



## RISE AND SHINE

SERIES: GUILT, GRACE, AND GLORY

Catalog No. 1215

Romans 13:8-14

27th Message

Gary Vanderet

February 4th, 2001

In the opening twelve chapters of the book of Romans the apostle Paul details the marvelous story of God's love. God saw our pitiful human condition. We were lost in our sin, lonely and desperate in our longing, and he became one of us. Then he died to bring us to himself so that he could fellowship with us. The book of Romans is the story of God's love.

In chapter 12, Paul describes the process by which God changes us. At times it is hard to see much change in ourselves. Change seems sporadic and haphazard. But God has a plan, and some of that plan is revealed in chapter 12. Our part in the process is to make ourselves available to God, to present our bodies to him as a living sacrifice. We are to let God know that we are available to him to be put to his intended purpose. We will go anywhere he wants us to go, do anything he wants us to do, and become anything he wants us to become. Once we do that we give him the freedom to work in our minds and hearts. He begins to transform us as the Spirit of God takes the word of God to renew our minds. And that becomes the key to change. As the Holy Spirit changes our thinking and attitudes, change naturally flows into our actions.

The primary change that we see is that we become more loving. Love is Paul's concern in these chapters. In John 13, Jesus told his disciples that love would be the primary mark of his disciples. And Paul has been explaining that love is the way we change the world too. We overcome evil by loving people, even our enemies.

We come now to verse 8 of Romans 13.

**Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another;**  
(Rom 13:8, NASB)

This verse flows out of verse 6, where Paul says, "render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to who fear; honor to whom honor." This reference to debt provides the transition to this section. While I believe that it is wise to live debt free, the apostle's point here is not to give a command that one should never buy anything on time. What he is saying is that while we ought to be conscientious about paying all our bills, including our taxes, there is one debt that we can never completely pay, and that is the debt of love.

It is important think about people in this way. We owe them love. That includes the clerk at the store we

frequent, the mechanic who works on our car, the teachers and students on campus, our employers, secretaries, spouses, children, our parents. We owe love to all of them. That is our obligation. We tend to forget that when people become hard to live with. But the apostle makes it very clear that we have a debt of love to everyone around us. It doesn't make any difference how they treat us. We must treat everyone with Christ's love.

According to Paul, this is how we fulfill the law.

**for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, "You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law. (13:8b-10)**

David Roper reminds us: "This was the purpose of the law in the Old Testament — to teach people how to love. Because of the profoundness of our depravity, it has to be spelled out to us."<sup>1</sup>

Without these guidelines we would not treat women with dignity and respect. We would think that it was all right to trade our wives in for newer models if the law didn't say we could not do that. That is the purpose for the detailed instructions in Deuteronomy. They tell us how to live in the world in a loving, gracious way.

Roper continues: "It is not that the law can save anyone. It can't. But the assumption of the Old Testament is that once you come into covenant with God, once you are related to him by faith, then his will is expressed through these loving actions."<sup>2</sup> Paul's emphasis here on fulfilling the law is not based on the means of fulfillment but on the nature of it. John Stott writes: "Love and law need each other. Love needs law for its direction and law needs love for its inspiration."<sup>3</sup> That is why Paul can say, if you love your neighbor, you have fulfilled the law. And our neighbor is not necessarily the person who lives next door to us. It is the next person we meet who has a need that we can legitimately fulfill. Jesus made this point in the story of the Good Samaritan.

In these verses, Paul is quoting from the second table of the law, the last five commandments, which deal with our relationships with people. When we love our

neighbors we will refrain from breaking these relational commands: “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” and “Do not covet.” To these, Paul adds, “and whatever other commandment there may be.” Then he declares that all of them are summed up in this one rule, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” as Jesus had said before him.

Love doesn't commit adultery. That is not a loving thing. We may call it an affair and think of it as adventurous and invigorating, but in reality it is deceitful and destructive. Adultery is unloving to our spouse, our children and our friends. It creates chaos and hardship for everyone. Love doesn't take another's life or assassinate his character. If you love someone you will not steal from him. You will not covet what he has. You will not drool over his house, his computer or his car.

Why does love sum up all the commandments? Because love does no harm to its neighbor. John Stott writes: “Certainly, the last five sins forbidden in the Ten Commandments harm people. Murder robs them of their life, adultery of their home and honor, theft of their property, and false witness of their good name, while covetousness robs society of the ideals of simplicity and contentment. These things do harm to our neighbor, whereas it is the essence of love to seek and to serve our neighbor's highest good. That is why love is the fulfillment of the law.”<sup>4</sup>

Why should we do this? Why should we submit to the government, pay our taxes and love our neighbors? Paul goes on to remind us of what time it is, and to live appropriately. In verse 11-14 he give an scatological foundation for our behavior.

**And this do, [everything he has been saying] knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. (13:11)**

It's time to wake up, time to get up. Do you know what time it is? Some of you are looking at your watches. You are wondering whether I know what time it is! What time is it? Paul says that this is the hour to wake up. It's time to get out of the sack and get your eyes open. Rise and shine! He is not talking about waking up from a boring sermon. He is not referring to physical sleep. He is talking about waking up from moral slumber, because salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.

Our Lord Jesus is coming back any day now. That is what we look forward to. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul describes Christians as “those who love his appearing” (2 Tim 4:8). We love Jesus. We long for him to come back and set things right. Man is having his day now. He is allowed to do pretty much as he pleases, hurting others and destroying his own life. But, God is going to have his day. There is coming what is re-

ferred to in many places in Scripture as the “Day of the Lord.” That is when the Lord will have his day and set everything right. The night is nearly over. The day is at hand. The prophet Malachi describes the Day of the Lord as “the day when the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings” (Mal 4:2). One of these days the sun will come up and darkness will be dispelled. It is a sure thing.

The Book of Acts describes incidents from the 40-day post-resurrection ministry of Jesus to the apostles, and says: “After this Jesus took them up to the Mount of Olives and as he was talking with them suddenly he was lifted up, and then he disappeared. And as they were looking up two angels appeared and said to them: ‘Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.’”

One of these days Jesus is going to appear in all his glory. No matter what your eschatological beliefs are, he is coming back; that is the point. That is his promise to us, and we live in the light of it. This is what keeps us going during these dark days. This is why we continue to love in spite of our family struggles, when we would like to give up on our marriage or when our children are breaking our hearts.

Do you ever have nights where you awake feeling tormented with all kinds of worries and fears? You can't seem to stop thinking about damaged relationships and all the things you have done that hurt others. Perhaps you fearful about your finances or what is going to happen to your children. One thing I have learned to do, in addition to praying and reading my Bible, is to remind myself that in a few hours the sun will going to come up and things will look differently in the daylight. That is a picture of what Paul is saying here. No matter how bad things may appear in the dark, one of these days the Lord is going to return and make everything right.

According to Paul, each day that passes our salvation is closer than the day before. Maybe you are thinking to yourself, “Wait a minute. Paul wrote that over nineteen hundred years ago, and he said the day is about to dawn. How could that be?” Paul lived with the constant awareness that Jesus could come at any time. It was the next and the culminating event in salvation history.

The Bible divides history into “this age” and “the age to come.” The age to come was initiated by Jesus. At the present, those two periods overlap. And so we wait expectantly for the Second Coming, when that old age will finally end. There is also a sense in which the apostle Paul knew that at his death, that would be his Lord's coming for him. And in that sense the night is nearly over for every one of us. How far away is the Lord's coming for you? If I achieve the average life expectancy

for males in this country, I have about 25 years left. Every day I am one step nearer to home. It's time to wake up because salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.

It isn't enough to understand the time; we have to behave accordingly. Paul now issues three appeals, stating each one both positively and negatively.

**The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. (13:12)**

The first appeal concerns our clothing. Understanding what the time is, what should we wear? The picture here is that we not only need to wake up and get out of bed, we need to get dressed, too. Rise and shine! We need to get of our pajamas, our nightclothes (the deeds of darkness), and put on clothes suitable for the day. And the appropriate dress for the believer is military dress, because the Christian life is not a snooze, it is a battle. In verse 14, Paul says that it is Jesus Christ whom we are to put on. He is both our adornment and our protection. He is both our defensive and offensive armor.

From appropriate clothing, Paul goes on to speak of appropriate behavior. Knowing our destiny changes the way we live day to day. It helps us know how to live in the here and now.

**Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, (13:13)**

We might use the term "parrying." Some people live to party. "TGIF" is their creed. They can hardly wait for the weekend. They live for "good times."

**not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality,**

The word for "sexual promiscuity" is based on the Greek word for bed. The appeal is not to live for sex. "Don't sleep around," is how Eugene Peterson translates this in *The Message*. Sensuality is simply living for what feels good. If you live for what feels good you will miss out on the excitement and glory of loving people. Here is how C. S. Lewis described this: "We are half-hearted creatures, fooling around with drink and sex and ambition, when infinite joy is offered us. Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a vacation at the beach. We are far too easily pleased."<sup>5</sup>

Christians do not party their way through life. We do not trivialize life. We certainly are fun loving. We have every reason to enjoy life and have a good time. But at the same time we need to be serious about life. We need to be thinking about what we are here for, where we came from and where we are going, and what our purpose is. It is not merely to retire, to make money or ac-

quire possessions. We are here to "seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness."

Paul is saying that if we really understand what time it is, and that everything we have is going to burn up one day — our real estate, cars, boats and computers, all the things that we spend a great deal of time and money amassing — that's going to change our perspective on things. Not that it's wrong to have any of these things. But if we are preoccupied with them, then we really don't understand the significance of life. We are investing ourselves in a treasure that is going to burn up.

Lastly,

**not in strife and jealousy.**

Here the apostle points up the more secret sins of our hearts. He deals with the characteristics that bring us into conflict with others. He is referring to the kind of person who causes things to be unsettled, one with a controlling personality who causes conflict and gets others angry and upset. It is good to examine the effect we have on others. Do we promote peace? Are we making others happier as a result of our being around, or are we making them unsettled and upset? These three couplets are incompatible with a life of love. They are old clothes that we need to get rid of.

**But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts. (13:14)**

We "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" by immersing ourselves in him from the moment we get up in the morning. We remind ourselves of all that we possess in him, and say, "Thank you, Lord, for this new day. Thank you that you are adequate for whatever you ask me to face today. I don't know what new issues are going to arise. I don't know what kind of mood my co-workers, my boss or my teachers will be in. But you do. Thank you for the grace you will give me today to love them, to be patient with them, to care and listen. I offer my body to you today. Take it and use it for your purposes. Thank you for my salvation, for saving me from the guilt of my sin. I don't need to go through the day burdened by the past, by how I have hurt and damaged others. Thank you that you don't keep an account of my sins. And thank you for the hope of heaven, that if I die today, I will merely graduate from this life to a much better one." Immerse your heart and mind in the Lord Jesus and walk with him through the day.

If we center our lives on anything other than God — our children, our marriage, our job, parrying, a vacation home — we are always going to end up with an empty feeling. If our education about life comes from the media, we are going to be deceived. Rationalized evil always looks good; rationalized good always looks boring. But in real life it isn't so. Paul is trying to save us from a lifetime of pursuits that do not satisfy. So he says, "put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provi-

sion for the flesh in regard to its lusts." In other words, don't plan to sin. Don't set yourself up to fall. As Jesus taught us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation." Let us not put ourselves in situations where we are inclined to fail. Every one of us is going to sin, and God has made provision for that in the cross. The point is, don't plan to sin.

I want to close with Eugene Peterson's contemporary translation of verses 12-14 in *The Message*:

But make sure that you don't get so absorbed and exhausted in taking care of all your day-to-day obligations that you lose track of the time and doze off, oblivious to God. The night is about over, dawn is about to break. Be up and awake to what God is doing! God is putting the finishing touches on the salvation work he began when we first believed. We can't afford to waste a minute. We must not squander these precious daylight hours in frivolity and indulgence, in sleeping around and dissipation, in bickering and grabbing everything in sight. Get out of bed and get dressed! Don't loiter and linger, waiting until the very last minute. Dress yourselves in Christ, and be up and about!

That is the way to live and love.

1. David Roper, "Dress for Success," a message delivered at Cole Community Church, June 19, 1988.
2. Roper, "Dress for Success."
3. John R.W. Stott, *Romans* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994), 350.
4. Stott, *Romans*, 350.
5. Quoted by Ray Stedman, *From Guilt to Glory*, Vol. II, 135.

© 2001 Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino