

Romans

Bible Study

Living in the World

Romans 13:8—14

Romans 12 begins Paul's teaching on how to get along with people. First he introduces us to the concept of the Body of Christ and how we are to care for, nurture, and build up one another as believers. Chapter 13 begins with how we are to obey government officials since they are part of an institution that was ordained by God. He then broadens his focus to show how we are to deal with all people whether believers or unbelievers. Instead of seeking to edify unbelievers, as we are instructed to do with believers, Paul focuses in on their number one need: salvation. The common element through our interaction with all people is that we should not tarnish the name of Christ, but reflect Him in all we do.

Love one another (verses 8–10)

Everything we do should be done with love. Love will cause a person to do what is best for others. If a believer is with other believers, love will cause him to encourage, help, build up and even reprimand if needed, all for the betterment of the Body. This requires us to really know intimately what other believers are going through in order to properly help. The goal should be to bring one another to the same understanding of the faith (Ephesians 4:13). It is necessary to understand the word of God in order to properly live for God. Attaining the unity of the faith requires first a solid knowledge of Scripture, rightly divided. Second, we need to apply that knowledge. Our job amongst other believers is to encourage them to renew their minds and walk in the Spirit. The stronger brother would take the responsibility of lifting up the one who is weaker in the faith. More of this in future lessons.

Love also defines how we interact with unbelievers. Interestingly, Paul, who tells us that we are not under Law but under Grace (Romans 6:14), now makes a point in verse 8 that we fulfill the Law when we love our neighbor. This goes back to Matthew 22:36–40 where Jesus says that the Law and Prophets are fulfilled in two commandments. The first is to Love the Lord your God, and the second is to love your neighbor. Paul continues to explain that when we love someone, we will do no wrong to them, which is exactly what the Law demands. Instead of obeying the Law out of fear of retribution, we should desire to reach out in love because of God's grace.

Paul's statements above seem to contradict themselves, and give fodder to those who say the church began after the end of the book of Acts. On careful examination, Paul is not telling us to live according to the Law, only that the Law is fulfilled when we approach others in the spirit of love. In God's eyes, believers have already fulfilled the Law by being baptized (identified) in Christ. Since we are identified with Him, and He has fulfilled the keeping of the Law, we are also seen by God as people who have not broken the Law (Romans 8:3–4). However, Paul also says that the Law is holy and good (Romans 7:12; 1 Timothy 1:8). Although we are not under the condemnation of the Law, we are not at liberty to deliberately break the moral ordinances of the Law. The commandments that relate specifically to getting along with each other are just as valid today for us as they were thousands of years earlier. The difference is that when we break the Law, we are not condemned by the Law (Romans 8:1). Unbelievers are still condemned when they break the Law, even today (1 Timothy 1:8–9). Those things that were morally wrong then are still morally wrong today. Those who seek justification by keeping the Law will only find condemnation (Galatians 2:16; 3:10–11). Paul's point is that the Law gives us good and holy advice, but we are no longer under the Law or condemned by the Law.

Instead of remembering each ordinance of the Law, we are able to fulfill what the Law is demanding by dealing with others in love. Love will drive us to do what is best for the other person and not use

them for some selfish means. Paul brings up the Law because most of his audience was familiar with the Mosaic Law. Instead of trying to follow what the Law said, Paul was explaining that we actually will be living up to the standards of the Law when we deal with people out of love. He was not saying that it was necessary for us to obey the Law, only that we would be doing what the Law demanded when love drives our actions. In a sense Paul raises that bar above what the Law requires, just as Jesus did with the Law to the Jews (Matthew 5). Acting out of the constraint of love covers every possible moral situation, whereas the Law focus in on only a few specific situations. The Law controls the outward actions, while the love comes from the heart. As believers, the change in our heart is the driving force to how we deal with others. This is the result of living the Grace life as Paul teaches.

Wake up (verse 11)

Relating to the idea of loving one another, Paul gives us a warning that we are to arise from slumber so that we can make the most of our time, because the days are evil (Ephesians 5:14–16). When we are asleep, we are not aware of our surroundings. Paul is giving us a wake up call to look around us and take action as necessary. If you see a need within the Body of Christ, work to correct it. If you see an opportunity to witness to an unbeliever, take it. Love will drive us to take action, just as God did when He sent His Son (Romans 5:8). Just as action without love is worthless, love without action is merely sympathy (1 Corinthians 13:1–3; 1 John 3:16–18).

1 Thessalonians 5:6–10 makes it clear that we have to choose how we use our lives. We can sleep by not being aware of opportunities around us, only aware of our own needs, or we can be awake, growing in the faith and looking for ways to serve others. In either case, whether asleep or awake, believers will have an eternal future with Christ. However, we will be judged for how we use our time (Romans 14:10). This judgment is not about salvation, but about reward (1 Corinthians 3:10–15). Those who are awake will have their works remain and they will ultimately be rewarded. Those who were asleep will have their works burn up at their judgment, but they will be saved. The works by which we will be judged are those set forth by the Apostle Paul. He is our master builder, and the works we do need to be built upon the foundation that he built, which can be found in his 13 Epistles (1 Corinthians 3:10).

Since our salvation is getting nearer (at the Rapture), we are to be alert and put aside the deeds of the flesh. We are to be an example to all people, believers as well as unbelievers. This is done to demonstrate our love for others. When we are living in the flesh, we are wasting our limited time on this earth. Every minute wasted is irretrievable; gone forever. When we are living for the Lord instead of for ourselves, we will have the desire to use our time to help others. We will desire to edify believers and share the Gospel of Grace with unbelievers.

Put on Christ (verses 12–14)

As believers, we are presented with a choice about how we are going to live. Are we going to continue in our deeds of darkness, or are we going to lay them aside and put on the armor of light? We are of the light, now we need to walk in that manner (Romans 6:4; Ephesians 5:8; Colossians 2:6). Our walk is dependent upon biblical knowledge and the work of the Holy Spirit (Colossians 1:9–10; 1 Thessalonians 4:1–8). We should not allow the flesh to dictate what we do, and therefore we should never even think about how we could fulfill the lusts of the flesh. We need to decide up front that we are going to identify ourselves with Christ so that others can see Christ in us.

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