

Sermon & Bible Study Helps

LIFE ABOVE REPROACH

Emphasis Passage: Romans 13:13-14

King James: Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

New King James: 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.

New International Version: Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

New American Standard Version: Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

Holman Christian Standard: Let us walk with decency, as in the daylight: not in carousing and drunkenness; not in sexual impurity and promiscuity; not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no plans to satisfy the fleshly desires.

New Living Translation: We should be decent and true in everything we do, so that everyone can approve of our behavior. Don't participate in wild parties and getting drunk, or in adultery and immoral living, or in fighting and jealousy. But let the Lord Jesus Christ take control of you, and don't think of ways to indulge your evil desires.

Greek Text: Romans 13:13-14

ὡς ἐν ἡμέρᾳ εὐσχημόνως περιπατήσωμεν, μὴ κόμοις καὶ
as in [the] day decently let us behave not in orgies and

μέθαις, μὴ κοίταις καὶ ἀσελείαις, μὴ ἔριδι
drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension

καὶ ζήλω• ἀλλὰ ἐνδύσασθε τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν,
and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ

καὶ τῆς σαρκὸς πρόνοιαν μὴ ποιήσθε εἰς ἐπιθυμίας.
and of the sinful nature forethought do not give to desires

KEY WORDS (WITH STRONG'S REFERENCE NUMBERS)

εὐσχημόνως (*euschēmonōs*) — adverb

(2158) εὐσχήμων (*euschēmōn*) — well-formed, decorous, noble, honorable

μέθαις (*methais*) — noun, dative, feminine, plural

(3178) μέθη (*methē*) intoxication, drunkenness

πρόνοιαν (*pronoian*) — noun, accusative, feminine, plural

(4306) προνοέω (*pronoēō*) — to consider in advance, provide

HELPFUL SCRIPTURE

Bible verses about Substance Abuse:

Proverbs 20:1; Proverbs 23:20-21, 29-35; Isaiah 5:11, 22; Habakkuk 2:15; Luke 21:34; Romans 6:12-14, 19; Romans 12:1; I Corinthians 6:19-20; Ephesians 5:18

CONTEXT

Beginning in Romans 12, Paul turned from a discussion of the problem of Israel and its rejection of Christ to a series of practical exhortations for the Christian life. In chapter 12:1-8, he gave instruction about behavior in church. In 12:9-21, he described how we are to behave in society. In 13:1-7, he defined the Christian's responsibility to government. This logical progression led Paul to his statements in 13:8-14 regarding the believer's moral behavior.

SERMON AND BIBLE STUDY NOTES

Introduction

Augustine, one of the early church fathers, told in his *Confessions* how he was changed from one who led a profligate life to a believer when he read Romans 13:13-14. Being distressed over the failure of his life, he kept asking himself how long he would continue in his depravity. Hearing a child's voice say, "Take and read; take and read" he picked up a copy of Paul's writings and began reading at verse 13. At that moment, he believed and was converted. The result was a changed life.

As Christians, we are called by God to live a life that is above reproach. We are to be a different kind of person than those characterized by a worldly mind-set. God continually reminded His people through Moses and the prophets that they were not to join themselves to those who walked according to the ways of the world. The Apostle Paul told the people of Corinth that they were to separate themselves from those who lived ungodly lifestyles—to "come out from them and be separate" (2 Corinthians 6:17).

We must not only hear that call to separation, but follow that call as well. Even many Christians today are abusing all kinds of substances, both legal and illegal. We are to be hearers and doers of that which honors God and gives witness to a lost generation that God is real and that He can deliver them from their moral failures. To live that separate lifestyle means to live a life that is above reproach.

I. Life above reproach is characterized by decent behavior (v. 13).

Christians are to live as though every act was in broad daylight where everyone can see. Those who live evil lives usually do so under the cover of darkness (John 3:19). However, the philosophy that “anything goes” is causing that to change. Many blatantly flaunt their sin openly. Much that is evil, including the things that Paul mentioned in verse 13, is now done in the open without shame or regard for who might be offended.

Christians are to “behave decently” (εὐσχημόνος). A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. IV, p. 410, says this word means “honorable.” We are to conduct ourselves in an honorable manner. For a Christian, there is no place for an immoral lifestyle. William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans*, p. 178, says that even non-believing Greeks held drunkenness in contempt. Though they drank diluted wine as a guard against germs in the water supply, they considered drunkenness to be both disgraceful and shameful.

What is often at issue in indecent behavior is the absence of self-control. The sins that are mentioned in verse 13 all speak of a loss of self-control. Self-control is part of the fruit of the Spirit that Paul detailed in Galatians 5:22-23. Therefore, behaving decently is dependent on believers practicing self-control.

II. Life above reproach is characterized by putting on Christ (v. 14a)

The term “clothe yourselves” (ἐνδύσασθε), usually translated “put on”, occurs many times in Scripture. F. F. Bruce, Romans. *Lyndale New Testament Commentaries*, p. 229, believes it was probably a “catchword” used by the church to help new Christians memorize key concepts of the faith. Paul used the phrase repeatedly throughout his letters (Eph. 4:24; Eph. 6:11-12, 14; Col. 3:10, 12; 1 Thess. 5:8). John Murray, *Epistle to the Romans*, NICOT, p. 170, says that the word translated “clothe yourselves” in verse 14 is closely associated with Galatians 3:27, where it is used of the believer’s identification with Christ in His death and resurrection. To put on Christ is “to be identified with him not only in his death but also in his resurrection.”

A life above reproach requires not only clothing in Christ, but also a taking off. Paul spoke of putting off one thing and putting on something else in Ephesians 4:22-24. We are to put off the old self that is corrupted by deceitful desires and put on the new which is like God in righteousness and holiness. He had this same idea in mind in Romans 13. We are to put off our old ways and put on the ways of Christ.

III. Life above reproach is characterized by right thinking (v. 14b).

Generally speaking, actions (whether evil or good) follow thoughts. Paul made it clear that a Christian is not to allow his or her mind to dwell on evil things. The word translated “think about” in the NIV means to “consider in advance” or “to make provision for” something. It speaks of planning to do evil. Whether the old adage “You are what you eat” is true or not may be up for debate. But it is certainly true that a person will become what he or she thinks. As thought patterns develop and become ingrained in a person’s mind, more often than not, they eventually work their way out into the person’s lifestyle.

What should one think about in order to avoid this downward progression into evil? Paul said, “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things” (Col. 3:2). We are to focus on the things of God. He also said that, if we would experience the life of peace, we should think about “whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable” (Phil 4:8). This kind of thinking will produce a life above reproach.

Conclusion

Singer Bobby Hatfield of the Righteous Brothers died November 5, 2003 while on tour with his partner, Bill Medley. The initial diagnosis was heart failure. But after an autopsy was performed, it was found that, though Hatfield did have coronary artery disease, the thing that took his life was cocaine. The amount of cocaine found in his system is not usually enough to cause death, but when it was combined with his heart blockage, it killed him.

Substance abuse in any form is risky business. Countless lives have been ruined through addiction. Countless others have been snuffed out by death. But Christians have yet another reason to avoid substance abuse in any form—the loss of our influence for Christ. We are to live above reproach so that no one will ever be able to say that we stood in the way of his or her salvation.

WHAT CAN ONE PERSON DO?

- Ask your pastor to preach on substance abuse.
- Learn how to counsel those involved in substance abuse.
- Volunteer to work a few hours each month in a rescue mission.
- Check with your local Christian bookstore or visit the ERLC bookstore (www.familybookstore.net) to find books that will help you understand the issue of substance abuse. Once you find a good resource, make it available for others to read as well.
- Ask your church to invite a local expert on the subject of substance abuse to lead a seminar describing what actions can be taken to help those who are addicted.

SUGGESTED BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS

This is a suggested Bible study for any size group. The sermon notes on this sheet, the accompanying fact sheet, and the enclosed materials serve as resources as you prepare to teach and then lead this Bible study. Answers are provided with the questions when appropriate, but do not be too quick to give the answers. Allow the participants time to talk about the questions among themselves and offer their own answers.

Create Learning Readiness: Before participants arrive, write the phrase “Substance Abuse” on the board. Also write the following words on different pieces of colored construction paper and attach to the wall in various parts of the room: Alcohol, Drugs, Tobacco. After everyone arrives, share one or two stories from the news about people who have abused drugs, alcohol or tobacco. (Hint: many are available on the Internet.)

Say: Probably none of these people started out to become substance abusers. It was a gradual process that led them into the abuse. Most people, especially Christians, do not plunge headlong into some sinful behavior all at once. Most descend gradually—little by little, step by step. Substance abuse is just one of many moral problems people face today. You may even be aware of some things that you would like to see changed in your life but you feel helpless to change them.

Say: Augustine lived between 354 and 430 A.D. At some point in his early life, even though he was involved in the church to some extent, he participated in a wayward lifestyle and began to despair that he would ever be able to change. Change for Augustine came about suddenly and unexpectedly. One day as he read Paul’s letter to the Romans, something happened. For the first time, he understood the message of grace and was converted. He became a changed man.

Say: Things are not that much different 1500 years later. Many people today also struggle with devastating problems—some with substance abuse, some with other kinds of problems. Though Augustine felt helpless to make the changes needed in his life, he found help for his struggles in Romans 13. I believe we can find guidance for any problems we face in that passage as well. Open your Bibles to Romans 13:13-14. (Have someone read the passage.)

Ask: What do you think Paul meant when he said we are to “behave decently?” What would behaving decently exclude according to Romans 13:13? Can you give some examples of these? Ask someone to read Galatians 5:22-23.

Say: One of the aspects of the fruit of the Spirit that Paul mentioned is self-control.

Ask: How many of those sinful behaviors that we have just named are expressions of a lack of self-control? How important is it that we learn to practice the fruit of the Spirit?

Ask: What do you think Paul meant in Romans 13:13 when he said we are to live “as in the daytime?” Ask someone to read John 3:19.

Say: Jesus said that people love darkness because it hides their sinful behavior. But have you noticed that people today are doing more and more in public that used to be done only in secret?

Ask: Can you name some instances where this is true? Answers could include acts depicted on TV, in movies or in video games. Answers could also include public drunkenness, drug abuse, smoking in restricted areas or other sinful activities.

Say: The word translated “clothe yourselves” in verse 14 refers to putting on something. The image is that of putting on a piece of clothing. Paul used that analogy in several places. If time permits, ask participants to look up the following verses: Ephesians 4:24; Ephesians 6:11-12, 14; Colossians 3:10, 12; and 1 Thessalonians 5:8.

Say: What Paul means is that we are to clothe ourselves “with the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Ask: What does that mean to you? (It is possible that this phrase refers to our identification with Christ’s death and resurrection. We are to put off our old ways and put on His ways. We are to live differently than the world. See Sermon Outline point II for further help.)

Ask: Can you think of any verses in the Bible where God says that we are to live differently than the world? (Some possibilities are: Lev. 11:44-45; Deut. 4:2; Ezra 10:11; Romans 12:1; 1 Peter 2:9)

Say: Paul said that we are not to “think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” The word translated “think about” means to “consider in advance” or “to make provision” for something. It refers to planning in advance to engage in some form of evil.

Ask: If actions are usually the result of prior thinking, what does this say about the focus of our thought processes? Ask someone to read Colossians 3:1-2.

Say: Paul said the best way to avoid thinking about ways to satisfy the desires of our sinful nature is to think on the things of God rather than the things of this world. He talked about this in a slightly different way in another passage. Ask someone to read Philippians 4:8.

Ask: What kinds of things did Paul say we are to think about in the passage just read? (Allow response time.) How would that kind of thinking lead to a life above reproach?

Say: I want you to take a few minutes to write down some things that fit into each of these categories mentioned in Philippians 4:8. Then I want you to take a few moments to commit yourself to thinking about these things this week.

Say: Next week, come prepared to share some ways in which this has changed your behavior.