

# As in the Day

Isaiah 2:1-5 | Psalm 122 | Romans 13:11-14 | Matthew 24:36-44

## ROMANS 13:8-14

*[<sup>8</sup>Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup>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, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' <sup>10</sup>Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.] <sup>11</sup>Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; <sup>12</sup>the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light; <sup>13</sup>let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. <sup>14</sup>Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*

## INTRODUCTION

What is the chief end of politics? As we have watched the world devolve into greater and greater extremes of partisanship, as ideological positions move farther and farther apart, one has to wonder what exactly the goal is. Is it there some agreed-upon ideal? Freedom, efficiency, and prosperity for all? Or are we now at the point where we are aiming at mere tolerance? Whether it is the economic, social, or cultural divide, is it simply allowing the existence of the other—without too much complaint—that is our highest hope? Or might we move beyond tolerance to something more—the opposite of tolerance—something like love?

Love, interestingly, is a topic that Paul takes up in the thirteenth chapter of his letter to the church in Rome. And if you're looking at me confusedly right now, that's okay. There's no reason you should know that. I have to stop and modify our reading a little bit. The lectionary organizers, very excited about the motivational language in that paragraph, presumably because of the occasion of the first Sunday of the Christian year, seem to have missed something rather important. All the metaphorical language of reading—wake up, put on armour of light, live honourably as in the day, and even put on the Lord Jesus Christ—are motivating Paul's readers to follow through with something, the something found in the previous paragraph. And it is in the preceding three verses where Paul tells us what it is we are to do. Let me read them:

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. 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, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.<sup>1</sup>

You see, according to Paul, the defining characteristic of a Christian should be love. Of course, we are probably more used to the version of this idea captured in John's Gospel, when Jesus said: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."<sup>2</sup> But nevertheless, Paul makes a case for it here. And this is his what he wants us to see: It is time to

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<sup>1</sup> Rom 13:8-10.

<sup>2</sup> Remember, Jesus says as much in the Gospels. John 13:35.

wake up and put others first. It is time to wake up, and love people, in such a way, as to put them first. Let's take a closer look.

### 1. LOVING (8-10)

In verses 8-10, that bit before our reading, and having just finished exhorting his readers to pay their taxes, Paul picks up in the first part of our passage with a reference to owing. Only he turns it to the abstract: 'Owe no one anything, except love.' He then indicates that loving other people is akin to keeping the commandments of the Law, for the Law can be summarized thusly: Love God and love your neighbour.<sup>3</sup> This is especially interesting because Paul had, earlier in the letter, distinguished between the Law as legal code, which served primarily to show us our failings, and the law of righteousness—the way we are to live by faith. Here, Paul continues and explicitly states the other side of the coin—the inverse: 'Love does no wrong to a neighbour.' That is, to love someone is to avoid harming them, even at great personal cost.

In short, truly loving someone, including in the romantic sense, but primarily in the human sense, is sacrificial. And if we are to do anything as Christians, it should be to love—and love sacrificially. And what is sacrificed? Personal privilege, individual rights, and anything that puts oneself first. He will unpack this in the section that follows our passage, where he gets into how Christians ought to treat one another when they disagree on matters of opinion. But for now, he makes the contrast between loving one's neighbour and continuing in sin.

### 2. LEAVING (11-14)

In the second section of our reading, then, from verses 11-14, Paul begins to further define what it means to love your neighbour by not harming them. And he does so by way of metaphors and exhortations. The night is gone—a metaphor for the darkness of this present age—in favour of the day that is coming—a metaphor for the return of our Lord, his Advent, when all things will be set right. After all, salvation is near. And so, what are we to do while we wait in this moment of already but not yet? We are to live honourably as in the light, putting off the works of darkness. In particular, we are to refrain from revelling and drunkenness—which harms others through temptation and abuse. We are to refrain from debauchery and licentiousness—which harms others through exploitation and selfish manipulation. We are to refrain from quarrelling and jealousy—which harms others through offense. In short, we are to love others rather than harming or doing wrong to them—leaving behind the sins that put first the self. And to do so is to put off the works of the flesh and, instead, to put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

### 3. LIVING (APPLICATION)

And friends, this is a needed message for today. So much of our lives revolves around us attempting to gratify our own flesh—our desire to please ourselves, our selfish ambition, our self-centred behaviour, our self-realization, and our overestimation of ourselves. 'What can I get out of this? How does this make *me* feel? How does it make me look? Is this good for my reputation—or in modern terms, is this good for my brand?' How many likes will I get? We view the world entirely individually and construct our lives around our own desires. This is human tendency, and it is only magnified in our world in this age.

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<sup>3</sup> See Mark 12:28-31, Matt 22:35-40, and Luke 10:27.

It creates an inner tension—between our selfish desires and either a genuine desire to care for someone or, at least, the appearance to be doing so. This tension, I think, was captured well by Martin Luther King, Jr. in his sermon called “Loving Your Enemies.” In it, he contemplates what keeps us from moving beyond this impasse. He locates it internally:

I’ve said to you on many occasions that each of us is something of a schizophrenic personality. We’re split up and divided against ourselves. And there is something of a civil war going on within all of our lives. There is a recalcitrant South of our soul revolting against the North of our soul. And there is this continual struggle within the very structure of every individual life. There is something within all of us that causes us to cry out with Ovid, the Latin poet, “I see and approve the better things of life, but the evil things I do.” There is something within all of us that causes us to cry out with Plato that the human personality is like a charioteer with two headstrong horses, each wanting to go in different directions. There is something within each of us that causes us to cry out with Goethe, “There is enough stuff in me to make both a gentleman and a rogue.” There is something within each of us that causes us to cry out with Apostle Paul, “I see and approve the better things of life, but the evil things I do.”<sup>4</sup>

That reference to Paul at the end, interestingly, comes from Romans, chapter 7—just a few pages before our reading from Romans.<sup>5</sup> The concern is a right one. And yet, as Paul has been arguing, the most basic and foundational aspect of Christian life—life as a follower of Christ—seems to be moving beyond hatred, beyond animosity, beyond malice, and even beyond mere tolerance. It is the giving up of rights and personal freedoms in order to sacrificially love someone else. It is putting others before ourselves. It is doing something other than exactly what we want, in order to serve someone else—whether that person is a friend or loved one, an enemy, or even someone you’re not disposed to like. But why? Why should you love someone else in this way?

This is precisely what Jesus did in the cross. He gave up his rights as God and as an innocent man, the only innocent man, and he sacrificed himself to gain the forgiveness of our sins. This is why Paul can easily equate selflessly loving others and ‘putting on Christ.’ For Christ is the ultimate example of selflessly loving others. And in fact, this is precisely how Paul described it earlier in his letter. In the fifth chapter, he notes; “*But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.*”<sup>6</sup> If this is how God proves his love for us, in the gospel, how can we do anything less than look upon others with love?

## CONCLUSION

As I begin to conclude, the point should be clear. It is time to wake up and love one another. I join Martin Luther King, Jr. in his vision of this hope:

And I’m foolish enough to believe that through the power of this love somewhere, men of the most recalcitrant bent will be transformed. And then we will be in God’s kingdom.

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<sup>4</sup> Martin Luther King Jr. “Loving Your Enemies” in *A Time to Break Silence* (New York: Beacon Press, 1962), 18-19.

<sup>5</sup> See Rom 7:19 and 21-23, which King seems to be paraphrasing.

<sup>6</sup> Rom 5:8.

We will be able to matriculate into the university of eternal life because we had the power to love...<sup>7</sup>

It is time to wake up, and love people, in such a way, as to put them first. So, let us find the power to love others, even our enemies. Let us find the power to follow in this way. In both big ways and small, let us love others as ourselves. And in so doing, let us 'put off the works of darkness, but live honourably in the light.' What better way is there than this, to start the Christian year, today, this first Sunday of Advent?

Let me pray: *Heavenly Father, help us to love others as you have loved us. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

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<sup>7</sup> Martin Luther King Jr. "Loving Your Enemies" in *A Time to Break Silence* (New York: Beacon Press, 1962), 28.