

“After Darkness, Light”

Leviticus 19:18; Romans 13:8-14

By Rev. Nollie Malabuyo • October 31, 2021 (BSCC)

Dear Congregation of Christ: In Geneva, Switzerland, there is a monument wall in honor of the 16th century Protestant Reformers. It is known as the Reformation Wall honoring four primary Reformers in the center: John Calvin, who was the pastor in Geneva for 26 years from 1536-64, with a two-year exile; William Farel, Théodore Beza, and John Knox. Six other Reformers are also honored along the wall.

The Reformation Wall was inaugurated in 1909. In 2019, the wall was vandalized twice. In March of that year, feminist activists wrote a graffiti on the wall which read, “Where are the women?” Then in July, the wall paint sprayed with the colors of the rainbow by LGBTQ activists. Obviously, feminists and LGBTQ activists vehemently oppose the Reformers’ faithfulness to the light of the Scriptures’ teaching against their teachings and practices.

Spanning the entire Reformation Wall is this inscription: *Post Tenebras Lux*, Latin for “After Darkness, Light.” This is the motto of the Reformers then and the city of Geneva today. The medieval age was an age of Biblical darkness when the church strayed away from Biblical teachings and practices. It was riddled with corruption among the clergy, from the Pope all the way down to the lowest friar. But wickedness was not exclusive to the church; kings, the royalty, and the wealthy rivaled the corruption and evil of the church. In spirituality and civil affairs, the medieval age was truly the “Dark Ages.”

However, there were sparks of light even before the 16th century Protestant Reformers arrived on the scene. In the 14th century, there was John Wycliffe in England, who translated the Bible from Latin into English, an act punishable by death; Jan Hus of Bohemia (present-day Czech Republic), who preached against Rome’s corruption; and William Tyndale, who also translated the New Testament from Greek into English, and who taught justification by faith alone in Christ alone before Martin Luther discovered this same doctrine. Hus and Tyndale were both burned at the stake while Wycliffe was only persecuted because he was supported by some friends in high places. However, some 30 years after his death, the Pope had his bones exhumed and burned, and his ashes dumped into a river. He was later called “The Morning Star of the Reformation.”

Light finally dawned upon the “Dark Ages” when these forerunners of the Reformation discovered the truths of Scripture. They discovered that Scripture alone, not church traditions and the Pope’s declaration, is the final authority in the church. They discovered that salvation is by faith alone through God’s grace alone in Christ alone, not salvation by faith and works that Rome taught. When Martin Luther read and understood Romans 1:17 that “*the righteous shall live by faith*,” he said, “the very gates of paradise opened up before me.” This illumination of his mind and heart led him to post his famous *99 Theses* on the door of the castle church in Wittenburg, Germany on October 31, 1517, a piece of paper that sparked the spread of the Reformation throughout Europe.

Post Tenebras Lux, “After Darkness, Light,” therefore became the motto of the 16th century Protestant Reformation. What sparked this light? It was the Holy Scriptures faithfully translated, read, interpreted, and meditated upon by men—and women—searching for the light of God’s truths in their own language, not Latin, Hebrew or Greek.

In Romans Chapters 1-11, the first main part of his letter, Paul instructs us in the doctrines of God’s holiness, man’s total sinfulness, salvation by faith alone in Christ alone, righteousness from God, and God’s salvation plan for both Jews and Gentiles. Beginning in Chapter 12, Paul answers the question, “What do we do with this knowledge?” So the second main part is the “practice” following “doctrine.” In other words, how then are we to live as those who have been saved from sin and transformed into Christ’s image as individuals and as a communion of saints? Two Sundays ago, we studied how we are to live life transformed by the renewing of our minds by the Holy Spirit. We are to offer our lives as a “living sacrifice” to God, worshiping and obeying him according to his word and with the guidance of the Spirit. We are to pray for those who persecute us.

Then in the first seven verses of Chapter 13, Paul gives an example of a transformed life: life under the civil authorities. We studied this passage almost two years ago in relation to the last presidential election. Paul commands us to submit to the governing authorities, whether good or evil, for they derive their authority from God. So, we are to pay taxes to the authorities.

Today, we come to verses 8-14 of Chapter 13, where Paul instructs us first to “*owe no one anything, except to love each other.*” This is a transition from owing the government taxes. He is not saying Christians should not take loans for houses, cars and other needs. He is saying whatever we loan, we must repay. For example, there is a movement from our socialist Congress to forgive all student loans. This is totally wrong. As we pay taxes to the government, we must also repay loans.

Paul says the only thing we can never repay fully is loving others. This is a debt that we always owe our neighbor. And loving our neighbor is the fulfillment of the law. The second thing that Paul reminds us is that we are near the fullness of our days in this world. Christ will soon return from heaven, so we must “*cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor light.*” So our theme today is, **“From Darkness into Light”** under two headings: first, **From Dark Disobedience to the Light of Loving Obedience**; and second, **From Works of Darkness to Armor of Light**.

From Dark Disobedience to the Light of Loving Obedience (verses 8-10)

The first characteristic of the medieval church was its disobedience to the Bible’s command to love each other. It was in deep darkness of disobeying the law of loving the neighbor, both Christian and non-Christian. The clergy showed little love for their flock but were lovers of corruption in all kinds of ways. They loved money. They loved power. They loved immorality. Martin Luther raged against all their abuse of power in his *95 Theses*, particularly the corrupt doctrine of indulgences.

Paul says in verse 8 that “*the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.*” Since verse 8 is a continuation of the command in verse 7 to pay taxes and respect the authorities, loving “another” refers to loving both believers and unbelievers. For most of those in authority are unbelievers.

But why does Paul say that loving is fulfilling the law? Does he not say in Romans 6:14-15 that Christians are not under the law but rather under grace? Paul might have been countering those who were teaching that since Christians are not under the law, that they can do whatever pleases them. If they are freed from the law, then they can do whatever they want regardless of what the law commands. Therefore, Paul sets out to disprove this teaching.

Even today, we hear many pastors teaching that the Ten Commandments, the summary of God's moral laws, are obsolete. They even teach that the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' exposition of the Ten Commandments, are not for Christians, but only for Jews. And since the Lord's Prayer is included in this sermon, Christians should not pray the Lord's Prayer. Those who teach this error are also those who teach that Jews and Christians are two distinct peoples of God even in eternity.

But how can loving the neighbor be the fulfillment of the law? Paul is merely echoing what Jesus taught in Matthew 22:37-40 about the two great commandments. The first great commandment is loving God with all our heart, soul and mind. And the second great commandment is loving our neighbor as ourselves. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two great commandments. In referring to these two great commandments, Jesus quoted the Old Testament Law. Loving God is from Deuteronomy 6:5 and loving the neighbor is from Leviticus 19:18. Therefore, loving God and loving the neighbor is truly fulfilling God's law.

In Galatians 5:14-15, Paul warns us about abusing the freedom from the requirements of the law. Obedience to God's law is not the *requirement* for salvation, but the *fruits* of salvation. When Martin Luther read Romans 1:17, it dawned on him that "*the righteous shall live by faith.*" No matter how much he strove to do good works, his conscience bothered him that all his good works would not save him. Through this verse, he found out that salvation is by grace alone through faith in Christ. This is why the Reformers have the slogans, *Sola Gratia*, grace alone, and *Sola Fide*, faith alone.

Paul lists only the sixth, seventh, eighth and tenth Commandments in verse 9, but he includes "*any other commandment.*" It might be that most of the problems of Christians in Rome relate to these commandments. We often think that we do not commit adultery, murder and stealing. But Jesus teaches us that we are guilty nevertheless. We lust for others who are not our spouses. We hate others and millions of unborn infants are murdered every year. We steal in many ways. And all of these sins of the heart can be summed up in coveting things that do not belong to us.

We used to live in the darkness of the fruits of our sinful nature: "*sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these*" (Gal 5:19-21). But when the Spirit of Holiness brought us from this darkness into the light of God's grace, we demonstrate obedience to God's law by our good fruits: "*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*" (Gal 5:22-23). Therefore, we must examine ourselves. Do we have these evil fruits of darkness or the good fruits of the light? Without the Spirit dwelling in our hearts and minds, it is impossible for us to show that we are children of light and not of darkness.

From Works of Darkness to Armor of Light (verses 11-14)

In verses 8-10, Paul lists God's laws that relate to loving our neighbor, both Christians and non-Christians. In verses 11-14, Paul lists some of the things that unbelievers do in their dark world.

But Paul urges us to "*cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light*" because the hour of salvation is very near. He is referring to the hour of Christ's return from heaven. Every minute, every hour, every day, and every year that passes is a minute, an hour, a day, and a year closer to his return. When Paul says, "*salvation is nearer to us now,*" he is not referring to that moment that the Spirit gave us faith and repentance and salvation. He is referring to the completion or consummation or perfection of our salvation. This is our glorification when Christ returns and takes us to the new heaven and new earth. We have been saved from sin, Satan and God's wrath in this age. But we still sin, we still fall when tempted by Satan, and we still fear God's wrath when we sin. But all of these sins, temptations and fear will disappear forever when our Lord returns for us.

Paul often compares sin to the darkness of night and holiness to the light of daytime. So he exhorts us to wake up from our sleep in darkness, because the day of Christ is at hand. He contrasts the "*works of darkness*" with the "*armor of light.*" In Ephesians 5:7-14, he says that we were "darkness" before we were saved, but now, we are "*light in the Lord.*" So we should walk as "*children of light*" discerning and leading lives that are "*good and right and true... and pleasing to the Lord.*" Therefore, he commands us, "*Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.*"

Again, Paul gives us examples of what we must not do as children of the light: "*orgies, drunkenness, sexual immorality and sensuality, quarreling and jealousy.*" Our culture is a wicked culture. Our civil government is a wicked government promoting murder in abortion, alcohol and drug abuse, and sexual immorality in homosexuality and transgenderism. In Loudon County, Virginia, two high school girls were sexually assaulted by the same boy who self-identified as a transgender. The father of one of the girls was arrested defending his daughter. The school board covered up the assaults and then branded the father and other parents who protested as "domestic terrorists." A few days ago, in a school in ultra-liberal Broward County, Florida, a school board member brought elementary school children on a field trip to... guess where: a gay bar. A mother in Los Gatos, another ultra-liberal city, was charged with hosting alcohol and sex orgies for his son and his friends. They were all 14-15-year-old high school students.

We live in the deep darkness of a wicked nation. What can we do? What do we do? As Christians, Paul directs us to put on the "armor of light." In Ephesians 6:11-19, he lists the "whole armor of God" to battle against "*the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*" We are to put on the "belt of truth," the "breastplate of righteousness," "shoes [of] the gospel of peace," the "shield of faith," the "helmet of salvation," the "sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God," and "praying at all times."

We are at war against a powerful enemy, Satan the deceiver and accuser. He is more powerful than any king or ruler on earth. But we wage war against him not with weapons of war, but with truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, salvation, the word of God, and prayer.

Beloved brothers and sisters, all of these spiritual weapons of war against the darkness of sin are given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ alone. Therefore, we must “*put on Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*” Paul commands us, “*put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness*” (Eph 4:22-24). We must put off our old sinful self when we were in darkness. Then we must put on the new self which Christ gave us when he brought us into his light.

In the 16th century, the Protestant Reformers brought the church from the dark ages of corruption, sin and immorality to the light of the truths of Scripture and salvation. Our Lord Jesus Christ sent this light to Martin Luther, a monk gripped by the darkness of sin, Satan and God’s wrath. So he wrote in his hymn, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God”:

Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is he,
Lord Sabaoth his name,
from age to age the same,
and he must win the battle.

We are still fighting against the darkness of evil. The battle is difficult and sometimes we think we are losing. But God’s promise is that our King will fight and win the battle for us.