

“Clothing makes the man.” We don’t hear that anymore. It meant to look your best; don’t be content with being casual or sloppy. Being casual and sloppy has become the standard. But what you wear is still a clue to who you are. You can see what I mean in one piece of apparel – the hat.

The fedora. Men don’t wear formal hats in public, except in uniform. So, a guy wearing a fedora has an attitude. He comes across as cocky. He’s trying to make a statement. He’s probably in his 30s or late 20s. The golf hat. A few golfers wear it. Otherwise, old guys wear it. It makes them feel younger. But if you turn it around, it looks more like a beret, and that gives a more daring appearance. But old guys don’t often want to do that, because they don’t want to look like they are trying to feel younger.

The featureless hat. The man who wears this is off duty. He may be mowing the lawn, going for a walk, or heading for a day at the beach. The cowboy hat. A real cowboy would never wear this hat. It’s too stiff for work on a ranch. Wearing this hat suggests that a man wants people to sense a certain rugged mystery about him.

This is my favorite: the baseball cap. It identifies you with the home team or your favorite team. But it really says, “I’m just one of the guys. I don’t take myself too seriously.” But turn the cap around, and it says the opposite. This is the Ben Roethlisberger feeling pretty good about throwing a touchdown pass in the last 30 seconds to defeat the Patriots for the AFC championship.

Now, cock the cap like this, and you are at home in the ’hood. At least, you are at home if you are black. If you are white, you just look stupid, and in the ’hood you may attract the wrong kind of attention. A black guy wears his cap like this or with the cap cocked backward to say, “We’ve got our own black culture, and we’re proud of it.”

This is a sermon about what to wear to show what kind of person you are. Let’s get after it in Romans 13:11-14.

The Day of Redemption

Romans 13:8 said: **Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law.** And verse 11 invites us to **do this** – fulfill the law of God by loving your neighbor as yourself – **understanding the present time.**

I don’t know what Paul meant by **the present time**, but I have two ideas of what it means to understand the present time. First, it means that “the times, they are a-changin’.” The core of the Church doesn’t change: the supremacy of Christ, the authority of Scripture, and the power of the Holy Spirit. But these eternal realities have been embodied here and elsewhere in ways that are less and less adequate to the changing times in which we live. We will talk about that a lot in months to come.

Second, understanding the present time means that we are living in the last days. That means we live in times when the authority of Jesus to govern the nations will be contested in every way imaginable. If you think Christ and the Church are being attacked from within and from without, you’re right. Don’t be surprised. Don’t be surprised if it gets worse before it gets better.

So, how are we supposed to live in these changing times and this growing opposition to Christ and His Church? Paul’s first answer comes in the first part of verse 11: **The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber.** “Don’t go gentle into the darkness that threatens to swaddle us into unthinking compliance. Great

issues are at stake. Wake up!” Any of us might say that about the times in which we live.

The second part of verse 11 seems foreign to our habits: **wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.** We would not say that. We might predict dire consequences of the political, economic, and moral perils we face. I am sure the apostle did not deny the dire consequences he saw in his world. What sets him apart is that he saw in them evidence that **our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.** His comment on that in verse 12 is haunting: **The night is nearly over; the day is almost here.** Are we awake enough to see that?

We have to ask: Did Paul think the Second Coming of Christ was at hand? If he did, we know he was mistaken about the timing. So, we have to ask: Can that belief be relevant to our lives?

Here are two reasons why we might say it cannot. First, the early Christians expected Christ to return during their lifetime. For example, the Apostle Paul wrote to the first Christians in the Greek city of Thessalonica: **You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven** – 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10. They waited from the Second Coming the way children wait for Christmas. Their expectation was so intense that when people in their congregation died, they wanted to know if the people who had died would be part of the Second Coming.

Well, they all died, and Christ had not returned; now 2000 years have passed, and Christ has not returned. It’s not that we don’t believe Christ will come again, but it’s hard to see how it’s supposed to make a difference in our lives here and now.

There’s another reason we might be reluctant to take the Second Coming of Christ seriously. American Christianity for the past 175 years is strewn with predictions of the Second Coming of Christ. The most recent was last year when Harold Camping of Family Radio set two dates for the Second Coming: May 21 and October 21. If that’s what belief in the Second Coming of Christ makes people do, then may the Lord bless Harold Camping and people like him, and keep them – far away from the rest of us. We want nothing to do with such craziness.

The Second Coming of Christ is relevant to our lives despite the craziness and the passage of so many centuries. What is the second request we make when we pray the Lord’s Prayer? “Thy kingdom come.” Every time we say that to God, we are saying, “The political system we are part of right now is flawed and temporary. We are waiting for something better. Please send it.” The Church has prayed that for 2000 years. Belief in the Second Coming of Christ simply reinforces those ideas by uniting the coming kingdom with the coming King.

The Pattern of This World

And so what? What difference should this belief make in your life? I think you will find the Apostle Paul’s answer as sane as sunlight on water. Verse 12: **So let us put aside the deeds of darkness.** What does that mean? Read on. **Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing** (think frat party) **and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery** (no free pass here), **not in dissension** (think people-who-can’t-get-along) **and jealousy** (the poisonous sorrow at other people’s success).

People who are looking for the coming Kingdom of God and the coming King say no to anything in this world that pushes them away from Christ and His Church. But they don’t just say no. By all means **Let us put aside the deeds of darkness**, but also **Put on**

the armor of light. Clothing makes the man. Remember? The apostle was writing about what to wear to show what kind of person you are as surely as this chef's hat. Who puts on armor? A soldier, and he puts it on for protection.

What is **the armor of light**? It's what we've been reading through the past two months. **Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world.** This is not the advice of an extremist. It means simply and powerfully, resist anything in this world that pushes you away from Christ and His Church.

Be transformed by the renewing (the renovation) **of your mind.** Going from being the fixer-upper that you are to the dream house God has in mind for you to be means changing fundamental attitudes and taking up new perspectives on life, including the Church. **Each member belongs to all the others.** You and I belong to each other the way the bow and violin belong to each other – not to meet each other's needs but to create something neither can do alone.

And then, Romans 12:9-21: Sincere love, brotherly love, hating what is evil, clinging to what is good, honoring others above yourself, keeping your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord, being joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer, sharing with those in need, hospitality, blessing those who persecute you – it all protects believers in Christ from anything that tries to push us away from Christ and His Church.

It is easy in our permissive society to these short commands and think that we are just being asked to keep rules. The apostle teaches us better. These aren't just rules. They are armor that protects us, our children, our church, and our society from danger.

Now, look at verse 14: **Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.** Clothing makes the man. Again, the apostle was writing about what to wear to show what kind of person you are as a baseball cap can tell you a lot about a person. The obedience that protects us from evil also displays Christ.

People who are looking for the coming Kingdom of God and the coming King in these changing, dangerous times don't just say no to anything that pushes them away from Christ and His Church. They **put on the armor of light**, and they **clothe themselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.** They have broken the spell that bewitches us into thinking that the worries of life, the love of money, or the desire for stuff are supreme.

Decision Time

That brings us back to the headwaters of Roman 12-15. Romans 12:1: **I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy.** The letter to the Romans tells the story of God's mercy to man. **God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** – Romans 5:8. Romans 5:10: **When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son. He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?** – Romans 8:32. That is the gospel, and the gospel is God's way of extending mercy to ever-widening circles of humanity.

Has the mercy of God washed up on your soul like a gentle wave on a sandy beach? Or is this message of the mercy of God just so much religious jaberwocky to you? Has it never reached the core of your being that if God is not merciful to us, we are doomed as a species?

If you have any sense that the mercy of God is meant for you, and you have never responded to God, why don't you at least say to Him with all the sincerity you

can muster, “Thank you”? “Thank you for doing what was best for me when I was your enemy and couldn’t care less about you. Thank you for Jesus Christ.”

If you have any sense that the mercy of God is meant for you; if you have any hunger to say thank you to Him in some deep way; if any stirring of devotion, any desire to please Him, then **offer your bodies to God as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual worship.**

As one who leads the way, I say to you, “Offer your body to God as a living sacrifice. Reaffirm the offer of your body to God as a living sacrifice. Don’t be afraid of failure or hypocrisy. Be afraid only of being so mired in the mundane that you no longer lift up your eyes to the horizon and aspire to be what God calls you to be.”

The only thing left to do is pray – two prayers for us who are prepared to pray. “Thank you, heavenly Father, for Jesus who showed me your mercy.” “Lord, take my body, and let it be consecrated to you, everywhere my body goes.”

If you are prepared to declare in a material way that you have offered your body as a living sacrifice to God, I want you to join me in filling out a card *without your name* on it that says you have done that and post it in designated places for all to see when you leave this worship service. (I will talk people through the contents of the card before we pray. Then, we’ll pray, and people will sign the cards.)

1. If you have done so, write: “I have offered (or renewed the offer of my body to God as a living sacrifice.
2. Write briefly an example of how doing that has made a difference in your life.
3. Do not write you name on the card.
4. Place it in the offering plate in a moment.