

30. ROMANS SERIES: The Christian and His Neighbour

Romans 13:8-14

Having already considered how we are to live toward the governing authorities in response to the mercy of God exercised on behalf of Christians (Rom 12:1,2), Paul now moves on to explain the Christian's response toward those that are to be considered as our neighbours. In other words, Paul is again addressing the Christian's response to society in general. Once again the continuing theme of love is prominent in the believer's life.

Please Read Romans 13:8-14

Verse 8: Paul has been speaking of giving to all their just dues. To all those around us we are to owe nothing. In other words, we are to pay our bills. Paul is not saying that a Christian shouldn't borrow money, or anything of that nature, but what he is saying is that we should pay the bills that we owe. Failing to pay our bills is something that is not acceptable for a Christian (Ps 37:21).

We are to pay all the debts that we incur; yet the debt of love is an ongoing obligation that is always due. This is a debt that we can never pay off, for we must always give others love. To love the other is to fulfil all duty, for to love is to fulfil the law (Mt 22:37-39).

NOTE: INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY QUESTION HERE: How does Romans 13:8 find practical relevance in a Christian's life?

QUESTION: How can we avoid failing the Lord (and therefore sinning) and fulfil the instruction of verse 8?

Verse 9: This verse further explains verse 8, explaining how love is the fulfilment of the law. All of these commandments focus upon the believer's attitude toward others and can be summarised by loving your neighbour as yourself (Mt 22:37-40; Mk 12:28-34; Gal 5:14). By obeying these laws, you are in effect loving your neighbour.

The moral law is obviously still binding upon Christians, for it is summarised by love, and love expresses itself by obedience to God's law. Love is the summary of the law because the law reveals how love is to express itself toward others. If a person actively loves the other, then that person will not disobey the law of God and bring injury upon another in any way whatsoever.

Equally true is that the law cannot be obeyed by any person unless the motivation of love is present. Obedience to the law will gain no man merit before God for salvation, for it is something that cannot be kept in such a fashion, yet the Christian filled with the Spirit and possessing the spiritual fruit of love is indeed able to obey the law in love.

Love is seeking the greatest possible good for others, treating them as I would like myself to be treated. It is being concerned about the other's well being, and therefore doing nothing to injure the other.

Verse 10: Love seeks the best for the other, and therefore will not seek to harm the other. Because of this, love actually fulfils the law. Love is clearly the motivation, while the law of God gives direction to the motivation.

QUESTIONS: Does the law serve any useful purpose for Christians in the light of Romans 13:8-10?

Why is the law of God necessary for giving direction to the motivation of love?

Verse 11: *'And do this, knowing the time (Rom 13:11a - NKJV)'* probably refers back to at least Romans 12:1 through Romans 13:10, a section that is summarised by Romans 13:9. The motivation given by Paul for fulfilling the law is that of knowing the time in which we live. We are to live in a godly way because of the time in which we live - it is not a time to fear, but a time to live as unto the Lord and in love.

The time referred to by Paul is short. It is that short time that remains until the culmination of our salvation, when we shall experience salvation in all its fullness. The end is drawing near, for we already live in the end times. Each day brings that final day a day closer, and who knows when that day will actually be. It is coming nearer all the time. This present age is only temporary and is coming to an end. Therefore we should shake off all spiritual sloth and set ourselves to the fulfilment of the law in love.

Verse 12: The present era of sin and sorrow is coming to an end, and that of holiness and happiness is fast approaching. Because this is so, let's cast aside from us, and have nothing to with, those wicked practices that are usually committed under the cloak of darkness. We should clothe ourselves with those things of which we have no need to be ashamed and that can bear the scrutiny of being seen of men in the light, and indeed of God Himself (Eph 6:11-17; 1 Thess 5:1-11).

Verse 13: This verse further expands upon the previous, revealing some of the works of darkness that are to be cast off. If we are to walk properly as those that have no reason to be ashamed before God, then these things must be abhorred (12:9) and be done away with.

QUESTION: What is the nature of sins referred to by Paul in Romans 13:13?

Verse 14: This verse further explains the armour of light mentioned in verse 12. We are to put on the Lord Jesus Christ so that we would appear as He Himself would appear in all manner of living. To do this we must refuse to yield to the urges of the sinful nature. We must not allow the flesh to feed and indulge in any sin whatsoever, making sure that we give it no ground in which to move.

QUESTION: How are we to make no provision for the flesh so that we do not fulfil its lusts?

INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY

What practical implications flow from Romans 14:13?

What does Paul mean by Romans 14:23?

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