

# UNIT 25—Love, for the Day Is Near/Romans 13:8-14



## TEXT

### *Love, for the Day Is Near*

<sup>8</sup>Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law.

<sup>9</sup>The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet,"<sup>a</sup> and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself."<sup>b</sup> <sup>10</sup>Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

<sup>11</sup>And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. <sup>12</sup>The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. <sup>13</sup>Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. <sup>14</sup>Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>9 Exodus 20:13-15, 17; Deut. 5:17-19, 21

<sup>b</sup>9 Lev. 19:18

<sup>c</sup>14 Or *the flesh*

## STUDY

### READ

#### First Reading/First Impressions

What is one thing that immediately strikes you about this passage?

#### Second Reading/Big Idea

What is the key verse here? Why?

### SEARCH

1. How does verse 8 connect with verse 7?

2. What types of debts are to be put aside? (v. 8)

3. What debt are we to keep? (v. 8)

4. What is the relationship between the Law (Ten Commandments) and love? (vv. 9-10)

5. How do the commandments help you know what it means to "love your neighbor"?

6. What is the difference between "fulfilling the law" by love and living "under the law"? (8:2)

7. The commandments listed are all negative: "Do not. . . ." Love, however, is positive. Take each commandment and "translate" it into a positive statement that shows what love does:

Commandment	The Way of Love
Do not commit adultery.	Example: I will nurture my marriage, and that of others.
Do not murder.	
Do not steal.	
Do not bear false witness.	
Do not covet.	

8. How would you paraphrase the motivation Paul gives for this life of love? (vv. 11-12)

9. Practically, how does "clothing yourself with Jesus" (v. 14) relate to living by love? (v. 8)

## APPLY

When you think of "clothing yourself" with Jesus, what comes to mind?

☐ A three-piece suit for formal occasions. ☐ A strait jacket. ☐ Knock-around clothes you'd wear all the time if you could. ☐ A uniform that looks like that of everyone else on the team. Why?

In what situation is it especially difficult for you to "wear" Jesus (live in love) right now?

How will you try to put love into practice in that situation this week?

# GROUP AGENDA

Divide into groups of 4 before starting on these questions. Follow the time recommendations.

## TO BEGIN/10 minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

☐ Are you more like the last of the big spenders or the first of the big savers? ☐ If you had to move to a place one half the size of your present place, what would you throw away? What would you keep? ☐ If you knew you had 24 hours to live, what would you do with the time? ☐ What did you jot down for READ? ☐ What is your view of the second coming of Christ?

## TO GO DEEPER/20 minutes (Choose 2 or 3)

☐ Go around and answer the questions under SEARCH—one person answering question 1, the next person answering 2, etc. ☐ When is the last time you thought seriously about simplifying your life? ☐ How literal should a Christian take the command to stay out of debt? ☐ Why is it that the debt to love can never be paid? ☐ Can a person who has very little self-respect really love another person? Explain. ☐ Case History: Your friend Jerry, an earnest Christian, comes to you for advice. He is tired of the rat race involved in keeping his business going. He's thinking about selling it so that he can devote himself to ministry, since "Christ might be returning at any moment. People need to be ready." What do you suggest to him?

## TO CLOSE/5-20 minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

☐ What did you jot down for APPLY? ☐ To whom do you especially need to pay up your "debt" of love? How can you do so? ☐ On a scale from 1 to 10, how much does the prospect that Christ could return at any time affect your own behavior? (Let 10 be a great effect and 1 be no effect.)

# NOTES ON ROMANS 13:8-14

**Summary/Romans 13:8-14.** Beginning in 12:1 Paul shifted his emphasis from theology to lifestyle. He first outlined how believers are to live as members of a Christian community (12:1-13). Then he looked at the question of how Christians are to relate to unbelievers, ending that section with a very practical discussion of how Christians are to relate to the governing authorities (12:14—13:7). Here he moves from specific instructions on relationships to the general principle that guides all relationships: the law of love (13:8-10). He ends this unit by pointing out what it is that motivates Christians to follow this law of love: the imminent return of Christ. Paul's summary of the Christian life here in 13:8-14 is therefore: "Love others because the new age is dawning."

v. 8 **debt** . . . a repetition in negative form of the positive statement in verse 7 ("Give everyone what you owe him."). In verse 7 Paul has in mind public taxes, while here he turns to private debts.

**debt to love** . . . "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 all this debt daily and always owe it." (Origen)

v. 9 Paul points to the second half of the Ten Commandments and indicates that each law would be automatically fulfilled if people kept the more basic principle that underlies them—loving others in the same fashion in which they love themselves. If a person really loved his neighbor, he wouldn't steal from him, etc. See Mark 12:28-34.

**neighbor** . . . In Leviticus 19:18, the neighbor is a fellow Jew; but Jesus in the

parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) clearly expands **neighbor** to include all people. One's neighbor is the person in need regardless of race or nationality.

v. 10a The negative statement of verse 9b.

v. 10b Augustine once said, "Love God—and do what you like." If one truly loves, that person's life will automatically fall into those patterns established by the written law. Still, since all people are sinful and therefore imperfect, the admonitions of the Ten Commandments as well as those of St. Paul will be of great value by helping clarify the path of love.

v. 11-14 The idea of the Second Coming as that which motivates one to live morally can also be found in Matthew 25:31-46; Mark 13:33-37, Philippians 4:4-7; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, 23; Hebrews 10:24f; James 5:4-11; and 1 Peter 4:7-11.

v. 11 **The present time** . . . This present age within which believers now live is not the ultimate reality. It is merely the prelude to a greater reality which will burst forth when Christ returns. Therefore Christians are not to live as if the here and now is all there is. Rather, remembering what Christ did in the past, they are to set their eyes on the future and live a lifestyle consistent with the coming new age. This is how the Second Coming motivates one to moral living.

The idea of the **present age** occurred previously in Romans 3:26; 8:18; 9:9; and 11:5.

**slumber** . . . sleep is inappropriate for those who must prepare for the imminent coming of Christ.

**salvation** . . . here understood as a divine event that will take place at a particular time in the future, i.e., though one enters into salvation upon conversion, this is a state to be realized fully only at the Second Coming.

v. 12 **night** . . . the present age.

**day** . . . the coming age inaugurated by Christ's second coming in which God's new order will appear.

**the day is almost here** . . . the early church understood that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus had ushered in the last days—the end time. God, however, because of his patience had provided an *interval* before the culmination of the "night," the purpose of which is to allow other men and women to come to faith. During this interval the call to the Christian is to remain alert and expectant knowing that the Second Coming may occur at any time.

**armour of light** . . . that which one obtains from God and is appropriate to wear when the new age dawns. (See Ephesians 6:11f).

v. 13-14 In the summer of A.D. 386, Aurelius Augustine, Professor of Rhetoric at Milan University sat weeping in a friend's garden, wanting to begin a new life but not knowing how, when he heard a child chanting, "Take Up and Read! Take Up and Read!" Whereupon he picked up his friend's copy of Romans and read these two verses. "No further could I read," he later wrote, "nor had I any need; instantly, at the end of the sentence, a clear light flooded my heart and all the darkness of doubt vanished away." (Confessions)

## COMMENTS

v. 13 **orgies** . . . the word originally meant a group of supporters who accompanied home a victor at the games, singing his praises. It later came to have a negative sense, describing noisy revelry or carousing.

**drunkenness** . . . while all Greeks including children drank wine even at breakfast (when they dipped their bread into wine), drunkenness was considered a shameful thing.

**sexual immorality** . . . the Greek word means, literally, "a bed." In the first century, prior to Christianity, chastity was almost unknown and was not considered a virtue by most people.

**debauchery** . . . the public display, without shame, of immoral acts.

**dissention** . . . the desire for power and prestige; unwillingness to be in second place.

**jealousy** . . . envy which begrudges another's place or gifts.

v. 14 **clothe yourselves** . . . to put on the *armor of light* (v. 12) is, in fact, to put on Christ. It is not merely a matter of cultivating Christian virtues independently on one's own. "To put on the Lord Jesus Christ means here to embrace again and again, in faith and confidence, in grateful loyalty and obedience, Him to whom we clearly belong . . . . It means to follow Him in the way of discipleship and to strive to let our lives be molded according to the pattern of the humility of His earthly life. It means so trusting in Him and relying wholly upon the state of righteousness before God which is ours in Him, that we cannot help but live to please Him." (Cranfield)

### The Law of Love

There were various words in the Greek language that described different aspects of this thing called love.

*Eros* was used to describe sexual love. It is the word from which we derive the English word "erotic." *Storge* meant "affection." It is that which existed between a mother and child. It is what characterized families. *Philia* is best understood as friendship, a kind of warm, comfortable bond that exists between old friends.

None of these three words was used to describe Christian love. *Eros* was too tainted with negative overtones to be of use. *Storge* was too tied to family and kin. It was not broad enough to reflect what Christians were called to. *Philia*, though a positive word, was again too exclusive. It described the natural affinity one felt for a small circle of people of like mind and inclination.

Instead of using any of these three words the New Testament writers took a little-used word from classical Greek and filled it with an almost new content. That word is *agape*. What does it mean?

The best definition is found in Matthew 5:43-44: "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies." That seems a contradiction in terms. How can one "love" a person who by definition one "hates"? The answer is that it all depends upon how you define love. If love is nothing but a warm feeling, then, of course, one can't "love" an enemy. But if love is an activity—a benevolent action done on behalf of another—then one can love an enemy. You can act in that other person's interest regardless of how you feel about the person.

It was, of course, this kind of love that revolutionized the first-century world.

### The Second Coming

Jesus will return again to earth one day. He himself taught this (Matthew 24). It was confirmed by angels at the time of his ascension (Acts 1:11), and the apostles wrote about it frequently (1 Corinthians 15, 1 and 2 Thessalonians; James 5:7-9; 2 Peter 3; 1 John 2:28, etc.).

Three key words are used in the New Testament to describe his second coming, each revealing a different aspect of the event. The most frequent word is *parousia*. It means "arrival" or "presence" and was used by the Greeks to describe the visit of a ruler. Jesus will visit earth again, this time coming as the King and arriving in great power and glory. The second word is *epiphaneia* (English: epiphany). It was used by the Greeks to describe the appearance of a god or the ascent to a throne of a king (2 Timothy 4:1). The third word is *apokalypsis* (English: apocalypse). This word means an "unveiling" or a "revelation"—that which was invisible is now made visible (1 Peter 1:7, 13).

But the fact is: Jesus has not yet returned again. It has been nearly 2000 years and yet his return is delayed. This was a problem for believers in the first century when after 30 years He had not returned. It is still a problem today, though now most Christians have lost that sense of urgency and immediacy that gripped the early believers.

He will come again. This we know. When He comes, the new age will dawn. This also we know. The problem is: How do we live during this in-between time? We understand the reason for the delay: so that more and more men and women around the world can be drawn into God's kingdom. But still, living during this gap-in-time is not always easy. Christ *has* defeated the hostile evil powers, but they don't seem to know it.