

# Proper Clothing

Romans 13:8-14



## Debt to Love – Read verses 8-10

- Paul already encouraged his readers to practice a sincere and devoted love (12:9, 10), but returns here to topic of love to further emphasize this defining characteristic of a Christian’s life.<sup>1</sup> He uses the concept of debt<sup>2</sup> (what is owed) as a transition from the previous section about fulfilling responsibilities to civil authorities, and to illustrate the nature of the Christian commitment to love others.



1. What does Paul indicate (v. 8) is special about the “debt to love one another” compared with other kinds of debts?
2. To whom does Paul indicate that this debt to love should be directed?<sup>3</sup>
3. Twice in this short passage, Paul says that love fulfills the law<sup>4</sup> (v. 8, 10). How can he make that claim, and in what way does he support his argument?

- **For further thought:** Though Paul indicates that loving others fulfills the law, is the Christian’s debt to love fulfilled simply by meeting the law’s requirements regarding other people (i.e., “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” “Do not covet”)? Consider the kind of love that is described in 1 Corinthians chapter 13 and Philippians 2:1-4.

## A Change of Clothes – Read verses 11-14

- **Wake up!**—Paul expresses urgency for his readers to live in a way that reflects who they have already become as redeemed Christians through faith in Jesus.<sup>5</sup> Rather than asleep (inactive, unaware, or complacent), they were to be alert, “ready to make the most of every opportunity” (Eph 5:16).<sup>6</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Jesus says in John 13:35 “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

<sup>2</sup> When he says “let no debt remain outstanding” (v. 8), Paul is not indicating that Christians are forbidden from incurring financial debts (loans). However, if borrowing is necessary, the loan should be repaid promptly, in accordance with any agreement made with the lender.

<sup>3</sup> In New Testament letters, “one another” often refers primarily to relationships with other Christians. Here, though, Paul includes the expression “fellow men”, which means literally “the other person”, and does not specify Christians in particular. Later in this passage (v. 9, 10), Paul refers to loving neighbors, who Jesus makes clear is anyone who is in need (see “Good Samaritan” story found in Luke 10:25-37).

<sup>4</sup> Discussing the law, Paul refers to the “Ten Commandments” that are found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Of the Ten Commandments, four refer to a relationship with God, while the six others refer to a relationship with other people (though one of those refers to parents, and not other people in general). The command to “love your neighbor as yourself” comes from the Old Testament in Leviticus 19:18, and is repeated by Jesus also.

<sup>5</sup> Other places, the Bible describes the change of clothing as having already happened as soon as a person becomes a Christian (Gal. 3:27, Col. 3:10). Here, Paul describes this change as something a Christian should continue to pursue. The former describes holiness that the Christian already has been given through faith in Jesus (our position in Christ), while that latter case describes the continued pursuit of practical holiness in our lives (our condition at the present time).

4. From what kinds of complacency might a Christian need to wake up today, and how can they avoid going to sleep in the first place?

- ❑ Put aside the dirty clothing—Paul tells them to lay aside dark deeds (actions) like dirty clothing. He says that they should live with decency, not participating in orgies (wild partying), drunkenness, sexual immorality, debauchery (sensuality), dissention (quarreling), and jealousy. According to Hebrews 12:1, things (sins) such as these “hinder and easily entangle,” obstructing attempts to live the Christian life.



5. Are these “deeds of darkness” consistent with the kind of love that Christians are called to in verses 8-10? Explain.

- ❑ Clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ—To clothe yourself with Christ is to live and act in a way that is consistent with who Christ is and what he wants us to do. In Colossians 3:12-17, Paul describes characteristics of the clothing that a Christian should wear as follows:

compassion—a heart for one another/sincere sympathy or mercy

kindness—goodness expressing itself in deeds and generosity

humility—lowly of mind, recognizing dependence on God’s strength rather than my own

gentleness—meekness, not struggling against God or retaliating against others—instead trusting God’s goodness and control over situations

patience/forbearance—self-restraint in the face of provocation, enduring wrong and putting up with the frustrating actions of others

forgiveness—bestowing favor unconditionally, being gracious to someone who has wronged you

love—charity, seeking the welfare of others

peace of Christ—having rest and security in Christ

thankfulness/gratitude—expressing joy regarding what God has done



6. How can this kind of clothing be described as the “armor of light” (v. 12), and how does the process of changing our clothes take place in a practical sense?

- ❑ Am I on my own in these things? God has not left Christians to their own abilities or moral discipline to make the payments on this debt to love or to change their clothes, but rather has given the Holy Spirit to assist in making these changes. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” (Gal 5:22-23)

### *Reflection/Application*

- Have you yet received the new clothing of salvation that comes by putting your faith in Christ Jesus, the one who paid the penalty for sin on the cross?
- Christians, with the help of the Holy Spirit, are you continuing to pursue a change in the clothing of your attitudes and actions that befits the position that you have already attained in Christ? “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness” (Colossians 2:6-7)!

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<sup>6</sup> “Our salvation is nearer now” (v. 11) It is not that Christ’s return (his 2<sup>nd</sup> coming) and the final fulfillment of a Christian’s salvation is necessarily imminent, but that we should be ready as though it might come at any moment (see I Thess 5:1-11). Certainly, with every passing moment the time of Christ’s return, and the completion of a Christian’s salvation is closer to realization.