

WALKING IN LOVE AND LIGHT

Romans 13:8–14

Dr. George O. Wood

Romans 13:8–14 (NIV)

“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not covet,’ and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. 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. 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. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”

Romans 13 is speaking to the theme of our relationship to society. The first seven verses speak of our relationship to the government. And the last seven verses speak of our relationship to every person, whether they be believers, or whether they be citizens of our country, or fellow persons in the world.

These verses, 8–14, speak to us of our need for walking in love and walking in light. And how the world does need love. The old cliché is really true. If there were really love in the heart of every person, the love that Christ came to bring, there would be no war anywhere in the world. If there were true love in the world, there would not be the breakup and disruption in family life as we see it today. If there were really true love in the heart of every person, there would be no

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crime in the world. Love is a need in the world. As Christians, we are ones especially given of God the gift of love in Christ Jesus—a gift to not only treasure, but a gift to share with others.

The world has need for light. Light is that which causes us to see God clearly, as He has revealed himself, and causes us then to act as we ought to act. Have you ever thought of driving on the freeway and there would be no lights, no headlamps on anyone's car, just driving down the freeway, taking your chances? Probably kind of like it is now anyway! Imagine trying to drive down the freeway without lights. Imagine trying to live life without the light, which Christ has come to bring—left in spiritual and moral darkness without His light.

Indeed, the themes of love and light are so fitting for believers, because they flow out of the very nature and being of God himself. John declares to us that, “God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.” He further states that: “He who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 1:5; 4:8). God is light, and God is love.

Verses 8–10 speak to us of how we are to walk in love. Verses 11–14 speak to us about walking in the light. There's a negative and a positive side to walking in love. The negative side is stated by the phrase, “Owe no one anything” (Romans 13:8). In other words, we're not to be in debt.

We can get into all kinds of legalese as to what it is that the Scripture is saying here. There would be some that would argue firmly that what this Scripture is saying is that never is the believer to contract debt. There are others who would say, “No, that's not what it's saying. It's saying never is a believer to default on a debt that he has.” The beginning of the continuum is to contract the debt, and the end of the continuum is to pay of the debt. So are we talking about “Don't contract the debt,” or are we talking about “Pay off the debts you have”? I think it's very easy to slip into legalism on this very question and to, as well, do something called proof texting—where you take a passage from Scripture, forget what all the rest of the Scripture has to

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say about indebtedness, and borrow and use this text as a weapon against others, or sometimes against ourselves.

In order to really get at what the Apostle Paul is saying, we have to just take a moment to look at the broader sphere of what the Bible is teaching us about indebtedness. Two basic themes in Old and New Testament. Debt is associated with poverty is the first theme. And the second theme is—the greater stress in both the Old and New Testament—is not words to the debtor, but words to the person who loans money. Strikingly, that’s of interest, I think.

Debt is associated with poverty. In Exodus 22:25, God makes provision for persons who, because of poverty, will need to go in debt. So he tells moneylenders, “If you lend money to any of my people who is poor, you shall not be to him as a creditor and you shall not exact interest from him.” Notice what the Law is saying. When you have a person who is poor and needs money, do you give him a lecture on how to manage his finances properly or tell him to have faith in God and don’t give him anything? No. There is a very clear command given to the person who has the capacity to help the person who is on the brink of nothing. That is, lend. And very tight strictures are laid to the account of the person who lends. Not charging interest, not taking collateral of those things that are necessary for the poor in pursuit of his own livelihood. This kind of poverty which the Old Testament is speaking of is the kind of poverty that resulted from crop failure, the kind of poverty that would come and a person would not have any resources at all to buy bread, to get on with living, the very essentials.

This happened in Nehemiah 5:3 with persons who came to Nehemiah and said, “Because of crop failure, we are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, and our houses to get grain because of the famine.” So from the Old Testament perspective, debt was permissible if one had cause—that is, poverty.

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From the New Testament perspective, the Lord's words were these, "Do not refuse him who would borrow from you" (Matthew 5:42). Jesus does not say, "Do not give the person a lecture who would borrow from you and tell him he shouldn't be doing this." Do not refuse him who would borrow from you. What's He saying? He's speaking from the Old Testament context about a person who was in such narrow straits that unless somehow they borrowed money, they weren't going to eke out a living at all. They weren't going to exist. This cannot be cited by teenage children who come to Dad to ask for ten dollars on Friday night and say, "The Bible says do not refuse him who would borrow from you." I want to set that hedge about the Scripture. Jesus further teaches persons who lend in Luke 6:35: "Lend, expecting nothing in return. And your reward will be great." The stress of Old and New Testament teaching appears to fall more heavily on the person who lends.

But Romans 13:8 especially deals with the person who obligates himself. I think it would be unfair to take 13:8 and say that it automatically is forbidding the contracting of all debts, inasmuch as Scripture clearly allows provision for contracting debt in the event of clear poverty. But certainly the principle of Romans 13:8 forbids looseness in contracting a debt. It also forbids carelessness or refusal to pay a debt.

Psalm 37:21 says, "The wicked borrows and cannot pay back." So many of you have read "Money Matters." I suggest you give heed to what it says. Just some principles that I want to add that I didn't feel were covered. Some guidelines regarding scriptural principles in respect to contracting debt. How should you know when it is time to contract a debt if you're ever in position of needing to borrow money?

Let me ask this. Are you contracting the debt from need or from want? If it's from need, then the evidence from Scripture is clear. It is allowable. If it is from want, it's going to bring you into

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bondage. The Lord would rather have you have the discipline of stacking something ahead than simply getting in over your head.

Ask yourself another question, “Will this debt which I’m going to contract gain or lose me and the kingdom of God money?” There are some debts which are not really debts. They are truly investments. By contracting them, one is actually going to be ahead rather than be behind. A house, for example, is a tremendous illustration in our culture. To take an investment in a house, to take a first trust deed mortgage, is probably to do something, unless the economy collapses, which is pretty shrewd. It’s fitting with the parable of the talents or the parable of the pounds. It’s that capitalization of the little in order to make it go further.

Another question: “Would this debt which I am considering contracting bring me distress or peace? Will it bring me into bondage, or will it really bring me the peace of God?” Not just the peace that “Now I’ve consolidated all my bills and got them in one heap with smaller payments, and now I can take on more.” That’s a false kind of peace.

“Does this contracting of debt burden me with an obligation which I cannot clearly see at the outset the ability to repay? Will this contracting of debt help me or hinder me being a servant of God?”

I don’t suppose I had these questions available to me when I contracted the debt for my college and seminary education. It’s amazing how much horse sense and common sense come into play when you don’t have all the principles and your heart’s right with God. The Lord takes care, a lot of the times, of the rest. As I look back, if I were to start over again as a freshman in college and realize I was going to contract some debts with the federal government for education, I would define that as a need rather than a want. I would look upon it as having gained me in the kingdom of God rather than lost me. It’s helped me become a better servant of Christ than a poorer servant of Christ. I made the obligation with the clear intent to pay them back and saw

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ahead as to how they could be paid back. I wouldn't understand, therefore, that as violating the principle of Romans 13:8: "Owe no one anything." The ultimate goal for us, as a believer, is to be financially free.

Sometimes that involves a process in getting there. It cannot be done overnight. There are many of you who have made a change in your financial way of looking to life. You're now no longer contracting loose debts as you did before. But you're yet not free from all the payments of things you incurred, so you can't fulfill Romans 13:8 yet. It takes time, but you're working at it. It's going to come to pass, because that's the goal—to not be under financial bondage or obligation to anyone. So that's on the negative side. Owe no one anything. Don't get yourself or the faith in disrepute by having bills you cannot repay.

On the positive side though, this is the main stress of what Paul is saying. He uses the comparison of, "Owe no man anything," because he wants to tell us, really, the debt we do owe. So he introduces the debt we do owe by telling us debts we shouldn't owe. "Owe no one anything except to love."

I. That's the debt—to love.

I don't know if you have ever borrowed money from another person rather than an institution.

But it's quite different borrowing money from a friend or a relative rather than a bank or whatever. I found that I can go by the bank, and it doesn't bother me at all if I owe them something if I'm paying it off. But if I have borrowed something from a family member or friend, every time that I saw them, I would think to myself, "I owe them some money."

Constantly, I was being reminded to myself, "I am in debt."

Paul says that kind of feeling you get with somebody you owe is the sort of feeling in regard to love that we're to have toward everyone in the whole, wide world. Everybody we meet. We're to not feel ourselves as just an island all by itself, secluded to itself, owing no one anything. But

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rather, we are in debt to each person. And the special debt which we bring to every person is our debt to love them.

The word which Paul uses here for love is that common word, made common by Christianity, the word *agape*. I was doing some reading this week in a commentary on the Book of Romans, on the Greek text. They traced the history of this word *agape* in a way I had not realized it was derived. Words have ways of coming into being. It so happened that *agape* came into being in this manner: that in about the middle of the second century before Christ, the translators of the Old Testament were going to translate the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek, a translation which became known as the Septuagint. They were looking for a Greek word which would translate the Hebrew word for “love” in the Song of Solomon. They struggled with what Greek word they should use. There was *eros*, the word for erotic love. But that seemed too sordid a term to use for the word “love” there. And there was the term *phileo*, which means the love between friends. But that seemed too weak a word. So they had another word in Greek—a verb. That verb had never appeared in noun form. What they did was they took the verb and created a noun, the noun *agape*, and they inserted it in the text of the Song of Solomon to describe the love occurring there. They used it a couple of other places in the wisdom literature. But interestingly enough, this word *agape*, which term these translators coined, was never at all used by the classical Greeks. The word was never used by Plato, Socrates, and the like. It was almost never used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament except in the Song of Solomon and a couple of other places.

But whenever you pick up the Christian writings—the New Testament, the early church fathers, just common Christians writing to one another—wherever you pick up Christian literature, there you find that word *agape* in profusion. Why? A new thing had come into existence in the world. The new thing being Jesus, and the early Christians simply took that Septuagint word *agape* and

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said that truly describes God's love in the person of Jesus Christ. There's a new love that's come into the world, and we need a new term to describe it, and the term is *agape*.

If you were to go to 1910 in a rural community to church today, you have a group of farmers who have ridden in their buggies. Most people still, in 1910, didn't have a car. They're gathered before you in church. You're a traveling minister, and you have just come from Europe. You get up before them and you say, "I'm really suffering jet lag this morning." They'd look at you. "Jet lag? What is that?" There's nothing around to describe it. You'd need to invent new language to describe the experience you've had.

That's precisely the meaning of *agape*. A new word to describe a new experience. What is this kind of *agape* love? It's a love which is an unconditional love. A love that I'm in debt to you and in debt to everyone that I meet. Not because they look good, or because I feel good about them, or because they can do something for me, or the like. It's just a debt I owe, regardless. I'm under obligation to love. That's why Paul says, in the beginning of this letter to the Romans, "I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the non-Greeks, to the wise and to the foolish" (1:14). I owe every man an obligation, unconditionally.

Not only that, but there's something new about this love in that it is universal. I must love more than family. I must love more than the patriotic citizens of my own country. I'm obligated to love anyone, regardless of the color of skin they wear, the language they speak, the ethnic group from which they derive. I am under obligation universally. No one is excluded from my debt to love them. This love, this *agape* love, is unvarying. That is, it is a principle that operates not upon feeling, which varies. My feelings towards people go up and down, and your feelings toward people go up and down. But *agape* love is not dependent upon feeling. It's an unvarying principle. It is more based upon action than it is upon the palpitating of the heart. I once defined

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romantic love as an itching in the heart that cannot be scratched. *Agape* love is not that kind of thing.

Those who have this kind of love that has come into the world because of Christ will then see love at work in very practical ways. Paul notes in this passage how love, indeed, fulfills the Law. That when one has this unconditional, universal, and unvarying love, a law isn't necessary. For Law is fulfilled by simply being a debtor—one who owes others love.

I recall, I think a third- or fourth-century church father, was once asked the question—in a legalistic dispute what things a Christian could do, and what things a Christian couldn't do. His response—still very wise and still very right—was very simple. It was this: “Love Christ, and do as you please.” I suppose if you really understand that first phrase, “Love Christ,” then you really do the second phrase as well, “Do what you please.”

Paul says that one who loves does not commit adultery. The Law said, “Do not commit adultery,” but the one who loves automatically will not commit adultery. When two persons allow their physical passions to sweep them away, the reason is not that they love each other too much. But rather, that they love each other too little. In real love, there is respect and restraint. The one who loves will not commit murder—physical or verbal murder.

The song, “You always hurt the one you love,” what a dumb philosophy. I suppose it's true. We do hurt those we love, but I certainly hope we don't approach loving the ones that are close to us with the vantage point that our love is going to hurt them. What kind of love is that? Real love does not murder. Real love does not steal. I'm not going to pick someone's pocket or try to beat someone I love in a business deal. This, then, since I'm under obligation, means no one will I defraud. Real love does not covet.

How, then, do you become a lover? How do you, who owe this debt of love, walk in love? Don't wait for your feelings to percolate up so you start acting on your feelings. Just simply begin

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acting. Often, our actions are ahead of our feelings. It is the way that we behave and relate in respect to other people—that unconditional way of relating. That universal way of acting. That unvarying kind of quality which says to every person, “I will act with love.” That’s what counts. I recall listening this week to a testimony of a guy named Mike, who was sharing how he came to faith in Christ. He was in the Marines, and a group of Christians were witnessing to him, and he was really rejecting their witness. He was a pretty tough guy. Finally, one guy came to him and started one-to-one sharing with him about Jesus. He said, “I do not want to hear the Name of Jesus again.” The guy went on witnessing. Mike pushed him, and he fell, and he hit his nose on the corner of the table. All of a sudden, blood was gushing on his face, all over the floor. Mike looked down on him and said, “If you ever say the Name of Jesus to me again, I’ll slip into your room some night when you are sleeping and slit you open.” The guy looks up at Mike and says, with tears streaming down his face, “But I cannot help it. Jesus loves you, and I love you.” This just stunned Mike. He said, “How can you love me when I’ve just done what I’ve just done to you? How can you dare say that?” He said, “It’s because I serve One who said He loved you when He was bleeding from the cross. And if He loves you, how can I help but love you as well?”

This is the kind of, really, “guts love” that Paul is speaking about here. Not only a love which does not commit adultery, does not murder, does not steal, does not covet. But a love which has a sense of obligation to—not in a guilt-ridden way, but in a joyful way—an obligation to share the good news of Jesus with others. That’s the focus of, “I am a debtor,” in Romans 1.

Paul says not only are we to walk in love, but he says to us in this passage:

II. We are to walk in light.

Verses 11–14. We, as Christians, owe more to society than obedience to the law and paying our taxes and the payment of honest debts. We also owe to the individuals in society examples of

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holy living. I like to use the word “healthy” instead of “holy” because I think in our culture it more adequately translates. We owe examples of healthy, wholesome living. Three admonitions Paul gives in respect to this holy living, this walking in the light. Verse 13 says, “Let us conduct ourselves becomingly.” The literal is, “Let us walk dressed as though we were in the daytime.”

A. The first admonition Paul gives to us as believers is that we are to wake from sleep. It’s Christian reveille time. Besides this, you know what hour it is. It is time now for you to wake from sleep. Sleep is a condition of being alive, but being unaware. When I am sleeping, you can take my pulse rate, a respiration rate, listen to my heartbeat. I’m alive. It’s very clear I’m alive. I do not, when I sleep, cut the motor off for eight hours. We’re living, though we’re sleeping. But to be asleep is to be terribly unaware.

Paul says that the whole world really is in sleep. It’s a time of darkness. He uses imagery that says when we’re Christians, we begin to understand that where we’re living right now is that intersection of the day, just before the night becomes the day. And we’re to rise while it’s still dark. Arise from our sleep because the day is breaking and salvation is nearer to us than when we first believed. Here, salvation is used in the completed sense. Justification, sanctification, glorification. That salvation which finally incorporates all of us as an entity. That day is now near, nearer than when we first believed. It is in that period of darkness, when the world is in moral and spiritual sleep, that the Christian is aroused.

We Christians only live with three days in mind. Yesterday He died for me; today He lives for me; tomorrow He comes for me. We have this unique understanding of time. An understanding that Christ comes again. So we are to live as though He had already come. As though His era of righteousness and reign had already occurred. Because, indeed, in our lives we are seeking to live as God is going to want us to live for eternity. Loving Him and obeying Him from our heart. The only difference between now and being in the eternal age with the Lord is that in the eternal

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age, God is forever going to take away from us all ability to sin. But the same willingness to be righteous is going to be there in eternity that's there now.

As Paul says in Romans 7, we still struggle. There will be no struggling in eternity. Already, we have begun to want to live—and in many cases live very close to—the ideal which we are going to have in that age to come. So we're to wake up. We are not in darkness. We're in light.

B. Paul tells us in this second admonition that we're to cast off the garments of sleep, Romans 13:12-13. The stuff we sleep in gets rumpled. And it doesn't look becomingly in the day. So he says when you arouse from sleep, then, put off the garments of the darkness. And he gives for us, in verse 13, three pairs of sin which are characteristic of a life without Christ.

1. The first pair of sins speak of a lack of self-control. Reveling and drunkenness. Reveling is a noisy group that is on their way to a drunken party, to a bash. Reveling. And drunkenness. The inability to exercise self-control.

2. He tells us that we're not only to throw off the garment of the lack of self-control, but we're to throw off the lack of sexual control. He says that we're not to have on us debauchery and licentiousness. "Debauchery" here is literally the term "bed." It means, in the context which Paul is using here, "forbidden bed." And it says that the true Christian is one who has put off all forms of immorality. Not only that, but the true Christian has put off licentiousness, which is shamelessness. It's the kind of sin which the person commits that he's no longer ashamed of, but wants to flaunt it openly and in public, and does not care what people think about it. Paul says this will not characterize the garment of a believer. Put it off.

3. He also says there's a third pair of sins that we're to put off. That is, sins that relate to the lack of spirit, human spirit control. Lack of self-control, lack of sexual control, lack of spirit control. These are quarreling and jealousy. Sometimes it's easy for Christians to be legalists and say, "Thank God I don't drink, and I live an upright, moral life." But sometimes believers get into the

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trap of quarreling and jealousy, which is being described here. And these are garments are to be thrown off as well. Quarreling means contention. It's the desire for power, for place, for prestige. It describes the person who operates from the hatred of being surpassed by anyone else. The hatred of ever being in second place. I always must be number one. It negates *agape*. And jealousy is to live in envy.

It's a little bit surprising, I think, at this point of Paul's letter to the Romans that these are here. Remember, he's writing to Christians. He's saying to Christians, "Throw off these old garments, which smack of lacking self-control, sexual control, and spirit control." You say, "What kind of believers were these Romans? We thought they were kind of spiritually mature. Look at the language in which Paul writes to them, very mature language. These persons are saved, sanctified, and just about glorified. And surely, Paul, you must be wasting words on these people, to tell them to stay away from these kind of evident sins."

We must remember Paul is writing this letter from Corinth. And every one of these have reared its ugly head in the Christian community at Corinth. Paul does not underrate the pervasive influence of sin. Even in the most mature and godly life, sin wants to rear its ugly head in a very hideous way and startle us with its surprising vigor. The saints are not immune from temptation, and that includes preachers. That includes deacons. That includes everybody. So Paul is reminding us here of the fact that there are sharp, painful occasions, when even in the believer's life, there may be moments when the old life wants to resurrect its ugly self. We must remember that we're not to wear in the daytime what we used to wear at night. We're to put off the old clothes.

C. Instead, the third admonition takes place. We're to put on clothes for the day. Paul says we're to put on the armor of light, and we're to put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

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How do you put on the armor of light? I've gone to museums where they've had the crusader mail, the big, iron thing. Paul writes in a day before they had invented that. Armor was something light that was strapped onto you. It was used for defensive purposes. He says, "Put on light." What does he mean? He's evidently saying that, as believers, we're to live in such a way that all that we do can bear scrutiny. There's no darkness in us anywhere. If we have committed sin, we let the light in by confessing the sin and being open and transparent about it—not pretending to be better than we are, something that we're not. We can be authentic and honest. Self-disclosing. Light. Light describes our character as Christians.

God has put within nature an amazing ability of the creatures in nature to adapt in color to their environment. For example, why did He make grasshoppers with brownish tinges and green tinges? They can fade into the grass rather easily. I have never spotted a bright red grasshopper. I don't think bright red grasshoppers exist unless there was some red grass around that they could haunt. God gave them a protective coloration.

The protective coloration of the believer is light. It is, in doing things that are right and providing things honest in the sight of all that we have, our safety. Satan has no foothold in an honest life and a loving life.

Paul not only tells us to put on the armor of light. But he also tells us to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. He says to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, we must cast off the works of darkness. You can't add Jesus on top of your old nature. You must shed the old nature and put on the new nature. It just doesn't work trying to put new clothes on top of old clothes. You take the old clothes off, and then you put on the new clothes. We cannot simply add Christ on to our lives as they are. We must change. The foundation of the gospel is repent, confess, believe. But repent is always first. There is a change which must take place.

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Then we can put on the Lord Jesus Christ. When I'm thinking of putting Him on as Lord, I'm thinking of coming under His authority. The word "Lord" covers the idea of governance. One who governs, one who rules. When I put Him on, and underline the word "Jesus" in His title, I'm putting on the person who saves. That's the meaning of His name, "Jesus," "one who saves."

When I put Him on as Christ, I'm thinking of "Messiah," which means "anointed one."

Everything in the Old Testament which was anointed was used for some function. It wasn't anointed just so that it might have a title. When Christ was anointed, it was so He could preach the gospel to the poor, bring release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind. The ministry of being anointed means that one is serving. So when I put on Christ, it means He wants to be in me in such a way so that His ministry can keep on going, His service can keep on going.

I am to put Him on.

The actual language which Paul is using when he says, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, His authority and His salvation and His anointing," the actual imperative, "put on" is, in the Greek tense, a decisive action which is a once-for-all, total kind of thing. The action is total and decisive. It is not, "Put on Jesus today, and a few days later something else comes along." So you take Him off and put something else on for a while, then you put on Jesus again. It's like putting on a wedding ring. It's a decisive action. If Paul were writing in regard to weddings, using the same language, he would say, "Put on the wedding ring and don't make provision for other potential dates." It's automatic. You put on the wedding ring. You're no longer thinking about who you're going to take out on Saturday night. When I put on the wedding ring, it didn't dawn on me I should go around planning on who I should date after that. I'm in love with the one I married. The wedding ring is there. Are there times when I have failed as a husband? Should I take off the wedding ring when I fail? No, the wedding ring stays on. Night and day, it's there. It's always on. It's never off.

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Do I cease to have the Lord Jesus Christ on when I fail? No, not at all. I decisively, at one point in time, put Him on, and He's on. Not half on, not hopefully on, but decisively, totally, completely on. That's a great assurance and comfort to believers—that once you've taken that decisive act, and now that you've made that decisive act, live in the consequences of that act.

When we put on the Lord Jesus Christ, then we're no longer planning in advance to live life the way we lived it when we were in the flesh. The word "flesh," or "sinful nature," here does not mean sexual, sensual. It means all of life that stands opposed to God. It's our human nature before we became a Christian. You don't plan to live life like you used to plan it before you became a believer. You have a whole new agenda, a whole new set of priorities, a whole new set of relating. Because Christ is on.

If you've never taken that once-for-all, decisive action to become a believer, that's necessary—to put on, decisively, the Lord. This governing of your life. Jesus, the saving of your life. Christ is wanting now to use your life to be His hand extended, His eyes, and His heart, reaching out to others.

So Paul is telling us in this passage, "Walk in love, and walk in light."

Closing Prayer

I think, Lord, of Saint Augustine, how he was struggling with his life as an unbeliever, having rebelled against the Christian faith of his mother. Having tried other religions and all sorts of misadventures of life and eroticism. Finally, in his middle age—being overwhelmed with conviction but being afraid to become a believer, because if he became a Christian he feared he wouldn't have the strength to live the Christian life and, therefore, bring discredit to the Name he would have confessed. I think, Lord, how one day You spoke to him while he was in his garden and said to him in a voice, the Source of which he never figured out other than it was You, "Take and read, take and read." And how he went and found a book, the Romans letter, and found

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where it was open. His eyes immediately fell on the text, “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh.” Instantly, there came to him saving faith because he believed that if You called him, You would also give him the power to live the kind of life You were calling him now to come into. That’s how You do it, Lord. It’s not in our own strength. Not of works, lest anyone should boast. It is Your power at work within us, helping us to put off the old and put on the new. Your life being lived in us. Your love being expressed through us. The light of Your countenance shining through our experience. It is You. To You we will give the glory, to You the praise.

Lord, there may be some here today who have served You for quite a time and have really progressed in their walk with You. But suddenly and recently, temptation has come to them that they thought they’d grown past, receiving that kind of temptation. Sin has raised its head in all of its hideousness and ugliness, and they have been astounded that they have even been willing to consider the temptation and listen to it. Lord, by looking at Your Word we find that that’s not a surprising thing, and we don’t accept the guilt or the condemnation that would come because we’ve been tempted in that way. Instead, we recognize that You see that these things indeed do happen. But You also bear testimony to us that when the temptation comes, You’ll provide a way of escape. That we will not submit to it. That we will cast off the works of the darkness, having put on the armor of light. And in Your Name, we’ll be strong. We will confess that we are weak—not only to ourselves, but to others we know. And in confessing that we are weak, You will make us strong. For the enemy cannot live in the midst of a life which is open and transparent. He can only live in those who try to play games, and enter into duplicity, and hide, and pretend that they are strong when they are weak. We thank You that Yours is the power, and Yours is the glory, and Yours is the Kingdom. And greater are You who is in us than he that is in the world.

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In a very special way, Lord, let us carry away today, too, this admonition of being in the debt of love. To see one another in this Body, to recognize that we have obligations to each other—not to earn points with You, but to express Your life instead. We owe love to one another and to our neighbor and to the world. Thank You for the new day that is dawned upon us because of Christ. That because Your light has come, we no longer walk in darkness, but, indeed, are children of the morning, children of the day. We thank You. In Jesus' name. Amen.