

XXX. The Law of Love

February 28 & March 1/2, 2017 Romans 13:8-14

Aim: To fulfill the law of love in all our horizontal relationships, even as we wait for the completion of our salvation.

A. Fulfill the Law of Love (Romans 13:8-10)

Paul cleverly uses the idea of ‘obligation’ to make the transition from his advice about governing authorities (vv. 1-7) to his exhortation to love for the neighbor (vv. 8-10). In this demand for love, Paul suggests, we find an obligation that can never be discharged, a ‘never-ending debt.’ We will never be in a position to claim that we have ‘loved enough.’ Yet, while joined to vv. 1-7 by means of the notion of obligation, vv. 8-10 are connected by their content to 12:9-21, where Paul expounded the meaning and outworking of ‘sincere love.’ These verses therefore return to the ‘main line’ of Paul’s exhortation after the somewhat parenthetical advice about government in 13:1-7. But these verses look forward as well as backward. In their insistence that love for others fulfills the law, Paul lays groundwork for his rebuke of the strong and the weak (14:1-15:13), who are allowing debates about the law to disturb the love and unity that they should be exhibit.

The obligation of love for another (v. 8b) is the key point in the paragraph. Paul highlights the importance of love in vv. 8c-10 by presenting it as the ‘fulfillment’ of the law. This point also serves the larger purpose of the letter – the explanation and defense of the gospel – by guarding Paul’s gospel at a potential point of vulnerability. For the claim that Christians are ‘not under the law’ (6:14, 15) could open the way to the assumption that Paul’s gospel leads to a ‘do whatever you want’ libertinism. Paul rejects any such conclusion by asserting that obedience of the central demand of the gospel, love for the neighbor, provides for the law’s complete fulfillment.

1. Love Is Owed (13:8ab)

a) *Financial Debt (13:8a)*

⁸*Owe no one anything...*

The need for Christians to discharge their obligations forms the transition between vv. 1-7 and vv. 8-10. In v. 7a, Paul urged Christians to ‘pay back’ their ‘debts’ (*opheilas*) to everyone, especially (in that context) to the governing authorities. In v. 8a, Paul repeats this demand: ‘Owe [*opheilete*] nothing to anyone.’ This command does not forbid a Christian from ever incurring a debt (e.g., to buy a house or a car); it rather demands that Christians repay any debts they do incur promptly and in accordance with the terms of the contract.

Paul has just been speaking of paying taxes (vv. 6-7), and the admonition to ‘owe nothing to anyone’ continues his focus on the Christian’s financial obligations. That phrase is sometimes interpreted to mean that a Christian is never justified in going into debt of any sort. But neither the Old nor New Testament categorically forbids borrowing or lending. It is obvious from Exodus 22:25 (cp. Ps. 15:5) that if lending was permitted in the Mosaic Law, so was borrowing. The moral issue involved charging interest (or ‘usury’ KJV) to the poor (Lev. 25:35-36; cp. Neh. 5:7; Ez. 22:12). It is obvious that lending, and therefore borrowing, were common and legitimate practices in ancient Israel. The Law carefully regulated lending by prohibiting

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charging interest to those who were destitute, but it did not forbid lending with honest and reasonable interest. When borrowing is truly necessary, the money should be repaid as agreed upon with the lender, promptly and fully. But Scripture nowhere justifies borrowing for the purpose of buying unnecessary things, especially luxuries, which cannot be afforded. And whatever is owed must be paid on time and in full. Those financial principles are the essence of Paul's admonition to 'owe nothing to anyone.'

The application from this text concerning borrowing and lending is this: there is no sin in borrowing, but there is sin in borrowing something and not paying it back. We are required to fulfill our obligation. When Christians incur debt, they, above all others, must move heaven and earth to honor their obligations as a matter of principle and conscience. If you owe somebody something, pay what you owe. Pay your bills and pay them on time. If you enter into a contract, fulfill the terms of the contract. That is basic integrity.

b) Debt of Love (13:8b)

...except to love each other...

The principle of paying one's debts is wrapped up in the overarching principle of love. If we borrow our neighbor's rake and do not return it, we are failing to love our neighbor. All the practical applications of righteousness and justice Paul gives us here in vv. 8-10 are rooted and grounded in that overarching responsibility we have to love our neighbor as ourselves. The things Paul sets forth are nothing more or less than practical applications of the Golden Rule.

Prompt payment of debts, however, is simply a transitional point in these verses. Paul's real interest emerges in the next clause: that Christians 'love one another.' What is the relationship between this demand for love and the preceding demand that Christians 'owe nothing to anyone'? The words that connect these two commands could be adversative; we would then translate v. 8a, 'Owe nothing to anyone; *but* you ought to love one another.' However, the words can also denote an exception; and, from early times, commentators have generally preferred this explanation, translating, 'Owe no one anything, except to love one another.' This interpretation is preferred, since it gives the debated words the meaning that they usually have in Paul and creates a transition between the two commands that is both natural and striking. As Origen put it, 'Let your only debt that is unpaid be that of love – a debt which you should always be attempting to discharge in full, but will never succeed in discharging.'

The apostle then makes what appears at first glance to be a radical transition, declaring that all Christians have a type of perpetual indebtedness. Completely apart from financial considerations or situations, all believers have the constant obligation 'to love one another.' It is a debt that we are constantly to pay against but can never pay off. Our love toward 'one another' applies first of all to fellow believers, our brothers and sisters in Christ. But 'one another' also applies to unbelievers—all unbelievers, not just those who are likeable and friendly.

On the one hand Paul encourages us to get out of debt—'Owe no one anything,' while on the other hand he tells us we have an ongoing debt of love—'love each other.' Origen wrote in the second century, 'So Paul desires that our debt of love should remain and never cease to be owed, for it is expedient that we should both pay this debt and always owe it.' The Christian is always a love-debtor, no matter how much love he gives.

Pauline use of 'one another' in similar context shows that the command to love here is restricted to love for fellow Christians. Nevertheless, the universalistic language that both precedes – 'no

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one’ – and follows – ‘the other’ – this command demands that the love Paul is exhorting Christians to display is ultimately not to be restricted to fellow Christians. We are called to love ‘the other.’ As Paul has already made clear, ‘sincere love’ (12:9) means that we are to ‘bless our persecutors’ (12:14) and seek to do good to *all* people (12:17).

‘Love’ towards the ‘fellow-man’ (*heteron*) echoes God’s command, ‘Love thy neighbor (*plēšion*) as yourself’ (Lev. 19:18), words that reappear in verses 9 and 10. Paul’s choice of the word ‘fellow-man’ instead of ‘neighbor’ in verse 8 is significant. He is not directing love to ‘neighbor’ (i.e., the fellow-Jew) but to ‘Everyman’ (i.e., all people, including Jews, Gentiles, even enemies – 12:14, 17021). God commended His own love to the morally weak, the godless, the sinners, and those hostile to him (5:6-10). Christian believers, like God, are to direct their love beyond their immediate covenantal brothers and sisters to everybody, even their persecutors.

2. Love Fulfills the Law (13:8c)

...for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

In the second part of the verse, Paul explains why love for one another is the Christian’s one outstanding debt: ‘the one who loves the other person has fulfilled the law.’ By using the phrase ‘the other’ to specify the object of our love, Paul emphasizes that we are called to love specific individuals with whom we come into contact. At the same time, he hints that these individuals may be people who are different from us. As the repetition of the point in v. 10 makes clear, Paul’s claim that the one who loves the other ‘has fulfilled’ the Mosaic Law introduces a central point in this paragraph. What does Paul mean by this claim?

(1) He may simply be highlighting the centrality of love *within* the law. On this view, Paul is teaching that loving other people is necessary if we are to claim truly to have ‘done’ what the law demands. Paul’s purpose is not to minimize the importance and continuing relevance of the other commandments but to insist that love must ever be the guiding principle in our obedience to these other commandments. But I question whether this view does justice to the word ‘has fulfilled.’ Paul reserves the word ‘fulfill’ for Christian experience; only Christians, as a result of the work of Christ and through the Spirit, can ‘fulfill’ the law.

(2) The word ‘fulfill,’ then, suggests that Paul is thinking about a complete and final ‘doing’ of the law that is possible only in the new age of eschatological accomplishment. Christians who love others have satisfied the demands of the law *en toto*; and they need therefore not worry about any other commandment. However, such complete and consistent loving of others remains an impossibility, even for the Spirit-filled believer: we will never, short of glory, truly love ‘the other’ as we should. This means that it would be premature to claim that love ‘replaces’ the law for the Christian, as if the only commandment we ever needed to worry about was the command of love. For as long as our love remains incomplete, we may very well require other commandments both to chastise and to guide us. What the source of those commandments may be is, of course, another question; and this Paul touches on in the next verse.

How does loving one’s neighbor fulfill the Law? The Ten Commandments contain two divisions, sometimes called the two tablets. The first gives us vertical, Godward commands. The second division contains horizontal commands that pertain to human relationships. Each of the divisions can be summed up with a single comprehensive commandment (Mt. 22:37-40; cp. Dt. 6:4-5 and Lev. 19:18). Keep both the vertical and the horizontal commandments and you

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will keep the whole Law! Here in his letter to the Romans, Paul is assuming that his readers have a vertical love for God, but do they have a horizontal love for others? If so, they are fulfilling God's Law.

3. Love Summarizes the Law (13:9)

⁹*For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'*

After declaring that love fulfills the law (v. 8b), the apostle illustrates his point by quoting five specific Old Testament laws. The first four are from the Ten Commandments, although they are not in the exact order found in Exodus 20:13-17 and Deuteronomy 5:17-21. The fifth law is from Leviticus 19:18.

Paul now supports his contention that loving others fulfills the law by arguing that the commandments are 'summed up' in the 'word' found in Lev. 19:18: 'love your neighbor as yourself.' Paul cites as illustrations of the commandment he has in mind abbreviated references to the seventh, sixth, eighth, and tenth commandments from the Decalogue. His addition 'and if there is any other commandment' makes clear, however, that he includes other commandments: probably, as the context would suggest, all those commandments of the law that relate to our relations with other human beings. Probably, therefore, the central position that Paul gives the commandment echoes Jesus, who paired Lev. 19:18 with Deut. 6:5 as the commandments on which 'all the law and the prophets hang' (Mt. 22:34-40). Paul undoubtedly also follows Jesus (see the parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25-27) in interpreting the 'neighbor' in the commandment to refer to other persons generally and not (as the original text of Lev. 19:18 might indicate) to the fellow Jew. The 'as yourself' in the commandment does not command or give an excuse for egotism or selfishness. It simply recognizes that people do, as a matter of fact, love themselves. It is this deep concern for ourselves that should characterize our attitude toward others.

The commandments Paul mentions in Romans 13 are those that prescribe behavior on the horizontal plain—our behavior toward each other. Whoever loves another has fulfilled the law. Ethical principles and divine precepts are given to us to be obeyed, but doing so requires a context in which to obey them. God's law is given to us for real-life situations. Augustine said, 'Love God and do what you want.' If our decisions about how to treat others are always motivated by love for God, a singular love for God, we really do not have to worry about the law, because the law reflects what is pleasing to God. That is why Augustine said, 'Love God and do what you want.' If you love God, you can do as you please, because you will be doing what pleases God. It is that simple. If you really love Him, you will be pleased by what pleases Him, and what pleases Him is revealed to us in His law.

The rule of love is this: love God and do what the love of God requires in every human situation. Paul could not envision any situation that would justify disobedience to God's laws of purity. When Paul writes about love in Romans 13, he is writing about the purpose and goal of the law—the love of neighbor.

The command to 'love your neighbor as yourself' is not, as some interpreters today insist, a defense of the popular but totally unbiblical idea that we are to have a high psychological self-image. It rather assumes that, as fallen human beings, we already have a high view of ourselves

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and that we should, by God's grace, have the same affection for others. Elsewhere Paul admonishes that we are to care for others more than ourselves (Phil. 2:3-4).

Brotherhood is something special in Scripture. It is enjoyed by all who share the same elder brother, Jesus Christ, the only begotten of the Father. The idea that all mankind is a brotherhood and God is the Father of all dilutes the special character of redemption. By nature, Jesus told us, we are children of Satan, and therefore unbelievers are not our brothers. They are, however, our neighbors. The Bible does teach the universal neighborhood of man. The law of the neighborhood, in which God is the supreme mayor, is the law of love, which is to be given to everybody.

'Neighbor' includes all people. Therefore, 'You shall not commit adultery.' If we love our neighbor, we will not commit adultery, because adultery is hatred of our neighbor. It is the destruction of our friends and family. 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness.' We do not love our neighbor by helping ourselves to his possessions, nor do we slander people we love or poison others against them. That kind of behavior violates a specific law of God, and most of all it violates the law of love.

Paul denotes the relationship of the love command of Lev. 19:18 to the rest of the commandments with the verb 'sum up.' Paul has earlier in Romans proclaimed the Christian's freedom from the 'binding authority' of the Mosaic Law (6:14, 15; 7:4; 8:4). The Christian, who belongs to the New Covenant people of God, is no longer 'under the [Mosaic] law,' the law for the Old Covenant people of God; he is under a 'new law,' 'the law of Christ' (see Gal. 6:2 and 1 Cor. 9:19-21). And central to this new law is a command that Christ Himself took from the Mosaic Law and made central to His new demand: the command to love our neighbors as ourselves (cp. Gal. 6:2 with 5:13-14).

4. Love Culminates the Law (13:10)

¹⁰*Love does no wrong to a neighbor therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*

While not explicitly connected with v. 9, the first statement in verse 10 clearly explains what Paul has asserted in that verse. The reason why the love command can 'sum up' the law is that 'love does no wrong to the neighbor.' For not doing wrong to others or, positively, doing good to others, is exactly what the OT commandments about our relationship with other human beings aims at. 'Therefore,' Paul concludes, 'love is the fulfillment of the law.' It is likely that v. 10b repeats the idea of v. 8b; that the Christian who loves, and who therefore does what the law requires (vv. 9-10a), has brought the law to its culmination, its eschatological fulfillment.

Paul sums up: 'Love does no harm to a neighbor.' If we love our neighbor, we do not steal from him or slander him, nor do we allow ourselves to be jealous or envious or to bear false witness against him. If we love somebody, we do not want to do them harm. That is the way we are to live as Christians, we are to be known by the love that we have for one another. 'Therefore,' Paul concludes, 'love is the fulfillment of the law.' Here Paul provides a terse treatment of the theme. In another epistle he writes an entire chapter about love, 1 Corinthians 13, which was not written as a treatise on romance but on neighbor love.

If believers have such selfless concern for the welfare of others, it clearly follows that genuine, godly 'love does no wrong to a neighbor,' meaning it does no wrong to *anyone*. Paul's point is that a Christian who allows God's love to rule his life is divinely protected from sin and inclined to righteousness. The loving Christian does not obey God's law because he fears the

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consequences of disobedience but because He loves God and seeks to please Him by loving others. Contrary to what many people think, living by ‘love’ and living by ‘the law’ are not mutually exclusive. They are, in fact, inseparably related. God’s law cannot be truly obeyed apart from love, because love, and only love, as Paul has already explained (v. 8b), ‘is the fulfillment of the law.’ Love fulfills both the Lord’s *golden rule* (Mt. 7:12) and the Lord’s *royal law* (James 2:8).

B. Prepare for Your Salvation (Romans 13:11-14)

Paul brings to a close his general exhortations to the Roman Christians by focusing on the same point with which he began: a call for a totally new way of living in light of the eschatological situation. In 12:1-2, Paul urges Christians to give themselves as living sacrifices, adopting a lifestyle in keeping with the new era to which they belong. In 13:11-14, he exhorts Christians to clothe themselves with Christ Himself (v. 14) and with that behavior (v. 12b) fitting for those who live already in the light of the great ‘day’ of final salvation that is soon to dawn (vv. 11-12a). The earlier text encourages Christians to look at the present in light of the past: by virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection, the ‘old age’ has been transcended by a new one. The Christian is to live out the values of that new age, appropriating the power available in the gospel to renew the mind and transform conduct. The text now before us shifts the perspective, encouraging Christians to look at the present in light of the future. For, while transferred by God’s grace into the new realm of righteousness and life, Christians still await full and final salvation (cp. 5:9-10), ‘the redemption of the body’ (cp. 8:23). The transformation that the gospel both demands and empowers flows from the work of Christ already accomplished. But it also looks ahead to the completion of the process on that day when we will be fully ‘conformed to the image of [God’s] Son’ (8:29). Christians are not only to ‘become what we are’; we are also to ‘become what we one day will be.’

Following his declaration that godly love fulfills the law (13:8-10), Paul next focuses on the urgency of believers becoming more and more like their Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, who is Himself the source and power of that divinely-required love. We are to ‘put on the Lord Jesus Christ’ (v. 14a). That phrase summarizes sanctification (the theme of chapters 12-16), the continuing spiritual growth of those who have become children of God through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. The faithful, obedient, loving Christian grows spiritually by becoming increasingly like Jesus Christ. As we clothe ourselves with Christ, His righteousness, truth, holiness, and love become more and more evident in our own lives. His character becomes reflected in us.

Verse 11-14 demonstrate that the various exhortations in chapters 12 and 13 are not merely humanistic but spring from a sense of nearness of the End when God will judge all people.

1. The Indicative (13:11-12a)

a) *Know the Time (13:11a)*

¹¹*Besides this you know the time...*

The ‘this’ could refer back immediately to the love command in vv. 8-10, but it probably alludes to all the exhortations in 12:1-13:10. All that Paul has set forth as the will of God for our sacrificial service in the new age of redemption is to be done because we understand the ‘time,’ or ‘opportune moment’ (*καιρος*, *kairos* as opposed to *χρονος*, *chronos*) in which we live.

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Paul's sense of urgency is stressed by the word 'time' in his opening phrase. Either of two Greek words could have been used. *Chronos* would emphasize chronological, calendar time. *Kairos* emphasizes quality or kind of time. Paul uses *kairos*. 'Besides this you know the *kind* of time it is....' What kind of time is it? The New Testament calls it 'the last days' (Acts 2:17; 2 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 1:2; cp. 1 Jn. 2:18)—not in the chronological sense but qualitatively. These 'last days' began with Christ and could culminate in 'the day' (v. 12a) of His return at any moment, but that is not the point here. Paul was telling his hearers, and us, that we are living in 'the last days.' This brings an urgency to this matter of loving on the level. Believers are to wake up from spiritual lethargy and love their neighbors while they have opportunity to do so.

Paul is not referring to chronological 'time' (*chronos*) but to *kairos*, 'time' as an era, epoch, or age. The phrases in verses 11-12 'it is already the hour...now salvation is nearer...the night is almost...and the day is at hand all express urgency. Time is limited, opportunity is brief. The time to heed and to obey is *now*. There is no time for apathy, complacency, or indifference.

In this section Paul enjoins a certain kind of behavior and prohibits another. He prefaces it by reminding people of the time. The time requires vigilance, alertness, and diligence. Some say that Paul might have been reference the destruction of Jerusalem. He might have been, but most commentators—rightly so—say that Paul is talking about the consummation of our salvation when we pass into glory.

b) Salvation Is Near (13:11b-12a)

...that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. ¹²The night is far gone; the day is at hand.

Paul then adds three statements in which he explains just what he means by the 'time.' His first and third assertions share the metaphor of night giving way to day. In a society governed by the sun rather than by the convenience of artificial lighting, people rose at dawn. Only slackards would keep to their beds after the first glow of daylight. Early rising was especially necessary in the Near East, where the bulk of work needed to be done before the heat of midday. Paul wants no slackards among his readers. Christians are to be alert and eager to 'present their bodies as a living sacrifice.' But Paul does not use the darkness/light, night/day imagery simply as an illustration drawn from daily life. For in using these contrasts, Paul is drawing on a broad tradition in which these contrasts were used as metaphors for moral and eschatological conditions. Basic to Paul's application is the OT/Jewish 'the day of the Lord,' adapted by the early Christians to denote the time of Christ's return in glory and the believer's final redemption. 'The day' of v. 12a is certainly a reference to this 'day of the Lord/Jesus Christ.' The 'night,' then, probably also hints at, by contrast, 'the present evil age' (cp. Gal. 1:4). While not as certain, it is also possible that 'the hour' in v. 11b has eschatological connotations. To 'rise from sleep,' then, means to reject 'absorption in the present night-age,' to avoid conformity with the present evil age (cp. 12:2).

Paul's declaration that 'the night is almost gone, and the day is at hand' means that man's time of spiritual unbelief, rebellion, and sin is about to end and God's time of judgment, glory, and righteousness is about to begin. In the New Testament, the term 'day' is often used to signify the dawning, as it were, of Christ's imminent return, and is used here in contrast to the 'night' of man's spiritual darkness, which is almost over. From the human perspective, it sometimes seems that the 'night' of man's depravity is interminable and that Satan's dominion over man is

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becoming stronger and more unalterable. The world as a whole is certainly not becoming more godly and peaceful but more ungodly and violent (2 Tim. 3:13).

The central explanatory statement of ‘the time’ is a straightforward assertion of what these metaphors hint at: ‘our salvation is now nearer than when we believed.’ Some Christians might find it puzzling that Paul places ‘salvation’ in the future for believers. But, in fact, Paul regularly uses ‘salvation’ and its cognates to denote the believer’s final deliverance from sin and death.

In verses 11-12a, Paul is portraying the ‘age’ begun with Adam’s Sin as a ‘dark night,’ in which his children engage in ‘works or darkness’ (v. 12; cp. Mark 13:35-37). With the dawning of the ‘day’ will come God’s salvation (the reappearance of Christ). ‘The night is nearly over,’ says Paul, ‘the daylight is near.’ While ‘salvation is nearer than when we first believed,’ Paul is not sensationalizing the Second Coming, but rather urging the behavior of the ‘light’ rather than the ‘darkness.’ Rather, Paul is saying that with the first coming of Christ the dawning of the day of salvation is in principle imminent, not that it was of necessity imminent in the next few minutes.

In declaring that ‘now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed,’ Paul obviously is speaking about the *completion* of ‘salvation.’ He is addressing Christians, those who already had believed and been converted. The ‘salvation’ that is becoming ‘nearer’ refers to the future and final dimension of redemption, namely, glorification. Justification refers to declared and positional righteousness that happens once and saves the believer from the penalty of sin. Sanctification refers to the life-long process of the believer’s growing spiritually in practical righteousness. Glorification refers to the believer’s ultimate perfection as a child of God. It is to that eschatological motive, the hope of Christ’s imminent return, to which the apostle appeals.

Many scholars think that Paul’s statement here, along with many similar ones in the NT, shows that that early Christians were certain that Christ was going to return within a very short period of time. Paul certainly betrays a strong sense of expectation about the return of Christ (e.g., Phil. 4:5) and can even speak at times as if he will be alive at that time (e.g., 1 Th. 4:15). But nowhere does he predict a near return; and, more importantly, he does not ground his exhortations on the conviction that the parousia would take place very soon but on the conviction that the parousia was always imminent – its coming certain, its timing incalculable. ‘On the *certainty of the event*, our faith is grounded; by the *uncertainty of the time*, our hope is stimulated, and our watchfulness aroused.’ Christ’s return is the next event in God’s plan; Paul knew it could take place at any time and sought to prepare Christians – both in his generation and in ours – for that ‘blessed hope.’

Do you ever wonder how long you are going to live? Whatever our age, it is time to wake up because the day is approaching, and therefore our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The fullness of our salvation will not take place until our glorification when we enter into heaven. Paul is addressing believers when he writes, ‘Our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.’ That is not bad news. It is good news because it means the fullness of our salvation comes closer to us with every passing hour. Paul uses a figure from the normal daily movement of the sun—the difference between night and day. The time already passed is the nighttime. We are now in the last watch of the night, and the dawn of the fullness of our salvation is about to break. People love darkness because it conceals them from exposure. When we are brought into the fullness of day, we are known for what we are.

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2. The Imperative (13:12b-14)

a) *Cast Off (13:12b)*

So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.

The first pair of imperatives that Paul builds on the imminence of Christ's return uses the imagery of changing clothes: 'putting off' one set in order to 'put on' another. This language was widely used with metaphorical associations in the ancient world, and the NT writers adopt it as a vivid way of picturing the change of values that accompanies, and is required by, conversion to Christ (cp. Eph. 4:22, 25; Col. 3:8, 12). Equally common as an image of morality is the contrast between darkness and light that Paul uses to characterize what Christians are to 'put off' and 'put on.' Particularly significant here is that in the OT, Judaism, and the NT, the contrast is extended into eschatology, with darkness characterizing the present evil age and light the new age of salvation. The darkness of night, as the time when those bent on evil and mischief are particularly active, becomes an image for the evil realm, that 'old age' which continues to exert its influence and to which Christians are not to be conformed (12:2). The light/darkness contrast is, of course, a natural extension of the day/night imagery of vv. 11-12a; cp. also 1 Th. 5:4-5. The 'works of darkness' that Paul urges us to renounce are therefore those activities that are typical of that evil realm. In their place, we are to put on 'the weapons of light,' weapons appropriate for those who have been 'delivered from the dominion of darkness' and been 'qualified to share in the inheritance of the saints in light' (Col. 1:13, 12). We need such weapons both to defend and to extend the light.

The imagery here pictures a soldier who has been engaged in a night orgy and drinking bout and, still clad in the garments of his sin, has fallen into a drunken sleep. But the dawn is approaching and the battle is at hand. It is time to wake up, throw off the clothes of night, and put on the battle gear. 'Lay aside' here carries the idea of forsaking, or renouncing, and in this context obviously refers to repentance from 'the deeds of darkness,' a general term that includes all sins in which a believer may indulge. Scripture frequently uses the figure of darkness to represent sin, here described as 'deeds of darkness.' Crimes are frequently committed at night, the time of 'darkness,' because they can more easily go unnoticed.

Paul next moves from the negative to the positive, from emphasizing confession and genuine repentance in the laying aside of the destructive darkness of sin to putting on the protective 'light' of righteousness. Paul uses the imagery of a soldier who had dressed himself in party clothes and spent the night in reveling. As the day dawns, the commander orders him to wake up, take off his night clothes, and 'put on the armor' he needs to fight the day's battle. 'Armor' is made for warfare, and its purpose is to protect the one who wears it. By the indwelling Spirit working through our new nature in Christ, we not only have every resource necessary to forsake the deeds of darkness but also every resource we need to 'put on the armor of light.' God's own 'light' provides divine protection in our battle against Satan's supernatural powers of darkness as well as against the natural darkness of human sin, to which, even as believers, we still are so prone. 'The armor of light' is 'the full armor of God' (Eph. 6:11-12).

b) *Walk Properly (13:13)*

¹³*Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy.*

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Paul now derives a second pair of contrasted commands from his teaching about the nearness of the Lord's return. This contrast employs the very popular imagery of 'walking' as a way of speaking about one's daily conduct. Our manner of life, Paul urges, is to be 'decent,' a word that suggests a decorous and 'becoming' deportment, a lifestyle 'appropriate' to those who live in the full light of the day.

To 'behave (walk) properly' is to live in a way that pleases God. It is to live honestly before our Lord and before men, to live an outward life that is consistent with our inner nature in Christ, to live a sanctified life that reflects our justified life. We are to 'behave properly as in the day,' because, as children of God, 'we are *of the day*.' Returning again to the negative, Paul, as he often does, mentions a number of specific sins, characteristics of our lives that reflect spiritual darkness rather than light, the night of unrighteousness rather than the day of righteousness.

In contrast to the 'decent' conduct that we are to exhibit, Paul lists three pairs of vices that we are to avoid. It seems evident that Paul has chosen the first two pairs especially to match the metaphor of darkness/night that he has been using; for excessive drinking and sexual misbehavior are especially 'sins of the night.' 'Strife' and 'jealousy' do not so naturally fit here; and Paul may have chosen them with a view ahead to his rebuke of the Roman Christians for their divisiveness and mutual criticism (cp. 14:1-15:13).

Paul is directing these exhortations to Gentile believers, some of whom knew from first-hand experience the drinking binges, sexual orgies, and quarreling Paul refers to. These occurred both in high-class banquets and low-class bordellos. These shameful activities are 'dark' since they usually occur at 'night' behind closed doors under the 'cloak of darkness.' Such behavior has the appearance of having a good time, but really speaks of boredom and despair, the sense that life is rapidly slipping away, and equally that death is rapidly approaching.

Paul's reference to rioting and drunkenness pertains to the pagan religious worship of the god Bacchus, the god of the grape and the vine. Bacchus was the sponsor of the ancient Bacchanalia, an orgiastic feast involving gluttony and unbridled sexual behavior. Participants set out to get drunk and to silence pangs of conscience so they could engage in unbridled sin.

First, there must be no 'orgies and drunkenness.' These words used together picture drunken individuals having a so-called 'good time' and disturbing the citizens of the town. The Christian who wants to love must set aside such pursuit of harmful pleasures. Second, there is to be no 'sexual immorality and sensuality.' 'Sexual immorality' is a Greek word that can simply be translated, 'bed,' and the word rendered 'sensuality' is one of the ugliest words in the Greek language, describing one who is not only given to immorality, but is incapable of feeling shame. The Christian who wants to love must understand that one cannot both love people and live for sex. The third specific is to abstain from 'quarreling and jealousy.' This phrase describes someone who cannot stand being surpassed and grudges others their success and position. Tragically many believers act as if it is their holy duty to keep others in their place. Such behavior can never exist in a heart that truly loves a neighbor.

First on the list is 'carousing,' which translates *kōmos*, a term often used of a military or athletic victory celebration. Because such revelry frequently turned into drunken and immoral disorder, *kōmos* came to be used of any wild party, sexual orgies, brawls, and sometimes even rioting, especially when associated with 'drunkenness,' the second sin mentioned. *Methē* ('drunkenness') most often was used of intentional and habitual intoxication.

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The next two sins mentioned here, ‘sexual promiscuity and sensuality,’ also are closely associated. ‘Sexual promiscuity’ does not translate *porneia*, the most common Greek term for sexual immorality, but rather *koitē*, which literally refers to a bed or bedroom. But it came to have the same connotation that the phrase ‘going to bed’ with someone of the opposite sex carries today. In the New Testament the word is used both of the honored marriage bed (Heb. 13:4) and of illicit ‘sexual promiscuity,’ as here. ‘Sensuality,’ translates *aselgeia*, which has the basic meaning of shameless excess and the absence of restraint. Like *koitē*, it was used almost exclusively of especially lewd sexual immorality, of uninhibited and unabashed lasciviousness. It refers to the kind of sexual debauchery and abandonment that characterizes much of modern society and that is often flaunted almost as a badge of distinction.

‘Strife’ (*eris*) refers to persistent contention, bickering, petty disagreement, and enmity. It reflects a spirit of antagonistic competitiveness that fights to have its own way, regardless of cost to itself or of harm to others. It is produced by a deep desire to prevail over others, to gain the highest prestige, prominence, and recognition possible. ‘Strive’ is characterized by self-indulgence and egoism. It has no place even for simple tolerance, much less for humility or love. *Zēlos* (‘jealousy’) is the term from which we get the English *zeal* and *zealous*, which often carry a positive connotation. It is also sometimes used positively in the New Testament. But in the present passage, this word is properly translated in the very negative sense of ‘jealousy’ (‘envying,’ KJV). James twice connects ‘jealousy’ with ‘selfish ambition’ (James 3:14, 16).

c) Put On (13:14)

¹⁴*But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*

Paul’s final pair of contrasted imperatives are not so obviously related as those in vv. 12b and 13. The positive command picks up the verb ‘put on’ from v. 12b. Now, however, what we are to put on is not a suit of armor but Christ Himself. The exact meaning of what Paul intends is not easy to pinpoint. But perhaps we should view the imperative in light of his understanding of Christ as a corporate figure. Against this background, Paul’s exhortation to ‘put on the Lord Jesus Christ’ means that we are consciously to embrace Christ in such a way that His character is manifested in all that we do and say. This exhortation appears to match the exhortation at the beginning of this section, ‘be transformed by the renewing of the mind,’ suggesting that it is into the image of Christ that we are being transformed (cp. 8:29).

It is true that if we are Christians we have already put on the Lord Jesus Christ (cp. Gal. 3:27). But our text here in Romans has reference to a practical day-to-day, repeated putting on of Christ. We are to embrace Him again and again and again. Paul emphasizes that it is ‘the Lord Jesus Christ’ that we put on. We bow to His Lordship. He is the King of all or He is not King at all. This is where we gain the capacity to love. Loving on the level comes from *the negative* (putting off the works of darkness) and *the positive* (putting on Jesus Christ day by day). We must constantly do this.

In contrast to sins of verse 13, we are to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for our flesh. Paul means that we are not to make or provide opportunities for sin. An old country preacher said that if we desire to overcome drunkenness, we best not tie our horse to the post in front of the saloon. We are not to make provisions. Luther put it this way: ‘I cannot keep sparrows from flying about my head, but I can keep them from making a nest in my hair.’ We are not to make provision to accommodate our base desires. Instead, we are to provide for our soul by putting on Christ and walking in daylight.

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‘To put on the Lord Jesus Christ’ represents the continuing spiritual growth of those who have become children of God through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ (cp. Col. 2:7). Once again, Paul uses contrast to make his point, this time in reverse order from that of verse 12. Here the order is first to put on Christ and His righteousness and then to put off sin, by making ‘no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.’ *Pronoia* (‘provision’) has the basic meaning of forethought, of planning ahead. More often than not, the sins we commit develop from wrong ideas and lustful desires that we have allowed to linger in our minds (cp. James 1:14-15). The longer we permit them to stay, the more ‘provision’ we make ‘for the flesh’ to bring them to fruition. ‘The flesh’ does not refer primarily to our physical bodies but to our remaining humanness, our lingering proclivity to sin, which finds expression through our bodies. The ‘provision’ for sin originates in our hearts, minds, emotions, and will, which are still influenced powerfully by ‘the flesh.’

As the negative counterpart to ‘put on the Lord Jesus Christ,’ Paul warns us, ‘make no provision for the flesh, to carry out its desires.’ ‘Flesh’ might have neutral meaning here, but the term more likely lies more toward the negative end of its spectrum of meaning: ‘flesh’ as that principle and power of life in this world which tends to pull us away from the spiritual realm. As he does in Galatians (cp. 5:13-26), Paul implies concern that his proclamation of freedom from the law (vv. 8-10) might lead to a licentious lifestyle. Thus he urges his readers, in place of the law, to embrace Christ – who, through the Spirit, provides completely for victory over the flesh.

Paul word’s have been made famous through their impact on a man who read them in 386 AD (*Confessions*, viii, 28-30). Brought up as a Christian, this native of Thagaste in North Africa became a professor of rhetoric, first in Rome and then in Milan. He had long since abandoned any vestige of Christian living, and immersed himself in ways of life that typified the godlessness of that time. In Milan, he re-entered the Christian circle, though as yet without repentance from sexual promiscuity and without accompanying peace of heart. One day in deep sadness, seated in the garden of a Christian friend, he heard a child singing, ‘Take up and read.’ Coming inside the house, he opened at random a volume of Paul’s letters and read the words, ‘not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual acts and licentiousness... but put on the Lord Jesus Christ.’ This proved to be a life-changing moment for Augustine, who later became Bishop of Hippo in North Africa and the greatest theologian of the early Christian centuries.

For next time: Read Romans 14:1-12.