

# The Law of Love

## Ice-Breaker

1. When do you usually get up in the morning?
2. What is your favorite item of clothing you own?
3. What was the occasion of your first debt or loan?

## Scripture Passage

Romans 13:8-14

<sup>8</sup>Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup>The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet,"<sup>a</sup> and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself."<sup>b</sup> <sup>10</sup>Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

<sup>11</sup>And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. <sup>14</sup>Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.<sup>c</sup>

a [9] Exodus 20:13-15,17; Deut. 5:17-19,21

b [9] Lev. 19:18

c [14] Or the flesh

## Bible Study

1. What is one debt you owe? What is one debt that is to remain outstanding"?
2. What is the greatest example of love you have ever experienced or observed?
3. How does Paul's concept of love differ from today's popular notions of love?
4. How does love fulfill all of the other commandments?
5. How does Paul's urgency in verse 11 influence your perspective on life?
6. How can you clothe yourself with Christ this week?
7. In what real and practical way can you show love to a neighbor this week?

**CASE STUDY:** Your friend, Jerry, an earnest Christian, comes to you for advice. He is tired of the rat race involved in keeping his business going. He's thinking about selling it so that he can devote himself to ministry, since "Christ might be returning at any moment. People need to be ready." What do you suggest to him?

## Reference Notes

**13:8-14** Beginning in 12:1, Paul shifted his emphasis from theology to lifestyle. He first outlined how believers are to live as members of a Christian community (12:1-13). Then he looked at the question of how Christians are to relate to unbelievers, ending that section with a very practical discussion of how Christians are to relate to the governing authorities (12:14-13:7). Here Paul moves from specific instructions on relationships to the general principle that guides all relationships: the law of love (13:8-10). He ends by pointing out what motivates Christians to follow this law of love; the imminent return of Christ. Paul's summary of the Christian life here in 13:8-14 is therefore: "Love others because the new age is dawning."

**13:8 debt.** A repetition in negative form of the positive statement in verse 7 ("Give everyone what you owe him"). In verse 7, Paul has in mind public taxes, while here he turns to private debts. **debt to love.** "So Paul desires that our debt of love should remain and never cease to be owed; for it is expedient that we should both pay all this debt daily and always owe it" (Origen).

**13:9** Paul points to the second half of the Ten Commandments and indicates that each law would be automatically fulfilled if people kept the more basic principle that underlies them; loving others in the same fashion in which they love themselves. If a person really loved his neighbor, he wouldn't steal from him, etc. **neighbor.** In Leviticus 19:18, the neighbor is a fellow Jew; but the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) expands "neighbor" to include all people. One's neighbor is the person in need, regardless of race or nationality.

**13:10** Augustine once said, "Love God; and do what you like." If one truly loves, that person's life will automatically fall into those patterns established by the written Law. Still, since all people are sinful and imperfect, the admonitions of the Ten Commandments as well as those of Paul will be of great value in helping to clarify the path of love.

**13:11-14** The idea of the Second Coming motivating believers to live morally can also be found in Matthew 25:31-46; Mark 13:33-37; Philippians 4: 4-7; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11,23; Hebrews 10: 24-25; James 5:4-11; and 1 Peter 4:7-11.

**13:11 the present time.** This present age within which believers now live is not the ultimate reality. It is merely the prelude to a greater reality which will burst forth when Christ returns. Therefore Christians are not to live as if the here-and-now is all there is. Rather, remembering what Christ did in the past, they are to set their eyes on the future and live a life consistent with the coming new age. Thus the Second Coming motivates one to moral living. The idea of the present age occurred previously in Romans 3:26; 8:18; and 11:5. **slumber.** Sleep is inappropriate for those who must prepare for the imminent coming of Christ. **salvation.** Here understood as a divine event that will take place at a particular time in the future; i.e., though one enters into salvation upon conversion, this is a state to be realized fully only at the Second Coming.

**13:12 night.** The present age. **day.** The coming age inaugurated by Christ's second coming, in which God's new order will appear. **the day is almost here.** The early church understood that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus had ushered in the last days; the end time. God, however, because of his patience, had provided an interval before the culmination of the "night," the purpose of which is to allow other men and women to come to faith. During this interval the call to the Christian is to remain alert and expectant, knowing that the Second Coming may occur at any time. **armor of light.** That which one obtains from God and is appropriate to wear when the new age dawns (see Ephesians 6:11-12).

**13:13-14** In the summer of A.D. 386, Aurelius Augustine, Professor of Rhetoric at Milan University, sat weeping in a friend's garden, wanting to begin a new life but not knowing how, when he heard a child chanting, "Take Up and Read! Take Up and Read!" He picked up his friend's copy of Romans and read these two verses. "No further could I read," he later wrote, "nor had I any need; instantly, at the end of the sentence, a clear light flooded my heart and all the darkness of doubt vanished away" (Confessions). Thus is the conversion story of one of the early church's most influential theologians.

**13:13 orgies.** Originally referred to a group of supporters who accompanied home a victor at the games, singing his praises. It later came to have a negative sense, describing revelry or carousing. **drunkenness.** While all Greeks (including children) drank wine even at breakfast (when they dipped their bread into wine), drunkenness was considered a shameful thing. **sexual immorality.** Literally, "a bed." In the first century, prior to Christianity, chastity was almost unknown and was not considered a virtue by most people. **debauchery.** The public display, without shame, of immoral acts. **dissension.** The desire for power and prestige manifested by a willingness to stir up trouble if one is not in charge. **jealousy.** Envy which begrudges another's place or gifts.

**13:14 clothe yourselves.** To put on the armor of light (v. 12) is, in fact, to put on Christ. It is not merely a matter of cultivating Christian virtues independently of one's own. "To put on the Lord Jesus Christ means here to embrace again and again, in faith and confidence, in grateful loyalty and obedience, Him to whom we clearly belong. It means to follow Him in the way of discipleship and to strive to let our lives be molded according to the pattern of the humility of His earthly life. It means so trusting in Him and relying wholly upon the state of righteousness before God which is ours in Him, that we cannot help but live to please Him" (Cranfield).

## Caring Time

1. How has God been at work in your life this past week?
2. How can the group help you in prayer this week?