**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**ROMANS-038**. **LOVE AND THE DAY by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"8. Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. 9. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 10. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. 11. And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. 12. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light, 13. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying: 14. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."*

*Romans 13:8-14*

The two paragraphs of this passage are but slightly connected. The first inculcates the obligation of universal love; and the second begins by suggesting, as a motive for the discharge of that duty, the near approach of the day. The light of that dawn draws Paul's eyes and leads him to wider exhortations on Christian purity as befitting the children of light.

**I. Verses 8-10 set forth the obligation of a love which embraces all men, and comprehends all duties to them.**

The Apostle has just been laying down the general exhortation, Pay every man his due and applying it especially to the Christian's relation to civic rulers. He repeats it in a negative form, and bases on it the obligation of loving every man. That love is further represented as the sum and substance of the law. Thus Paul brings together two thoughts which are often dealt with as mutually exclusive,--namely, love and law. He does not talk sentimentalisms about the beauty of charity and the like, but lays it down, as a hard and fast rule, that we are bound to love every man with whom we come in contact; or, as the Greek has it, the other.

That is the first plain truth taught here. Love is not an emotion which we may indulge or not, as we please. It is not to select its objects according to our estimate of their lovableness or goodness. But we are bound to love, and that all round, without distinction of beautiful or ugly, good or bad. A hard saying; who can hear it? Every man is our creditor for that debt. He does not get his due from us unless he gets love. Note, further, that the debt of love is never discharged. After all payments it still remains owing. There is no paying in full of all demands, and, as Bengel says, it is an undying debt. We are apt to weary of expending love, especially on unworthy recipients, and to think that we have wiped off all claims, and it may often be true that our obligations to others compel us to cease helping one; but if we laid Paul's words to heart, our patience would be longer-breathed, and we should not be so soon ready to shut hearts and purses against even unthankful suitors.

Further, Paul here teaches us that this debt (debitum, duty ) of love includes all duties. It is the fulfilling of the law, inasmuch as it will secure the conduct which the law prescribes. The Mosaic law itself indicates this, since it recapitulates the various commandments of the second table, in the one precept of love to our neighbour (Lev. xix. 18). Law enjoins but has no power to get its injunctions executed. Love enables and inclines to do all that law prescribes, and to avoid all that it prohibits. The multiplicity of duties is melted into unity; and that unity, when it comes into act, unfolds into whatsoever things are lovely and of good report. Love is the mother tincture which, variously diluted and manipulated, yields all potent and fragrant draughts. It is the white light which the prism of daily life resolves into its component colours.

But Paul seems to limit the action of love here to negative doing no ill. That is simply because the commandments are mostly negative, and that they are is a sad token of the lovelessness natural to us all. But do we love ourselves only negatively, or are we satisfied with doing ourselves no harm? That stringent pattern of love to others not only prescribes degree, but manner. It teaches that true love to men is not weak indulgence, but must sometimes chastise, and thwart, and always must seek their good, and not merely their gratification.

Whoever will honestly seek to apply that negative precept of working no ill to others, will find it positive enough. We harm men when we fail to help them. If we can do them a kindness, and do it not, we do them ill. Non-activity for good is activity for evil. Surely, nothing can be plainer than the bearing of this teaching on the Christian duty as to intoxicants. If by using these a Christian puts a stumbling-block in the way of a weak will, then he is working ill to his neighbour, and that argues absence of love, and that is dishonest, shirking payment of a plain debt.

**II. The great stimulus to love and to all purity is set forth as being the near approach--of the day (verses 11-14).**

The day, in Paul's writing, has usually the sense of the great day of the Lord's return, and may have that meaning here; for, as Jesus has told us, it is not for even inspired Apostles to know the times or the seasons, and it is no dishonour to apostolic inspiration to assign to it the limits which the Lord has assigned.

But, whether we take this as the meaning of the phrase, or regard it simply as pointing to the time of death as the dawning of heaven's day, the weight of the motive is unaffected. The language is vividly picturesque. The darkness is thinning, and the blackness turning grey. Light begins to stir and whisper. A band of soldiers lies asleep, and, as the twilight begins to dawn, the bugle call summons them to awake, to throw off their night-gear,--namely, the works congenial to darkness,--and to brace on their armour of light. Light may here be regarded as the material of which the glistering armour is made; but, more probably, the expression means weapons appropriate to the light.

Such being the general picture, we note the fact which underlies the whole representation; namely, that every life is a definite whole which has a fixed end. Jesus said, We must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day: the night cometh. Paul uses the opposite metaphors in these verses. But, though the two sayings are opposite in form, they are identical in substance. In both, the predominant thought is that of the rapidly diminishing space of earthly life, and the complete unlikeness to it of the future. We stand like men on a sandbank with an incoming tide, and every wash of the waves eats away its edges, and presently it will yield below our feet. We forget this for the most part, and perhaps it is not well that it should be ever present; but that it should never be present is madness and sore loss.

Paul, in his intense moral earnestness, in verse 13, bids us regard ourselves as already in the day, and shape our conduct as if it shone around us and all things were made manifest by its light. The sins to be put off are very gross and palpable. They are for the most part sins of flesh, such as even these Roman Christians had to be warned against, and such as need to be manifested by the light even now among many professing Christian communities.

But Paul has one more word to say. If he stopped without it, he would have said little to help men who are crying out, How am I to strip off this clinging evil, which seems my skin rather than my clothing? How am I to put on that flashing panoply? There is but one way,--put on the Lord Jesus Christ. If we commit ourselves to Him by faith, and front our temptations in His strength, and thus, as it were, wrap ourselves in Him, He will be to us dress and armour, strength and righteousness. Our old self will fall away, and we shall take no forethought for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.