The Game
Romans 13:8-14

SET UP: Over the previous few weeks, our Lord's Day worship services have coincided with Jags Football games. Even when they play in England, they are able to play at the exact same time as our morning worship services. This has resulted in a 10% drop in attendance. Fortunately, this is a BYE week. Which gives me a marvelous opportunity to make those of you who missed feel terribly guilty. And who knows, perhaps the Lord was going to take the Jags to the Super Bowl… but you may have jinxed it… I do have it on good authority that the Lord will give them serious consideration if you put a triple tithe in the giving boxes today. Just a thought! :)

INTRODUCTION: We are living in the most information-saturated moment in human history.

- According to the **International Telecommunication Union**, about 6 billion people were using the internet in 2025.
- That is roughly 3 out of every 4 people on the planet.
- Among young adults between 15 and 24, the number is 82%.

Every one of those people carries a device in his pocket that can pull up more information in ten seconds than a medieval king could gather in a lifetime.

And here is the irony. The more information we have, the less of it we actually process. In fact, studies prove that our brains adapt to deal with this tsunami of information.

ILLUSTRATION: Twenty-five years ago, **Malcolm Gladwell** observed this phenomenon in a book called **The Tipping Point.**

He suggested that with all this information thrown at us, we need a filter, and the filter we use is our friends. When you want to know which movie to watch, you watch the reactions of people you trust and make a decision. When you want to know which truck to buy, you ask the guy at work who has one. And here is why it matters this morning: when people want to know what to worship, they do exactly the same thing.

Very few people today dig through ancient source documents and study apologetics before they decide whether Christianity is true. They simply watch you and me and ask, "Do they believe it?" And "Does it seem to work?"

It seems we live in a day when people must trust Christians before they trust Christ. The Ancients described Jesus as the Greater Light; you and I are lesser lights. ***The responsibility is overwhelming.*** In today's text, Paul simplifies the process for us. Ironically, he uses the same approach that any good coach would follow. ***Good Offense, Good Defense, and watch the game clock.*** Look at verse 8 with me.

TEXT: Romans 13:8–14 (ESV)
8 Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

That is the Christians…

1. Offensive Strategy

Now parenthetically, some have used this verse to say, "A Christian should never go into debt of any kind." That is not what Paul is saying. The Bible regulates lending; it does not outlaw it (Exodus 22:25). Paul just said in verse 7 that if you have a debt, pay it. It is as if he assumes you will have debts from time to time, and you should pay them as agreed.

The emphasis of the text is the last part of verse 8 - except (the debt) to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

Now, in what way do you owe a debt of love to the people around you?
ILLUSTRATION: Suppose a man in Nassau County won the lottery, but he had seen all the shows that reveal how miserable most lottery winners become, so he decided to give it all away. But suppose he dropped into First Baptist Church, gave me a suitcase filled with money, and instructed me to distribute it evenly to all of you. If I failed to give you your share, I would owe you a debt. In fact, I would be stealing from you if I did not pay it. Right?

In the same way, we read in **John 3:16 (ESV)**
16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Whom did God love? The world! But do you see what happened? The news got to you, and you were certainly included in the world, but the Gospel was not limited to you. He died for more than you. So if God's love and Gospel end with you… you are embezzling the Love of God. You owe it to the rest of us to pass it on. Why? It's for us. So you must allow God to love us through you.

Paul felt this deeply. Remember what he wrote earlier in **Romans 1:14–15 (ESV)**
14 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. 15 So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

GREEK NOTE: "Under obligation" is the same Greek term as "owe" in **Romans 13:8.** Paul says, "I am in debt to the Greeks and the barbarians." But think about it. Paul never borrowed anything from them. They never did him a favor. So why was he in debt to them? Because he had received a Gospel that included them. Jesus didn't only die for Paul, and God didn't only die for you. Allow yourself to feel that.

9 For 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.”

The Old Testament has 613 commandments. Jesus boiled them down to two. Love God with all your heart, love your neighbor as yourself.

The Jews understood the Ten Commandments in two tables: the **vertical** commands, which govern our relationship with God, and the **horizontal** commands, which govern our relationships with each other. Paul is talking about the **man-ward** commands, and he says every one of them is “summed up” in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

This really is a major practical help against sin. Notice what Paul enumerates:

- **Adultery** - You can’t love your neighbor as you ought, and sleep with his wife.
- **Murder** - You can’t love your neighbor as you ought, and murder him. And most of us don’t physically murder, we verbally murder. Remember what Jesus said,
  Matthew 5:21–22 (ESV) 21 “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.

  Do you have an outburst of anger? It’s not an anger problem as much as it is a love problem. You see?
- **Stealing** - You can’t love your neighbor and rob him blind.
- **Coveting** - Coveting is the sense that you would rob him blind if you could get away with it. You can’t covet him and love him simultaneously.

10 Love does ***no wrong to a neighbor;*** therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

So the major offensive strategy to advance the Gospel is love for your neighbor.

NOW, you can have offensive momentum, but if you take your eye off the game clock, the tables can turn too late for you to correct.

2. The Time Clock

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.

GREEK NOTE: Paul uses two different words for time in verse 11. “You know the time” is **kairos**. It is not clock time (chronos). It is a season, a decisive moment on God’s calendar. And “the hour has come” is **hōra**. The alarm is going off.

There is nothing left on God's calendar before it. The cross is behind us. The resurrection is behind us. Pentecost is behind us. The next great event on God's calendar is the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. As I read the Scriptures, we are right on the precipice of His return. He could come at any moment. And in the meantime, this is the day when people from every tribe and tongue are being saved.

ILLUSTRATION: In Luke 4:20, the very first sermon that Jesus ever preached was in the synagogue at Nazareth, and he read from **Isaiah 61**: "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then Luke says, "he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down and said, today this scripture is fulfilled in your presence." But here's the deal - He stopped mid-sentence. **Isaiah 61:2** goes on, "and the day of vengeance of our God." Jesus did not read that part. **WHY**? Because the year of favor had come with Him, and the day of vengeance had not come yet. Isaiah saw both comings of Christ like **two mountain peaks,** one behind the other. **We are living in the valley between them.** We are living between the comma and the day.

What a REMARKABLE opportunity we have to win the world to Christ! But when will it be over? We have no idea! We are told repeatedly that the day or the hour cannot be known… but the signs of the times may be discerned!

1. **Restoration of Israel** — Ezekiel 36–37; Luke 21:24
2. **Widespread Apostasy and Spiritual Deception** — Matthew 24:4–5
3. **Instability** — Matthew 24:6–7
4. **Increase in Knowledge** - Daniel 12:4
5. **Rise of Global Political and Economic Control** — Revelation 13:16–17

Jesus tells us these will be like the birth pangs of a woman in labor, increasing in frequency and intensity before the coming of the Lord. FOLKS, the time is at hand. I will say more about this in a moment; for now, I will say -

- If you ever intend to serve Jesus, serve Him now.
- If you ever intend to teach a class, teach now.
- If you ever intend to join the choir, join now.
- If you ever intend to witness to a friend, witness now.
- If you ever intend to go on a mission trip, go now.
- If you ever intend to become a generous giver, give now.

We've seen the Offensive Strategy is Love; the Time Clock is ticking down… But we must not forget the….

3. Defensive Strategy

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.

Now, the reason Paul had to warn Christians not to participate in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy is that it was possible for them to do so.

Listen, any sin you committed before you came to Jesus you can commit after you come to Jesus - Salvation doesn't change your capacity for sin. In fact, one of Satan's primary tactics is to get you playing with things that play for keeps.

Most of what Paul enumerated in verse 13 is addictive. The enemy would LOVE to get you addicted to so habitual sin right when Jesus comes back. You need a solid defensive strategy to keep that from happening.

14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and ***make no provision for the flesh***, to gratify its desires.

Do you see what the plan is? Starvation of the flesh.

ILLUSTRATION: Listen, as amazing as the Gospel of Jesus Christ is, it did not kill your old sinful nature. That is why you still find temptation tempting. But if you are a believer, the Holy Spirit also dwells deep inside you. It is like two great wolves locked in battle, one Holy, one evil; how do you determine which wins? The one you feed wins; the one you starve loses, every time.

Jesus said it this way in **Matthew 5:29–30 (ESV)**
29 If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.

Doesn't it seem that tearing your eye out would be sufficient? Jesus says, "no" You have to be more radical than that - you have to cast it into a field never to be found again, because you'll be surprised how innovative the flesh will get when it wants to sin.

30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

Doesn't it seem that cutting it off would be sufficient? Jesus says, "no" You have to be more radical than that - you will become a surgeon to sin.

The writer to the Hebrews said it this way in **Hebrews 12:1 (ESV)**
1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

- **Pornography.** Why do you think more men and women are addicted to pornography today than at any time in history? Researchers who study it have used three words: it is more **accessible, affordable, and anonymous** than ever before. You cannot

coast into purity anymore. You have to be intentional in the battle. Put the filter on the phone. Give someone you trust the password. Make no provision.

- **Dating.** If you are dating someone who is compromising your purity, either break up or get married. Otherwise, you are making provision for the flesh, and it is just a matter of time.
- **Friendships.** Are there certain people you cannot hang out with and still walk with Jesus? Remember: The companion fools will suffer harm.

ILLUSTRATION — Above the Snake Line: In the mountain country of Colorado, people who sell real estate will sometimes talk about homes "above the snake line." Above a certain altitude, it is too high and too cold for rattlesnakes to live. Below that line, you had better watch where you step. Some of you need to relocate your life above the snake line. You keep living in the low country of temptation and then acting surprised when you get bit.

ILLUSTRATION: Skoal Illustration.

CONCLUSION/INVITATION: Julie and I traveled to Boston this week to be taught by two amazing storytellers, Malcomb Guite and Martin Shaw. In the foreword to Guite's latest book, Shaw writes about an ancient story told countless times on the British Isles: Long ago, in the wild country of Dartmoor, a shepherd wandered across the ancient hills of Devon. One day, he discovered an opening in a hillside. Curious, he ventured into the darkness. There, deep beneath the earth, he encountered an astonishing sight. Before him lay King Arthur and his knights, sleeping in silence. The great warriors of Britain had not perished. Instead, they had been hidden away, preserved for an appointed hour. Near them stood a great bell.

This was no ordinary bell. Its sound held the deep conscience of Britain, and it possessed the power to awaken the good. The shepherd gazed upon the sleeping king and his mighty companions. Perhaps he wondered how many generations had passed while they lay there, or what terrible circumstances would finally summon them from their rest. Eventually, the shepherd turned to leave. But as he moved, the hem of his shepherd's smock barely brushed against the bell. It was the slightest touch. Yet something stirred in the darkness. King Arthur opened his eyes. And from the ancient silence came a question: "Is it time?" The shepherd gathered his courage and answered: ***"Not yet, my lord, but soon."***

Let me close with this…. Ring bells… It's time… arise, O sleeper.