is to be mistreated

or maimed; nor does he say the servant is to be abused or imprisoned. Thus to the body pertains subjection, labor and whatever is essential to its proper welfare. Paul says of himself: "I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage [subjection]." 1 Cor 9, 27. He does not say he brings his body to illness or death, but makes it serve in submission to the spirit.

39. Paul adds this last admonition for the sake of two classes of people. One class is represented by them who make natural necessity an excuse to indulge their lusts and gratify their desires. Because of humanity's proneness to such error, many saints, deploring the sin, have often in the attempt to resist it, unduly restrained their bodies. So

subtle and deceptive is nature in the matter of its demands and its lusts, no man can wholly handle it; he must live this life in insecurity and concern. The other class is represented by the blind saints who imagine the kingdom of God and his righteousness are dependent upon the particular meat and drink, clothing and couch, of their own choice. They look no farther than at their individual work in this respect, and fancy that in fasting until the brain is disordered, the stomach deranged or the body emaciated, they have done well. Upon this subject Paul says (1 Cor 8, 8): "Food will not commend us to God; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse; nor, if we eat, are we the better." Again (Col 2, 18-23): "Let no man rob you of your prize by a voluntary humility and

worshipping of the angels . . . which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and severity to the body; but are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh."

40. Gerson commended the Carthusians for not eating meat, even though debility made meat a necessity. He would deny it even at the cost of life. Thus was the great man deceived by this superstitious, angelic spirituality. What if God judges its votaries as murderers of themselves? Indeed, no orders, statutes or vows contrary to the command of God can rightfully be made; and if made they would profit no more than would a vow to break one's marriage contract. Certainly God has here in the words of Paul forbidden such destruction of our own bodies. It is our duty to allow the body all necessary food, whether wine, meat, eggs or anything else; whether the time be Friday, Sunday, in Lent or after the feast of Easter; regardless of all orders, traditions and vows, and of the Pope. No prohibition contrary to God's command can avail, though made by the angels even.

41. This wretched folly of vows has its rise in darkness and blindness; the looking upon mere works and trusting to be saved by the number and magnitude of them. Paul would make of works "armor of light," and employ them to overcome the works of darkness. Thus far, then, and no farther, should fasting, vigilance and exertion be practiced. Before God it matters not at all whether you eat fish or meat, drink water or wine, wear red or green, do this or that. All foods are good creations of God and to be used. Only take heed to be temperate in appropriating them and to abstain when it is necessary to the conquest of the works of darkness. It is impossible to lay down a common rule of abstinence, for all bodies are not constituted alike. One needs more, another less. Everyone must judge for himself, and must care for his body according to the advice of Paul: "Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." Had there been any other rule for us, Paul would not have omitted it here.

42. Hence, you see, the ecclesiastical traditions that flatly forbid the eating of meat are contrary to the Gospel. Paul predicts their appearance in First Timothy 4, 1-3, where he says: "But the Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, through the hypocrisy of men that speak lies, branded in their own conscience as with a hot iron; forbidding to

marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God created to be received with thanksgiving." That these words have reference to ecclesiastical orders and those of the entire Papacy, no one can deny. They are plain. Hence the nature of papistical works is manifest.

43. Also you will note here Paul does not sanction the fanatical devotion of certain effeminate saints who set apart to themselves particular days for fasting, as a special service to God, one for this saint, another for that. These are all blind paths, leading us to base our blessings on works. Without distinction of days and meats, our lives should be temperate and sober throughout. If good works are to be our armor of light, and if the entire life is to be pure and chaste, we must never lay off the arms of defense, but always be found sober, temperate, vigilant, energetic. These fanatical saints, however, fast one day on bread and water and then eat and drink to excess every day for one-fourth of the year. Again, some fast from food in the evening but drink immoderately. And who can mention all the folly and works of darkness originating from regarding works for the sake of the efforts themselves and not for the purpose they serve. Men convert the armor of good works into a mirror, fasting without knowing the reason for abstinence. They are

like those who bear a sword merely to look at, and when assailed do not use it. This is enough on today's epistle lesson.

SOURCE

martinlutherpostil.com, file "1st. and 2 Sunday in Advent.doc; Romans 13-1-14 and Romans 15-4-13.pdf"

(<https://martinlutherpostil.com/1st.%20and%20%20Sunday%20in%20Advent.doc;%20Romans%2013-1-14%20and%20Romans%2015-4-13.pdf>). That file holds two sermons; this is one of them.

And second Sunday in Advent; Romans 15:4-13