

## Prayer

Jesus Christ, You are our only hope for liberty, truth and justice. Set us free from the grip of all cruelty, coercion and tyranny, and liberate us into the light of Your Kingdom. Open our eyes to see that even in this world, something of Your majesty and perfection may be seen, may be heard, may be touched, may be felt, and may be known. Then, empowered by Your forgiveness and love, may we live as a people liberated! Thanks be to God, AMEN

## Prayer Suggestions

### Prayer ideas

Scan the internet for information about something of interest to you, and then pray about what you find

### On-going prayers

- **Pray for those whose lives are threatened by commercial expansion:** Pray for the Eskimo people whose livelihoods are affected by the degradation of the sea and global warming
- Pray for those who are working at this very moment, to bring to justice those who have done heinous crimes. Ask the Lord to bless those who do this good with wisdom, and through the difficulties of their work may they come to the One who is the true judge of all.
- Praise God for His deliverance, and the protection that he gives you throughout your life

## Meditation

Lord Jesus Christ, I can hardly believe that you are  
Never not there with me;  
Never not part of what I am doing;  
Never not interested in the details of my life.  
Never not helping me to do what is right.

And what is more staggering, throughout the whole of creation,  
you are equally involved with every other person who has lived!

Lord Jesus Christ, help me understand that you are  
So much further beyond my sight!  
So much higher than my grasp!  
So much deeper than my heart!  
So much broader than my comprehension!

In Your infinite majesty, You hold all things together!  
You are the great 'I AM' and You are always with me: Hallelujah!

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## Bible passage - Romans 13:8-14

<sup>8</sup> Owe nothing to anyone, except love for one another; for the one who loves others has fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup> The commandments; 'you shall not commit adultery, you shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not covet, and whatever other commandments there may be, are summed up in this one saying: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' <sup>10</sup> Love does no wrong to a neighbour; love fulfils the law.

<sup>11</sup> Now, you know what time it is. The time has come for you to awake from your sleep, for our salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. <sup>12</sup> The night is almost gone and the day is nearly here. So let us put away all dark deeds and put on the armour of light; <sup>13</sup> let us conduct ourselves properly, as for the day, and not in revelry, drunkenness, sexual

immorality, indecency, strife or jealousy. <sup>14</sup> Clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ and do not seek to satisfy the desires of your sinful nature.

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## Bible Study

### Review

Following on from what Paul said about paying taxes, this passage contains teaching that is remarkably similar to that of Jesus. It is often said that the teaching of Paul is somewhat different from the teaching of Jesus, but this is not true here. He advocates the keeping of the Ten Commandments (13:9f.), as Jesus does, and sums it up in the same way by emphasising the need for love of neighbour (13:9,10). Then, he sets the teaching in context by reminding his readers about the times in which they lived, for Christ was expected to return at any hour, which remind us of Jesus' own description of this in Matthew 24. He sums up his moral teaching with the famous advice to '*clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ*' (13:14), because Jesus is the one true example of godliness.

There is much worth remembering, and there is also much that is similar to the teaching in Paul's other letters. All in all, this text weaves together some of Jesus' great sayings with some important themes of Paul's own preaching, and it also reads much like the rigorous teaching that was given to converts before they were baptised. It includes the commandments, being ready for the coming of Christ, putting on the '*armour of light*' (see also Ephesians 6:13f.), and giving up the '*desires of the sinful nature*' (13:14, see also 8:3f.). All this is directly applicable to us today, but it is fascinating to recall that this was written to the church at Rome, the church that became the 'mother church' of Christianity for hundreds of years after Paul's death.

The teaching here is something of a relief after the complexity of Paul's comments about the authority of the state (13:1-7). He teaches that the only indebtedness that should weigh on the heart of the faithful should be the obligation to 'love one another'. This was Jesus' command to all His followers given just before he died, as recorded in John (13:34 and 15:12f). Paul also quotes from the law, citing the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:1f.), and 'other commandments' (13:9), and then adds the great moral law from Leviticus 19:18 '*you shall love your neighbour as yourself*'. In this way, Paul highlights love as the most important of all Christian teaching, and like Jesus, he describes love as a way of life, not just a feeling or a hope. This is how God's law is fulfilled in the life of the believer, and this is how Jesus' character is reflected in the words and deeds of those who love Him.

However, Paul clearly felt that he had to put his advice about Christian living in its proper context, which was that of the shortening hours of the 'present age' (Gal 1:4, 1 Tim 6:17). He describes the time before the coming of Jesus as like 'darkness', and the new age begun in Christ as 'light' (13:12). In the years immediately after Jesus' resurrection, the early Christians believed that they were in an age of transition, like the dawn, in which the darkness disappeared and light brightened with the beginning of a 'new day' of Christ's Kingdom.

Everything we read here is consistent with the rest of the New Testament. Jesus Himself spoke of a day when He would return '*like a thief in the night*' (Matt 24:43), and Paul wrote extensively about Jesus' return in both 1 Corinthians (chapter 15) and in 1 Thessalonians (chapter 5). The advice of scripture is therefore consistent; God calls on His people to be ready, and also to live as if preparing not just for a good life here on earth, but for God's new day and His eternal presence.

The helpful advice within this passage has been a great witness to many people. St Augustine, one of the 'greats' of Christian history, was convicted of his own sin when reading verses 13 and 14. He felt that having heard the call to '*put on Christ*' (13:14), he could no longer live the life of sin to which he had previously given himself. To this day, this wonderful passage of Scripture remains a challenge to all Christians, who through their baptism are called to live in this way.

### Going Deeper

The Bible study continues with further information about the following subjects:

- Paul's summary of Christian living
- A warning about behaviour

### Going Deeper

Paul pulls together a number of quotes in this passage, and appears quite familiar with a number of sayings of Jesus. These are worth exploring and there are also many similarities between this passage and other

letters of Paul. It is worth dwelling on this because anything that is repeated and emphasised in this way within Scripture is clearly important.

The opening advice from this passage 'owe nothing to anyone, except love for one another' is interesting. It must have been triggered by Paul's previous comments about the paying of taxes, which was a contentious issue for many Jewish people, some of whom sought to avoid these and in so doing, built up debts. Christians may also have considered avoiding taxes because they believed, together with Paul, that the end days were coming, and hoped to get away without paying their debts before the Lord came in glory! Paul was well aware of all this, and it may be why this passage contains this particular collection of thoughts which includes moral behaviour and anticipation of the second coming. In his second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul attempted to strike a balance by telling the church there to keep on doing what was right for each other and maintain their witness to Christ in the world, whilst holding on to their belief that the Lord would soon come in glory. This is very much the same as the advice given in this whole passage. As far as Paul was concerned, the proximity of Jesus' coming again should spur His people on to greater heights of goodness and testimony, not sloth, the avoidance of tax or any other frivolity!

### ***Paul's summary of Christian living***

The words 'one who loves others has fulfilled the law' in verse 8 go together with the similar phrase in verse 10, 'love fulfils the law'. This sounds very neat, and provides what appears to be the right emphasis for clear Christian advice about living. However, it would be wrong of us to think that Paul meant by this that all other duties and obligations were irrelevant. There are many examples of where people may well have acted from the most loving of motives, but what they have done has not benefitted either the witness of the church or its fellowship. Love is more than a motive for Christian action, it is a way of life, and Paul describes it here, as Jesus does, as the 'fulfilment of' (not as the 'replacement for') all the Bible teaches us about how to live as God's people.

The Old Testament Law was given to God's people so that they had a moral compass to guide them to the Promised Land (Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5,6), and the Ten Commandments were regarded as the pinnacle of this Law. When Jesus was asked 'what is the greatest commandment of them all?' He said 'the first is, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."' (Mark 12:38f.) Now, Paul appears to be aware of this tradition about Jesus' summary of the Law, and also the famous incident where He says 'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.' (John 13:34,35). Paul spots that love is the one main component of all Jesus said about the moral law, but was also aware that Jesus' teaching was quite specific; he said that no law of God would ever disappear, it could only be 'fulfilled' in Himself (Matt 5:17).

It seems therefore that love is the one God-given property, found in Christ, which will enable us to keep the laws of God. Any other form of effort in human terms is doomed to failure. Love is therefore not a sentiment, or perhaps even what we might call a 'motive', but an approach to life, and we find it through being 'clothed' with Christ (13:14). Although I have skipped ahead in our text to pull this quote from the end of the passage, it is an important part of what Paul believed about Christ and about love. Because of the way we use the word 'love' in normal usage today, it is very important for us to have strong Biblical images that tell us what 'love' means as a way of life. So the idea of 'putting on' Christ, or 'being clothed' with Christ is just this (in verse 14, the word for 'clothed' could equally mean 'put on'). The picture leaves us with no illusions; to follow the path of a Christian is to 'put on' Christ so that His loving presence enables us to live as we should.

Lastly, I have spoken about this as if it was an individual matter, but earlier I warned that the text should be seen as advice for the fellowship of believers. The idea of a whole community of God's people being 'clothed' with Christ seems strange, but why should this be so? Surely, if all who are part of a fellowship of believers have been baptised and profess Christ as Lord, then it is a good idea for us to think of ourselves as 'held together' in this way by Christ; like a cloak around us all. If Christian unity means anything, it should surely mean this!

### ***The warning about behaviour***

Paul's words to the church at Rome in verse 11 and 12 are important for us as well as the church in Rome! He describes the changing of time brought about the coming of Christ which is frequently likened in Scripture to day after night, or light after darkness (Col 1:13, 1 Thess. 5:5 etc.). It is not easy for us to think that the Lord might be returning at any moment, but God's prerogative in this has not changed, and He retains His right to bring His Creation to an end at any time of His choosing.

Paul regarded this change in time as a reason for God's people to be active and alert, not passive or inactive. The task of bearing witness to the Lord Jesus was for Him a very urgent one which required dedication and commitment on the part of all believers. Jesus Himself also spoke in the same way in His

own prophetic sayings about the end times (Matt 24:43f.). Now, if, according to our text, love describes the way that Christian people go about doing things, then the motive for our actions should, according to this text, be the possibility of Jesus' return. Certainly, we can ask the question even now, whether the Lord Jesus would be happy to find us doing this or that if He were to come in glory in the very next few moments of time; and if the answer is that He would not, then we should probably not be pursuing whatever it is we are doing. It is not always easy to feel that we have the right grasp of what the Lord might say to us in all the circumstances of our lives, so this is where the fellowship of believers works at its best, for we can help each other explore and answer such questions.

This sense of urgency and determination continues in verses 12 and 13, where Paul uses the picture language of baptism; 'let us put away all dark deeds and put on the armour of light', and 'let us conduct ourselves properly, as for the day'. This is the language of change and resolve, and Paul reminds his readers of the commitment to Christ which lies at the heart of their faith and their baptism. The 'armour of light' is a new expression, for we are used to Paul's famous imagery of armour from Ephesians 6 in which individual pieces of a suit of armour represent different aspects of spiritual warfare against the enemy, but what does Paul mean by the 'armour of light'? Here, it is no less than Christ Himself, as he makes clear in verse 14. Christ is our defence against all powers of darkness, and has no part in those things which are of the night, listed by Paul in verse 13. If our life is to be lived in love and in the light of God's coming glory, then Christ Himself is our only hope of escaping the 'desires of our sinful nature' (13:14), and living the Christian life of love.

## Application

Love lies at the heart of Christian faith because it is the nature and character of God Himself. The message of this passage of Scripture is that love should be a way of life for a Christian. In the same way that marriage works as an expression of love, and not because two people have some motive to 'love one another', Christian faith works in daily life when our deeds and words become an expression of God's love for others. This is impossible for us to do, except through Jesus Christ, who has shown us how this is possible in His own life and death, and because He has been raised and ascended to the Father, He is there for us spiritually. To be clothed with Christ as an individual or as a community is to consciously be so taken over by the power of God that we do His work and become His agents of the Kingdom of God in this world. This is no small conclusion to Paul's words of wisdom about Christian living in Romans 12 and 13.

It is quite reasonable to talk about the second coming of our Lord as a motive for action. In the secular world, global warming is given as a reason for people to hasten change within the way we manage our life on this planet; and yet the planet has been changing for centuries. Perhaps the secular world is merely coming to terms with reality. In the same way, much modern church life carries on as it has for centuries in churches and chapels and under the cover of societies which largely tolerate faith. However, things are changing, and more and more Christians are feeling that the precarious nature of the world in which we live demands that we act more urgently, as if the Lord was coming very soon. The best security we can have in a world of change is to be 'clothed' with our Lord, Jesus Christ.

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## Discipleship

### **Questions** (for use in groups)

1. How is love demonstrated within the church community of which you are a part? How can we live the life of Christ as a community?
2. In what ways are you conscious of the Lord's presence in everyday life? How do you relate to the picture of being 'clothed' with Christ?
3. The picture painted by Paul in verses 11 to 14 is one of change. Do you fear change or welcome it?

### **Personal comments by author**

*To what extent do Some of the evils mentioned there are distressing, and would cause alarm if confessed by a leading member of a church. However, they are all very relevant. It can be valuable to spend some time considering whether you have been tempted back into any 'works of darkness' and also praying to seek the Lord's protection and His 'clothing' in order live the life to which you have been called.*

## ***Ideas for exploring discipleship***

- *Do you feel that you have conquered the 'works of darkness' which Paul lists in verse 13? How can this be done? Pray about this issue*
  - *How do we 'conduct ourselves properly' (13:14) as Paul suggests here in this passage? Does the life of the church help us in achieving this aim?*
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## **Final Prayer**

Direct us, Lord Jesus, in that simple faith which is content with You and with Your presence; leading us as You will, and guiding us into all truth. May we never wander far from You through forgetfulness, wilfulness, or selfishness, and bring us back to Your paths of peace. Through Jesus Christ we pray AMEN

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