

## **“Genuine Love and Practical Purity”** **(Romans 13:8-14)**

Love is the hallmark of the Christian faith (John 13:35). We can never show enough love—love for God, love for our neighbor, and love for one another. We maintain an ongoing debt of love because God first loved us (1 John 4:19). Because of our love for God we’ll want to grow in our love for others and in practical purity, to become more holy in the way we live our lives. Paul puts these two themes—love and purity—side by side in Romans 13:8-14. Our love for God spills over into loving our neighbor and striving for purity.

### **A transformed Christian life demonstrates genuine love (13:8-10).**

Having previously identified unhypocritical love as a necessary outcome of a transformed life (Romans 12:9), Paul again highlights the importance of love. Here Paul focuses on love for our neighbor.

#### ***Genuine love is the heart of the law of God (13:8).***

In Romans 13:7 Paul stated that Christians are to give whatever we “owe” others. This idea of debt seems to prompt the apostle to talk about our continuing debt of love in Romans 13:8. When it comes to debt, Christians are to “owe nothing to anyone.” We’re to keep our accounts current. This verse doesn’t address the subject of incurring financial debt—borrowing and lending—but simply the necessity for Christians to remain current in their accounts. (Even Jesus referred to borrowing and lending in a non-condemning way in Matthew 5:42). We’re simply to pay all our bills and pay them on time. There are to be no outstanding debts on the books, with one exception. The exception to this command has to do with love. We can never be “paid in full” when it comes to loving one another. The depth of God’s love for us through Jesus Christ makes it impossible for us to repay His love. Love for others, which in reality is an expression of our love for God, is at the heart of God’s law. Paul states that those who love others have “fulfilled” the law. The law of love permeates every other moral law of God. It’s the capstone of the law. We can’t fulfill God’s law until we’ve engaged in active, genuine love for others.

#### ***Genuine love is the summary of the law of God (13:9).***

Paul selects, in no particular order, several of the Ten Commandments that relate to loving others. Love for others drives us to refrain from adulterous relationships, from murder, from stealing, and from coveting. Some Greek manuscripts also include the commandment not

to bear false witness. Jesus interpreted these commandments in their purest form. Murder includes anger toward a brother or sister (Matthew 5:21-22) and adultery includes lust in the heart (Matthew 5:27). There are, of course, other commandments that apply to the Christian life, commandments which Paul includes in his phrase “and if there be any other commandment.” All of God’s commandments, Paul states, are “summed up” in a single “word” (or “commandment”)—“You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18; compare Matthew 22:34-40; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8). Love for our neighbor is the bottom line, the summary, of God’s law.

***Genuine love is the fulfillment of the law of God (13:10).***

In its simplest terms, love always seeks the good and refuses to do evil toward one’s neighbor. We can gauge our love for others by whether or not we consistently seek their betterment instead of harm. Will our words and actions uplift or destroy the other person? Do we have their good as our goal? Genuine Christian love seeks the good and resists the bad. Paul concludes his thoughts where he began (compare verse 8), saying that “love is the fulfillment of the law.” When we show genuine love for others we demonstrate love for God and His holy standards.

**A transformed Christian life  
pursues practical purity (13:11-14).**

Our love for God motivates us to show genuine love for others and to live pure lives, especially in light of the imminent return of Jesus Christ. Practical purity now becomes the focus of Paul’s exhortations.

***Practical purity anticipates the approaching hour of salvation (13:11-12a).***

Paul ties his next thought with his previous exhortation to love others by the little phrase “and this.” We’re to love our neighbor because we understand the “time.” This term for time refers to the present time, the opportunity that lies before us, that is, the distinct time in which we live relative to God’s redemptive work. Paul specifies that the hour is “now” for us to be raised out of sleep. Because we live in the new era of God’s work, the age of the church and the Holy Spirit, we don’t want to linger in spiritual lethargy. Our era is advancing toward the time of Christ’s return just as night time advances toward daylight. Paul states that, as Christians, “our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.” Of course, our salvation was established at the moment we put our faith in Jesus Christ. But the ultimate result of that faith step will be evident when we come into the presence of Jesus Christ. We have a limited lifetime in which to serve God, and each day brings us closer to our ultimate deliverance from sin and this sinful world.

Therefore, we must be alert and active in living out our faith. Likewise, God's plan for the world is approaching its climax in the second coming of Jesus Christ. In both senses, our salvation is nearer at hand than ever before. Paul describes this advance as that of daylight overcoming the darkness of the night. "The day has drawn near." The kingdom of God on earth is near—imminent, ready to burst on the scene at any moment according to God's plan. Therefore, we as God's people are motivated to live pure lives while we anticipate the approaching hour of salvation.

***Practical purity rejects deeds of darkness and wears the weapons of light (13:12b-13).***

Because of the approaching kingdom of God we're to take active steps toward practical purity, steps that Paul expresses in terms of three imperatives—put aside, put on, and walk. First, we're to put aside the "works of darkness." There's no room in our lives for the sinful practices that characterized our lives before we put our faith in Jesus Christ (compare Ephesians 4:22, 25; Colossians 3:8). Second, we're to put on like a garment (the idea behind Paul's term) the "weapons of light." The spiritual life is like a battle and requires spiritual weapons. These weapons are characterized by light, that is, they protect us from evil and advance the cause of God's goodness and holiness (compare Ephesians 4:22; 6:11; Colossians 3:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:8). Finally, we're to walk in such a way that our lives display that which is decent and fitting with "the day" as opposed to "the night." Paul gives specific examples of behaviors that are inappropriate for those who walk in the daylight of the gospel—"orgies" (excessive feasting or partying) and "drunkenness," "sexual immorality" (intercourse outside of marriage) and "debauchery" (any excessiveness, especially with a sexual connotation), or "strife" (fighting) and "jealousy." These actions and attitudes reflect a life of spiritual darkness instead of light and purity.

***Practical purity displays our relationship with Jesus Christ (13:14).***

Again Paul states that Christians are to "put on" like an article of clothing that which is fitting to our calling as believers. In verse 12 he said to put on the weapons of light. Here he says to put on the Lord Jesus Christ (compare Galatians 3:27). We're to wear Christ, to let His character be evident in our lives and to let His protective power shield us from sin. In order to wear Jesus Christ we must also refuse to make any provision—to resist any preoccupation with—the flesh and its lusts. To provide for the flesh means to leave room and offer opportunities for our sinful disposition to have ready access for expression. We should avoid places, practices, and even people that draw us away from practical purity in Jesus Christ. Instead, our relationship with Jesus must be foremost in our hearts and evident to others. Our love for God must spill over into loving our neighbor and striving for purity.