

Romans 13:8-14

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Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 00] As citizens of the kingdom of heaven, we are loved deeply, and we are to love deeply.

This was something we were reminded of this morning as we thought about Jesus speaking to His disciples concerning what is involved in belonging to the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, the family of God.

The call to love one another, the call to love deeply, is not a novel one that Jesus brought to the table as some kind of Jesus innovation.

The same call to God's people is found throughout the Bible. We think especially of words that Paul picks up on in our reading in chapter 13 of Romans' gospel, love your neighbor as yourself.

In this passage that we want to think about this evening, and very particularly the closing call that we find, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.

[1 : 28] In the passage, the believers in Rome are being reminded of this biblical imperative, of this mark of Christian citizenship, to love our neighbor.

And the call to love our neighbor. There in verse 9, in summarizing the different commandments that Paul has chosen to mention, he then reminds the Romans, the believers in Rome, of these words from the Old Testament, love your neighbor as yourself.

And the call to love our neighbor then evolves, we might say, into a further and related call, but with a distinctly New Testament flavor.

And that is the call with which Paul ends this section, certainly the way it's divided in the chapters in our Bible, in verse 14. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.

So, there are two calls, love your neighbor as yourself, picking up on a familiar language from the Old Testament, but then that develops into this related call, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.

[2 : 43] And what I want to try and do this evening is to take us on a journey, I might say, from that call, grounded in the Old Testament, love your neighbor as yourself, to this connected, related call, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Walk that path or join the dots, if you wish, between these two calls. So, let's begin by just commenting on, very briefly, on the opening call there in the second half of verse 9, love your neighbor as yourself.

Now, Paul, on this occasion, presents this biblical call as a debt of love.

In verse 8, he says, Let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt to love one another. And then he continues giving some examples and summarizes it with this call, love your neighbor as yourself.

And the reason Paul uses the language of a debt to speak of this duty is that that is what he has been talking about. He's been talking about debts and obligations.

[3 : 58] And he simply uses the language as an opportunity to remind the believers of this particular obligation. The word debt is being used in that sense as an obligation upon us as Christians, as citizens of the kingdom.

But as we recognize that that's the language Paul uses, I think it is important to say two things concerning this obligation. No doubt there are other things, but two that I want to just mention as we then move on to what follows.

Two things concerning love as a debt or an obligation. The first thing to say is that Paul is not using the language of debt that we might think of the debt to love as something burdensome.

And perhaps even more importantly, he's not using it in the sense that our loving others is somehow a payment we make for the love that we might think of. That might be another way in which Paul's language could be misunderstood.

We are loved deeply by God, and so somehow that means that we have to pay back the love that we receive by loving others. And that's not the picture that Paul is painting.

[5 : 36] He's simply using the language that he has been using in another context, and he takes the opportunity to remind us that to love others is an obligation that is upon us, but it is a blessed obligation that we should love others.

The other thing to say about this obligation, and this is what Paul is contrasting with other obligations, is that this is an obligation that we never entirely fulfill.

It's a permanent obligation. Other debts we can pay off, and it's a great relief when we do. We may be taking out a loan, and we need to pay it over three years, or maybe for the purchase of a car, or maybe a mortgage.

And those who have reached the point of paying off a mortgage, I can't relate to that, but I could imagine what a great relief. Finally, the debt's been paid.

I no longer owe the bank. Or maybe some other obligation to others that is finally met. And we can say, right, that's me, done. And Paul says that in the matter of loving our neighbor, we never fulfill the obligation.

[6 : 52] It's a permanent obligation that is never altogether fulfilled. The examples of loving our neighbor that are given by Paul are some of the commandments from what we normally describe as the second table of the law, those that relate particularly to our relationship with other people.

The first table of the law being concerned primarily with our relationship with God. And as Paul is considering and dealing with this matter of loving others, then he gives quite reasonably the example of commandments relating to others and how we treat others.

So the opening call is love your neighbor as yourself. But our concern is how do we get from there to what he says in verse 14? Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first step, if you wish, that I want to look at is what Paul says concerning the present time, the time in which he is reminding them of this obligation.

Paul introduces or provides a particular reason for obeying the call to love. Now, you might quite reasonably say, Well, surely the call to love our neighbor as ourself doesn't require a reason.

[8 : 19] It is so grounded in the heart of the biblical message. It ought not to be necessary for reasons to be given. And there's a sense in which that's true. But Paul does give a particular reason why, for those who are receiving this letter, they should be mindful that there is a particular urgency, a particular reason for them taking seriously this call to love their neighbor as themselves.

What is that reason that Paul gives? Well, the reason given is what Paul calls the present time. Notice there in verse 11, having reminded them of this obligation, love your neighbor as yourself, he then says, And do this.

Love your neighbor as yourself. 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.

The night is nearly over. The day is almost here. The present time. How are we to understand that?

What does Paul mean by speaking of the present time? For him, it's relevant to this call to love our neighbor as ourself. Well, what is this present time that impinges on or is relevant to us taking seriously this command?

[9 : 54] Might it be that the present time that Paul is speaking about has come and gone and is no longer relevant for us? It was for those who were reading the letter, first receiving the letter, but times have moved on and we are in a different time.

It could be. How do we understand what Paul says when he speaks about the present time? Well, the present time is located by Paul between the night that he speaks of, the night is nearly over, and the day that is almost here.

The night is nearly over. The day is almost here. Those are his exact words said in verse 12. And the present time is wedged between the two, if you wish.

You've got the night that's nearly over. You've got the day that is about to begin. That's a familiar picture. You know, we go to bed, we sleep through the night, hopefully, and then the morning dawns and a day begins.

There's the night and there's the day. We all know about night and day. And Paul is saying that the present time that he's speaking of is that moment or that time at the breaking of day, when the night's nearly over and the day is just about to begin.

[11 : 07] Okay, but what is that? What is this time in between or towards the end of the night and just as a new day is beginning?

Well, let's think of the two periods, if you wish, the night and the day. We'll start with the day and identify what this new day that is almost here, to use Paul language, is.

What is this new day? Well, a clue that we're given is that on this new day, our salvation will be brought fully to us.

Notice there in verse 11, 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.

The implication is, I think, fairly clear that when this new day dawns, of which Paul speaks, then that which is nearer but still not fully ours will be fully ours, will be fully our possession.

[12 : 15] And given what Paul says there then, it seems clear that Paul has in mind when he speaks of the day that is almost here, he is speaking of the day of Christ, the second coming of Jesus Christ and the inauguration of a new age, the ushering in of the new heavens and the new earth, where we, citizens of the kingdom of God, will enjoy our salvation in all its fullness.

We often hear, helpfully, the language, in speaking of salvation, the language of the already and the not yet, what we already enjoy, what we already experience, forgiveness of sins, adoption into God's family, and so much more.

And yet, there is more. There is more that we have not yet experienced. That is yet to come when we will fully enter into and experience and enjoy our salvation when Christ returns.

So, it seems clear that Paul, when he speaks of this day that is almost here, he is speaking of that day. What about the night? He speaks there at the beginning of verse 12 of the night that is nearly over.

Nearly over, but not quite. But still the night. It's the time in which Paul's readers lived when the night was nearly over.

[13 : 41] And I would suggest it's the time in which we still live. We still live in the night, in this night that is nearly over, but not quite.

And the night is what we might call the present age, an age that is characterized by darkness and death. It's the night. It's characterized by this darkness.

And so, the picture that Paul is painting is of the believer, his original readers in Rome, but given the way we understand what he's saying, it applies to us also.

Believers living at the dawn of a new age. We live in the night, and yet we are not of the night. We live in the light of the new day, and yet the new day has not yet fully dawned.

One commentator who comments on this passage, thinking of the day that's not yet dawned, and yet we live in the light of it, expresses it in this way.

[14 : 45] The day of Christ, though not yet come, is nevertheless throwing its light backward upon the present. And in that light, believers must now live.

You can maybe try and picture where we are located visually. Maybe you've been doing that already. We live just as dawn is about to break.

So, you have the night that is still there, and the darkness is still there. The night isn't quite yet over, and then you have the day that's about to dawn. And we're kind of in the middle, straddling these two ages.

Still in the night. It's not over yet. And yet the day that we belong to still hasn't fully dawned. And we're there in the middle, and there's a tension being there in the middle.

It's not altogether night, and yet it's not altogether day. And there we are in the middle. That's where we're called to live. We're wrestling between the sleep that corresponds to the night and the life that corresponds to the day.

[15 : 53] Why is that relevant in Paul's call to love our neighbor as ourselves? Why does Paul give this as a reason for loving our neighbor as ourselves?

Why the urgency, then, to love your neighbor as yourself? Well, because Christ is coming, and it is time to live in the light of His coming.

And loving as He loves and living as He lives. Then Paul continues and develops this picture of the night and the day by speaking of two contrasting, we might call them lifestyles, or we might speak of two uniforms or armors that correspond to the night and to the day.

And obviously, as we establish where we are, where we belong, then we have to choose the lifestyle that is fitting for who we are and where we belong.

Night and day. We might, as well as speaking of night and day or developing the picture, we might speak of nightlife or daylife. That's maybe a little bit more memorable.

[17 : 09] Nightlife and daylife. This is what Paul speaks of here and what characterizes nightlife and what characterizes daylife. Each have their own codes of conduct, if you wish, their own uniform or armor.

Let's think of them. Let's think of the night. Let's think of the day. We'll start with the night. The night is characterized by darkness. Notice there in the second half of verse 12.

So, let us put aside the deeds of darkness. The deeds of darkness are to be expected for those who live in the night. They correspond to the night.

The correspondence is obvious, the night and darkness. Deeds of darkness belong to the night. Paul gives a selection of these deeds of darkness in verse 13.

It's not a pretty picture that he paints, but it's an accurate one, a partial one, but one that draws out some of the deeds of darkness that belong to the night.

[18 : 18] What does he mention there? Well, he mentions orgies and drunkenness. He mentions sexual immorality and debauchery, dissension and jealousy. All of these deeds of darkness that belong to the night.

And they are all the antithesis of loving our neighbor. This is Paul's concern, that the believers would love their neighbor. All of these things are wholly and completely contrary to loving our neighbor.

When we live this nightlife, if we want to call it that, we harm our neighbor. You just need to look at the examples. Drunkenness, it leads to others being harmed.

That which seems to be just a bit of fun degenerates into that which is harmful, that destroys families and relationships, and has all kinds of harmful effects on not only the one who is guilty of this deed of darkness, but others who surround them.

Sexual immorality, infidelity, and all kinds of harm and hurt and damage that is done. The very opposite of loving our neighbor.

[19 : 36] Rather, these are deeds that harm our neighbor. Jealousy and dissension, envy and death. Seeking to get ahead of somebody else and to do somebody else down.

It's harming our neighbor. Not loving our neighbor, but harming our neighbor. These are the deeds of the night. These correspond to the night. Of course, another feature of the night is sleep.

We sleep at night. Well, most of us do. Slumber is proper of the night. We don't realize so often what we're doing and the consequences for ourselves and others.

We don't appreciate. We're not awake to realize the damage we're doing to ourselves and others as we live in the night. The night is like that.

But what about the day? Well, daytime or daylife requires a different uniform altogether. The armor of light. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness.

[20 : 37] Verse 12 at the end. And put on the armor of light. The way this armor, or in any case the lifestyle of those wearing the armor is described, is as behaving decently.

In verse 13, most of what Paul says is about those deeds of darkness. But he begins with this little expression that really serves as the contrast to the deeds of darkness.

And the expression is translated in verse 13 there at the beginning, behaving decently. That is what is fitting for the day, for those who belong to the day.

Behaving decently. I think even the contrast is an intriguing one. The contrast is not between deeds of darkness and deeds of light. You might have expected that.

Well, these are the deeds of darkness, and these are the deeds of light. And there will be a list of good deeds that Paul could have outlined. But no, the contrast is between deeds of darkness and, in the manner that it's translated here, behaving decently.

[21 : 41] Or walking decently. Walking becomingly. It's about a way of life that is being described. A way of life that is attractive and becoming.

Again, one commentator paraphrases. It is a paraphrase, but I think a helpful paraphrase of what Paul says here, translated behaving decently.

Paraphrases it, I think, in a striking and in a very beautiful way. He says this, This is a contrast. If you're of the night, then your life will be marked and characterized by deeds of darkness that harm yourself and harm others.

That is the very antithesis of love. But if you belong to the day, if that is where your citizenship is, then you will behave decently.

You will walk in loveliness of life. The Christian, you and me, if we are Christians, is not to be a forbidding or miserable character marked simply by what he doesn't do.

[22 : 49] Isn't that the caricature of a Christian? Well, a Christian is that miserable guy who doesn't do this and doesn't do the other. Well, it's certainly true that there are deeds of darkness that we are not to do.

And we don't do them because we see the harm that they result in. But much more to characterize us is this life that is attractive, that is comely, to walk in loveliness of life, to use that expression.

Also, in contrast to the deeds of darkness, behaving decently or walking becomingly will serve to build up and to bless our neighbor.

We've just noticed that the deeds of darkness do the very opposite. They harm others. They damage others. They bring hurt and injury and prejudice to others.

But when we behave decently, when we walk becomingly, when we live in loveliness of life, we build up others.

[24 : 01] We are a blessing to others. It is the way we love them as we ought. The one who walks decently is loving others as he is called to do.

Paul then, the manner in which he presents these two alternatives, is in the manner of calling those he is writing to, to put off the deeds of darkness and to put on the armor of light.

To live in the manner described, behaving decently. This is the call that he presents to them. And again, we could picture ourselves living at the break of dawn.

The night is not yet over and the day is about to dawn and we're rising from the night and we need to dress ourselves. What do we do? Well, we are to put off the deeds of darkness.

They don't correspond to us anymore. Perhaps once they did, but no longer. We put them off. That doesn't belong to me. And rather, we clothe ourselves. We put on the armor of light.

[25 : 10] We behave decently. We live in loveliness of life. Putting off the deeds of the night and putting on the decency of the day.

And then that takes us into the closing call in verse 14. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ. This closing call of Paul to the believer, certainly in this section of the letter.

I think we can take this call. We can see it as the fullest and richest expression of what it means to love your neighbor and to live in the light.

We might even say that this, in a sense, is the way in which we will be able to love and live in the light of Christ's coming. As we clothe ourselves with Christ, so we will be able to love as we ought.

To behave decently. To live in loveliness of life. To build up and to bless others rather than to harm and to damage them. Now, Paul often uses the picture of putting off and putting on clothing or armor to speak of spiritual realities.

[26 : 25] What drew me to this verse was that we have been thinking precisely about that these past few Sunday evenings, considering the armor of God. And Paul uses this language often.

But for our purposes this evening, as we draw things to a close, we're only interested in one other way. When Paul uses exactly the same expression. Clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Or clothe yourself with Christ. And that is in Galatians. The verses that we read just a few moments ago. Let's just remind ourselves of what Paul says there.

In Galatians chapter 3 and verses 26 and 27. Galatians chapter 3 verses 26 and 27. You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothe yourselves with Christ. So here Paul speaks of believers clothing themselves with Christ.

[27 : 27] And in our passage in Romans he also uses the same language as he urges believers to clothe themselves with Christ. And there's a sense in which the two uses of this expression together provide us with a rich description of what it means to be a Christian.

We become a Christian by clothing ourselves in Christ. Or to use the language that Paul uses in Galatians. You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. This clothing ourselves with Christ takes place by faith in Christ Jesus.

A once and for all being clothed. A once and for all being clothed with Jesus. Being clothed in His righteousness. To use language also that relates to this matter.

When we become a Christian we clothe ourselves with Christ. And there's a sense in which it's a once and for all clothing. But then when Paul uses the same picture to the Romans.

[28 : 39] He's speaking not of a once and for all clothing. But a day by day clothing ourselves with Christ. This involves every day resting in Jesus.

And looking to Jesus. And becoming like Jesus. Clothing ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ. And what or who will people see if we day by day.

Clothing ourselves in Jesus. Who will they see? Well if we clothe ourselves in Jesus. Then they will see Jesus. Our neighbor will see.

The one we are called to love. Will see and will be blessed. By one who loves like Jesus. To tie up the connection between the opening and the closing call.

As we've described them. As we, as you. Clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ. You will be enabled to love your neighbor as yourself.

[29 : 48] Just like Jesus did. Well may God help us to listen. And to respond. And to clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father we do thank you for your love and goodness towards us. We thank you for this call that is laid upon us.

An obligation and yet a blessed obligation. That we might love one another. That we might love our neighbor as ourselves. We don't pretend that it is an easy thing for us to do.

Far from it. We fall so far short. But we pray that these words that are so familiar to us. Would be given the added urgency that Paul intends.

As he urges us in the light of the present time. The present time in which we live. In between the night that is about to end.

[30 : 51] And the day that is about to dawn. As we straddle these two ages. And yet as we belong to the day. And help us to put on the armor of light.

Help us to behave decently. To walk attractively. To live in loveliness of life. As corresponds those who belong to the day.

Help us to clothe ourselves. Day by day. And evermore. In the Lord Jesus Christ. And we pray in his name. Amen.