

Love is the Fulfillment of the Law

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[0 : 00] Imagine, if you can, Christ's church attempting to live faithfully and surrounded by these circumstances. There's an intrusive government, and it's taxing people excessively, and it spends the tax money on unjust and murderous causes.

Marriage comes under attack as promiscuity and sexual immorality become more and more mainstream. The makeup of the society was diverse in ethnicities, nationalities, and religions, but there was an anything-goes culture that threatened to cause many to abandon any sort of sense of right and wrong.

Political corruption, bribery, blackmail, and cover-up seemed like everyday news. Economic and social classes were at war with one another. The top 1% had the ability to buy influence and justice, and it seemed like they lorded their power over the other 99%.

And the nation's lawmakers were aware of the injustice, but they were either incapable or unwilling to do anything about it. Sound familiar? Of course, I'm talking about Rome in the first century.

What were you thinking of? As someone famous once said, history doesn't always repeat itself, but it often rhymes. I like that.

[1 : 18] History doesn't always repeat itself, but it often rhymes. And so the words of Romans 13 are as much for this time as they were for the Christians of Rome in the first century.

And God's word here brings us a comfort in the circumstances that we recognize that are similar to the circumstances of Rome. And as it often does, it brings a challenge with that comfort as well.

The Lord has a way of doing these things simultaneously, challenging while he comforts and comforts while he challenges. He did this very thing in the middle of the greatest persecution in history, the Roman persecution.

And the simultaneity of this comfort and challenge is summed up well as Paul closes chapter 12 of the book to the church in Rome. He says, As if to say, evil will not overcome you.

There's a comfort there. All you have to do is overcome evil with good. The challenge in the midst of the comfort. To overcome evil with good. So Paul goes on from there in Romans 13 to describe the calling of Christians in the midst of this unjust human rule.

[2 : 31] And he says something that's a little bit frustrating. He says, Just pay them. Pay what's owed to them. Taxes to whom taxes are owed. Revenue to whom revenue is owed. Respect to whom respect is owed.

And honor to whom honor is owed. And we might say honor. Honor to corrupt officials. If I was a believer in the church in Rome, I might be saying, Paul, give me something practical.

Practical to stand up under injustice. To do something to reverse it. And Paul, you're telling me just to submit to it. Even enable it, we might say. But I hope we see, as we examine the passage today, that Paul's challenge and his comfort is a much higher calling than we would have imagined.

Would be our duty in the present corruption of the world. So let's go into the passage for, the New Testament passage for this morning, which is Romans chapter 13, verses 8 and 10.

8 to 10. This is the word of God. He says, O no one anything except to love each other. For the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

[3 : 38] 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.

Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. Lord, by your Holy Spirit, will you shed light on your gospel through the preaching and the careful hearing of the word today.

Amen. So love is the fulfillment of the law. There's the bedrock. This is where Paul goes to guide Christians who are frustrated with evil and injustice.

He doesn't give you practical advice for redeeming the culture. He doesn't give the people instructions on how to organize politically. He just moves from the first section of Romans 13, which talks about honoring our civil magistrate, the government officials, our elected officials in our case. He moves from honoring your government leaders to the broader principle of loving your neighbor. So let's start from verse 8 and see why Paul would land on this theme as a response to evil.

[4 : 45] He says, O no one anything except to love each other. And now the first thing to understand about this is it's not a command forbidding any sort of debt when he says, O no one anything.

Debt's an abiding reality of this world. Even in Romans 13, 7, the seventh verse of the passage, Paul is talking about paying debts to whom they are owed, specifically to the government.

And if you are, we all pay taxes, right? If you are a business owner, you live in a perpetual state of debt, right? You pay your taxes after they are owed quarterly or yearly.

You are continually owing taxes to your government. If you are an employee, you have taxes that you pay at the end of the year and the government owes you, right? There's this relationship of debt that just exists perpetually among us, particularly to our government.

So Paul's words are, O no one anything. But we shouldn't understand that to mean a blanket prohibition of any kind of debt. Matthew 5, 42 specifically, where Jesus says, Give to the one who begs from you and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

[5 : 53] And so there Jesus actually commands us to be involved in debt, if you think about it. And he commands specifically that we would lend to others compassionately. I like the way Jesus puts it in Luke, Luke chapter 6.

He says, Love your enemies, do good and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great. And you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.

So there are kinds of debt, debts that are monetary and otherwise, that bring God glory. And how do we understand what kind of debt brings God glory? The principle that we extract from these scriptures is twofold.

Good debt occurs, God-glorifying debt occurs, when the lender lends compassionately. That's the first principle. And not for gain. Think about how many relationships, how many friends and families have been broken by money.

Why do you suppose that is? Because when most people lend, they tie up their relationship with their return on their investment. When you lend money to another, the temptation is to expect that back, and when it doesn't come back, your relationship is severed.

[7 : 06] You've tied up your relationship with the money that was owed. And relationships are ruined. So when we lend, we ought to do it compassionately. And we don't expect our reward, Jesus says, to be payment in kind.

We expect nothing in return. We lend out of a heart of compassion. The second principle of godly debt is when the debtor shows honor by discharging the debt promptly and joyfully.

When the lender lends compassionately and expects nothing in return, and then the debt is returned, the debtor is now freely honoring the one who gave by giving it back.

So the debtor's obligation was not the money in the first place, but the honor due to a friend who showed compassion. And likewise, the lender's reward is not a return on an investment, but honor. Honor for the compassion they showed. The Lord offers his reward to those who lend compassionately and to debtors who show honor by discharging their debts promptly.

[8 : 10] This is the meaning of Paul's words, owe nothing to anybody. The Christians in Rome, like we do, have ever-present debts to pay to the evil and to the ungrateful. And when they paid those debts honorably, they reflected God's own love.

Because he is kind to the ungrateful and to the evil. So the commandment is, demonstrate your love, demonstrate your love to God by discharging your debts quickly. Taxes to whom taxes are owed.

Revenue to whom revenue is owed. Honor to whom honor. Respect to whom respect. And we are to discharge all these debts, except the one that can never be fully paid up.

And that debt is to love one another. To love each other, in the words of Romans 8, 14, or 13, 8. I'm reading from the ESV. What is it to love each other, in verse 8?

Is it the Christians we're in fellowship with, here today, or is it all mankind? And it would be nice if we could just say this applies only to the household of faith, to love each other, which would be a difficult enough command to obey well.

[9 : 14] But it's not. The context is God's law. And as we know, God's law is not just for God's people. God's law is the standard of living, righteous living for all men. So in the context of God's law, this loving each other must also be as broad as the law itself, applying to all mankind.

It's neighbor love, in the way that Jesus showed us what neighbor love is, in the parable of the Good Samaritan. But does Paul mean to tell us that this neighbor love is a kind of debt?

Think about that for a second. If love is a debt, doesn't that take away some of the freeness of our expressions to love, to each other? Doesn't that reduce acts of love to just mere transactions?

I'd like you to think about it this way. There's a knock on your door in the middle of the night, and it's your close neighbor, the neighbor you love, asking to borrow your car because her mother's having a seizure and she needs to take her to the hospital.

What is it that you do? You love your neighbor, so what are you going to do? You won't have to think about what you're going to do. You're going to help your neighbor in her time of need. In fact, even though it's the middle of the night and all you want to do is go back to bed, you won't even ask the basic practical questions.

[10 : 26] What's wrong with your car? Why don't you just call an ambulance? Practical questions, right? I'm not unreasonable for wondering that in my mind, but what am I doing in that moment? If I love my neighbor, I don't even ask them.

My neighbor has a need, and that need has created a debt. It's created a debt because I love them. So I don't ask those questions in that moment because I absolutely know the debt that I have towards my neighbor is to fulfill her request out of neighbor love.

I could expand that illustration from this morning. My tire pressure is fatally low. I give a call to John Alpeter. What does John Alpeter do? There's probably taxis in the area, right? Just get here.

But I don't because the neighbor love in John says, I see a need. I've been asked to supply it.

That's my duty. I do it not out of a sense of duty, but because the love has created that duty in me.

So does the debt, the fact that love is a debt, take away from the freedom involved in works of compassion? No. The fact that we sense that this reality is a debt is evidence of our compassion for one another because love produced in us that sense of debt.

[11 : 43] Jesus explained to us this when he was teaching his disciples to pray. This is from Luke 11. He said to them, Which one of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey and I have nothing to set before him.

And he will answer from within, Don't bother me. The door is now shut and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything. I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs.

And Jesus' point is to say that even a mediocre friend will answer the request of a neighbor based on an earnest plea. You might call this the parable of the terrible lazy friend.

A mediocre friend you can count on to do this if you are earnest and plea earnestly. They will sense that debt to you, though their love is weak. So the passage that you heard in Proverbs tells you the same thing.

I'll read it again, Proverbs 3, 27 to 28. Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due when it is in your power to do it. Do not say to your neighbor, Go and come again.

[12 : 50] Tomorrow I will give it when you have it with you. Because the love that fulfills the law is our response to the debt that love creates towards those in need.

So what's this law of neighbor love teaching us? If your neighbor asks for help and you have the ability, you have the power, you incurred a debt because you love them.

Because, as Proverbs says, you have it with you. When you have it with you to supply your neighbor's need and your neighbor asks, there's nothing else love does but supplies the need.

not from unwillingness but from love that proceeds from our relationships. So there are three simple things that create this debt of love for us.

Three things that love creates in us that equate to a debt. Number one, it's the need. If there's a need present in another. And number two, there's the opportunity.

[13 : 47] The opportunity or our occasion to supply that need. And maybe the occasion is just the occasion of being asked. We have the opportunity because there are a need and we're asked to supply it. And the ability.

Do we have the ability to supply the need? The need, the opportunity, and the ability. These create the debt of love between us as believers, between us and unbelievers.

It's a mark of the Christian life that the Lord will frequently bring the needs of others in contact with our ability and our opportunity. That's how the Lord works. It's a debt that we will never fully discharge and therefore we can owe no one anything but our debt of love will always remain with us.

The love that fulfills the law is a love that seeks to apply our abilities to others' needs and it is never fully completed. Anytime we look at God's law now, we should not only look at how we should obey the spirit of it but also what it teaches us about the God we serve.

We know that every one of God's laws was given to us because it expresses something about his many perfections, about his nature in other words. And love for the other is integral to God's very being.

[15 : 00] How do we know this? Well, let's ask ourselves the reason why we ought to obey this command to love each other. We need to obey because God commanded it. That's true. But that's not the most true.

The most true reason I will assert that we obey this command is because God is doing it. not because God said it merely. We obey the command because God does it.

God was loving each other before the world was created. Think about that. Before we were all here, before there was anything, God existed in a relationship of love to each other.

The Father loves the Son, loves the Holy Spirit, and back and forth. God was an eternal community, is an eternal community, of love toward the other. God loves his neighbor.

And he did it before there was creation. So we love our neighbor not out of a respect for a command, though that is part of it, but out of a love for God and who he is, that we would seek to emulate his nature.

[16 : 09] As a matter of fact, God's love for one another is one of the things that Jesus longed for when he was on earth, to ascend again and share the glory that he had with the Father before the world was.

That's from John 17, 5, where Jesus says, And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed. Christ, in his dwelling here on earth in flesh, longed for the fellowship that he had with God from eternity, the love that he shared with his Father. So God loves the other perfectly within himself, and then he brought forth a creation to share in that love. And ultimately, God met our need with his ability.

The first time the Lord told his people, love your neighbor as yourself, that wasn't in Matthew that we just read. It was way back in Leviticus, Leviticus 19, 18. God said, here's the command I give you, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

And he gave them this reason. He said, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord. What's the reason given? That God asked us to love our neighbors as ourselves? Because I'm the Lord.

[17 : 19] I'm the one who does it. Do what I do. That's the heart of all of his commandments. And once God said this to his people, the wheels were set in motion.

Once the people of God knew that God's nature was to love his neighbor, we could be certain, we could take it to the bank that God will supply his people's need. And what was the need that God's people were going to have?

The need of God's people was that their guilt kept them distant and its penalty was too much to bear. We had a death sentence and we needed escape.

That was our need. And that's what God decreed from eternity that he would supply. And that decree is expressed in Leviticus 19. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

I am the Lord. I am the one who does it. So it was clear once God said this, if we were paying attention, that he will certainly save his people who were in need. So the need was expressed.

[18 : 20] We had guilt. We had a death sentence upon us. God had an ability. What's the ability of God? Well, the scripture says to do far more abundantly than we ask or think. And there was an opportunity.

The opportunity that God alone created. A decree for eternity that we are given in Ephesians 1. I'll read this starting from the first of the chapter. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him.

That decree resulted in a debt or if you'd rather an oath to meet his people's need through a sacrifice of infinite worth.

Think about that. The debt that God creates for himself. Paul goes on in Ephesians 2 verse 15. He says, What did he do?

He broke down the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two and so making peace and he might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross thereby killing the hostility.

[19 : 34] How can God in Christ abolish those commandments? By living them out. By living them out in neighbor love and giving us the example and creating us the spirit to live by it.

Jesus taught us that our father binds himself to this sort of debt but that debt isn't to us. That debt's to his own nature. He made a decree and he must by his own nature complete it.

So we will assuredly receive our help in our time of need because of the debt incurred by his love for us. Specifically what he did is he took the righteous law that separated him from an unrighteous people and he created in himself the one new man in the place of the two.

The one new man in the likeness of Adam and in the likeness of God right? Which is our likeness now. We have the likeness of Adam remaining but what unifies us to Christ it is the likeness of God in us the Holy Spirit indwelling us.

He created in us first in Christ and then in us the one new man the one new woman in place of the two and thereby he made peace between man and God through Christ on the cross.

[20 : 44] In John 3.16 the familiar verse God loved each other. God loved the world in John 3.16 but what is he speaking of? He's speaking of God who loves his neighbor his neighbor within the Godhead and his neighbor his creation.

That loving each other is God simply telling us what he does so that those who love him can be like him. So we see the mystery of this truth now coming full circle.

One, the law exists to explain to us how we can love our neighbor and then if we have loved our neighbor we have fulfilled the law. Though that fulfillment resides in us still we remain ever bound to discharge the debt of love to others.

And in a more broader and a broader and more perfect way Christ fulfilled the law once for all through his life and through his death. And intrinsic to that fulfillment is the fact that he sits at the right hand of God ever binding himself to meet our need out of the debt of love that he created for us.

Remember Jesus' illustration in the parable of the terrible lazy friend? He told us that story to explain how much more we should be sure that God who is better than a mediocre friend whose love surpasses the kind that we find in any friend will assuredly supply our need.

[22 : 02] He finishes that story in Luke 11 verse 9 and he says I start in verse 8 I tell you though that neighbor he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs and I tell you ask and it will be given you seek and you will find knock and it will be open to you.

In Christ God perfectly and completely fulfilled all points of the law which means he has demonstrated the epitome of neighbor love rescuing us out of our deepest and most desperate need namely our own death sentence.

So we love each other not merely because God said it but because God does it. He creates in us the same love as well. The one who loves another the end of verse 8 in our passage has fulfilled the law.

Paul uses the words has fulfilled in the perfect sense and he doesn't merely say he has obeyed the law he has fulfilled the law the one who loves his neighbor. That has a fuller and deeper meaning than simply obeyed.

If I just obey the law by loving one another the rest of the commandments remain to be obeyed but if I have fulfilled the law there is nothing lacking if I have loved my neighbor. John Murray summarizes that by saying this the law has received the full measure of that which it requires in loving our neighbor.

[23 : 25] That fulfilling means the law has received the full measure of that which it requires. It's not saying love has replaced the law. It's not that it's a better thing to love rather than obey the law.

It's that the law itself fulfills in a way that the law rightly obeyed brings the fruits of love to others. Again John Murray has a great summary and this is worth writing down.

John Murray says love fills to the brim the cup which the law puts into our hands. Love fills to the brim the cup which the law puts into our hands.

It's as if we have a cup and that cup's giving shape to what we're about to put in it and we are given the cup in order to fill it and what we fill it with is love at the first drop every drop in between down to the last drop.

There's nothing else that fulfills the law but the love that we put in it and there's no other commandment there's no other principle of God's law that fills the cup. Those are commandments and ordinances they teach us we become schooled by the ordinances so that we might love well and love effectively.

[24 : 39] Going on to verse 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.

Now those who would say you talk about God's laws that's fine I just want to love as Jesus loved. When you hear that we understand that that person doesn't really understand what the love of God is to say that don't tell me about the law I just want to love as Jesus loved.

I don't need the law in order to love I just love instinctively. That person doesn't understand what God did in us what he does in us to produce neighbor love. I thank God for the Pharisees they give us such great examples of perfect villains yet they also give the challenge that pokes at our heart in our own hypocrisy and I'm going to read this passage from Matthew 23 where Jesus speaks to the Pharisees he says woe to you scribes and Pharisees hypocrites for you tithe mint and dill and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law justice and mercy and faithfulness these you ought to have done without neglecting the others you blind guides straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel woe to you scribes and Pharisees hypocrites for you clean the outside of the cup and the plate but inside they're full of greed and self-indulgence you blind Pharisee first clean the inside of the cup and the plate that the outside may also be clean woe to you scribes and Pharisees hypocrites for you are like whitewashed tombs which outwardly appear beautiful but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness so also you outwardly appear righteous to others but within you're full of hypocrisy and lawlessness right now to call a Pharisee a hypocrite was one thing but to call a Pharisee lawless that was beyond the pale the Pharisees at least by their own lips loved the law they loved God's law they loved it so much that they expanded on it and they taught the people to do things beyond

God's law but the trouble with the Pharisees was not that they practiced the law too minutely and knew it too well the problem with the Pharisees is they didn't understand the law at all they appeared righteous to others but they were really full of unlawfulness of lawlessness they would strain out a gnat the mint the dill the cumin things that Jesus said yes do those but they swallowed a camel because works without works of the law without neighbor love are empty deeds this is what the person is reacting to when they say you have the law talk about the law that's fine I don't I love right that's the hypocrisy they're reacting to they see that works of the law without love are just empty deeds like Paul says in 1 Corinthians if I give away all I have and I deliver up my body to be burned but I have not love I gain nothing but on the other hand to love without the law is just impotent sentimentality John the apostle John is a great person to go to who by the spirit answers what true love is and he gives us it's all the way through 1 John

I'm going to read 1 John chapter 5 this is John the apostle telling us what love is by this we know that we love the children of God when we love and obey when we love God and obey his commandments verse 3 for this is the love of God that we keep his commandments so there's no room in scripture for us to say I just want to love my neighbor I don't need to be taught by the law don't give me law give me love because the law is the shape right John Murray's example of the cup the law is the shape that love fills you don't understand love if you haven't been taught by God's law because as Romans 13 says and the ten commandments show love does no wrong to a neighbor therefore love is the fulfilling or the fulfillment of the law the law is the shape of love we work toward each other it's the cup that we fill with works of love without the law without God's law our works are formless our love is formless it has no place to abide and without love we just hold on

to an empty cup we have a law that's empty and we're hopeless to truly obey it we're Pharisees we have ordinances but we don't have the law what God

[29 : 11] Christ abolished was the law of commandments and ordinances the law remained but without love it is merely ordinances without love we hold on to a law that's empty and then when you look around your neighborhoods or you look at CNN and you can't help but see evil and corruption and ingratitude we remember that our Lord's way is to be kind to the ungrateful and to the evil because we were also ungrateful and hostile toward God and what did Christ do with our hostility with our ingratitude he killed it Ephesians 2 16 he killed the hostility between us it died with Christ on the cross he gave us a grace that loves the other because he's been loving the other from eternity when we love the other we're not just obeying God's law we're fulfilling it there's nothing else that the law requires because we're not just doing what God says we're being who God is we're being taught by God's nature this hymn we sang struck me this morning love divine all love excelling joy of heaven to earth come down fix in us thy humble dwelling all thy faithful mercies crown

Jesus thou art all compassion pure unbounded love thou art visit us with thy salvation enter every trembling heart let's pray father our need today our need today is to be filled so that we can fulfill we have no way to fulfill your commands but by what you work in us may the Holy Spirit fill us with compassion for each other that we can fill up the cup you gave us and pour it out on the needs around us Lord we give thanks for taking such an unlovable we give you thanks for taking such an unlovable people pouring out love upon us and all the while making us instruments to carry that love to each other plant this word deep in us as we use it to bring you glory we pray it in Christ's name Amen God bless Ane Jesus iso and this word bring you glory from his heart for whoever are you and this word is in your name again for whoever is in your name