

John 13:34-35 (ESV)

³⁴ *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.* ³⁵ *By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

When those words were spoken... the then-known civilized world was split by deep gulfs of separation... like the crevasses of the Grand Canyon.

There certainly were racial animosities and class differences. ...

Language... religion... national animosities... and gender differences...

turned and angled the canyon – every which way. ... A "stranger" and an

"enemy" were expressed in one language... by the same word. The

learned and the unlearned... the slave and his master... the barbarian and

the Greek... the man and the woman... stood on opposite sides of the

gulf... flinging hostility across at each other.

There seems to be division wherever we look today. However... by

comparison... first-century division makes ours as superficial as surface cracks on a parking lot pavement.

The world was broken apart and fractured so deeply when Christ gave His

new commandment to love. ... But as years sped by... and the flame of

Christianity spread around the Mediterranean... the world witnessed

something unheard of before this time.

Barbarian... Scythian... bond and free... male and female... Jew and

Greek... learned and ignorant - clasped hands and sat at one table... and

felt themselves "all one in Christ Jesus." ... They were ready to break all

sources of division... and to yield to the uniting force of Christ-like love. ...

There never had been anything like it. ... The disciples were obeying the

"new commandment"... and a new thing had come into the world — a community held together by love... and the world could not believe it! The truly radical nature of this love was that the Master's commandment called them to love *as Christ loved them*. It was a sacrificial love... the kind of love that even reaches out to those who wish us harm (as Jesus had done to Judas just moments before he gave the command).

Jesus' words are so challenging. Who (even among those in the Early Church) fully lived up to the commandment? ... Probably very few. ... Who today? ... Perhaps even fewer.

But look how the command is so promising. ... The promise is, "All men will know that you are my disciples..."— will know that we are truly His — if we obey the command to love one another. ... The implication is that many will turn to Christ as a result.

This love is to be toward fellow believers and is also to be turned toward the world. We are in a section of Romans... where Paul is explaining how we are to relate to the world.

Romans 13:8 begins a new section of Paul's letter in which Paul turns from the way believers are to relate to the governing authorities to how they are to treat other people in general. ... In this section... Paul returns to the key theme of love as a way of relating to others... whether Christians or non-Christians. ... Paul's emphasis on love dominated his picture of the Christian life in 12:9-21... and he will return to it again in chapter 14.

For Paul... love is the very essence of Christian living... the single most important trait to be expressed in a Christian's life. ... Love occurs first in the list of virtues he describes as the "fruit" of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23).

Christian love (which is self-sacrificing)—comes only by the transforming work of the Holy Spirit... Who pours God's own love into our hearts. A truly loving heart... then... is an expression of our new life in Christ and is brought about by the power of the Spirit. ... This is why Augustine said, "Love... and do as you please." ... A person motivated by pure love is driven by the Spirit of God and will do what pleases God... in all things.

Romans 13:8

Why is love for others presented as an obligation? ... We are permanently in debt to Christ for the lavish love He has poured out on us. The only way we can even begin to repay this debt... is by fulfilling our obligation to love others in turn. ... Because Christ's love will always be infinitely greater than ours... we will always have the obligation to love our neighbors.

Pay your debts as they come due. However... one debt you can never finish paying... is the debt of love that you owe each other. ... We can never say, 'I have done all the loving I need to.'

Every time we meet someone... we ought to say to ourselves, "*I need to show him or her the love of Christ. I have a great and wonderful debt to pay.*" ... If you have ever had a personal debt (be it ever so small)... you know that the first thing that enters your mind when you see that person is that you "owe" them. ... We need to truly see ourselves as spiritual debtors.

When we go to church... into town... to work... shopping... school— wherever we go... whoever we meet - we owe love. This is our debt— loving on that level.

But does “*owe no one anything except love*” ... also have another meaning...? ... Because DEBTS...! AMERICANS LOVE DEBT. We borrow to buy houses... cars... sound systems... food... medicine... clothes... appliances... lottery tickets. ... College students take on staggering debts to finance their education. ... Churches borrow immense sums to erect buildings. What does Romans 13:8 —“*owe no one anything except love*” — say to our debt-ridden society?

J. Hudson Taylor (the godly missionary to China) would never incur a debt... basing his conviction on this verse. ... Charles Spurgeon (the great 19th Century Baptist preacher) had the same conviction. ... But this is probably not what verse 8 means. Paul is not prohibiting us from borrowing money but demanding we pay back what we owe.

Chuck Swindoll wrote:

It would be magnificent if all of us could live debt-free. Some do, and everyone applauds that. People have asked, “Is our church in debt?” “Yes,” I reply, “and it’s a debt we can manage.” Some have adopted a superior tone and asked, “Well, why are we in debt?” to which I reply with tongue in cheek, “Because we preferred not to meet in the rain!”

Back when we rented space, we could have continued to pay that monthly fee to others (money down the drain), or we could have turned that same payment into a mortgage and paid that money toward something permanent. Sometimes a mortgage is the best way to steward the money God entrusts to us. Furthermore, paying money over time allows us to have adequate facilities while serving the needs of the people God sends our way.

On the other hand, we must be disciplined and wise with debt. Specifically, we should avoid habitual, repeated, or ongoing debt. In other words, don't allow debt to continue indefinitely. Pay it off. Don't let it remain outstanding. Don't add debt on top of debt. Don't allow debt to become a comfortable addition (I'm trying hard not to write "addiction") to your lifestyle. And by no means default on a loan.

Credit is nothing more than a tool, which can be properly used or habitually abused. Unfortunately, most people today abuse credit. So, I can appreciate the intent of those who see debt as a great evil to be defeated.

Our text calls for us to be careful financial planners... not taking on more debt than we can handle. But... sadly... this principle is so neglected in our day. – by believers as well as non-believers. ... The age we live in seeks to conform us to its pleasure-oriented... present gratification spirit. ... Buy what you *want* now so that you can enjoy life - let the future worry about itself.

Believers need to anchor themselves solidly in a contrasting worldview—one that reminds us that present pleasure should never be our focus in life... and that God expects His people to manage prudently and for His glory the resources He has entrusted to us.

Romans 13:9-10

We can easily convince others that we love God... but it is far more difficult to pretend love for our neighbors. They are not fooled as easily on that score... and neither are we. ... Thus our love for others provides a helpful measure of our spiritual state.

When you love your neighbor you will refrain from adultery. When you love your neighbor you will regard his life as sacred. When you love your neighbor you will respect his ownership of property.

Paul only cites the last five of the Ten Commandments because these deal with love's duty to mankind. ... When a rich young ruler came to Christ wanting to know what he must *do* to inherit eternal life... the Lord Jesus simply quoted to him these five commandments. ... When the young man claimed to have kept all these from his youth up... Jesus showed him in a single sentence that he had done *nothing of the kind*. ... "*If you would be perfect, go and sell everything you have and give it to the poor... then you will have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me*" (Matt. 19:16-22). The young man went sorrowfully away because "he had great possessions." The Lord's sword-thrust to his conscience revealed that he really did not love his neighbor as he loved himself.

Romans 13:11

The prospect of the Lord's near return should be a great incentive to holy living. ... The doctrine of the Lord's imminent return is one of the most motivational themes in the Bible.

1 John 3:3 (ESV)

³ *And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.*

Do you know what Napoleon said when he looked at China? Napoleon saw the vast teeming millions in China... and Napoleon said, "*There lies a sleeping giant, and let him sleep, because if he awakens, he will shake the world.*" ... I really believe the devil says that about the church of our day. "*There lies a sleeping giant.*" ... We're asleep... and the reason that we're

asleep is that so many of us have been chloroformed by the spirit of this age. ... We're bombarded on every side by all kinds of amusements. (LISTEN!) do you know what "amuse" means? ... "Muse" means "to think" Now... you attach the prefix "a" (in Greek - the alpha) in front of it... and it makes it mean just the opposite... "amuse," means "not to think". We're a generation that is amusing ourselves into oblivion.

But do you know what time it is...? We need to know what time it is on God's clock! There are two Greek words that are used for "time." *Chronos* is used to emphasize chronological (calendar time.) *Kairos* emphasizes quality or kind of time. ... Paul uses *kairos*. ... "Do this, knowing the *kind* of time it is..." ... What kind of time is it? The New Testament calls it "the last days!"

God's alarm clock is going off around the world. Have you listened to the news lately? I mean, can you see the time in which we're living? If the Apostle Paul said in his day, "It is high time to wake up," how much more for us? My dear friend, you don't have to have eyes to see that we are living in the middle of moral, and spiritual, and social, and political darkness, but we need not to sleep in the night.

What time is it? ... Oh! Please take notice... it is not only time to wake up... it is time to get up. ... Do you know another problem that we have? We come to church and listen to sermons. We go to home Bible Studies and we discuss the Bible. And all of this stirs us, and wakes us up, but the problem is when we wake up, we don't get up. We just roll over in bed, yawn in the face of God, and go back to sleep until the next message. Look again at the Scripture...

Romans 13:12-14

That is... *“Get up, and go to work.” “Walk honestly as in the day.” “The night is far spent, and the day is at hand.”*

It is later in the age than you think. It is later in your life than you think. It is later in the day of opportunity than you may think. God is giving us a window... and none of us knows how long that window will be open. The Lord Jesus said,

John 9:4 (ESV)

⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.

It's wonderful for me to be able to stand up here Sunday after Sunday without fear of some police state... some Gestapo coming to close us down. ... May I tell you the noose is tightening? I... personally do not believe that it will be this way much longer? ... Things are quickly changing in America. You say, “You're an alarmist.” And I say thank you! I am sounding the alarm that Paul wrote here in Romans. I am sounding the alarm of Bible prophecy, the Bible says,

John 16:2 (ESV)

... Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.

We will be the troublemakers in this world. The Bible will be considered “hate speech” for declaring that Jesus is the only way to be saved. ... There are missionary doors that are open now that may never be open again. It is later in the day of opportunity than you may ever dream. Jesus said, *“I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night is coming, when no man can work.”*

But we read here in Romans 13... not only wake up... and not only get up... but Paul has also written - dress up. Look (again) at verse 14.

Romans 13:14

Wake up, get up, dress up.

In verse 12... we were told to “cast off the works of darkness” - that’s the bed clothes — and put on the armor of light... (Get dressed for work!)

Then in verse 14—“put on the Lord Jesus Christ ...” Jesus Christ is your armor. Wear Christ like a suit of clothes.

When I get up in the morning I put on my clothes... intending them to be part of me all day... to go where I go and do what I do. They cover me and make me presentable to others. That is the purpose of clothes. In the same way... the apostle is saying to us: "*Put on Jesus Christ when you get up in the morning. Make him a part of your life that day. Intend that He go with you everywhere you go, and that he act through you in everything you do. Call upon his resources. Live your life IN CHRIST.*"

But let me take this analogy in a slightly different direction. ... Imagine a young man reporting for duty at the army headquarters. He is wearing his civilian clothes. He signs the papers which make him officially a member of the armed services and is issued a complete uniform. The company of recruits lines up on the parade ground the next morning for its first inspection. All the other soldiers are in full uniform but our friend has on his khaki pants but otherwise is dressed in a sports jacket, a white shirt and a green tie! The sergeant major would make short work of him! Once in the army he is to be through with the old dress, radically, completely and once-

for-all. In a decisive and complete act he discards his civilian clothes and puts on his uniform. From hereafter he is to be identified by his clothes.

It is just this very thing that Paul has in mind here. Because he is saved the believer is to put off deliberately and decisively, through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, the "works of darkness"—all those habits which once marked him out as an unbeliever. In their place he is to put on the "armor of light,"

In this closing section an alarm clock goes off to waken believers who have gone to sleep in the world and have forgotten this added incentive for yielding their total personalities (mind... will... and emotions) to God.

Paul delivered a rousing alarm... issuing an urgent call for believers to wake up and be aware of the critical hour in which we live. Our Lord has called us to live as His redeemed community in a hostile world that is doomed to receive judgment. Paul urges us to conduct ourselves appropriately as put on Christ's love. ... We need to live in the present moment with an eternal perspective.

So here are three things to do... in light of today's passage:

1. *"Consider... that you are accountable to God for your time."* Time is as much a gift given to you by God as your natural attributes or advantages. If you were really convinced that you will have to give God an accounting for what you do with your time... would you not use it differently than you do? Would you not resolve "never to lose one moment of time, but to improve it in the most profitable way [you] possibly can"? ... If your answer is yes... all that is left is... to **do** it.

2. *"Consider how much time you have lost already."* If you are in your "golden years" or "middle age"... you need to pay special attention to this. If you have not been active in Christ's service... you have wasted many precious moments. You can never make them up. But should you not (then) make every effort to use the remaining time well? ... Should you not "redeem the time" you do have... knowing the evil of the age... and the value of the gospel?

3. *Consider how you may "improve the present time without delay."* There is nothing you can do about the past... but you should at least make sure that you do not repeat your former errors. ... Turn from your sluggishness... sin... or unbelief. ... Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and determine to follow Him. Witness for Him. Remember that you are to understand the times and use time wisely. The time is coming when *"time shall be no more."*