



Put on the Lord Jesus Christ

Gospel Culture – Part 12

Romans 13:8-14

David Sunday

April 22, 2018

O Lord, thank You that grace and mercy flowed from Calvary to the valley of our need. You're committed to giving us everything we need, and You speak through the Word of God the word of life, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our paths. This is no empty word for us. It is our life. And Jesus, You prayed to the Father before You died for us, saying, "*Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth*" (John 17:17).

So Father, we pray now in the name of Your Son that...

what we have not, You would give us,
what we know not, You would teach us,
and what we are not yet, You would make us,

until we are fully conformed to the image Your Son in all His loveliness, in all His wisdom, in all His purity and righteousness. We ask this in the name of Your Son, Jesus. Amen.

God's Word to us today comes from a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Rome back in the first century. Please turn to Romans 13. This is a passage of Scripture that has played a powerful role in the history of the Christian church, turning a young man toward Christ. His name was Augustine. You might recognize that name as someone who played a very influential role in Christian theology and Christian history.

Augustine grew up in a society that was marked by sexual promiscuity. When he became a teenager, he was burning with lust. At age 16, he started living with a woman who was not his wife, and by 19 they had a child out of wedlock. But he had a mother named Monica who was a Christian and she was praying earnestly that he would meet Jesus Christ and follow Him. He also had a Christian in his life named Ambrose who was praying and persevering and proclaiming the Word of God to Augustine. He gave him a copy of Paul's letters which he was reading those letters.

Augustine wrote a book called the Confessions, telling the story of how God brought him to faith in Christ. He said when he was 32 years old, his heart was like a hissing cauldron of lust.

But he was reading Paul's letters and was experiencing profound conviction of sin. He even prayed this prayer: "Lord, deliver me from my lusts—but not yet." He wasn't ready to repent, until one day the turbulence in his soul became unbearable. He describes it like this:

I was beside myself with madness that would bring me sanity. I was dying a death that would bring me life. I was frantic, overcome by violent anger with myself for not accepting Your will and entering into Your covenant. I tore my hair and hammered my forehead with my fist. I locked my fingers and hugged my knees. I flung myself down beneath a fig tree and gave way to the tears which now streamed from my eyes. In my misery, I kept crying, "How long shall I go on saying, 'Tomorrow—tomorrow'? Why not now? Why not make an end to my ugly sins at this very moment?"

That's when he said he heard some children playing next door. One of them—he couldn't tell if it was a little boy or a little girl—was saying in a sing-songy kind of voice in Latin, "*Tolle lege. Tolle lege.*" which means, "Take up and read. Take up and read." When Augustine heard those words, he thought, "God's telling me to open Paul's letters and read." He opened to the passage we're going to read now in Romans 13. What he read changed his life forever. So listen to the passage Augustine read, and may God be working to change our lives as well through this passage today.

⁸ *Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.* ⁹ *The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* ¹⁰ *Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*

¹¹ *Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.* ¹² *The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.* ¹³ *Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy.* ¹⁴ *But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*

This is God's holy Word.

After Augustine read these words, he wrote, "I had no wish to read more, and no need to do so. For in an instant, as I came to the end of the sentence, it was as though the light of confidence flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled." What was that

sentence? *“Not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”*

I want you to imagine something with me, if you can. Imagine the day when you're going to be completely freed from sinning, when physically it will be impossible to sin, when emotionally your affections will be completely aligned with what God wants for you, when mentally you won't even have memories of sin anymore, when relationally you'll live in a world full of love. Can you imagine that day when you're completely freed from sinning?

I want you to think about that day, because I know that some of you have come into church today feeling very defeated. You've come because this week you got muddy in the pig pen of sin. Maybe it was going to a party that you knew you really shouldn't attend—but you went, and then you drank too much and one thing led to the next. Or maybe you failed to extinguish the flame of lust in your heart, it ignited into a four-alarm fire and now you're ashamed.

Or maybe that green-eyed monster, jealousy of another person, caused you to act sullen and irritable and angry, to say things you shouldn't say, or just act in ways that were beneath you as a Christian—and now you're embarrassed. Maybe it was anger that broke through that dam called self-control, leaving a whole lot of relational wreckage all over the landscape of your life.

So you've come to church today feeling really defeated. It seems like sin has gotten a stronghold over your heart and you're wondering if grace is loosening its grip. Right now sin feels more powerful to you than your salvation feels. You're weary of struggling with sin. You're wondering, “Will I ever get over it?”

If that's how you're feeling today, friends, I want you to know you're not alone. There is scarcely a Christian in this room who has not come to church on some Sundays feeling exactly that. I'm not going to ask for an 'amen,' but I know that if you've been following Christ for any amount of time, there have been many Sundays when you've come to church feeling very defeated.

So I'm asking you to imagine that day when “all the ransomed church of God will be saved to sin no more.” Can you imagine that? If you're a person who's trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ today, I want you to know that day is drawing near when the darkness turns to light, the shadows disappear and our faith will become sight. We will rise on that day faultless, with great joy, before our God and Savior.

Friends, I know of no greater motivation to live a life of love and holiness than keeping that day in view. That's the greatest motivation to holiness. So we pray with Jonathan Edwards, “Lord, stamp eternity on my eyeballs.” Let me just live with eternity ever before me. I want to

give you two ways to wake up in the morning with eternity stamped on your eyeballs. It will change the way you get up every morning.

I'm one of those people who needs all the help I can get to wake up in the morning. I am not by nature one who gets out of bed jumping up and down because I'm so happy to be alive each day. I need a grind-and-brew coffee maker set the night before so I can hear the noise and smell the aroma. I need three different alarms set at various places in my house so I know in five minutes it's going to go off in another room if I don't get up and turn it off. Occasionally I turn it off and get back in bed. I need help to get up in the morning, and I need habits that will remind me why I'm here.

I want to talk to you today about waking up in the morning with a mindset of love in the light of eternity and with a mindset of living in the light of eternity. Let's start with love.

Love in the light of eternity (Romans 13:8-10)

Look at how verse eight begins: *"Owe no one anything, except to love each other..."* Paul just told us in verse seven that we are to pay people whatever we owe them. If we owe the government taxes or revenue, pay it. If we owe leaders respect and honor, we should give them respect and honor. Now, verse eight is not a command never to take out a mortgage or a loan. But it is telling us we should never take on financial debt that we're unable to pay according to the terms of the agreement. We need to pay what we owe. It's not acceptable to just ignore a debt.

But there is one debt we can never repay. There is one duty we'll never exhaust. That's the debt of love we owe as believers—that we owe to one another—in light of the love God has shown us. I like how Michael Bird puts it:

Imagine that love is a credit card with no borrowing limit. Your job is to try to max it out. Make yourself indebted and obligated to love others. Make your love higher than the interest rates on the American Express card. The best way to avoid moral bankruptcy is to rack up love-based debts.

What he's saying is if you're someone who can say, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so," then you've got a debt of love that needs to be paid daily and it will never be liquidated. There will never come a time when you can say, "I've paid up my debt of love to You. I owe You no more." I can't say that to my wife. I can't say that to the people with whom I work. I can't say that to my neighbors. Even if I succeed in loving you perfectly today, even if I love you

as I love myself 100% of the time today, tomorrow morning when I wake up I still need to tell myself, “I have a debt of love that I owe to my neighbor. It’s a debt I can never fully repay.”

In fact, it would be really helpful if you would imagine some difficult person in your life right now. Just think; don’t look beside you and let them know you’re thinking about them. Ask yourself, “Who’s the most difficult person to love in my life right now?” Just be thinking about that person. What would it look like to love this person as you love yourself? What tangible actions would it require? What is your debt to that person today? Now, suppose you pay that debt today. What’s going to be required of you tomorrow, and the next day, and the next week, and the next year? You’re still going to have a debt of love to pay to that person. You can never say, “I’m paid up.”

The reason Paul gives for this command is in verse eight: “*For the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.*” You might be thinking, “Paul said we’re dead to the law. It no longer has dominion over us.” And that’s true regarding your salvation from sin. The law cannot make you righteous before God. But once you’ve been redeemed—once God has rescued you from your sin—God’s law becomes a great guide to show you His will for your life.

Paul is reminding us here that love is not just a vague feeling. It’s not just a sentimental notion. Love has definition. If you want to know how God defines love, start with the commandments, because to obey is to love and to love is to obey. Sometimes we think we know better than God does and we think the loving thing to do is to break God’s law. For instance, we might say, “I know that God’s law commands me to tell the truth, but if I tell the truth it will hurt this person. So I’m going to lie.”

What are we saying when we do that? We’re saying, “Father, I know better than You what this person needs and what I need.” But our Father knows best what we need, and He knows best what our neighbor needs. He defines what love looks like in His law. So if we really want to love our neighbors, we need to be guided by God’s law. If we disobey God’s law, we fail to love.

It’s pretty obvious when you look at the commandments Paul lists in verse 9. If you’re committing adultery—even if it feels like love—it’s not, because love does not steal another person’s spouse or cheat on your own. If you murder—even if it seems like revenge demands it—you’re obviously not loving the person you killed or his loved ones. If you steal, you’re not loving the person whose belongings you’re taking. If you covet, you’re not loving the one whom you resent for being blessed with something you don’t have.

He says in verse ten, “*Love does no wrong to a neighbor.*” But it’s more than just not doing harm. Notice he wants us to fulfill the law. You can’t just kind of aim for a passing grade. God’s law is something that really is fulfilled from the heart. It’s overflowing with intent for your

neighbor's good, wanting your neighbor's highest joy. It's motivated from the heart. That's why Jesus said it's not just about not committing adultery or not murdering. It's also about not lusting, not even desiring what is evil, not hating in our hearts.

Looking beyond the commandments, what do we see? We see a person. What does the Bible tell us? *"In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins"* (1 John 4:10). What does that word 'propitiation' mean? It means that Jesus is the One Who came and bore the wrath of God that we deserve to experience for all eternity for our sins. Jesus took the blame and bore the wrath, so that we who have committed adultery and murdered and stolen and coveted can stand forgiven when we put our trust in what Jesus has done on the cross for us. The Bible says, *"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another"* (1 John 4:11), in light of the love God has shown us.

What's the most loving thing you can do for anyone? What's the most loving thing you can do for your neighbor? It's to point him toward Christ. Whether your neighbor is way over in the kingdom of darkness, or moving in this direction, or have already crossed over into the Kingdom of light as a brother or sister in Christ—the most loving thing we can do is point one another toward Jesus Christ, helping each other see Who Christ is and to apply Christ's Word in our lives.

How do we do that? We do that by being God's people who persevere and are patient, continually proclaiming God's Word to one another in prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit. That's four P's: God's People, Persevering, Proclaiming God's Word through Prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit. That's how we ultimately love one another—by pointing one another to Christ. As far as I know, Christianity is the only religion that puts such a high value on love. It's the only religion that teaches us that love is a debt we can never fully repay. That's because we are the only people who know that we have been loved by God with a love like that.

I know that when we stand before Jesus in heaven, not a single one of us is going to have a regret that we loved someone too much. You're never going to say before Jesus, "Oh, what a waste that was—loving that person so much." No. As the hymn writer says:

When I stand before Your throne
Dressed in beauty not my own
When I see You as You are
Love You with unsinning heart
Not till then, Lord, shall I know
Not till then, how much I owe

(Endless Hallelujah by Matt Redman, et al)

Every day, because of that love God has for us in Christ, we wake up with a debt to pay to our neighbor—the debt of love we owe. And here’s the beautiful truth, dear friend. The day is drawing near when we will stand before the throne, when we will love God with an unsinning heart. Paul wants us to be motivated, not only to love but to live in light of that day. So let’s look at the second section together.

Live in light of eternity (Romans 13:11-14)

There are two ways to tell the time. There’s time by the clock, or there’s time by its significance. So if you knock on your teenager’s door, because she’s going to be late for school, and she asks, “What time is it?” you can say, “It’s 7:00,” which is time by the clock, or you can say, “It’s time to get up. You’re going to be late for school.” That’s time by significance. Or, if Kate comes to me on my day off and tries to shake me, “Get out of bed, David,” and I say, “What time is it?” she can say, “It’s 8:00 in the morning,” or she can say, “It’s time to eat pancakes.” Then I jump right out of bed because that is time by :significance, you see.

God wants us to understand the significance of the time in which we live. Look at what he says in verse 11. *“Besides this...”* Notice a connection between the verses that went before this about loving one another. Now he’s providing additional motivation to live this kind of love. There’s an urgency to this. *“Besides this you know the time (you know what time it is) that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep.”* He’s telling us when Christ rose from the dead, a new creation dawned. But we still live in this world which is passing away, along with all evil desires.

So as Christians, we’re people who live in between two worlds. We belong to the new creation, but we’re still living in this old, passing world. We’re living in the overlap between the ages. He’s telling you, “Don’t be discouraged, because the sun is rising on the horizon.” He says, *“Salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed”* (verse 12). That’s a beautiful word, and it’s something I need to remind myself of every morning. I have a debt of love I can never repay, and my salvation is nearer to me now than when I first believed. I’m one day closer to my salvation now.

Today if you’re trusting in Him, you’ve walked a few steps closer toward your salvation in Christ. That might sound strange to you. You might think, “I thought I was already saved.” That’s true. We’ve been justified by faith in Christ. We’ve been declared righteous by God, so we’ve been saved already from the condemnation of our sins. But it’s also true that we’re still in the process of being saved right now. We’re still being sanctified. We’re still battling against indwelling sin. We’re still living in a world that’s characterized by darkness, violence, sensuality,

gaudiness, noise, stupidity, arrogance, cruelty, misery, loneliness, vulgarity, shallowness, hypocrisy, blasphemy and lies. Darkness is all around us. This is the air we're breathing right now.

But Paul is telling us, "You belong to a new creation. Look over there on the horizon, on the eastern front. Can you see the dawn? Can you see the day is coming soon, when the darkness is going to be swallowed up by the blazing light of Christ's return?" He's going to come and He's going to build the perfect world every generation has longed for but failed to achieve. He's going to bring a Kingdom bursting with life, holiness, joy, truth, humility and wisdom. Sorrow and sighing will flee away. Everlasting joy will crown your head.

Can you see that this day is at hand? The night is far spent. You're living at the edge of eternity. It's time to wake up spiritually. This is no time for lethargy and apathy and spiritual sluggishness. Oh no! May the Master find us awake when He returns, serving Him with vigor and with joy. "Lift up your heads," he says, "for your redemption is drawing nigh." Look forward to the day when you will soon see Him face to face.

I remember one day back in July 2010 at the end of our vacation out west. Our family packed into the minivan around 5:00 in the morning to leave Bozeman, Montana, and begin the long journey home. I was going to break the trip up into a couple of days, but I hadn't reserved a hotel room along the way. I thought, "Between Montana and Illinois there have got to be hundreds of motels, right?" But I didn't know there was a Harley-Davidson convention going on in South Dakota, so every hotel we called for hundreds of miles around was booked. There was nowhere to stay. So we kept on driving.

When we got into Minnesota, I thought, "Well, the Mississippi River is not too far." We made it to the Mississippi River around 12:30 or 1:00 in the morning. By then I thought, "We're close enough to home. Why don't we just keep pressing on?" Well, that was still something like five hours away. Around 3:00 a.m., somewhere near Madison, Wisconsin, the weariness of the journey became almost unbearable. We were almost home, but we wondered, "Are we going to make it?"

So we opened the windows, let in the fresh air, told some funny stories, listened to music, anything to keep ourselves awake. I was never so happy to see a toll booth as I was when we finally got into Illinois. Finally, off in the eastern sky, as we were traveling along I-90, I could see that beautiful pink hue starting to fill the horizon—a new day was dawning. Once I saw the sun starting to rise, I knew I can make it home. We pulled into the driveway in the early dawn of that morning, safely home and dead tired. It was about a 26-hour trip. But we made it!

Friends, I'm here to remind you that you're on a journey. It's a weary journey. It's grueling. You're going to get worn out along the way. You're going to need a family that loves you to make it through this journey. You're going to need a community that loves one another. You can't do this alone. You can't make it on this journey in isolation from other believers. You need people who are helping to keep you going in the right direction, moving toward Christ. You need all of that.

But I want you to know that the destination of the journey you're on is so bright. It's so full of joy, peace, righteousness, beauty, laughter and holiness. It's worth every bit of struggle on the way. It's worth the weariness. One day when you get there, you're going to be saying, "Those struggles? They were light and momentary, compared to the glory that I'm feeling and believing and seeing right now."

You might feel like Michael Card puts it in his song, "I belong to eternity, but I'm stranded in time." You're weary of struggling with sin. But friends, "there is a joy in the journey. There's a light we can love on the way. There's a wonder and wildness to life and freedom for those who obey. Forget not the hope that's before you, and never stop counting the cost. Remember the hopelessness when you were lost." Keep your eyes on the goal. Don't forget the hope. You've taken some steps closer to eternity today. Live in the light of that.

Get rid of the dirty rags of your night life and put on the armor of light, the beautiful armor that God gives us through faith in Jesus Christ. The night life is characterized by debauchery—unbridled worldliness, things like orgies and drunkenness. It's characterized by no respect for God's good and gracious restraints that He puts on the physical pleasures of sex. Instead, you just give yourself over to sexual immorality and sensuality. It's characterized by living for self. Things like quarreling and jealousy—that's the night life. That's the darkness. That's the world that's dying. That's what's passing away. Throw off those dirty, soiled night clothes, and put on the armor of light.

You might be expecting right now a kind of sermon tirade against all these evils. You might be thinking, "Preacher, hammer them! Go get 'em now. Really come down hard on those sins." But notice that's not how Paul motivates us. No, he says, "That's the way of the night. That's the way of darkness. Why would you want to pattern your life going there and doing that, with those types of people? No, you're a child of the light. Do you know Who you belong to? Do you see where you're heading? Do you realize that the dawn is already approaching, that it's getting brighter and brighter the closer you get to Jesus? Live like it. Live like you belong to Him. Rub the sleep out of your eyes. Wake up! Salvation is dawning." That's what he's saying to

us. “You’re a child of the King. You’re loved. You’ve got a beautiful inheritance. Live like it. Look forward to it.”

I read about a dad with a young son named Jaden. He put him to bed on the last night of his fourth year and told him before he fell asleep, “Jaden, tomorrow you will be five years old.” In the middle of the night Jaden had to go to the bathroom. His dad helped him and when he put him back in bed he said, “Well Jaden, now you are five.” Jaden replied with awe, “Wow! That was quick.” And friends, you know that that’s true when you’re a parent. Little Nate is now big Nate, and I think, “Wow! That was quick.”

That’s the way it is when you’re following Jesus. Our lives here are a mist that appear for a little while and then vanish. Surely Christ is coming soon. In a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, we will wake up in the presence, we will look in His face and we will be thinking, “Wow! That was quick. We’re here now for eternity.” Remember who you are, and Whose you are. Remember what He did for you to get you there. That’s what it means to clothe yourself in the Lord Jesus Christ, according to verse 14.

It’s only by being united with Christ by faith that we can live as children of light in this dark world of sin. We need to be empowered by His Spirit so that we will not fulfill the desires of our sinful flesh. Friend, if you’ve trusted in Christ through faith, you have been clothed in Christ already. You’re clothed in His righteousness, in His spotless robes of righteousness. You’ve put on Christ in baptism. You belong to Him. And now he’s saying, “Daily put on Christ as your clothing.”

If you’re wearing a tuxedo, you’re not going to jump into a pig sty. If you are, remember, “I am clothed in Jesus Christ,” there are places you’re not going to go. There are conversations you’re not going to have. There are things you’re not going to do. Why? Because you represent Jesus. You’re clothed in His righteousness. You’re carrying His dignity with you wherever you go. You remember Who you belong to and what it cost Him to save you. You’re walking around in His robes, living in the light of His return.

And when you do that, you will “*make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires*” (verse 14). You won’t even think about how to gratify your sinful nature. That’s darkness. That’s old. That’s death—not life. I like how an old pastor put it: “It’s always easier to sin the second time, so don’t even think about how to do it the first time.” Don’t even make provision for the flesh. Instead, lift up your eyes. Every step you take is a step closer to Jesus.

Now, I would be remiss if I did not say that if you’re not trusting in Jesus, the exact opposite is true today. Every step you take is a step closer to judgment and hell. If you hear the Word of God today, hear this: Jesus is calling you to turn around. That’s what repentance means.

It means, “I’m turning in a new direction. I’m turning toward Christ. I’m recognizing I need what He did on the cross for me. I’m trusting in His payment for my sins. My sin was so bad that it required God’s Son to die for me. But He loved me so much He did this. The Father gave His Son to be my Savior.”

If you trust in this, if you love God and know that He is coming again, and you’re looking forward to being with Him, He says, “Come to this Communion Table now.” Let this be like a dress rehearsal for the wedding supper of the Lamb, when Jesus Himself is going to serve us and we’re going to feast on the abundance of His household. We’re going to drink from the river of His delight, in His very presence. I mean, wouldn’t it be great if this was the last time we had communion together here, and next time it is in the new creation? Come, Lord Jesus! Come, Lord.

But until He comes, believers, we celebrate this meal as a way of saying, “O, Lord Jesus, wake us up.” Believer, take the bread and the cup on the palate of your mouth, thinking, “Jesus, wake me up spiritually. Enliven my taste for You. Fill me with hunger for You. Help me to live in light of Your return. Rekindle my hope.” That’s what believers do.

If you’re not yet a believer in Jesus, we’d encourage you not to participate in the communion table today. This is for those who are trusting Christ. But do turn around. Turn around from the path you’re on and turn to Jesus. The next time we celebrate communion, we’d love nothing more than to be celebrating it with you. Know that Jesus loves you. He gave Himself for you and for all who will believe in Him.

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