

Romans Part 47 – Chapter 13

Resurrection Sunday, April 9, 2023

With input from BibleRef.com, John Piper: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/put-on-the-lord-jesus-christ-part-2>

Happy Resurrection Day! Through Christ's sacrifice and his example, we clearly see that "*Greater love has no one than this, that a person will lay down his life for his friends.*" - **John 15:13** and that "*God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" - **Romans 5:8**

Paul transitions in the second half of chapter 13 from discussing what is owed to human authorities, including respect and honor, to what is owed to everyone.

Romans 13:8-14:

Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. 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." 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

11 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. 12 The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.

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

Romans 13:8:

Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

The command to owe no one anything should not necessarily be read as a command to Christians never to borrow money for any reason. The sense of the Greek is that we should not let any debt remain outstanding—that we should not keep on owing anyone for anything. That may be understood as a requirement to always pay what we owe in a timely manner according to whatever agreement we have made with the lender. Or, put another way, to not live lives of constant dependency, borrowing, or unreliability.

In truth, however, Paul is not primarily concerned with money here, as the following verses will show, and even the focus of love in the same verse: "*except to love each other.*" He wants to talk about our obligation as Jesus-followers to love other people, including our neighbors. He seems to say that loving others is a debt we will never pay off. We will never be done with "paying" love to each other.

How does continuing to pay our debt to love others fulfill the law, exactly? Paul is reflecting what Jesus said are the two greatest commandments, to love God and our neighbors (Mark 12:29–31). Paul will show in the following verses that Christlike love will naturally motivate us to keep all the other relationship commands in the law.

Romans 13:9: *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."*

As an example of the entire law, Paul lists four of the Ten Commandments, those forbidding adultery, murder, stealing, and coveting. Paul then adds the statement "and any other command." This is the equivalent of the modern "etcetera," or "etc." He has in mind all the commands included in the law, especially those about human relationships, which are the ones he quotes. Remember the first four commandments concern our relationship with God, the next six concern our relationship with each other.

All those commands can be summed up in the word "love" from the command in **Leviticus 19:18**: "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" As Paul will show in the following verse, you cannot love someone and murder them or cheat on them or steal from them or covet their belongings. In this way, if we will obey the command to love our neighbors, we will fulfill all the other commands by default.

It's also still important to know that the first commandment is to Love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. When we put God's priorities, commandments, and principles first, our love for each other will not stray into areas of injustice, unfairness, and sin.

Romans 13:10: *Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*

Now Paul makes it clearer still: When we are acting in love, we will never hurt anyone. Thus, love fulfills the intention of every other commands given to protect people from harm.

We should be careful, though, not to read Paul's words here to mean that the command to love our neighbors has now become the equivalent of the law of Moses. Paul is not teaching that if we succeed in loving others, we will obtain on our own the righteousness of God. Paul has been extremely clear that those who are in Christ have died to the law and have been released from the law (Romans 7:4–6).

Nor is Paul's command suggesting that anything which displeases or bothers another is, by definition, unloving. For example, Christians are commanded to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15); truths such as the reality of our sin are sometimes hard to hear. What Paul means is that acts of love—in and of themselves—are not a source of harm. When we act for others' best interests, we're not doing anything to harm them.

Paul's point here is that those who are in Christ are called to keep on loving our neighbors as we love ourselves. If we were able to do so perfectly—which we are not—we would perfectly keep the law—which we can't. That distinction is one Paul has already addressed in Romans 3:10; 7:22–23.

Romans 13:11: *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.*

Paul prefaces his statement here with "besides this." The "this" in question seems to be everything Paul has written from the start of chapter 12 through the previous verse. He has described what it means to live as a Christian on this side of eternity. Using a series of commands, many of them difficult to follow, Paul has painted a picture of a believer as a person who sets himself aside for the good of others and radically trusts God to provide all that is needed.

Now Paul begins to describe why it is so essential for Christians to live this way. Time is of the essence. The world is changing right now. Paul writes to the Roman Christians that the hour has come for them to wake up, in the sense that the sun is about to rise. It's time to get to work.

The schedule of day and night drastically controlled the world of Paul's day. With no artificial lighting, firelight—feeble by modern standards—was all that stood between people and darkness. Most work stopped as soon as the sun went down and started again when the sun rose. Paul is urging Christians to see, in a spiritual metaphor, that the sun is about to rise. It's time to get up.

What does it mean that the sun is rising? Paul describes the moment as one in which salvation is closer now than when his readers first trusted in Christ. Does this mean that Paul did not think of Christians as being saved? Not at all. The New Testament often describes salvation as something that has happened, is happening, and will happen. In this case, Paul is referring to salvation in the sense that all who are in Christ will have reached eternity, that the time of ultimate victory and judgment is fast approaching.

Matthew 24:42-44: *“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. 43 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”*

1 Thessalonians 5:4: *But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.*

Romans 13:12: *The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.*

Now Paul writes that the night is far gone, and the day is at hand. He describes the moments when the sky turns gray and the birds begin to stir before the sun breaks the horizon. Spiritually, this symbolic moment began when death was defeated at the resurrection of Jesus. The world remains broken by sin, but the clock is ticking. Creation groans along with us as we wait for our adoption to be finalized and the redemption of our bodies (**Romans 8:22–23:** *We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.*)

Because of the nearing daybreak, Paul writes, Christians must throw away any works of darkness, any of the worthless things we have done that belong to the night and not to the day. He will list some of those in the following verse.

Instead, Paul insists, Christians must prepare for the day by putting on the armaments of light. The actual Greek root word used here is *hoplon*, which is also translated as "weapon" or "tool" in English. Suddenly, Paul has introduced the concept of Christians taking a defensive position against the darkness rather than joining with it. Paul communicates this idea of the Christian life as a battle in several letters. In Ephesians 6:10–17, he describes in detail the spiritual armor Christians are to take on as we stand against the forces of spiritual darkness.

Romans 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.*

Now Paul describes the opposite lifestyle: deeds of darkness, in which those who follow Christ should no longer participate. These things don't fit with who we are or the time in which we live. Paul urges us to walk as if it were daytime instead of taking part in the things that people usually do under the cover of darkness.

What should daytime people no longer do? Orgies and drunkenness describe a lifestyle of reckless partying. Sexual immorality and sensuality are the focus of those seeking personal pleasure above the good of others. Quarreling and jealousy are both about the need to serve ourselves first and best.

These are nighttime lifestyles, Paul writes, but the sun is coming up. Christians need a new way of living.

Romans 13:14: *But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*

Paul described some of the nighttime activities we must leave behind. Here's what we must do, instead: Put on the Lord Jesus Christ. The metaphor at work has to do with what we wear. In verse 12, Paul told us to cast off the works of darkness. Instead, we will symbolically wear Jesus. In other words, our goal as Jesus-followers is to live as Jesus would live. That would include all of Paul's commands and instructions in Romans 12 and 13. The opposite of this happens when we arrange our lives to satisfy our flesh.

When Paul uses the word "flesh," he means more than just sexual immorality. He means all the human appetites we experience to feel good, to get what we want, and to be treated well. It's not wrong to want any of those things, per se, but those cravings become sinful when we serve them above all others and are willing to harm others to gratify them. Instead, as Jesus did, we must put others first and trust God to provide for us in all other ways.

John Piper: "This is plain in the flow of the book of Romans—that chapters 1–11 precede chapters 12 and 13. First we get right with God by faith in what Christ has done. Then we dress and live and fight like people of the day. But this is even more clear in two other places where Paul talks about putting on the clothes of a believer. Listen to **Colossians 3:12:** *“Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.”* You are already God's chosen ones, God's holy ones, God's loved ones. Now he says, put on the character that reflects your new identity.

And the one other place in all the New Testament where Paul speaks of “putting on Christ” describes it as something already done. **Galatians 3:27:** *“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”* Baptism is an acting out of what happens by faith in conversion. And what happened was: You put on Christ, once and for all. Which means that the command to put on Christ is a call to become what you are—a Christ wearer.

So keep in mind as we move forward now that putting on the armor of light or putting on Christ in verses 12 and 14 are not instructions to become a Christian all over again. Paul is calling us to be what we are in Christ. You are children of the light, children of the day. Now dress like it, live like it, fight like it.”