

Romans 13:8-14 - Now is the time to live in the light

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Preacher: Steve Palframan

[0 : 00] Good morning, everybody. Good morning. We're going to read the Bible now. So the reading is from Romans chapter 13 verses 8 to 14.

! And it's on page 1140 of your Bibles. Let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt to love one another.

For whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. 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. Love does not harm to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law. And 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.

The 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.

[1 : 21] Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.

Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh. This is the word of the Lord.

Great. Thank you for reading for us, Kate. Let me pray for us as we come to God's word. Let me pray. Psalm 86 says this.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are a speaking and faithful God who raises the dead through his words of life. And so we pray this morning that you would do that work in us, even now. We pray for those of us who are Christians, who've read your word a lot. We pray, please, Lord, that you would speak to us, revive us, refresh us, renew us, we pray.

[2 : 51] And bring new life, we ask. Open our eyes to the truth of the gospel. Maybe for the very first time this morning, we ask. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Well, as you look down at the passage in Romans 13, hopefully you'll keep in front of you. Let me start with a question. You'll know what question I'm going to ask if you've been following the church Instagram account this week.

And that is this. What time is it? What time is it? Now, don't look at your watches and don't look at the clock at the back of church. I don't. So why should you? Right. That's not what I mean.

I don't mean like what time is it on your watch. I mean rather what era is it? What season is it? What age is it? Now, we do talk about time like that, don't we?

You perhaps talk about the seasons of your life, right? So some of you are in the spring of life.

You're young. Everything is ahead of you. Some of you are in the summer of your life. Still young enough to enjoy all that's going on.

[3 : 49] Others are in the autumn or even maybe the winter of life. And at the end is drawing near. But we talk, don't we, about time being seasons or eras like that.

And so think in terms of God's seasons or the era of his plans. What time is it, if I can put it this way, what time is it on God's watch this morning? Now, I know that some of us aren't very good at timekeeping.

But when it comes to theology, knowing what time it is, is really absolutely vital to living the Christian life. And if you look down at verse 11 of our passage, you'll see that Paul assumes in his writing that we will know the time.

He says this, doesn't he? And do this understanding the present time. Literally, the sense here is that you know the time. So do this, given that you know what time it is.

So before we get into the detail here, we need to make sure that we do understand the time. So let's think about what the times are on God's watch. If we skip past eternity past, before time began, the start of time is creation, isn't it?

[5 : 04] When God brings everything out of nothing by the power of his word. And obviously that time has gone. We are not Adam and Eve. This is not the Garden of Eden. This is Brent, right?

Not paradise. Next on the clock is the fall. Where Adam and Eve rebel against God, eating the forbidden fruit. And that time has passed too.

We live in a world that has fallen, that is broken. It's under the curse of God's judgment. Speeding up and we're next in Israel, aren't we? That the time of Israel, where God's promise to save is administrated by a nation who worship in a city called Jerusalem, who are looking forward to a Messiah who is still yet to come.

And that age has passed too. We are no longer in the Old Testament age. Nor is it the age of the Messiah, right? So the Messiah has come and has ascended into heaven.

Jesus, God, the eternal son in human flesh, has been. He lived a life of perfection. He died an atoning death on the cross. He has resurrected and ascended into glory.

[6 : 11] Those events are behind us. And there are still events to come on God's watch, right? Glory is still yet to come. Arsenal won the league, didn't they?

But they didn't win the Champions League. Glory is still ahead of us. It is yet to come. And we know, don't we, that this world has not yet been finally judged.

It will one day be held to account. It will one day be remade. Death is still with us. Sin is still with us. We still get sick. The devil is mortally wounded, but not yet finally defeated.

Glory is still to come. And that leaves us, doesn't it, in between times, if you like. We are in between Christ's ascension and his return. And in these in-between times, in this age that we're now in, Paul has been at pains to point out, we now live by the Spirit in the age of the church.

The message of Jesus Christ is preached to the nations that all who have faith in him might be saved from their sin and given a place in glory that's still to come. That's our time. It's the time of the Spirit.

[7 : 18] It's the time of the church. In our house at the moment, lots of wedding planning is going on. So this is just on my mind.

But if you think about the seasons or times of a wedding day, right? You have the entrance of the bride. You have the exchanging of the vows. You have the giving of the rings.

You have a celebration, a meal. You have speeches. And you have dancing, right? And it is vital for you at a wedding to know which time you're in, right?

Because otherwise you will behave inappropriately. If you go to the bar and you say, I do, they will not know what you're talking about. If you dance during the vows, someone will probably say to you, just listen, just stop.

This is kind of important. And that's Paul's sense here in verse 11. Knowing, understanding the era that we are in in God's progression through history matters for how we live and what we do.

[8 : 22] Knowing that God has a destination that he is working towards, a future that has been promised, is vital for how we live. I know we are flipping on with that this is not paradise, but actually it's really important that we know that we're not Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Yet we don't have the choice that they had. They are there as our representatives. They are making a choice and they are imposing that choice on all of us in a way that we are not.

They sin and we fall in them. So that sin is natural to us in a way that it wasn't to Adam and Eve when they were created. They had a choice that you and I don't.

And if you don't know that, you will just not know and appreciate what kind of trouble you're in simply just by being human. We're not nation building either, are we?

Like Moses. Worship is no longer restricted to the city of Jerusalem. We're not constructing a prosperous nation to be a flagship of the kingdom of God. We're not drawing people to one place to become one culture and one people.

[9 : 24] Those days are gone. That nation has fallen. It was only a shadow of the kingdom to come. It was not the kingdom itself. It was like a kind of an outpost, an ambassador that was pointing the way. And if you don't understand that, if you don't understand that that age has passed, you'll get that wrong too, won't you?

And you'll find yourself on pilgrimages and crusades. You'll start insisting that we all wear the same clothes and have the same haircut. But neither are we in the age of the Messiah either.

We are no longer looking for a saviour to come. We are not providing a sacrifice for sin. That has been and gone. We're not the apostles testifying to having seen the risen Messiah.

We're not launching the church. That work has been done. And if we get that wrong, then we will think that we are providing the sacrifice for sin and that we need to do that somehow.

Or we'll be chasing the new thing, finding the new prophet, looking for an apostle to submit to, seeking a new revelation or a new way of salvation. But that time is gone.

[10:27] Our time is the age of the church, the life of the spirit. And what does that mean? Well, verse 11, In this age, in this time, what really matters is that you're awake, spiritually awake.

Not because Paul is saying that Christ's return is imminent, as if he expects it to be next week or the week after. That doesn't seem to fit with what he says in Romans 11. Rather, it seems to be in this age, there is nothing still to happen before Christ is able to return.

Christ's victorious return is the next event. It's the next scheduled event on the calendar. The next season is glory, says Paul. The dawn is almost here.

The sun of glory is on the cusp of breaking the horizon. And each day and each year is a step closer to that day, the day of salvation, the day when faith in Christ becomes seeing Christ, the day when the curse will finally be lifted, sin will be judged, and Christ will bring heaven to earth, bringing with him all those who died in him and raising up all those who have faith in him.

Now, there are all sorts of applications of that great truth, right? We could spend ages just teasing all of them out. But Paul, in this section of Romans, gives you two concrete applications of that great truth.

[11:59] One is this is the time for love. Secondly, this is the time for holiness. And so we're just going to spend our time looking at those two together. So let's think firstly about love, love.

Come back to the beginning of the section that we read. Notice that it starts in verse eight by linking what we saw last week in paying taxes and revenue and respect and honor to the governing authorities.

He says, doesn't he, verse eight, let no debt remain outstanding. That is pay what you owe. Chapter 13, verse seven. Accept the continuing debt to love one another for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.

Now notice with me, that's essentially an impossible command, isn't it? The command is let no debt remain. Now that would be okay if all our debts were essentially payable. But we can't because there is an unpayable debt, a debt that you can never clear, which is the debt of love.

And so in this age, says Paul, this is the age of constantly loving others. And why is it that we're to love others and keep paying down a debt that never goes away?

[13:06] Well, it's because of end of verse eight, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. Now think about this carefully. Notice what he's saying. His point is that in the time in which we live, outside of the nation of Israel, in an age where Christ has come as the end of the law, fulfilling all the law's righteous demands, in that age, there is an ongoing purpose of the law, which is to teach you and me how to love others.

And how does the law teach you and me how to love others? Well, notice it does it in the negative. So love here is not gooey affections.

Rather, verse nine, what is love? Love is the absence of adultery. That is, love is the absence of sexual self-interest.

To love others is not to lust after others. To love others is not to be unfaithful to the marriage promises that you have made. To love is not to lead others to be unfaithful to the marriage promises they have made.

Love is not adultery, he says. Next, love is the absence of what? Murder. That is, love is the absence of angry intent towards others.

[14:23] Love is the absence of the desire for revenge. Love does not harbor bitterness and resentment. Love does not want to harm another, even if they have been harmed by that person.

Likewise, love is the absence of stealing. Love does not take from another what belongs to them. Instead, it gives to the other. It does not grab after personal gain.

It does not take what does not belong to it. And finally, love is the absence of coveting. That means love for someone is not to want what they have for yourself.

It's not to look at their situation and wish that that was yours. It's not to look at their gifts, their stuff, their relationships, and go, do you know what? I wish I had that.

I would be happy if I had that. No, love is happy that they have it. And so love is not discontent with its own situation, even when it's not as good as its neighbors.

[15 : 22] And so as Leviticus says, and Paul quotes, he says, love is summed up in one command, love your neighbor as yourself. Not because loving yourself is being instructed here, rather because no well person seeks their own harm.

And so likewise, verse 10, you should seek no harm to your neighbor, but rather do them good. Perhaps I can summarize it like this. In the age of the spirit, in the time of the church, in the time in which we live now, the Christian is to learn from the law which is passed to sacrificially give themselves for the love of others.

Seeing that while obligations to people might be written off in taxes and revenue and whatever it is, still there is an ongoing debt to pay, which is to love others.

So the important question to ask ourselves this morning is this, isn't it? Am I, are you, are we together loving like this? Does this love, does this love that puts the other ahead of itself, does that love mark me out, you out, us as a church out?

And if it doesn't, then the solution is not so much just to try harder, do more or be better. The solution is, listen, you must understand the time that you're in.

[16 : 46] You must understand where we are in history. Perhaps I could try and show you like a theological implication and a practical implication. The theological implication of all this is just how you read your Bible, right?

I don't know how you go about reading your Bible on your own. I want to encourage you to try and take a little bit of every day to read your Bible. And maybe you do that already, that's great.

But perhaps you don't read the Old Testament because you find it too difficult or maybe feel like it's a bit irrelevant because we're not in a nation state governed by the Old Testament law. If that's what you think, don't think the Old Testament is irrelevant to you, that it has nothing to teach you. Brother Paul's point is that actually the Old Testament is there to teach you to love. You know, teaching the Ten Commandments to your children, if you have them, or to your nieces or your nephews, or in Sunday school, or learning them for ourselves is a good thing to do because it will teach us to love.

Reading and thinking through how the Old Testament law protected the innocent and honoured those with nothing, that is going to help us. Not because we're trying to rebuild Jerusalem and get back to an Old Testament era.

[17 : 58] No, we realise that Christ has fulfilled all of that and completed all of that. We are trying to be taught how to love others today in this era. Perhaps I can put it this way.

I think Paul would say to you, if you were sat down having a kind of counselling conversation with Paul and you say to Paul, listen, I'm really struggling. I'm really struggling to love other people. I find myself just dominated by self-interest.

What would Paul suggest that you did? He'd say, you know what you need? You need to read more of the Old Testament. Because the Old Testament is given to teach you to love. Not because love is about keeping rules.

We're in the age of the Spirit. And the Spirit empowers you to live by God's law. To work it out in our love for other people.

That's the theological implication is read your Old Testament and understand it in the light of what Christ has done. The practical implication is this, that love starts in our hearts, doesn't it?

[18 : 56] Not just our actions. You might remember Jesus unpicks these commandments in the Sermon on the Mount. And he points out that adultery means don't lust. Murder means don't get angry and think angry thoughts towards others.

And he says that not only to convict us of our sin, but also to show you that the law is intended to touch our hearts. You can't say you love others because you're nice to their faces and you're horrible behind their backs.

Love is not like that. Love is the rooting out of unloving thoughts and attitudes as well as actions. And who is able to do that? Well, in the age of the Spirit, in the time of the church, you can command love like that.

Because you rely on the Spirit to do that work in our hearts. And that's what he'll do. So that's the first thing. Love others. Secondly, holiness. Holiness.

Look down at verse 12. Here the link to time is so clear, isn't it?

[20 : 22] The dawn of the return of Christ is here. And so we are encouraged to put off wickedness. All the things that are done under the cover of darkness. It's slightly obscured in our NIVs, but the wording here is significant.

We are to throw off, put off the deeds of darkness. And we are to put on the armor of light. Put on. Same word. Put on Christ.

In other words, the image here is of sort of getting up and getting dressed. Taking off the pajamas. Putting on the daytime clothes instead of the nighttime ones. And the daytime clothes are Christ. And so in this age, we are to put off the deeds of the night. The deeds of darkness. And according to verse 13, the deeds of darkness are what? Well, carousing and drunkenness. Perhaps those are not words that we use.

Binge drinking and partying. Might be a more modern term. Not be miserable. But rather that the time for our kind of losing ourselves in drunkenness and carousing is gone.

[21 : 23] It's not the time for that. It's not the time for sexual immorality. Literally the word there is just lying down. Linked with the word debauchery next to it. As in the loss of all moral restraints.

Especially sexual restraints. Get up. Wake up. Put that off. Likewise, dissension and jealousy. That is stirring up hatred. Speaking behind people's backs to disrupt relationships.

Getting your own way. No, that's nighttime stuff. That's to be lost. That's to be put off. Instead, we're to put on the armor of light. The protection of holiness.

Verse 14 describes it as clothing ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ. Knowing that we are clothed with him in righteousness for our salvation. We are now, having been covered by his righteousness, we are now to clothe ourselves in him in holiness.

Living like him. Behaving like he behaved. Feeding the desire to be like Jesus. That's in starving the desires of the flesh. Perhaps again, I could give a theological and a practical implication of all this.

[22 : 32] Theologically, just notice how Paul goes on about instructing holiness. You need to be so clear on this. Paul is not saying behave like this to become a Christian.

He's not saying that. He's not saying, you know, don't have sex outside of marriage. Don't get drunk. Don't be jealous. You'll get a place in glory as a result. He's not saying that. His point is rather, because you have been given a place in glory.

Because glory is coming. Because you will be awake with the Lord Jesus. Because you will see him and be with him. Therefore, be like him. Because you've been given all of that.

So holiness, if you like, is the result of salvation. Not the condition for salvation. And so Paul's motivation is really saying, listen, if you understand the age in which you live.

If you understand that we're on the cusp of glory. And you will be like this fully and perfectly on that day. Then be like that today. So if you're a Christian this morning.

[23 : 36] If you believe and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. What you need to know is that you're no longer a night time person. You're a day time person. The day is just dawning.

The future when sin and wickedness will be destroyed. That day is almost here. So be who you will be. Be like that today.

And don't hide from the light of Jesus. But bask in it. In a way. If you're struggling and battling with temptation. And that's all of us, right?

We're all struggling and battling with temptation if we're Christians this morning. This is what you say to yourself. This is no longer who I am. This is no longer who I will be.

That Steve has gone. The new Steve is coming. I want to be like that. I want to live in the daytime. And what about the practical implication?

[24 : 37] Well, the practical implication is this. Clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh. Notice just how practical Paul is here.

Flesh here is not your body. He's not saying don't eat or drink. In Romans, flesh is really shorthand for our sinful nature. And so his point is that holiness, clothing ourselves with Christ, goes hand in hand with starving out our sinfulness.

Literally, you can't fight sin without making a plan not to give it any food. Don't plan how to gratify your sinful nature.

[30 : 15] Please help us, we pray. Thank you, this is the age of the Spirit where the message is not pull your socks up and try harder but is ask and you will receive. So please help us by your Spirit to live lives which please you, lives of love and holiness.

As we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.