

The Christian Manual: Study 17, Romans 13:8-14

Romans Studies for Teens by Mike Apodaca, MA



Begin with prayer for wisdom from God and for the presence of the Spirit.

Note: In a Bible Study, as much as possible ask the questions and let the students answer. Where they cannot, you supply the answer and keep everything flowing.

Introduction: The sum of the law is love. When God's love rules our hearts, we fulfill the law.

Chapter 13:8-14 The One Command

Section 1: Romans 13:8-10 Love is Our Only Debt

⁸ Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰ Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Sometimes we hear that all we need is love and everything will be fine. We hear it so often that we become numb to its power. The love spoken of in this chapter is agape, the love which is found in God. Notice carefully, Paul is not talking about our love here. Our love is always tainted with some form of self-interest. This is God's love. It is love that loves because God is love by nature. God has been infinite love from all eternity. His love will never increase nor decrease. His love is infinite and eternal.

When I was in Bible college, I had a friendly debate with the President. He said that nobody could love with God's love, that we only love with our love. I thought he was wrong then and that he is still wrong. I can't imagine even the possibility of living anything approaching an authentic Christian life without God's love in my life, given there by the fruit of the presence of the Holy Spirit (see Galatians 5).

When we have God's love in us, by His Spirit, we are capable of loving God and others and thereby to fulfill the Law of God. This is supported by the Scriptures:

Matthew 22: 37-40 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Galatians 5:14 For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Again, this is a teaching that should never grow old. We should always be amazed that we have been invited to share in the divine nature, to be inhabited by the Holy Spirit of God, and to have His character born in us. This is not something accomplished by trying to be loving, or by trying to treat others well. This is accomplished by doing what Paul commanded in chapter 12:1. It happens when we present our bodies as living sacrifices and get out of God's way. When we pour ourselves out, He pours Himself in.

Section 2: Romans 13:11-14 We Are Closer to the End of The Age Than We Were. Act Like It.

¹¹And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. ¹²The 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. ¹³Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. ¹⁴Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

Our salvation is nearer than when we believed. What do you want to be doing when Jesus returns? Think about it. Think about the things you do in a week. Think about the time you waste. Think about the people you aren't very nice to. Think about the things that you expose your eyes to. Think about the ways you behave that are contrary to what Jesus would do. Jesus could come at any time. Paul is treating us like soldiers behind enemy lines. Soldiers that are expecting a fight at any time don't relax. They don't kick back. They show diligence. Jesus expects us to do the same. He could return at any time. If we are His, and everything we have and are belongs to Him, then we should be happy to see Him come at any time, because we are always doing all things in His name. We are doing what He would do.

Paul continues and gives us very specific ways to act in anticipation of Jesus' return.

1. Put aside the deeds of darkness. Think about this. In this one phrase we have a repudiation of all the pop-psychology that says that we are not responsible for our actions. Paul says we have a choice. We can put aside the deeds of darkness, we simply have to choose to. Notice also, this is not passive. This is something we must actively do. We must put aside these evil things that are in line with darkness.
2. Put on the armor of light. Just as we are to put aside evil, we are to put on the armor of God's light. This armor is fully explained in Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is

not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:10-17)

Notice again, this is a choice. We are to put on this armor. It is something we do.

3. Behave decently. The Greek word for decently literally means “Good form.” In Christ we are to behave with good form. Many translate it as decently. The best way to think about it might be, behave as you would if Jesus were visible to you at all times. We often forget that Jesus is with us always. We push out of our thinking that we are always in God’s presence. This hiding from God allows us to do bad things. We pretend God took a break, left us alone, or became blind or something. Paul tells us to live as we would live with Jesus watching us.

4. Paul now turns to the kind of things we shouldn’t be doing, things that we would be ashamed of to do in front of Jesus.

The first thing he bans is carousing. The Greek word here is associated with drunken parties where people would get wasted and would let lose all inhibitions. They would party. This is not for the Christian.

The next thing is drunkenness. Christians do not need to become inebriated to have a good time. When the Spirit fell on the believers in the book of Acts, they were having such a great time, they were so exuberant, that the crowds thought they were drunk. Spirit-filled Christians should be having a better time than anyone else. Joy beats drunk any day.

Paul proceeds to sexual immorality. There is no place where Satan gets more of a foothold than in our sexual lives. Sexuality is a very powerful part of us. It is a combination of our minds and the natural urges of our bodies. When we give our bodies to God, including our sexuality, we will use it for His glory. Sex is a perfectly normal gift of God to bring pleasure to married couples who illustrate the union between Christ and His bride, the church. To maintain sexual purity, Christians must steer clear of pornography, sexually explicit movies, and dating situations that could lead to sexual misconduct. To remain pure is difficult. It must be met with great effort. Remember who you are being pure for and why.

Next is debauchery. The Greek word here means rejecting restraint, going overboard, being out of control, wild, dangerous. It could happen when people are carried away by their anger, or lust, or by

alcohol or drugs. This is evidence that we are not controlled by the Spirit.

Next Paul deals with dissention. Dissention is creating divisions in the Body of Christ. It's the me-against-them mentality. It's bringing people to your side against someone else's side. We must remember what we are corporately. We are the place where Jesus chooses to be incarnate. Can you picture Jesus dismembered? Would you cut off his arm or his foot? If not, then do everything in your power to maintain the unity of the body. Strive to be on good terms with all your brothers and sisters. Take responsibility for encouraging the growth of your relationships and becoming closer with those in your fellowship. Build bridges, not walls.

The last thing Paul says we are not to do is have jealousy. Jealousy is wanting what God has given to others. We are called to be content in any situation we find ourselves in. In fact, we are to be thankful for all we have. Our greatest possession is our salvation and the riches that come with being a child of God. Once we realize the value of our Sonship/daughtership in Christ, we have no need to be jealous of the things others have or the positions they possess. Jealousy is telling God that what He has given you is not enough.

5. Cloth yourself in Christ. What a beautiful metaphor. Every day we put on clothes. These clothes say something about us. If we are professional, we may wear a suit or uniform. If we are going to the beach, we will wear appropriate clothing for the surf. In the same way, we are to put on Christ every day. We are to envelop our bodies with Jesus. When people see us, they should see Him. This is why we are here on this earth—to represent Jesus to the world. The

word represent is really re-present, to present again. We are to present Jesus again to our Oikos.

6. Don't think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh. The last part of Paul's list here has to do with our minds. In Christ we are to control what we think about. We are not to spend our time thinking about ourselves. This is a very foreign concept right now in our world. Many young people today believe that everything is about them. They feel that they should be entertained and happy all the time. They only want to do things that they enjoy and that bring them pleasure. This is as far from Christian life as you can get. Paul calls us to stop thinking about how we can fulfill ourselves, how we can be happy. Rick Warren was right. The first sentence in the book, *The Purpose Driven Life* is: It's not about you. When you can finally see that it is all about God, then your Christian journey has really begun.

Paul is taking us on a journey. He has shown us our need for Jesus and that He is the only way out of our sin. Then he showed us how much God gave up to have us in His kingdom. Next he called us to do the only reasonable thing—to give ourselves completely to God. He end by calling us to clothe ourselves with Christ and to do the things He would do. The purpose for our salvation is becoming holy, becoming a person filled with the Holy Spirit, a place set aside for Him, where He can express Christ to others. When we understand this, nothing else will matter.

We are blessed beyond comprehension in Christ.



WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

God saved us to be something special in this world. Some believe they were saved to go to heaven. That we are now to wait, be good, go to church and call ourselves Christians.

Paul shatters this whole picture. He explains that we were called to something far greater, something beyond our wildest dreams. We were called to be Christ in this world. This is accomplished by our choices. The first, and most important, choice came in the last chapter. Paul calls us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. This means we give up ourselves to God. He now owns us—our bodies and our lives. Our time is not ours, it is His. Our actions are all to be done in His name.

In this chapter, Paul lays out how we are to act toward the government, toward others in the body, and toward all. He sums it up with one word—love. This is not the sappy love that we read about in greeting cards. This is God’s love, poured out through us by His Holy Spirit. Paul ends this chapter by explaining that our actions matter. We can’t just do what we want, that is, what will satisfy our flesh. We live for Christ.

Living for Christ is accomplished by setting our minds off the things of this earth, and the things that our body is telling us would make up happy, and setting our minds above (see Colossians 3:1-4). Setting our minds on Christ will bring the filling of the Spirit and the unspeakable joy of His presence. Only then will Christ begin to be formed in us. Only then can we clothe ourselves in Christ, putting Him on like a garment and displaying Him to the world. Anything less than this is falling far short of our calling as Christians.



CONNECT

Tonight is about being Jesus for others.

You’re going to start tonight by making a list of your Oikos. These are the eight to twelve people that God has strategically brought into your life to have relationship with and to show them Jesus.

Your Oikos can be made up of family members, friends, people you spend time with at school, anyone God has put into your life.

Once you have your list, you are going to get together in groups of three or four and discuss your Oikos list. Here are some questions for you to consider:

1. What is your relationship with these people? How long have you known them? How often do you see them?
2. Are you showing them Jesus in your behavior? Are you being courageously sinless and pure, compassionate, and godly in all your words and actions? Are there behaviors that you are doing with these people that you should not be doing?
3. Are you modeling the abundant life that is in Christ? People will only leave what they are comfortable with if they think they are getting something better. There is nothing better than the life we have in Christ. Are they seeing you enjoying walking in Christ? Can they see how much you love God and His love for you? Do they know how you are devouring His Word and how you can’t get enough of experiencing His presence in worship? Are you showing the attraction of being in Christ? End your time praying for your Oikos.



WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Section 1 Romans 13:8-10

Paul tells us to owe nothing but love. The point here is that we will never come to the place where we no longer have to love others. This is a life-long debt that will never be repaid.

Paul is speaking about God's love in us, not simply our emotional feelings. This is the love from God, poured out through us by the Holy Spirit. When we walk in this love, we fulfill the law because we will always act like God and He always fulfills the law (Matthew 5:17-20). Love fulfills the Law (Galatians 5:14)

Section 2 Romans 13:11-14

Here Paul brings up the urgency of Jesus' return. We know Jesus is coming in glory. We just don't know when. Paul points out that with every day that passes, His coming is a day closer. Since it could be any time, let's live every moment as we would want to be found by Him.

Paul gives us the positive response first. We are to act like children of the day. In essence, we are to be people of heaven, living now according to the age to come when Christ shall reign. As far as is possible, we are to live now according to our future reality. We are to be like Him. God calls us to a life of spiritual discipline.

The negative response is to put away everything that is not like Christ. This includes carousing, drunkenness, sexual immorality, debauchery, dissention, and jealousy. We are to set our mind away from satisfying the flesh and are to put on Christ.



WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Section 1 Read Romans 13:8-10

1. Paul says that love fulfills the Law. What law is he speaking of? What love is he speaking of?
2. Is it possible to love with God's love? How is this accomplished?
3. Paul says that adultery is cured by loving others as ourselves. What do you think he means? Think of ways that people offend others or let them down. How would love affect these situations?

Section 2 Read Romans 13:11-14

1. In what two ways are you close to meeting Jesus?
2. Paul calls us to put on the armor of light. Why do you think he used the military term 'armor'? What do you think he means by the armor of light?
3. Paul seems to put great emphasis on our behavior. Why is this?
4. If we follow Paul's instructions and do not participate in these activities, how will that make us different from others? Are you willing to be out of step with the world in order to be in step with Christ?
5. How do we clothe ourselves with Christ?
6. Paul calls us not to think about how we can satisfy the desires of the flesh. What desires is he talking about? When we are bombarded with media that is telling us to satisfy ourselves, how can we follow Paul's directive here? How will you get control of your mind for God?



HOW DOES IT APPLY?

All Christians I know say they want to hear the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant,” when they appear before Jesus. The problem is very few of us are willing to do what is necessary to hear those words.

Many are under the illusion that just calling themselves Christians, going to church, giving money in the offering, etc. is enough to hear these words. Paul would say they have misunderstood.

To hear these words means to live a certain type of Christian life, one rarely attained these days, sadly. To be a Christian worthy of the name is to be like Jesus by His Holy Spirit. This comes about when we present our bodies to God as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1), setting our selves completely aside, dying to self. When we break free of the tyranny of self, then God can begin His work in us. Next we need to be filled with the Spirit of God, allowing Him to reside in all parts of our life, like water filling a house when all the doors are open. By worship and prayer and by ingesting the Word, we are brought into deeper fellowship with God, we experience Him. By these encounters we are transformed, from glory unto glory (2 Corinthians 3:16-18).

Walking in Christ means I cannot walk according to the world. I can't participate in the evil that they do. I can't revel in their pornography. I can't get drunk with them. I can't act like an idiot and treat others with prejudice or malice. Walking in Christ means I will be considered strange and out of touch. I'll be weird. I'll be ridiculed and not understood. I'll be rejected by men. It's the price I pay for being accepted by God and by those who also walk in Him.