

The Sense of Time Brought by End Age Perspective <Ro 13:11-14>

Prelude: When saints have the right perspective of time, they will have the right sense of time. Basically, there are two different kinds of believers in the church, and their senses towards the end times are different. A kind of believers becomes more numb as they hear more sermons, especially those about “the impending second coming of the Lord”. They not only do not anticipate it, but also feel distant from it. However, another kind of believers feels the urgency more as they are longer in Christ. They feel that time flies by more quickly and the time they have left is diminishing. Thus, they cherish every moment on earth to live for the Lord. When this kind of believers listens to sermons about “the impending second coming of the Lord”, they feel an anticipation in their hearts, and feel that the Lord is just outside the door. Actually, what the latter felt is aligned with the truth. In this last 2000-year era, although the saints are waiting for the Lord, the Lord has not come yet. But those who have this truth are brought into a pressing schedule. They have a heart to lead godly lives, completely live out the meaning of the present life, to accomplish their mission to face the Lord. As their ‘sense of time’ is aligned with the truth, so even though they live in a fallen world, they receive very precise conviction and guidance by the Holy Spirit. Darkness and sin of the world compel them to be more cautious. Today, some believers will grumble, “this end times is too dark, with too many temptations, and too many things that will make people fall!” However, there is another kind of believers who would discover that the darker the era, the easier it is to run the race marked out for us. The day that is coming (Coming of the Lord) is helping them to know that there is nothing worth remembering in the world. The gratification of the flesh is only temporal, and it passes as quickly as it comes. Therefore, they put their focus on things of eternal value (saving, healing and blessing others). Ask yourself, why is it that believers cannot pursue holiness and lead godly lives? Why believers only know but cannot carry out? Why do believers only see the challenge of the end times, but they do not see the blessings of the end times? That is because there is no correct perspective of time to bring about a blessed sense of time. The last kilometer of the marathon race is the easiest, because runners just have to summon all their remaining energy to charge ahead. There is no need to conserve energy. In labor, the last moment when a baby is about to be out can be endured no matter the pain because the mother knows that is the last push, and there is not much consciousness of pain. Therefore, problem of believers today is to put the messages about end times into their head, but they did not confirm that the end is indeed coming, and they did not confirm that God is giving them a sense of urgency as they grow in age. So how can we have the most vivid conviction of the last days and end times, and how can we preserve that conviction? That is to practically live out the mission of the last days. Therefore, a saint who wishes to be totally alert in the end times has to constantly challenge himself to preach the word in season and out of season, and be directed by the spreading of the gospel in his family living, raising of children, management of money and time. Because the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. Indeed, it is most real when we live it out.

1. The present time is the hour to quickly wake up from slumber <13:11>

1) Believers' slumber is the greatest crisis in the era

* One-third of our time is spent on sleeping. Sleeping is as if death, a person cannot see nor do anything while he is asleep. Although a person may be very active while he is awake, when he is asleep, he absolutely cannot gain any benefit from what he knows. Thus, when we try to understand a believer in slumber at the spiritual level: ① we have no way to tell if he is alive spiritually or not. Is he born again? Is he set apart from the world? The people of the world cannot tell, and he himself also does not know (no assurance); ② he has no effect on the gospel. Even if he can take the Bible to attend church every week and his mind is full of biblical knowledge, he cannot bring the effect of salvation to a fallen and perishing world; ③ instead of living in reality, he is living in a delusion. Just as a person in slumber experiences joy, anger and sadness in his dreams, a sleeping believer is also dominated by the thoughts that come from sinful nature. Therefore, whether he has positive or negative emotions, those have nothing to do with the reality (of kingdom, king, people, crown). Hence, how can such an era be awakened? If a house is on fire and there are two persons inside, one is a corpse and the other is sleeping, then there need to be someone else who is awoken to arouse the sleeping one.

2) The present time (Kairos) is the hour to wake up from slumber

* The meaning of “present time” is “existing opportunity and choice”, referring to this life. But from this passage, it can also refer to the end times. When Christ returns, we will enter into the eternity that is a consequence of what is gained in this present time. Actually, because the darkness before dawn is the darkest, the ordinary person will fall into the deepest slumber during then. However, there is a kind of person who likes to wake up before daybreak, prepared everything and finished the most difficult tasks before the busy day starts. Because during that moment, there is no noise and bustle from the world, it is also the moment in which one can enter into his best form. It is said that many famous CEOs wake up at 5.00am in the morning, and make the most important decisions and finish the most crucial tasks during that short one or two hours. Thus, in the end times when everyone is engrossed with the world, God calls His people to quickly wake up from slumber, to do the most important thing (the great harvest) at this best hour. If believers can hear this call and wake up, they will be the most important workers in this end era.

3) Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed

* The “salvation” here does not only refer to our born again and repentance that happened in the past, but it also refers to our present sanctification, and the future glory when our bodies are redeemed. Think about it, even if the Lord has not returned, if a person repented and is born again ten years ago and has been through ten years of sanctification, then he is ten years nearer to seeing the Lord, and that normal faith will naturally prompt him to have deeper sense of urgency. The world takes away such sense of urgency. But God’s word continuously turns us to this truth, so that we enter blessed sense of time. Indeed, we all have our moments of spiritual slumber after believing in the Lord. Perhaps in the first few years of believing the Lord, we were always still concerned about matters of the flesh, or we left footholds for sinful desires. In this process, we unconsciously wasted time. For example: when we leave room for bitterness and hatred, we waste the time to love people, have compassion on people, and intercede for them; or when we are greedy and invest energy to gain more on earth, we miss many chances to save and bless people. Although we sometimes find it a pity to see believers wasting precious time, the most important is still to “hear God’s voice today and submit to God today”. Therefore, the best way by which God calls us out from satisfying our flesh and its desires, is to point us to the truth of “the nearing of the day”. To holy people, time is most important, because every moment on earth can exchange for eternity. Sometimes, we feel that sufferings are very cruel, but if sufferings (such as: one illness, one failure, one loss, etc) can awake us from our wishful dreams on earth and prevent us from continuously wasting our time, then that is certainly worth it.

2. After knowing the truth about the present time, what to do now? <13:12-14>

1) The night is nearly over; the day is almost here

* Perhaps now some people may think that Paul was mistaken in saying this, because it has already been nearly 2000 years and Lord Jesus still has not returned yet. However, when we recap the spiritual meaning of this statement, we will know that this is the most reasonable saying, because first, Paul did not know when Jesus is returning, this is also what God permits to remain undisclosed <Mt 24:36>; second, everyone has his personal end of days (after this life, everyone has to go to face the Lord); third, noting from the entire human history, the gospel will not revisit where it had travelled. If the end era has been inaugurated with the coming of the Holy Spirit, and yet the holy people have no anticipation toward the second coming of the Lord, and also have no vigilance, then their era will be devoured. Whether it is the second coming of the Lord or the departure of humans from earth, it will suddenly happen. Therefore, from this revelation, we will know that the night will suddenly be over, and the day will also come unexpectedly. Hence, after holy people received this grace today, they certainly cannot take it for granted, but they have to live out the calling of this grace with all their hearts, all their minds and all their strength.

2) Put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light

* The Bible often gives us the idea of “putting aside” and “putting on”. Whatever we put aside and put on ourselves, is not merely referring to our spirits, but also our deeds. Ponder: Do we have many deeds of darkness? Are many of our deeds unable to be revealed before people, or do many of our deeds make us unable to face the holy Lord in our inner hearts? For example, <13:13> implies: deeds of drunkenness and love for this world, being indecent in sexual relationships, always saying words which lead to dissension, jealousy and hurts, etc. In addition, the Bible not only asks us to put aside what is dark, but it also tells us to put on what is bright. In particular, the “armor” of light is mentioned here. Paul used the term “armor” clearly to tell us Christians that faith living is not a state of spiritual complacency, but we have to be ever ready for battle. If we are always ready for battle (work out our salvation with fear and trembling) <Phil 2:12>, then the deeds of darkness (cries of the flesh and its desires) will become weaker in our spirits. Often, we have not confirmed what is dark in our spirits, but we allow the desires of our flesh to naturally dominate us. Furthermore, we also rarely deliberately battle those deeds of darkness, so those deeds become more and more natural to us. Grumbling, disliking, dissension, jealousy, lust, greed become natural responses to life. But if after hearing the word of God, we often confirm in our spirits what are deeds of darkness and light, then battle the dark ones and pursue the deeds of light, then we will naturally enter into a state of spiritual awakening, and we will be bold and confident in whatever we do, as if we are living in daytime.

3) Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh

* Believers must know that what we are pursuing eventually is not morals and ethics but Christ. Christ is the representation of perfect morals and ethics. A highly ethical person may not be able to save human souls, reform sinners who did wrong, support those who are weak, but the holiness and love in the life of Christ can do all these. Think about how our Lord in His glorious holiness can love, save, support and reform people? Why is it that He not only can save the souls of sinners, but He also can turn them from sinful intentions to God’s holiness? That is because His holiness has the power to save people from sin. Thus, when we continue to put aside darkness, and put on light, we must center our thoughts on Christ, clothe ourselves with His teachings and examples of virtues, put on compassion, love, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience <Col 3:12>. At the same time, we must also understand our flesh, which is that ugly and self-centered nature, is forever at odds with Christ. Even though the flesh is still present and ceaselessly cries out to us day and night, yet the Bible tells us to be heartless toward it, do not give it any chance, and all the more do not deliberately give it any foothold. For example: towards pleasures like those of feasting and drunkenness, we must not let ourselves fall into meaningless fun; towards the things that will arouse lustful evils, we must not deliberately be in contact with them; towards topics which easily cause dissensions and jealousy, we must try to stay away. In all these, our hearts must always exalt Christ our Lord, think about His glorious image, till we can enjoy the freedom and joy of holiness in our hearts.

3. The looming end days, the holiness of holy people

1) The more a man gratifies his flesh, the more his spirit grieves, and the more pressing is the need to spread the gospel

* Actually, when there is increase in lawlessness, the spirit of man suffers more. Today, when we see that men are becoming more self-centred, and cannot be satisfied by simple love, marriages can get into problems easily; when men are influenced by materialism, they cannot be satisfied by simple and plain lives; when man wants to improve himself, he forgot the relationships, love and grace that is more important than success. Therefore, when the scriptures say, “The night is nearly over; the day is almost here”, we will see that human hearts are unconsciously being manipulated by the culture of darkness. This is what an end-times believer must know and sense. Although such a culture exists to devour believers, but from another angle, it also helps us. If a believer receives the perspective of the gospel, he will know that this is the best time for evangelism. Because when the spirits of men are being tortured by evil, oppressed by heavy burdens, chained by sins, that is when believers can shine through their good works.

2) The holiness of holy people is all the more precious as the last day draws near

* In the end era, human thinking is more direct and carnal, once they want to influence people, they believe that only when they are better than others can

末世观所带来的时间感《罗 13:11-14》

序论：圣民带有正确的时间观，就会得着正确的时间感。基本上，教会里有两种不同的信徒，他们对末世的时间体感各有不同。一种是信主越久，听道越多，越感到麻木。特别是听到“主快要再临”的信息，不但不期待，也更是感到遥远。但有另外一种信徒是信主越久越感到急迫，这是因为感到时间走得越来越快，今生剩下来的时光越来越减少了，所以非常的珍惜地上每一刻为主而活的时光。这样的信徒一旦听到“主快要再临”的信息，不但心里期待，而且感到主就在门口。其实，后者得着的感动是符合事实的。在这 2000 年末世的时代，虽然众圣徒都在等着主的到来，主的再临纵然没有发生，但心里拥有这事实的圣民却是被带入一个紧凑的时间表，他们怀着敬虔度日的心，全然活出了今世的意义，完成使命去见主。他们的“时间感”合乎了真理，所以他们在一个堕落的世界里，受圣灵感动与指引非常明确。黑暗与罪恶的世界反而叫他们更加谨慎。今天有些信徒常会怨声载道说：“这末后的时代太黑暗，试探太多，叫人跌倒的事情太多了！”但也有另一种信徒会发现时代越是黑暗，越是容易跑那摆在前面的路程。这是因为他看见那将要临到的日子（主再临）叫他更明确知道这地上没什么可留恋的，那肉体的满足也只不过是暂时的，快来快走。所以，他更是将关注放在有永恒价值之事（拯救人，医治人，祝福人）。试问，信徒为何不能追寻圣洁，过着敬虔度日的人生呢？信徒为何只懂得说知道却做不到？为何信徒只会看到末世的挑战，却看不见末世的祝福呢？那是因为没有正确的时间观所带来蒙恩的时间感。马拉松赛跑的最后一公里相对来说是最容易的，因为赛跑者唯有汇集最后一切的力量跑就行了，不需再节省能力。快要将婴孩产下的最后一刻就算再痛也是能忍受的，因为当产妇知道是最后一刻，对疼痛是没太大意识的。所以，今日信徒的问题是将末日的道理装在头脑，但没有确认末时的到来，也没有确认神在他们年龄增长当中所给与他们的紧凑时间感。那么，我们要怎么得着对末日与末时最真切的感动，也同时保守那感动呢？那就是实际的活出末日的使命。所以，一个要在末日全然警觉的圣徒一定要不断的挑战自己得时不得时传福音，在家庭生活、养育儿女、管理钱财与时间、都与传扬天国的福音为导向。因为神国的福音要传遍天下，末期才来到。确实，活出来才是最真实的。

1. 现今就是该趁早睡醒的时候《13:11》

1) 信徒的沉睡是对时代的大危机

* 我们三分之一的时光都花在睡觉。睡觉就仿佛死亡，一个人在睡眠中无法看见什么，也无法进行什么。纵然一个人在醒着时能够很活跃，但是当他沉睡的时候，他根本无法从他所懂的取得什么果效。所以，当我们从属灵层面来明白，对于一个沉睡的信徒：① 我们无法看出他在灵里到底是活着与否。他重生了吗？他是与世界分别的吗？世人看不出，他自己也不晓得（没有确据）；② 他无法对福音起任何的作用。纵然他可以拿着圣经每周到教会去，脑袋里也装满圣经知识，但是他无法对一个堕落灭亡的世界带出拯救的功能；③ 与其活在现实里，他是活在假象里。如同一个睡着的人是借着梦中的内容产生喜怒哀乐，那在沉睡的信徒是受罪性所产生的意念支配。所以，不管他所得着的是正面或负面的感受，那都与真像（国度、君王、子民、冠冕）无关。所以，在这样的时代，一个时代怎么能被唤醒呢？如果一个屋子着火了，里头有两种人，一种是尸体，另一种是沉睡的，那必须有醒过来的人才能唤醒那些沉睡的。

2) 现今（Kairos）就是该睡醒的时候

* 现今的意思就是“现存的机会与抉择”，而这指的就是今世了。但在此经文看也能指是末时。当基督再临，我们就要进入那借着现今所得之成果的永恒了。其实，在黎明之前的黑暗，因那种的黑暗是最深的，所以一般的人都掉入最深的沉睡中。另外，也有一种人是最喜欢在黎明之前起床，在繁忙的白昼来临之前打理一切，完成最难的事。因为在那时刻，没有世界的吵闹与繁忙，也是人能进入最佳状态的时候。据说，许多著名的总裁都是在早上 5 点正起床，在那短短的一两个小时做最重要的决定，完成最重要的工作。所以，在一个人人都陶醉于世界的末日景象，神呼召他的子民趁早睡醒，在这个最佳时刻做最重要的事（大收割）。倘若能听到这呼声而醒过来的信徒将成为末后时代最重要的工人。

3) 我们的得救，现今比初信的时候更近了

* 这里所讲的“得救”，不仅是包括我们过去重生悔改的事发，也包括我们现在的成圣，和我们将来身体得赎的荣耀。试想，就算主还未来到，当一个人十年前重生悔改，经历了十年的成圣，也以见到主的时光来讲，十年更靠近了，那正常的信仰当然是叫他更有紧凑感了。世界是拿走这样的紧凑感。但神的话是继续叫我们转向这事实，而进入蒙恩的时间感。确实，我们信了主都有属灵沉睡的一面。可能刚信主的前几年，我们总是还处在关心肉体的事，或是给情欲留地步。在这当儿，我们无形中浪费了光阴。例如：当我们给苦毒怨恨留地步，我们浪费了爱人、怜悯人、为人代祷的时光；或是我们贪心而花精力要在地上多得什么时，我们错过了很多拯救与祝福人的机会。纵然有时我们看见信徒美好的光阴被浪费掉，我们感到非常惋惜，但是最重要还是“今天听见神的声音，今天顺服神”。所以，神呼吁我们从满足肉体情欲出来的最佳方法就是将我们指向“更靠近白昼”的事实了。对圣民来讲，光阴是最重要的，因为地上的每一刻都能换取永恒。有时，我们觉得苦难很残酷，但是若苦难（例如：一场病，一次的失败，一次的失去等）能将我们从地上的春秋大梦唤醒，禁止我们的光阴继续被浪费掉，那是绝对值得的。

2. 知道了有关现今的事实，那当要怎么做？《13:12-14》

1) 黑夜已深，白昼将近

* 可能现今有些人认为保罗讲这句话是弄错了，因为过了将近 2000 年主耶稣却还未再临。但是，当我们重温这句话的属灵意义时，我们会知道这是最合理的说法，因为第一，保罗不知道主几时来，这也是神不许可被透露的《太 24:36》；第二，人都有个人的末日（过了今世都要去见主）；第三，从整个人类历史来看，福音所走遍的地区就不再回头。倘若随着圣灵降临，末世时代被开启，圣民对主的再临毫无期待，也没有带着警觉，他和他的时代将要被吞灭。无论是主再

临或是人离世的事，那是忽然临到的，所以我们从这启示，会晓得黑夜是忽然过去，白昼是忽然来临的。因此，圣民今日领受了这恩典绝对不能将此当做理所当然的，乃要尽心、尽性、尽力活出这恩典的呼召。

2) 要脱去暗味的行为，带上光明的兵器

* 圣经总是给我们“脱去”与“带上”的观念。我们脱去与穿上的都是在我们的身上，不仅是说到我们的心灵，也更是说到我们的行为。试问：我们是否很多暗味的行为？我们有好些的行为是否是不能显露在人前，或是在内心无法叫我们面对圣洁的主呢？例如《13:13》所意味的：醉酒与贪爱这世界的行为、在对性爱关系方面的不检点、常常说出挑动争竞与重伤人的话等。另外，圣经不但叫我们脱去暗味的，也叫我们带上光明的。特别在此说到光明的“兵器”。保罗引用“兵器”这字眼显然是告诉我们基督徒信仰生活不是一种在灵里安逸的状态，乃是随时预备作战的。倘若我们常常预备作战（以恐惧战兢做成得救的功夫）《腓 2:12》，那暗味的事（肉体情欲的嚷声）必在我们心灵越来越微弱。往往，我们在心灵里没有确认什么是暗味的，就让肉体的情欲自然的带动我们。另外，我们也很少向那暗味的行为作出刻意的挑战，所以那样的行为变得越来越自然。埋怨、讨厌、争竞、嫉妒、好色、贪婪成为这么自然的生活反应。但若我们听了神的道之后，在心灵里常常确认那暗昧与光明之事，然后挑战那暗昧的，追求光明的，我们是自然进入灵里苏醒的状态，行事为人坦然无惧，好像行在白昼。

3) 总要披戴主耶稣基督，不要为肉体安排，去放纵私欲

* 信徒当晓得，我们最终的追求不是道德，乃是基督。基督是完美道德的表象。一个满有道德的人未必能拯救人的灵魂，改造犯错的罪人，扶持软弱的人，但那在基督生命里的圣洁与爱却是能够做到这点。试问我们的主在祂荣耀的圣洁里是怎么爱人、拯救人、扶持人、改造人？为何祂不但是能拯救罪人的灵魂，也能将他们从罪意转移到神的圣洁呢？那是因为祂的圣洁有那能叫人从罪里头拯救出来的能力。所以，当我们继续脱去暗昧的，带上光明的，我们必定要思念基督为中心，披戴祂的教训和榜样的品德，穿上怜悯、慈爱、恩慈、谦虚、温柔、忍耐的心《西 3:12》。同时，我们也要明白我们的肉体，就是那丑陋，自我为中心的本性是永远与基督对比的。纵然肉体仍然在，而且昼夜不休的向我们发出嚷声，但圣经叫我们要对他无情，不要给他留任何机会，更是不要刻意给他安排能落脚之处。例如：对荒宴醉酒类似的欢乐，我们总不要让自己进到无意义的欢乐；对那会动起好色邪荡的东西，不要刻意去接触；对那容易引起争竞与嫉妒的话题，尽量要远离。在这一切里，心里总要尊主基督为大，思念他的荣形，直到心里面享受那圣洁的自由与喜乐。

3. 末日的临近，圣民的圣洁

1) 人越满足肉体，心灵越是痛苦，福音的广传越是急需

* 其实，当不法之事增多，人的心灵是更痛苦的。因为当他们无止境的满足自己肉体的欲望，他们更加不能被满足。在现今时代，当我们看见人越来越自我，不能享受简单的爱情，婚姻很容易亮起红灯；当人被物质主义影响，不能满足于简单与朴素的人生；当人为着力求上进，忘记了那比成功更重要的关系、相爱、恩典。所以，当经文说到“黑夜已深，白昼将近”，我们会看见人的心已经无形中被黑暗的风气文化操纵了。这却是一个末世信徒要认知与察觉的。纵然这样的风气是因要吞吃我们信徒而来，但从另一个角度也是帮助我们的。若一个信徒得蒙了福音的眼光，就会知道这是传福音的良辰了。因为当人的心灵越来越被邪恶折磨，被重担压制，被罪恶缠累，那正是我们圣民借着善行发光的时候。

2) 圣民的圣洁在末日的临近越是可贵

* 在末后的时代，人的想法是越直接与属肉，一旦想到要影响人，就认定要比人优越才能做得到。教会信徒也是一样，所以容易掉入人数与事工的竞赛。其实，当人人都轻易体贴情欲时，圣洁就是大光了。所以，每当圣经谈论圣洁的教导，为了坚固门徒，一定会牵扯到基督的再临（身体得赎的日子），例如：《弗 4:30》《腓 3:20》《彼后 1:11》。其实，倘若我们没有想到最后那日的到来，我们在过圣洁生活与治死身体的恶行的事上，绝对会缺乏动力的。纵然有时过程当中偶尔会失败，但我们不断要仰望那不失败的主，以至心里渴盼脱去肉体的辖制去见祂。我们不断的争战显示我们是不属罪恶（黑暗）的，乃属圣洁（光明）的。特别，在末日临近，大淫妇与兽的工作越是猖狂，神民若是敬虔度日，满足于基督里面的福分，那光是会照在人前，使选民归向主。

3) 圣洁的宗旨就是爱了

* 倘若没有爱，一切的圣洁只不过是一种道德的修养。所以，我们要认真与实际的思想：当不法之事增多，叫人不能爱的生活节奏、事物、言论增多，试问我们怎么活出爱？例如：当人人都缺少耐心，我们是否能因为爱多给人一点时间？当人都被各种的情报操纵，心里摇晃不定，我们的言语举动是否能给人安稳？当人都只顾自己，我们是否能真诚的在乎他人的生命，看一个灵魂胜过全世界？《13:8》告诉我们惟有在彼此相爱要常以为亏欠。试问我们在面对这堕落的世界能说我们爱够了吗？倘若不能，我们要实际的去将福音传扬，为基督作见证。另外，教会在面对这越来越没有爱的世界要怎么显出爱的文化呢？是只有专讲相爱的道理，还是实际接受爱的挑战，领会基督的爱来爱那不可爱的或是与我不同的？当一群子民真正的彼此相爱，以至那关系的动机就是要得着主的选民，为他们凡事忍耐，圣灵必定借着他们的相爱吸引万民来到主前。