

Love in the Light of Day

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[0:00] Good morning, everyone. I'll be reading, as Andrew said, from Romans 13, and the verses are 8 to 14.

! Hope you've got your Bibles ready. Owe no one anything except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

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 neighbour as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbour, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. Besides this, you know the time that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep.

For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone, the day is at hand.

[1:06] So then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. Let us walk properly in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarrelling and jealousy, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires.

This is the word of the Lord. Good morning, church. How are we all doing?

Good, good, good. So I was actually in China just a bit, about a week ago, and accompanying my dad.

He has to visit his siblings for the last time. They're in their 80s and 90s. So part of today's sermons is actually made in China.

And if there are any issues with it, you can blame China. All right. Let's pray together, shall we?

[2:25] Dear Heavenly Father, we want to thank you for today. We praise you for who you are, and we are grateful for the church, our brothers and sisters in Christ, and friends who are in this gathering today.

We also thank you for your word. Please help us clear our minds, help us focus, tenderize our hearts, so that we may follow your son, and follow him really, really well.

And more importantly, may we be more in love with you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. So we are going through the book of Romans as a church at the moment, and the questions we are trying to answer in the current section of Romans is, how are we supposed to respond to such incredible, incomprehensible, and unpayable mercy from our loving God, who sacrificed his son to take on the death that we deserve, so that we can be in a relationship, and a right relationship with him.

One of the responses, a very key one, is love. And last week, Martin has already shared what genuine love is, what is grounded in, the dimensions of it, and also the adaptations from Romans 12, verses 9 to 21.

And today, it's like a bit of a continuation. We'll continue on the topic of love, from Romans 13, 8 to 14. And through this, I would like to share with us three points that are in your bulletin.

[4:08] The debt, the urgency, and the practice of love. Be really helpful if you can keep your Bibles open, and follow along, otherwise, you get really, really lost, and may end up in China.

First, the debt of love. Christian obligation may be one of the least popular topics among many churches today, but not for Paul.

In Romans 8, verses 12, he says, we, the church, are under obligation to live, not according to the flesh, but by the Spirit. In Romans, chapter 13, verse 7, it says, we are looking, sorry, that we were looking at two weeks ago, it says that we, the church, must pay the authorities what we are obliged to owe them, or owe them, whether taxes, or respect, or honor.

And again, in today's passage, Romans 13, verse 8, Paul literally says, be a debtor of nothing to no one, except to love one another. A debt is an unpaid obligation.

In Greek, the words, debtor, debt, obligation, all have the same root word, *ophilo*. Christians are obliged to love others just like we are obliged to pay taxes.

[5:32] The main difference is that there is an end to paying taxes, hopefully, but there is no end to love our neighbors and pay this debt of love, which is to seek our neighbors' highest good.

Why? Because the love we receive from Christ is infinite. So as Christians, we can never say, I've done enough loving. that can never happen.

At Dallas Theological Seminary, the Bible college that I attended, there's a professor called Steve Bramer, and I'm going to ask Sarah to pop his picture on if that's possible, and someone, it's another staff, who heads the alumni's office, his name is called Greg Hederberg.

They both love Jesus. As you can see, they're in their 60s, different churches, and they've been in colleagues and friends for many years. One day, during lunch in early 2022, Greg looked at Steve and said, you're not looking so good.

Is everything okay? Steve says, no, well, not really. My kidney levels are off, and the way that they're going, we probably need a new kidney.

[6:51] Without a moment of hesitation, Greg replied, I'll give you my kidney. It's not that simple, Greg, Steve said.

You have to have the right blood type, the right tissue type, and the right antibodies. Then Greg said, I'm sure I'm giving you my kidney. What blood type are you? I'm O.

Steve said, I'm O too. From there, they went through a series of tests for about two months, and although there were 20 other Christians and people who offered them kidneys, Greg's kidney was finally chosen by the doctors.

When the date of the surgery drew near, Greg's, that's the guy on the right, you know, he had a few kids, and they sat him down and had a really serious conversation with him.

They were supportive, but they were questioning him. Of all the people in the world, why are you giving your colleagues Brahma, your kidney? Isn't that something you only do for a family member?

[7:54] Brake's reply, wouldn't you do it for a brother? I have two kidneys, and they're healthy. How can I not help? How can I not help?

This is the kind of attitude I believe Paul is talking about when he says that we owe a debt of love to others. Not, all right, I'll do this love thing. You told me, right?

No, but how can I not? After the surgery, which was successful, an 11-year-old boy came into Greg's hospital with a small box, you know, with candies inside and a card, and he looked at Greg and said, thank you so much for giving me my grandpa back.

And later, when Greg was interviewed about these things, here are his final remarks. You know how Christians, we give money to missionaries, and they go out to places, you know, with the gospel, to places that we never would.

In giving Bremer my kidney, I could have a part in his extending and extending his ministry to so many people. He's going to go places now because he has energy and health.

[9:07] I feel a joy because of that. Greg is just one example of millions of Christians across the world who are taking this thing called living sacrifice from Romans 12, literally, and living a gospel-transformed life with a kingdom perspective.

He feels obligated to love to the extent of how can I not give away my kidney? But at the same time, there is joy. The two do not have to be mutually exclusive.

So Christians are to treat loving others like we owe them. Why? In 1 John 4, and we hear this in weddings all the time, we love because he first loved us.

It is an outpouring of what Jesus Christ has done inside us and for us. But he, in Romans 13, Paul gave a different reason. Verse 8 says, for, because, the Christian who loves another has fulfilled the law.

What? Fulfilled the law? Why does loving someone fulfill the law? Paul goes on to explain in verse 9, for the commandments, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not commit murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet, and if there's any other commandments are summed up in this word, you shall love your neighbour as yourself.

[10:39] Imagine all the shall nots you find in the Old Testament in the Mosaic law are printed on one side of the coin and you flip that coin over, what do you see? It says, love your neighbour,

sincerely seeking their highest good.

And in case the church still doesn't get it, Paul explains even further in verse 10. It says here, love does not commit evil against a neighbour, therefore, love is the fulfilment of the law.

One thing we need to be careful here is not slip into a misunderstanding that just by loving others and doing good to them, everyone, believers and non-believers, are able to fulfil God's law in the Old Testament.

In Romans chapter 7-8, Paul already explained that although God's law is good, it cannot free us from the power of sin or enable us to obey it.

It's impossible. But through Christ and the Spirit, God has done what the law could not, fulfilling the law's righteous requirements in us and as we walk according to the Spirit.

[11:51] So what does this fulfilling the law look like in every day? That is what Paul is explaining here in Romans 13. It looks like Christians loving neighbours because we, when we truly love others, we will not steal from them, we will not commit adultery against them, not even through looking at them in our minds or intentionally do them any harm.

But it only applies to those living according to the Spirit. Christians being transformed by the Gospel. Another thing we need to consider is what Paul doesn't say here about the commandments.

He says that love sums up the commandments but he doesn't say that love replaces them. Do you know people who insist that nothing is prescribed anymore because of the New Testament law except love?

How about the idea that love has its own built-in moral compass so that we can just do whatever we want, whatever we feel like is the most loving thing in that particular situation and do away with all the laws and commandments in the whole Bible?

Let's look at an example here of how this whole thing works. You know, this thing actually is called situational ethics or something. Let's say the Ten Commandments says this, you shall not bear false witness, right?

[13:16] Okay, we're not going to test which number it is but it's there. You know, let's say your best mate or BFF has stolen something small, you know, like one of those school sheets, those annoying things flying around schools at the moment.

You know, he stole a school sheet from a shop, okay? He got caught, you're the witness, you're asked to testify. The most loving thing you can do for this mate so you feel at that time is to lie about it.

You know, keep him up in jail, out of trouble and that way you also get to keep a mate and don't lose him. Forget about the Ten Commandments, right? This is loving.

That's in the Old Testament. That's all this Ten Commandment thing. But let's think about it. Is that really the most loving thing that you can do to your neighbour? By lying?

By not telling the truth? What's your lie going to do to your neighbour in the long run? And how about your other neighbour who's the shop owner? Is that the most loving thing that you can do?

[14:22] In John Stott's commentary on Romans, he writes that love cannot manage on its own without an objective moral standard. Love needs law for its direction while law needs love for its inspiration.

Love fulfils the law and sums up the commandments but it does not replace them. Isn't it absolutely mind-blowing that what millions and millions of Jews over the years have failed as a nation for thousands of years fulfilling that law, the Spirit is achieving it in and through us on a daily basis because of what Jesus Christ has done for us?

We've been given the gospel, we've been given the Spirit, so let's depend on that power to keep loving even when we don't feel like it.

Love is our continuing obligation because it fulfils the law, but when should we love? Let's move on to point two then, the urgency of love. Verse 11 says, Besides this, you know the time, that the hour has come for you to awake from sleep.

Do any of you check on your bank balance or super balance every day and multiple times a day?

Put your hand up. Well, I hope you're all being honest and I hope that no one actually does that.

[15:53] But we do and would check the time multiple times a day and probably every day, right?

In the past, most people would wear watches.

I'm an old man, so I still do. But nowadays, our time keepers have migrated to our phones, probably, hopefully, in our pocket. Anyways, most phones don't even require you to unlock your screen to check the time anymore.

Do you know that? Because the phone designers know it is the thing that we look at most throughout the day. You can't even turn it off. Please don't try it now.

In verse 11, Paul literally says, and this meaning do this as in loving our neighbors, knowing the time. In other words, love because of time.

But what is the time, Mr. Wolf? Instead of dinner time, Paul gives the church two important points about the time we are in from God's perspective.

[16 : 55] And there's a sense of urgency in each of them. First, he says, the hour has come for you to wake up from sleep. When we sleep, unless we are sleep walking, most of us would be missing in action.

We might have rapid eye movement, we might dream, we might even snore. But one thing we can be sure is that we can't be loving our neighbors much when we sleep.

So from God's perspective, the church is being called to wake up to love our neighbors. But why now? Why us? As many commentators have pointed out, we, the church, are living in a very unique time in history known as already, but not yet.

Very good. For example, Christ has already inaugurated his kingdom. All authority in heaven on earth has been given to him, it says in Matthew 28. But his rule has not yet manifested fully on earth.

Christians already have a new life in Christ, it says in Romans and various places, but we have not yet received our new bodies. We are living a time when the present age and the age to come overlaps.

[18 : 13] And Paul and nobody knows when that overlap is suddenly going to drop off and end, but the Lord was clear that it will come like the thief of the night. So this sense of urgency for the early church to love was always there.

It's always been there. It's been going on for 1,969 years because the letter to the Romans was written roughly around AD 57.

If it was already urgent almost 2,000 years ago, how about now? Isn't it even more urgent? From God's perspective, first, it's time for us to wake up and love others.

Second point about this time that we are in, from God's perspective, is in the second part of verse 11 and 12. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.

The night is far gone, the day is at hand. Many Bible commentators agree that the word salvation can refer to the past, present, and future.

[19 : 23] justification, sanctification, and glorification. We've been saved from the penalty of sin, we are being saved from the power of sin, and we'll be finally saved from the presence of sin.

Here, Paul is almost certainly thinking about our future glorification, being fully delivered from the presence and effects of sin into the complete and holy presence of God.

Do you realize that from whenever we first believed, it doesn't matter when we knew or which day it was, that we are always one day closer to the truly wonderful day when death and toothache and back ache and knee aches and heart aches will all be gone, and no one and no thing can ever hurt us anymore, and we can't hurt another person either, and there will be no more crime, no more accidents, no more wars, not even spam calls.

Verse 12 says, the night is far gone, the day is at hand. We are living in a time when darkness is going to be wiped out and we will all be in so much awe because we'll be face to face with the living Christ in the flesh, and everyone will be celebrating with so much indescribable joy that it's going to make that party, that best party that you have been to feel like a really boring, unbearable documentary that you've ever watched.

Listening to this, please listen to this from Revelations 21, when Paul John the Apostle described the future glory of the city of God. In verses 23 to 27 it says, the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb being Jesus.

[21 : 28] By its light will the nations walk, that's us, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day, and there will be no night there.

They will bring into the glory and the honour of the nations, but nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of

life.

Brothers, sisters, and friends, whose names are written in Jesus' book of life, that's your name, and hopefully mine too, if we are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ.

From the day a couple gets engaged, they are always, one day, closer to joining hands and living together, and the excitement hopefully doesn't decrease and always is increasing.

Have you heard of any bride who is so unexcited about the day before she walks down the aisle that she decides to slip in and miss the wedding? no, right?

[22:44] I used to do a little bit of wedding photography, and as a photographer, you get to zoom in to people's faces for hours and hours. One thing I've noticed is that many brides have red eyes, not that they smoked anything, you know, or because of the flesh, or they were crying too much, sometimes that's the case, but because they tend to not sleep much leading up to the wedding.

Right, Sarah? Yeah, yeah, thumbs up, yeah. Why? It's the anticipation. It's too exciting. There's so much that needs to be done and so little time.

Everything becomes urgent. That's the kind of excitement that Paul is calling us to have today.

Verse 11 says, salvation is nearer to us now than we first believed.

Paul is reminding us here that we must let this future awesome day, which can be tomorrow, motivate and excite us into loving our neighbours today.

There is simply too much love that we need to do, but we have too little time. When it comes to loving our neighbour, there's no parking, no stopping, no waiting.

[24:03] It's urgent. Let's keep going. So far, we've looked at the debt of love and the urgency of love. Third and final point, the practice of love.

How are we to love our neighbours given the necessity and urgency put before us? Continuing on with this Paul's day and night theme, we're instructed to cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light.

Like hair, the works of darkness are things that has always been on us. We all grew up with it, like hair. But given our new identity in Christ and in light of the coming day, that stuff, Paul says, is no longer suitable for us.

Paul says, let's take it off, let's throw it out. And just as the day will replace the night, so will the arm of light replace our deeds of darkness. You can't switch off darkness with darkness, but you can switch off darkness with light.

Although Christ has already won the war, we are still in the battle, the battle of love or not to love. So we are called to get up, dress up, and fight.

[25:24] How? It's in verse 17. Let's walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, and not in sexual immorality and sensuality, and not in quarreling and jealousy.

Now, what does walking properly as in daytime mean? Should I put some sunscreen on? Here, we are told that instead of conforming to the darkness of the world that's still here, let's live with a decent life now, as though we are living in a day when we are with Christ, notice that Paul names three pairs of how not to live here.

First, don't live in orgies and drunkenness. Sounds nasty, right? Well, in Greek, this is referring to excessive partying, carousing, and excessive drinking.

Partying and drinking are by themselves not evil when done in moderation, right? Jesus did turn water into wine so that the wedding party at Cana could go on.

That's in John 2. But the point here is not just about excessive partying and drinking. Paul is talking about excessive indulgences here. Certain things in the world are designed to enslave us because they can easily become addictive.

[26:52] Smoking, not many people do that here, I don't see, certain drugs, alcohol, caffeine, we've got plenty of that, gambling, and some type of gaming, once you start, it is very, very difficult to stop.

But other stuff are more by choice. You can't blame that stuff, it's by us. When we look for stuff to drown our sorrows, drown our boredom, fix our insecurity, our sense of emptiness, to fill that God sized void inside us, day two will become addictive.

So we end up losing track of time and we can't spend a day or sometimes not even an hour without touching that stuff. Excessive indulgences are deeds of darkness.

They are evil. When we are so doped out in those indulgences that we really enjoy, how are we supposed to have the energy and time to love our neighbours?

Paul is very, very clear here. These things don't suit us. Chuck them out. Does that mean Christians shouldn't party, shouldn't drink and shouldn't indulge or enjoy anything?

[28:11] Should we be stoics? If we follow Paul's instruction of living decently, I believe decent and moderate enjoyment is actually encouraged.

So besides not living in orgies and drunkenness, we are also told not to live in sexual immorality and sensuality. Sexual immorality is quite straightforward here.

It's all kinds of sexual activities outside of sexual marriages. And the word sensuality is a little bit more tricky. It literally means licentiousness, saying no to self-control and saying I don't care to moral, social or any ethical boundaries or standards.

what's that in Disney's frozen terms? Let it go. And if I were to sum up this as a category, it's actually unrestrained pursuit of personal pleasure.

Unrestrained pursuit of personal pleasure, whether sexual or not, is one of the most grievous sins because it is so personal. personal. And it feeds our self-centered fallen nature.

[29:24] It smells like freedom and it feels so amazing. And so our natural response would be to protect it, to hold on to it at all costs, which normally would lead to some kind of isolation, which is not what God has made us for.

How are we supposed to love our neighbours when our hearts are so towards our maximum pleasure all the time? instead of loving our neighbours, we would probably more likely be harming them, especially if they threaten our personal freedom and pleasures, saying, hey, you're doing that too much, get off the phone or whatever.

And that is something that is actually vividly portrayed again in Frozen when Anna confronts Elsa at her ice castle, that isolation chamber, and then accidentally she gets stabbed by Elsa's magic ice.

We tend to hurt our neighbours when we are in doubt or pursuing our personal pressures excessively without boundaries. Over the recent decades, in response to the dangers of legalism, the belief that we can make God owe us by doing good works or not sinning, many churches have been placing much emphasis on teaching grace and Christian freedom.

That's all good. But if too much focus is placed on freedom and too little is placed on self-control, then given how deceitful our hearts inherently are, it's really not difficult for a whole group of believers to fall into licentiousness.

[31:10] personally, I've served at a church where a group of young adults now, their Christ followers started believing that watching a popular show with explicit sex and crude jokes are perfectly okay.

They even did it together as a group. At another church, we had uni students arguing with their minister that highly intimate touching before marriage is actually okay.

The comment was, we didn't go all the way, don't we have Christian freedom? Unrestrained pursuits of pleasure and deeds of darkness, Paul says, do not suit us.

Again, Paul is clear here, take them off and chuck them out. What do we put on instead then? As in the fruit of spirit in Galatians 5 and as in the qualification of an overseer in Titus 1, self-control is what we should put on.

Self-control. Moving on, after orgies and drunkenness and after sexual immorality and licentiousness, Paul says, don't live in quarreling and jealousy.

[32:25] Now, quarreling is not just a once-off disagreement, you know, have a bit of fight here and there. It is engaging in rivalry and strife. How is strife and jealousy related?

Well, both are prideful attitudes from within the heart that outwardly affects relationships. Isn't it interesting that Paul places like, you know, strife and jealousy alongside like drunkenness and orgies and parties and drinking or drinking too much?

They are deeds of darkness too. Why? Because they harm our neighbours. You know, they damage relationships. Relationships are precious to God.

Remember how love fulfills the law? You know, we looked at that just a little while ago. Because love does no wrong to the neighbour. Strife and jealousy, and may I add from Romans chapter 1, verse 20, slander and gossip too.

They don't only wrong our neighbour, they can destroy and gnaw the entire neighbourhoods. Do you know what's the best way to actually split a church? Split hairs over something really inconsequential, and then spread a bit of gossip.

[33:50] Haven't churches been divided because two people just won't let an argument go? then others start picking sides, and the rumours mills start churning, and before you know it, the whole church is divided.

I've seen it happen again and again and again in different countries as well. One of my mentors used to say that if there is no pride in the world, there would be no competition.

If we are not trying to get one up on our neighbours, but instead humbly ask how can we serve and help our neighbours, help them soar, even above ourselves, wouldn't there be far less jealousy and strife or gossip or slanders among our communities, churches and workplaces?

Excessive indulgence, unrestrained pursuit of pleasure, prideful attitudes. Are these easy to fight and reject? Without keeping enjoyment decent and moderate, self-control and humble servant-heartedness, we won't be able to love our neighbours like we owe it to them.

But are these simple to live out? In verse 14, Paul concludes, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provisions, which means don't put thoughts ahead of time to plan it.

[35:26] Sorry, and make no provisions for the flesh to gratify its desires. So if left unchecked, the flesh, that's our sin-corrupted human nature, will always find its way to cross all boundaries and fulfil its inordinate passions.

So what are we to do? Paul says, make no provisions. Don't sit around and let your mind wander and then plan how to get there, those pleasures and indulgences and stuff.

Don't plan how to win that argument that honours yourself rather than Jesus. you know, we love that, you know, theology and Bible and whatever.

Don't plan how to sleep or fool around with that person that's not your spouse yet, or cross other moral ethical boundaries. King David, the man described as after God's own heart, and Bathsheba is the case in point.

Don't plan a pub crawl or any activity you know, moderate enjoyment is not going to be possible. If you find yourself planning something, basically, scene is crouching at your door, next thing you know, it's all done deal.

[36:48] I think we probably all have been there before, right? So what's going to give us that power to keep this darkness off our minds and help us love our neighbours really well?

The answer is actually again in verse 14, put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Without putting on the Lord, literally, clothing ourselves with him and doing so continually, we are absolutely powerless against these deeds of darkness, which are like leeches, you know, they're latching onto us and sucking our lives away, but we enjoy it.

But what does putting on the Lord actually means? some say it's like putting on his characters, others say take it as being protected by him, linking it to verse 12, like the arm of light.

It can also mean to put on the mind of Christ in Philippians 2, seeing others as more important than self. I think it can be all of the above, but in addition to this, perhaps it may also have something to do with belonging to him, being in him, being one with him, being covered by him, being under him, being held together by him, like a suit, being moulded and shaped by him.

With Christ on us and us in him, we can say no to excessive indulgence and all kinds of additions as Christ is our indulgence.

[38:22] Addictions, I mean. He's the only master who won't eat us alive, destroy us and then stop us from loving. With Christ on us and us in him, we won't need to pursue pleasure outside of any boundaries because Christ is our maximum pleasure.

With Christ on us and us in him, we won't need to be one up over our neighbours because even the Son of God who deserves the highest praise came not to be served but to serve and emptied himself and all reputations all for us.

And finally, let us never forget, we are now given the privilege to put on Christ because he first put on us.

As 2 Corinthians 5, verse 21 says, for our sake, God made him, Jesus, to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

May this great exchange, this great sacrifice, this great mercy, this great love, this great saviour, drive us to live and love for him even today.

[39:41] Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we are so sorry that we are so fallen, that we are so weak, that we so love the world, the creation that you made, that we become so less lovable to us.

Thank you for telling us that these things that we love, they can be actually the darkness and the evil that the world is trying to put onto us and slave us make us wear them around all the time and can't keep our hands and eyes off them.

Lord, may the beauty of your son and all that wonderful, merciful work that you've done for him, for us, become so mind-blowing, so awesome.

that day that's coming, going to be so sweet, so amazing, then that will preoccupy our minds to focus on you all the time, so much so that it will drive us to love our neighbors like we owe it to them.

Help us, Lord, do that individually and do that together as a church, starting with one another and then go beyond out to the communities that you place us in.

[41 : 36] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.