

**ALL DRESSED UP AND READY TO GO  
ROMANS 13:8-14**

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**M. I. WE ARE TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER BECAUSE JESUS COULD RETURN AT ANY TIME. HOW WILL HE FIND US?**

I. GETTING READY TO GO (Vs. 8-10)

**WE ARE TO IMITATE JESUS IN THE WAY HE LOVED.**

- A. LOVE AS AN OBLIGATION (V. 8a)
- B. WHO IS THE OBJECT OF OUR LOVE? (Vs. 8b-9)
- C. LOVE FAR SURPASSES LAW (V. 10)

II. GETTING ALL DRESSED UP (Vs. 11-14)

**WHEN JESUS RETURNS, HE EXPECTS TO FIND US DOING WHAT HE TOLD US TO DO. SINCE HE COULD RETURN AT ANY TIME, WE MUST LIVE EVERY MOMENT AND TAKE ADVANTAGE OF EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO DO GOOD AS IF IT WERE OUR LAST, BECAUSE IT MAY BE OUR LAST.**

- A. THINK RIGHT (Vs. 11-12a)
- B. DRESS RIGHT (V. 12b)
- C. WALK RIGHT (V. 13)
- D. BE RIGHT (V. 14)

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I would like for us to keep in mind that Romans chapter 12, verses 1-2 contain the theme that is governing this whole section. We are to offer ourselves up to God as holy, living, and pleasing sacrifices to Him. In other words, our lives are to be totally dedicated to living for Jesus.

Secondly, we are to become less and less sinful each day, and more and more like Jesus. We do this by submitting to the teachings of Scripture. As our thinking becomes more Godly, so will our behavior become more like Jesus.

We then went on to describe how we are to live with one another as a church family. We then went on to describe what our relationship with authority is to be. We are to learn submission and obedience by submitting to government and obeying the law.

This morning, we are commanded to love like Jesus. But not only are we told to love, we are given a compelling reason why we are to love. We'll get into that in just a moment.

Our problem with talking about love is that although we use the word every day, and we think we know what it means, most of us don't have a clue. Most of us love ourselves, but we are not good at loving others.

Let me give you an example of how distorted our view of love is. Most of you know that while Luig and I were dating, she was a television star. She had plenty of publicity pictures taken with her autograph already on them. However, for me, she had one really nice big picture made. On it she wrote, "I'll love you forever." I was touched, I mean really touched, until I turned it over and found a post-it-note attached to the back. It said, "If we break up, I want the picture back."

Well we've been married now for 31 years now, so I still have the picture. But really, I think for us Christians, we need to understand what love is, and why the Bible feels it necessary to command us over and over again to love one another.

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In our day, it seems as if people are very interested in the end times. Everybody wants to know how and when the world will come to an end. In theology, we call the study of the end times eschatology. People make a lot of money claiming to understand the order of events that will take place. In fact, there has been a resurgence of interest in Christianity with the popular "Left behind" book series. Television preachers are making money hand over fist because people are so fascinated with their maps and charts.

Listen eschatology is important. But what is it about the end times that is so important? Jesus said that no one knows the times or dates. Jesus said that He could return at any time. Three things we can be certain of is that Jesus will return, His coming will be a total surprise, and He will come to judge the living and the dead. Now here is how that influences today's sermon. **WE ARE TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER BECAUSE JESUS COULD RETURN AT ANY TIME. HOW WILL HE FIND US?** Now this will go back to some of the things we talked about living in community in chapter 12. When Jesus returns, will He find you nursing a grudge, gossiping about someone, procrastinating about getting some relationship right? Paul is not interested in some Bible teacher getting up and mapping out the end times. Paul wants us to know that we are to be loving people, doing loving things at all times. Why? Because Jesus could return at any moment and we should want Him to find us loving one another.

It's almost like suck-ups at work. All day long, they fool around and loaf on the job. But if they see the boss walk in the office, all of a sudden they get busy and look like they're hard at work. You know those types of people? Perhaps you are one of those types.

That is all well and good for your boss at work. However, the problem with that attitude in your Christian walk is that we don't know when Jesus is going to return. We will have no time to prepare or change. He will just simply appear and there He will be. What will we be doing, how will we be acting, and what will be coming out of our mouths?

I. GETTING READY TO GO (Vs. 8-10)  
**WE ARE TO IMITATE JESUS IN THE WAY HE LOVED.**

Verses 8-10 give us some insight in how we can be getting ready to go right now. The Christian life is pretty simple. **WE ARE TO IMITATE JESUS IN THE WAY HE LOVED.** I know we try to complicate the Christian faith but basically Jesus said, "Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as you love yourself." If we live that way, we should be o.k. Yeah, it sounds simple enough, and it is simple to understand, but not so easy to put into practice. Let's see how God defines love.

A. LOVE AS AN OBLIGATION (V. 8a)

In the first half of verse 8, love is defined as an obligation. Last week we heard Paul say, "Pay what you owe. Pay your taxes and pay your respects to government officials." Here he continues this theme of paying what we owe. The NIV starts out this verse, "Let no debt remain outstanding." However, the NASB is much more literal, "Owe nothing to anyone." It has the sense of obligation. In Romans 1:14 Paul said that we are obliged to give the Gospel to unbelievers. In 8:12 he informed us that we are obliged to live a holy life because of the Holy Spirit. In 13:6-7 we are obliged to the government to pay the taxes and respect.

So having paid our taxes, having paid our respect, we are called by Paul to owe nothing to no one. Now many commentators use this passage as a financial text. They say the text says that we should not borrow money or at least the text instructs us to pay our debts on time. Now those are good principles, but I don't think that is what Paul is focused on here.

Paul is focused on this ongoing debt of love we owe to love one another. First of all, Who is it we owe the debt of love to? I would say Jesus. Remember, back in chapter 5 Paul said, "God demonstrated His love for us in this, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." And Jesus Himself said that He could not demonstrate His love any more graphic than suffering and dying for us. He said, "Greater love has no one than this, that He lay His life down for His friends." Jesus gave up His life for us in the most horrible way so that we could be forgiven of sin and be in a right relationship with God. Jesus didn't die because we were good or pretty, or because we deserved it. Jesus died for us and saved us out of pure love. And keep this in mind as we talk about this. Love has nothing to do with the lovability of the object. We were dirty, ugly, and worthless. Yet Jesus chose to love us.

Can we ever return that type of love to Jesus? Not even close. We could never possibly return that debt of love. That's why the debt will always remain outstanding. But in John 13:34-35 Jesus told His disciples, "Love one another. You must love one another as I have loved you. By this, all people will recognize that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

So we are obligated to Jesus to continue to love one another as He has, and continues to love us. Since we can never possibly repay Christ, we are obliged to love one another always. That is the command. And remember, this is not MTV love. This is sacrificial; lays your life down love.

#### B. WHO IS THE OBJECT OF OUR LOVE? (Vs. 8b-9)

Our immediate question is, “Who are we supposed to be loving, everybody?” The second half of verse 8 through verse 9 describes exactly who is to be the object of our love.

Because Paul is writing this to the church at Rome, and because chapter 12 focused on relationships within the body of believers, we can assume that he means that we are to demonstrate love one to another in church. And he gave us some very straightforward guidelines in chapter 12.

However, if we look at the wording in this section, we may be being called to a broader object of love. Look at the second half of verse 8. It says, “For he who loves his fellowman.” Actually, in Greek it says, “For he who loves the other.” Oftentimes it is easy for us to love those who are like us. I don’t know how many of you travel, but there is an interesting thing that happens for me. When I meet someone and find out they are a Christian, there is like this instant connection. So it should be fairly easy for us to love one another here at church.

But Paul calls us to love the other, those who are different from us. Look at the last sentence in verse 9, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Do you remember how Jesus defined neighbor? In the parable of the Good Samaritan found in Luke 10:25-37, Jesus told the story of a Jew who had been beaten, robbed, and left for dead. Two very religious Jews saw this guy, but failed to stop and help. However, a Samaritan stopped to help the Jew. Now in Jesus’ day, Samaritans were looked down on by the Jews. Jews felt they were superior. However, it was this despised Samaritan who stopped to help the Jew. Jesus asked, “Who do you think was neighbor to this hurt and bleeding Jew?” If you read the story, you will see that the Jewish audience still couldn’t bring themselves to say, “The Samaritan.” Instead they responded, “The one who showed mercy.”

In that story, Jesus commands us to be a neighbor to all He brings into our lives with a need. And here is how love fulfills the law. I would rather say that love fills up the law. Look how the law is stated. It is stated in all negatives, “Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not covet, or whatever other command there may be.” But love takes this negative command and fills it up with positive love.

Let me explain. I have a neighbor. I never steal from him, dump stuff in his yard, or think of killing him. I don’t commit adultery with his wife, and I have not kidnapped his children. So technically, I have kept the law in regards to my neighbor. However, I have not paid off my debt of love to Jesus in regards to my neighbor. I should be praying for him, witnessing to him, actively reaching out to him to help him and to do good for him. You see, if I am actively ministering to him out of Jesus’ love, these commandments don’t even come into play.

I hear a lot of popular psychology that is mixed with theology these days. Some people say that when Jesus and Paul say, “Love your neighbor as you love yourself,” means that we be sure and love ourselves. I don’t think we have much of a problem with this. Even the people I have met the lowest self-esteem were still self-centered. In fact the lower the self-esteem, the more narcissistic the people seemed to be. Love in the Bible is not to be self-centered or self-motivated at all. Love is to be other-centered and motivated by the love and command of Jesus.

#### C. LOVE FAR SURPASSES LAW (V. 10)

And that brings us to verse 10 where it is explained further that love far surpasses the law. Look, there is some real content to Christian love. It is not just some emotional feel-good experience. It is not what makes me feel good or happy. The law is important. Verse 10 reminds us that Godly love does no harm. It fills up the law.

So you can't say, "I'll love my neighbor by having sex with him." No, the Bible says that we are not to be sexually immoral in any way. So if we have our neighbor's best interest in mind, we will be and encourage her to be sexually pure. If we are helping to provide for our neighbor, we will never think to steal from them. The commandments in the Bible are given to us to give us insight into what is right and what is wrong. However, for Christians, we are to look at the negative of each law, and then fill it up with its positive intent in Christ. In other words, we are to see that it is wrong to murder because God is the author of life. We should then be imitators of Christ and bring life to those around us. We should not steal because God is the One Who provides. We should then be imitators of Christ by feeding the hungry and clothing the naked. When there is a need, especially in church, we are to be God's provision to one another. That is what Biblical love is all about.

Jesus said that the world will clearly recognize us as Christians by the way we love one another and by the way we love others in general. When people look at us, do they say, "WOW, you must be a Christian? And if you are a Christian, then I want to be one too!" When people walk in off the street to our church, do you think they feel the unconditional love of Jesus here? Jesus made it clear, crystal clear. **WE ARE TO IMITATE JESUS IN THE WAY HE LOVED.**

II. GETTING ALL DRESSED UP (Vs. 11-14)  
**WHEN JESUS RETURNS, HE EXPECTS TO FIND US DOING WHAT HE TOLD US TO DO. SINCE HE COULD RETURN AT ANY TIME, WE MUST LIVE EVERY MOMENT AND TAKE ADVANTAGE OF EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO DO GOOD AS IF IT WERE OUR LAST, BECAUSE IT MAY BE OUR LAST.**

Paul talks about our motivation in terms of getting all dressed up in verses 11-14. In this section he reminds us that the Lord Jesus will someday return. And his point is this. **WHEN JESUS RETURNS, HE EXPECTS TO FIND US DOING WHAT HE TOLD US TO DO.**

**SINCE HE COULD RETURN AT ANY TIME, WE MUST LIVE EVERY MOMENT AND TAKE ADVANTAGE OF EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO DO GOOD AS IF IT WERE OUR LAST, BECAUSE IT MAY BE.**

Now if you remember, at the beginning of the sermon I talked about eschatology. That means the study of the end of time when Jesus will return. The Jews and early Christians had a lot of literature concerning the end times. The language in these four verses contain a lot of eschatological language. For example the words present time, hour, wake up, darkness, light, night and day are all common eschatological themes. So it is safe to say that Paul's motivation for doing good is that since Jesus will return at a time when we least expect it, we should always be doing the right thing. Let me give you an example. Let's say something objectionable comes on the television and I find myself entertained by it. If I were to ask myself, "What if Jesus came back at this very moment. Would I feel good about Him appearing here with this program on?"

You young people, let's say you're in the back seat of a car doing whatever it is that young people do. Paul wants you to ask, "If Jesus were to come back this very moment, and saw me doing this, how would I feel?"

But in regards to love, Paul wants to ask those of us who are holding on to anger or bitterness or grudges, "If Jesus were to return right now, wouldn't you be ashamed to have not settled this already?"

In regards to evangelism or doing some good work, if Jesus were to return today, wouldn't you say something like, "I was meaning to get around to it, but I never did?"

**A. THINK RIGHT (Vs. 11-12a)**

Verse 11 and the first half of verse 12 instruct us in right thinking. Paul starts out verse 11 with, "And do this, understanding the present time." Do what? We are to be offering our

bodies as holy, living and pleasing sacrifices on a daily basis. We are to be living to please God. We are to become more like Jesus every day by the renewing of our minds. We are to love and serve the church, submit to the government, obey the laws, pay our taxes and debts, and love the other believers and unbelievers like Jesus did.

How do we do it? In what manner do we do it? Understanding the present time. This has to do with right thinking. The present time doesn't have to do with clock time. It has to do with where we find ourselves living in history. We are somewhere between Jesus' resurrection and His final return to judge. As Christians we are living as children of the Kingdom of God, but we are physically living in a world dominated by sin and death, under the control of Satan.

Now look at the next sentence. It starts out, "The hour has come to wake up." We went from present time, to the hour. This indicates urgency. Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. In other words, we are about 2,000 years closer to the return of Christ than was Paul and the Apostles. Every day that passes brings us one day nearer to the return of Jesus. Our excitement and expectation are to be building with anticipation.

But I think that could also have some negative connotations as well. First of all, every day we put off evangelizing our friends and family means that our window of opportunity is closing. Each day that goes by and we don't forgive or don't do the good we intended to do, means the window of opportunity is closing. Putting off giving our lives to Christ means we are approaching a time when it will no longer be possible to make that choice. Once Jesus returns, everything is set in stone.

The second negative connotation about this language is that it parallels Jesus' last night in the garden before He was tortured and killed. When Judas came with the guards to arrest Jesus, He said, "The hour has come." And do you remember what the disciples were doing? Instead of

staying awake and praying for Jesus and preparing themselves, they fell asleep. Jesus told them to wake up and be prepared. And every Easter season we talk about Peter's three-time denial of Christ and how the Apostles ran and hid out in fear.

There will come a time when Christians will not be allowed to worship freely. We find ourselves in a time where we have a great window of opportunity to prepare ourselves to meet Jesus. Are there relationships you need to get right? Don't waste time. Do it right away. Do you need to ask for forgiveness or extend forgiveness? Do it right away. Is there someone you need to witness to about Jesus Christ and salvation? Don't waste time. Do you need to take your walk with Christ to a deeper level? Do it today, because our window of opportunity is closing quickly. Each day that passes brings us one day closer to the return of Christ.

#### B. DRESS RIGHT (V. 12b)

The second half of verse 12 talks about dressing right. The first half of the verse summarized the thought that nighttime is far along and has almost run its course. Daytime is drawing near. And so the implication is that we better take off our nightclothes and get dressed in our day clothes. We are to put aside the deeds of darkness. In other places, Paul describes these as sexual immorality, impurity, greed, obscenity, foolish talk, coarse joking, idolatry, drunkenness, and stealing, lying, gossiping, causing divisions, and worldliness.

Instead, we are to put on the armor that belongs to the light. In Ephesians, Paul describes these as truth, righteousness, the readiness of the Gospel, faith salvation, the word of God. We are soldiers of faith presenting ourselves for duty, offering ourselves in Christ's service as living sacrifices. As soldiers, our uniforms have to be properly maintained and ready. I was in the military during the first Gulf War. I was fooling around in training, having a good old time. But when we got word that Iraq had chemical weapons, you can be real sure I paid careful attention

on how to put on my gas mask, properly put on my protective clothing, and administer the antidote to myself. War was imminent. It was urgent that I be prepared.

### C. WALK RIGHT (V. 13)

That's the message here. The coming of Jesus is imminent. It could happen at any time. Are you properly dressed for the occasion? So Paul exhorts us to think right and dress right. In other words, we are to be properly prepared and alert. If we are, then verse 13 will describe our lifestyles. We will walk right. Look at verse 13. It starts out, "Let us behave decently." I like the Greek better. It says, "Let us walk properly." When I was young, we used to refer to our daily lives as our walk. We would say to each other, "How's your walk with the Lord?" Our walk indicates that this is a whole lifestyle, not just an act here or there. Our walk is how we are. We are to walk in the light. In other words we are to be doing good to all people, especially those who belong to God's family. We are to be ministering to the body. We are to be using our spiritual gifts, talents, abilities, and resources to build one another up and expand God's Kingdom here on earth. We are to be worshipping, evangelizing, discipling, and fellowshiping. We are to be helping one another to be more like Jesus.

We are not to be walking in darkness. That is characterized by orgies, drunkenness, sexual immorality, debauchery, dissension and jealousy. Because Jesus is so near to coming, let me just give us a little warning here. Many Christians live legalistically. They appear to be holy but in actuality they are just phony. Too many Christians try to do everything short of breaking the commandment. So the question becomes how many drinks can I have and technically not be drunk? Or how far can I go sexually without actually being sexually immoral. How much can I party or spend on partying before I have technically gone overboard? What can I say about other

people without it actually being called gossip? Or I'm not trying to cause problems or divisions in the church, I'm just concerned.

You see, that kind of an attitude, those kinds of thought patterns belong to the darkness. We should be striving to please God, not gratify our selfish desires, be they religious or worldly.

#### D. BE RIGHT (V. 14)

Verse 14 strongly urges us to be right. Here is an easy way to tell if you are right. Who do people see when they look at you? Do they see Christ or do they see you? Paul makes a nice contrast here. Either we will try and please ourselves by gratifying the desires of our sinful natures, or we will try and please God by becoming more like Jesus. C.S. Lewis has a nice take on this idea of clothing ourselves with Jesus. When we were little, we used to dress up and pretend we were some hero. We would play act. Lewis says that children's game would do us well as adults. We should dress ourselves up like Jesus and pretend to be Him. We should imagine what would Jesus do or say in these situations? How would Jesus act and respond? The more we imagine and play act in our quiet times, the more we will start to think, act, and imitate Christ in our everyday lives.

Here is where spiritual disciplines come into play. I know that there are people who think prayer, fasting, silence, humility, bible reading and other disciplines are holy in themselves. They're not. All religions practice these disciplines. But for Christians, we use these simply to focus on allowing God to conform our wills to make them more like Jesus. As we continue to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, we will start to manifest godly love in the form of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Let's clothe ourselves with Christ. Let's dress up like Him and love like Him. What kind of church do you think this would be if we loved one another as if Jesus were to return in the next couple

of minutes? What would our homes look like? Let me just remind us what kind of love we are after. In Paul's letter to the church in Corinth he wrote,

**“<sup>4</sup>Love is patient and kind.**

**Love is not jealous or boastful or proud <sup>5</sup>or rude.**

**Love does not demand its own way.**

**Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged.**

**<sup>6</sup>It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out.**

**<sup>7</sup>Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.**

**<sup>8</sup>Love will last forever,**

**but prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will all disappear.**

That's what we are supposed to be doing. And here's the motivation to do it today. **WHEN JESUS RETURNS, HE EXPECTS TO FIND US DOING WHAT HE TOLD US TO DO. SINCE HE COULD RETURN AT ANY TIME, WE MUST LIVE EVERY MOMENT AND TAKE ADVANTAGE OF EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO DO GOOD AS IF IT WERE OUR LAST, BECAUSE IT MAY BE.**

We are called to love others just as Jesus has loved us. This message is urgent and we should earnestly put this into practice immediately. The Apostle Paul has told us that **WE ARE TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER BECAUSE JESUS COULD RETURN AT ANY TIME. HOW WILL HE FIND US?**

I am deeply touched by this ancient story told by Jewish rabbis.

**The story is about two brothers who farmed together successfully. One was single and the other was married with children. One day the single brother thought, “It is not fair that my brother and I share the crops equally. He has many mouths to feed while I have only one. I know what I will do. In the middle of the night, I will take a bag of grain from my storage barn and put it in his. He will never suspect.” As life sometimes happens, the other brother was also thinking that day, “It is not fair that my brother and I share the crops equally. He has no one to look after him in his old age while my wife and I have many children. I know what I will do. I will take a bag of grain to him from my storage barn and put it in his. He will never suspect.” Weeks went by, but the number of bags in both storage barns remained the same.**

**It was mystery, until one night, half way between the barns, the brothers bumped into each other. Immediately they understood and embraced each other. The rabbis say that God smiled upon seeing the love between the brothers and in the spot where they embraced, God told Solomon to build His temple.**

I don't know if the story is true, but I do know that selfless, other-centered love moves the heart of God.