

READY FOR THE FUTURE, ROMANS 13:8-14

Pax Romana #31

Intro: This text is about getting ready for a world that's coming. A Kingdom has begun, is on the way, and will inevitably arrive fully. Paul is urging us to get ready for the future in our now, because only that which fits with it will remain. This should not be hard for us. We humans are all about fitting in. Isn't that what clothes are all about?

Have you noticed that shirts have morphed over the years. I used to be a men's medium. Then what seems like not so long ago the baggy shirt was in. Guys wore them untucked if they were really cool. Seams off the shoulder, sleeves down to the elbow. So I became a men's large for the baggy look. Today everywhere you go it's slim-fit cut, which makes me an extra-large just to be able to button it! Don't get me going on socks! I was trained that socks were lower than children: to be "not seen" and "not heard". "Match the pants so as not to distract", they told me! "Blue pants; blue socks. Tan pants; tan socks", they told me. That's gone with the wind! Today socks are loudmouthed and obnoxious, the more color the better. Save your old orange hunting vest. Its perfect for making modern socks. It's hard to keep up. My point is this: *let's let our natural motivation to fit in encourage us to prepare for the style of the coming kingdom.* That style is love.

1.What is love? Last week Paul told us that the Christian way was to respect authority, pay what we owe to the social structure

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around us. This text applies that involvement even more deeply, and closer to home; your neighbors

A. The Christian way is not just to submit to the authorities, but to love the people right around them by doing them good instead of harm (remember ch12; overcome evil with good"?). So what is love? It is doing good to your neighbor. This was Jesus' teaching in the parable of the Good Samaritan. The teacher of the law asked Jesus what the summary of the law was. Jesus quoted the Old Testament saying it was to love God and love neighbor. When the man tried to find a loop hole by saying, "Well, after all, who really is my neighbor?" Jesus told the parable of a despised Samaritan man helping a hurt Jewish man when other Jewish church leaders wouldn't. That's being a neighbor. We might summarize Jesus' answer as: my neighbor is someone who's need I see and am able to help.

Now it's interesting that here when Paul summarizes the law he leaves out the first half: "love God above all." and quotes only the second part: "love your neighbor as yourself". (James does the same thing in chapter 2 of his letter.) How can he do that? For the same reason that the teacher challenged Jesus with "who is my neighbor?" and didn't say "who is God?" You can't measure love for God apart from love for neighbor because God is a spirit. Neighbor love is the only love we can really measure, isn't it.

"If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom

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he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother." 1 John 4:20, 21, NIV.

So our love for God is best seen in how we treat everybody else.

B. Love is not harming your neighbor. It's sort of the other side of doing good, right? Not doing bad. Murder, stealing, adultery, drunkenness, sexual immorality –these things Paul mentions are wrong because they harm people. Do we do any harm to the people around us?

You're wife criticizes you so you mention that she's heavier than she used to be. What's that all about? She harmed you and you wanted to harm her too.

Take drunkenness. It harms people because you say a whole lot of things you would never have said, and you wake up in someone else's bed whom you don't know. And you both know you don't care a hoot about each other. You were just using each other for yourself. Or in your stupor you ride over 6 year old Jeffrey who just finally got his training wheels off. You walk into things, fall, cut yourself needlessly. God says drunkenness is wrong because it harms people, and God wants people not to be harmed, because he loves them.

C. Love is being humble enough to be wronged rather than to cause more harm. (13) Do you know what dissension is? It's disagreement that leads to discord. You see, we can disagree and not dislike the other. We can disagree and not feel agitated by the other. We can even disagree and not be offended that you

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don't know that I'm righter than you! But instead we often accompany our disagreements with all these. "I'm telling you this in love" we say, but a lot of the time with people who say that a lot, love has nothing to do with love. It's more pride, not wanting to be wronged, or not wanting to look wrong.

"The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?" 1 Corinthians 6:7, NIV.

I was reading the a devotional the other day on the text of the Beatitudes (Matt 5): blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are the meek, blessed are those persecuted, blessed are the merciful. All things that absorb offense instead of making more out of it. I ran across this quote:

"At some thoughts [one] stands perplexed, above all at the sight of human sin, and ...wonders whether to combat it by force or by humble love. Always decide: "I will combat it by humble love." (repeat) If you resolve on that once for all, you can conquer the whole world. Loving humility is a terrible force: it is the strongest of all things, and there is nothing else like it."

Take that as the gospel truth because the gospel of Jesus is the supreme illustration of the power of loving humility!! It was loving humility that sent to Creator God into infant diapers. It was loving humility that let the King of Kings stand bound before a puny Roman proconsul. It was loving humility that the commander of legions of angels let a ragtag band of temple guards arrest him. And it was loving humility that kept this actual God on the cross when first century whippersnappers made fun of him and said,

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“He could save others but couldn’t save himself”! None of us would have taken such obvious guff and offense to our pride. But because Jesus took it, human people get to live eternally in a better world, the one Paul mentions in our text; the end of the night, the break of a new day, the day of salvation (11-12). Here’s another character of Jesus...

D. Love is to put self on hold. (“Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” Romans 13:14, NIV.) Gratifying our desires is pretty much our starting point; how do I get to feeling better? How are you at *not* one-upping someone’s story? How are you at *not* putting someone in their place when you think they deserve it? How are you at assuming there *must be* some good explanation for why it seems like your friend turned on you? How are you at *not* yelling back at someone who’s yelling at you?

E. All God’s laws are about love. Verse 10 says love is the fulfillment of the law. It also says love does no harm to it’s neighbor. But love is never merely a lack of harm, it is the presence of shared goodness or benefit, as we’ve seen. That makes all God’s laws about filling the world with God’s goodness, doesn’t it? Paul is likely thinking about **Jeremiah’s** prophecy. Jeremiah taught Israel that even their pagan ruler in Babylon was a servant under God’s direction. When Jeremiah wrote to the exiled Israelites in Babylon, they were living in small enclaves and avoiding as much as possible all the other peoples in Babylon. Jeremi-

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ah say's that's a mistake. Be God's people in your place even in exile.

"This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."" Jeremiah 29:4-7, NIV.

In other words, interact with society. Fill it with my kind of life, which in a word is "love." Love is the one debt we should never think we've paid off (8) and everyone around us is the payee.

Someone who loves cannot sequester themselves off away from everybody else living only to gratify themselves.

That my friends is the biblical notion that lies behind our vision statement: to be passionately involved with our community. We can't *not* be concerned about that. That's why a group of us spend one hour with one kid once a week being their friend and helping with their classwork. That's why we're looking into Playworks (Mayflower Mill has invited us to help); a recess program where local adults are present on the playground, monitoring, encouraging, and even playing with the students. Reports are that everything works better in school with that. It's a simple act of love. But it is also mountainous, because every act of love is destined to have eternal consequences.

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Now lets talk about the appropriate motivation for all this difficult love we've been endorsing.

2. Why Love?

A. Well on the one hand because God commands us to. That's kinda a given. Our text is full of imperatives. Be like this. Do this. Don't do that. Don't be like that. Commands. We obey Dad because he's in charge. That's why he's the one we worship.

That's one reason, but do you want to go deeper?

B. We love because that's what our God does. We want to be like our God! Verse 14 say "Clothe yourselves with the Lord, Jesus, the Christ!" John writes that we love because he loved first. But do you want to see more?

C. The biggest reason in our text is this: we love because love is the currency of the kingdom. Love is the style of the new world order. Love fits in the kingdom. Love is the way they dress in heaven. Love is the good and lasting life.

"The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light." Romans 13:12, NIV.

Most people are ordering their lives in accordance with the style and habits of the old world, the one on the way out. That's kinda like going to the hair stylist and and getting a mullet. Man, that's so yesterday, people would say. Shave the sides and slick the long top back! That's today! Kinda like buying a new laptop and installing Windows XP. Remember that? Dude, XP is yesterday. Well living like the world lives apart from God is like that; it's old

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news; it's on the way out; it isn't going to last. The new world has begun. With the death and resurrection of the man Jesus, a new world order has broken in on this one. The Kingdom has come. It's landed on the beaches. It's only a matter of time until it conquers everywhere. And the one thing that got that Kingdom ball rolling has happened: A man died, and then death started turning backwards and he was alive again! This is what turned scared disciples into courageous martyrs. The death and the "standing up again" of Jesus changed the history of the universe. That's the Christian story.

Conclusion: Jesus came, he conquered, he returned to the Father to prepare eternity for his own! And he's coming back to fit earth into the new plan. That's where everyone's story will culminate. Everything we do in keeping, in style with heaven will last into heaven. Do you want to be in style when it most matters? You can last into heaven too. Make Jesus your Lord even today.