

Love Fulfills the Law

Matt 22:35-40; Rom 12:1-2; 13:8-10
SS Lesson for 08/28/2016

Devotional Scripture: 1 Cor 13:4-13

OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW AND KEY VERSE OF THE LESSON

Key Verse: Rom 13:8

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

LESSON INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENTS (MATT 22:35-40)

Loving God (35-38)

Loving God is fearing, serving and obeying Him (Deut 10:12-13)

Loving God is more important than what we do (Mark 12:33)

Loving God by keeping His commandments (1 John 5:1-2)

Loving God by listening to Him and holding fast to Him (Deut 30:20)

Loving God to be known by Him (1 Cor 8:3)

Loving God results in deliverance and protection (Psalm 91:14)

Loving Neighbors (39-40)

Loving neighbors comes from a pure heart, sincere faith and good conscience (1 Tim 1:5)

Loving neighbors sums up the Law (Matt 7:12)

Loving neighbors by faith working through love (Gal 5:6)

Loving neighbors by loving God (1 John 4:21)

Loving neighbors by obedience to the second great commandment (Matt 22:39-40)

Loving neighbors as we have been taught by God (1 Thess 4:9)

SACRIFICE AND TRANSFORMATION (ROM 12:1-2)

Being a living sacrifice (1)

A living sacrifice that is cleansed by God's purity (Heb 10:22)

A living sacrifice that is acceptable to God through Jesus (1 Peter 2:5)

A living sacrifice by offering ourselves as instruments of righteousness (Rom 6:13)

A living sacrifice by exalting Jesus in our bodies (Phil 1:20)

Transforming of the mind (2)

Transformed into a new creation (2 Cor 5:17)

Transformed into having a new attitude of the mind (Eph 4:22-24)

Transformed through reconciliation (Col 1:21-22)

Transformed into a new self that is being renewed in the knowledge of God (Col 3:10)

Transformed through rebirth (Titus 3:5)

PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF LOVE (ROM 13:8-10)

Loving one another (8)

Love one another as God has loved us (John 13:34)

Love one another by living a life of love (Eph 5:2)

Love one another by seeking the virtue of love (Col 3:14)

Loving one another through being imitators of God (Eph 5:1-2)

Loving one another because it is taught by God to do so (1 Thess 4:9)

Loving one another to cover sins (1 Peter 4:8)

Obeying God's commands (9)

Obedience to God proves our love of Him (John 14:21)

Obedience is better because it delights God (1 Sam 15:22)

Obedience leads to righteousness (Rom 6:16)

Obedience leads to the praise of God by others (2 Cor 9:13)

Obedience keeps us remaining in God's love (John 15:10)

Obedience leads to the reward of blessings (Deut 28:1-6)

Obedience brings the reward of freedom (James 1:25)

Benefiting others (10)

Benefit one another at every opportunity (Rom 14:19)
Benefit one another by seeking the good of others (1 Cor 10:23-24)
Benefiting one another is one of the Church's duties (Eph 4:10-13)
Benefit one another by controlling our speech (Eph 4:29)
Benefit one another by praying in the Holy Spirit (Jude 20)

CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH

Our Obligation to Fulfill the Law of Love (13:8-10)

Our Obligations in the Light of His Soon Return (13:11-14)

Application

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

PRACTICAL POINTS FROM THE BIBLE EXPOSITOR AND ILLUMINATOR COMMENTARY

Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson examines how God has purposed that **Love Fulfills the Law**. The **study's aim** is to know that if we are to love others, we must understand how. The **study's application** is to accept that we must love those around us correctly from God's viewpoint, not society's.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Rom 13:8

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

13:1-3. Rome was the imperial capital, the seat of the empire's civil government. As residents in Rome, Paul's initial readers were aware of both the glory and the shame of that city in the days of Nero, who reigned from A.D. 54 to 68. But they were also citizens of Christ's kingdom (Phil. 3:20; Col. 1:13). Appropriately, therefore, Paul discussed a Christian's relationship to his government and civil rulers. Both in its length and specific details this discussion is the key New Testament passage on the subject (cf. 1 Tim. 2:1-4; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17). The apostle's basic exhortation is, **Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities** (lit., "higher authorities"). The basic reason for such submission is that those authorities are **established by God** (cf. Dan. 4:17, 25, 34-35). An individual **who rebels against the authority**, therefore, **is rebelling against** (lit., "has taken a stand against") **what God has instituted** (lit., "the ordinance of God"). Such persons are thus actually rebelling against God, and bring civil and/or divine **judgment on themselves**. Those who obey and **do right** need have no fear of authorities; in fact, civil leaders **commend** those who do good.

13:4-5. Furthermore, a civil leader **is God's servant**, a concept often forgotten today. By commending those who do right (v. 3), a civil leader himself does **good** (v. 4). But on the other hand he bears arms (**the sword**) as **God's servant** (the second time in this verse Paul referred to the ruler this way; cf. v. 6), as **an agent of wrath**. Governmental force, properly used, helps prevent tyranny and executes justice; it brings **punishment on the wrongdoer**. A Christian has two reasons to be submissive to civil authorities—to avoid **possible punishment** (lit., "the wrath") and to heed his **conscience**, which prods him to obey God's ordinances.

13:6-7. A Christian's responsibility to civil authorities involves more than obedience (vv. 1, 5). It also includes support by paying **taxes** (cf. Matt. 22:21). This is because the leaders, as **God's servants** (cf. Rom. 13:4), are supposed to **give their full time to governing** and need support through taxes from citizens, Christians included. So a Christian ought to **give everyone what he owes him** (lit., "repay everyone his dues"), whether substance (**taxes and revenue**) or **respect and honor**.

13:8-10. Discussion of believers' obligations to civil authorities evidently triggered Paul's thinking concerning believers' debts to others. He commanded, **Let no debt remain outstanding** (lit., "Do not keep on owing anyone anything") **except the continuing debt to love one another** (lit., "except loving one another"). This is not a prohibition against a proper use of credit; it is an underscoring of a Christian's obligation to express divine love in all interpersonal relationships. A Christian should never fall short, and so be "in debt," in loving others (John 13:34-35; 1 Cor. 16:14; Eph. 5:2; Col. 3:14; 1 John 3:14, 23; 4:7, 11,

21). The importance of continually showing love is seen in the explanation, **For he who loves his fellow man** (lit., “the other one”) **has fulfilled the Law** (cf. Matt. 22:39; Mark 12:31). Love, not mere external conformity to rules, is the essence of the Law (cf. Gal. 5:14). Paul then quoted various specific commands from the social section of the Ten **Commandments**. These prohibitions—**not to commit adultery... murder... steal and covet**—are the 7th, 6th, 8th, and 10th commandments, in that order (Ex. 20:13-15, 17). Paul summed up that entire section of the Law by quoting Leviticus 19:18. The Jewish Rabbis and the Lord Jesus summarized the social section of the Law in the same words (cf. Matt. 22:39). Paul then expressed this principle in other words, **Love does no harm** (lit., “Love does not keep on working evil”) **to its neighbor**, and then he repeated (cf. Rom. 13:8) his basic assertion that **love fulfills the Mosaic Law**. Only in Christ can a person meet this or any of the other requirements of the Law (8:4).

13:11. Expressing divine love is a Christian’s constant responsibility, but it is especially crucial in **understanding the present time** (lit., “knowing the season”). Paul was not referring to time in general but to the end-time and to the imminent return of the Lord Jesus. It is a time, therefore, for spiritual vigilance and industriousness: **wake up from your** (some mss. have “our,” which conforms to the context) **slumber** (cf. Eph. 5:14; 1 Peter 5:8). This need for alertness is **because our salvation** (ultimate or final salvation realized at the return of the Savior; cf. Rom. 8:23; Heb. 9:28; 1 Peter 1:5) **is nearer now than when we first believed** (cf. James 5:8). Each passing day in the faith brings final salvation and deliverance closer.

13:12. Paul considered the time of Christ’s return and the consummation of salvation for believers (v. 11) as the start of a new **day**. The present time, while Christ is absent (John 14:2-3; Acts 1:11) and Satan is at work (2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2), is described as **the night** (cf. 2 Peter 1:19). Since “the day” **is almost here**, Paul urged his readers to **put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light**. Christians are soldiers in a conflict who need to be alert and equipped for battle (Eph. 6:10-17; 1 Thes. 5:8). Upright, Christ-honoring living is often referred to as being in the light (John 12:36; Eph. 5:8, 14; Col. 1:12; 1 Thes. 5:5; 1 John 1:7; 2:10).

13:13-14. In verse 13 Paul repeated his exhortation of verse 12, changing the figure from warfare to lifestyle. He charged, **Let us behave decently, as in the daytime** (lit., “day”). Crime, violence, and wickedness are associated with darkness and the night (John 1:5; 3:19-20; 8:12; 12:35, 46; Eph. 5:8, 11; 6:12; 1 Thes. 5:7; 1 Peter 2:9; 1 John 1:5-6; 2:9, 11). Perhaps this contrast was suggested to Paul by his phrase “deeds of darkness” (Rom. 13:12). At any rate the activities and attitudes he listed—**orgies and drunkenness... sexual immorality and debauchery... dissension and jealousy** (cf. Gal. 5:19-21)—are certainly “deeds of darkness.” It is interesting that Paul linked jealousy with immorality. Such actions and attitudes have no place in a Christian’s life. He belongs to “the light”; these deeds and thoughts belong to the darkness. A Christian’s lifestyle must be pure and holy, especially in view of Christ’s approaching return (cf. Rom. 13:11-12; 1 John 3:3). The secret to living chaste lives is for Christians to **clothe themselves with the Lord Jesus Christ** (cf. “put on,” Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). At salvation they were “clothed with Christ” (Gal. 3:27), so they should conduct themselves accordingly. Also the secret includes **not thinking about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature** (lit., “and do not make forethought [*pronoian*] for the flesh [*sarkos*; cf. Rom. 8:3-5, 8-9, 12-13] for lusts”). For a Christian to plan out specific ways to gratify his sinful nature is wrong and out of bounds.

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

After the long doctrinal discussion of Romans 1 through 11 on God's means of salvation and justification by faith, among other things, we find an application section on life and living beginning in chapter 12. The one who is justified by God's grace is to go on and live a life of surrender and holiness. In that sense, we are called to fulfill God's law. Our text has a negative command and a positive command and then an explanation of the ground for these commands. The negative command states that the Christian is not to owe anyone anything. It is a strong command; in the original language, it is kind of a double negative. It is most emphatic. This is an important command to understand and fulfill. First of all, it can be taken in a strict financial sense. We are not to have any outstanding debts that we are not paying back. That is a state of affairs that keeps us in good standing with our neighbor and adorns the gospel we believe and live. However, we can also expand this command. It is very broad and is not specifically limited to financial concerns. We should therefore have no neglected, undischarged responsibilities toward others. We should render to all what we ought to render. We should not come up wanting in the relationships we have with those around us. Given the emphasis on love in this text, we see that our rightful duties are a vital matter to consider in all our relationships. To the best of our ability, let us fulfill our obligations to other people. This also adorns the gospel we believe and live. The positive command is broader yet. It tells us to "love one another." The sense of it is that we should feel a debt of love toward all other people in our constant and

frequent interactions with them. Love should govern our relationships. Love should never cease to be practiced by Christians, every day in every relationship. The term used for love here is agape, which is committed, others-centered love; it is unconditional. Do we feel this debt of love always? Because God has loved us, do we love others? Are we practicing this lofty and challenging rule in our relationships, in the home, in the church, and in the world? Now let us take a look at the foundation of these lofty commands, which is to govern our relationships as Christians. Why should we do this? Because these basic commands to have no undischarged responsibilities toward others and to love others fulfill all the law of God. All the many and wonderful commands of God's moral and spiritual law are fulfilled by the ethic of love. Love is the pathway of obedience to God. Jesus said that the whole law hangs on just two simple principles: love for God and love for our neighbors (Matt. 22:35-40). If we want to be real Christians, we must strive for love. I think we can see that when we fulfill God's law, we are not in some kind of slavish submission but rather in a joyful embrace of God's love. Through our love, others come to see what God is like. As all our relationships are characterized by love, we fulfill the law. What a challenge to live this way!

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

One of the most remarkable phenomena we observe in nature is the change of a caterpillar into a butterfly. The caterpillar is a wormlike creature with many feet, eating leaves as it crawls among plants. It sheds skin as it grows larger, eating continually. Finally, it spins a cocoon around itself and seems to go into hibernation. After many days, this creature emerges from the cocoon. It looks nothing like the caterpillar it once was, for now it is a six-legged insect with glorious wings. Formerly limited to waddling around on plants and trees, it can now fly, for it is a butterfly. Scientists call this transformation from caterpillar to butterfly metamorphosis. The word chosen by scientists for this process is actually an ancient Greek term that means "to change form." This is radical transformation, though, like going from a slug-like larva to a beautiful winged creature capable of flight. This Greek word occurs four times in the New Testament. It is translated "transfigured" in Matthew 17:2 and Mark 9:2, as "transformed" in 2 Corinthians 3:18 and Romans 12:2. As we study the latter verse this week, we are to think of drastic change—a personal transformation so profound that we can hardly remember what it was like to be a spiritual caterpillar.

The book of Romans was written by Paul to Christians living in a city he had not yet visited. Although he knew some people there (see Romans 16), most did not know him personally. The book itself (actually, a letter) is well organized. The sequence of thought in the first 11 of its 16 chapters begins with an exposition of the origin and scope of sin, follows with an explanation of the remedy for sin, and wraps up with a discussion of the fate of the unbelieving Jewish nation. Due to the nature of their content, these first 11 chapters are often referred to as the doctrinal section, meaning that they present teaching that is foundational to our understanding of the Christian faith. In Romans 12, the apostle Paul moves to what is often called the practical section of the letter. Here we see concerns for how the great truths of the church are to be worked out in the lives of its members. Paul instructs in such things as the use of spiritual gifts (12:3-8), how to relate to governing authorities (13:1-7), and the dangers of judging others (14:10-13). These closing chapters are characterized by key summary statements such as "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (12:21) and "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you" (15:7). Today's lesson examines two texts drawn from this rich practical section.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

The Greatest Commandments (Matt 22:35-40)

- 35 Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying,
36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"
37 Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'
38 This is the first and great commandment.
39 And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'
40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

Loving God (35-38)

Loving God is fearing, serving and obeying Him (Deut 10:12-13)

12 And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13 and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?

Loving God is more important than what we do (Mark 12:33)

33 To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

Loving God by keeping His commandments (1 John 5:1-2)

5 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. 2 This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands.

Loving God by listening to Him and holding fast to Him (Deut 30:20)

20 and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Loving God to be known by Him (1 Cor 8:3)

3 But the man who loves God is known by God.

Loving God results in deliverance and protection (Psalm 91:14)

14 "Because he loves me," says the Lord, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.

Loving Neighbors (39-40)

Loving neighbors comes from a pure heart, sincere faith and good conscience (1 Tim 1:5)

5 The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

Loving neighbors sums up the Law (Matt 7:12)

12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

Loving neighbors by faith working through love (Gal 5:6)

6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

Loving neighbors by loving God (1 John 4:21)

21 And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Loving neighbors by obedience to the second great commandment (Matt 22:39-40)

39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Loving neighbors as we have been taught by God (1 Thess 4:9)

9 Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other.

Sacrifice and Transformation (Rom 12:1-2)

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Being a living sacrifice (1)

A living sacrifice that is cleansed by God's purity (Heb 10:22)

22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

A living sacrifice that is acceptable to God through Jesus (1 Peter 2:5)

5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

A living sacrifice by offering ourselves as instruments of righteousness (Rom 6:13)

13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.

A living sacrifice by exalting Jesus in our bodies (Phil 1:20)

20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

A living sacrifice by giving of oneself (2 Cor 8:5)

5 And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

Transforming of the mind (2)

Transformed into a new creation (2 Cor 5:17)

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

Transformed into having a new attitude of the mind (Eph 4:22-24)

22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Transformed through reconciliation (Col 1:21-22)

21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—

Transformed into a new self that is being renewed in the knowledge of God (Col 3:10)

10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

Transformed through rebirth (Titus 3:5)

5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,

Practical Application of Love (Rom 13:8-10)

8 Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.

9 For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Loving one another (8)

Love one another as God has loved us (John 13:34)

34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

Love one another by living a life of love (Eph 5:2)

2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Love one another by seeking the virtue of love (Col 3:14)

14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Loving one another through being imitators of God (Eph 5:1-2)

1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Loving one another because it is taught by God to do so (1 Thess 4:9)

9 Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other.

Loving one another to cover sins (1 Peter 4:8)

8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

Obedying God's commands (9)

Obedience to God proves our love of Him (John 14:21)

21 Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."

Obedience is better because it delights God (1 Sam 15:22)

22 But Samuel replied: "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.

Obedience leads to righteousness (Rom 6:16)

16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey — whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

Obedience leads to the praise of God by others (2 Cor 9:13)

13 Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

Obedience keeps us remaining in God's love (John 15:10)

10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.

Obedience leads to the reward of blessings (Deut 28:1-6)

28 If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. 2 All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God: 3 You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. 4 The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock — the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. 5 Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed. 6 You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out.

Obedience brings the reward of freedom (James 1:25)

25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it — he will be blessed in what he does.

Benefiting others (10)

Benefit one another at every opportunity (Rom 14:19)

19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

Benefit one another by seeking the good of others (1 Cor 10:23-24)

23 "Everything is permissible"-but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible"-but not everything is constructive. 24 Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.

Benefiting one another is one of the Church's duties (Eph 4:10-13)

10 He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) 11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Benefit one another by controlling our speech (Eph 4:29)

29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

Benefit one another by praying in the Holy Spirit (Jude 20)

20 But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Our Obligation to Fulfill the Law of Love (13:8-10)

While verses 1-7 focused our attention upon the Christian's obligation to submit to the powers that be, verses 8-10 direct our attention to our obligation to men in general. While our specific obligation to civic officials is to submit, our obligation to men in general is to love them. "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the Law" (Romans 13:8).

It seems unfortunate to me that this verse has been misapplied to condemn the practice of borrowing money. Such is the case with Phillip's paraphrase of this verse: "Keep out of debt altogether except that perpetual debt of love which we owe one another." Do not misunderstand me; I am not advocating indebtedness. "The borrower becomes the lender's slave" (Proverbs 22:7). But although Scripture does not recommend indebtedness, neither does it condemn it.¹⁰⁸

What puzzles me the most is the inconsistent interpretation of those who understand this passage to condemn indebtedness and then proceed to qualify the type of indebtedness incurred. The paraphrase of such a view would be something like this: "Owe no man anything, except for non-depreciating items." If we are to understand Paul to condemn the borrowing of money altogether, then at least let us be consistent in our application and refuse to borrow money for any and every type of purchase.

What I understand to be the most natural translation (and interpretation) is to see both verses 1-7 and verses 8-10 as speaking to our obligations. Paul is stressing in verses 8-10 our obligation to men in general. He is saying that our exclusive and primary obligation to men is to love them. The translation of Sanday and Headlam reflects this sense: "Let your only debt that is unpaid be that of love—a debt which you should always be attempting to discharge in full, but will never succeed in discharging."¹⁰⁹

Paul is not saying that we should never incur debts, but that we should quickly and speedily pay every debt except that of love. We should strive to love, but we should never consider the debt 'paid in full.'

The 'Law of Love'¹¹⁰ encompasses the whole Law of the Old Testament as it pertains to our obligation to our fellow man. The commandments mentioned in verse 9 are those of the second half of the decalogue which define our social obligations. Love never seeks the harm of our neighbor, only to accomplish that which is for his good. Therefore, to keep the 'Law of Love' is to keep the Old Testament Law which relates to our neighbor: "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the Law" (Romans 13:10).

Herein is found the error of Judaism. They had perverted the Law in such a way as to serve personal interests to the detriment of others (cf. Mark 7:6-13; esp. vv. 10-11). The heart of the Law was to regulate individual behavior to the benefit of society at large. The heart of Pharisaism was to twist the Law into the service of the individual at the expense of others.

In these verses also we are given a clue as to the rightful attitude toward the Law as it relates to grace. The question is really this: If Paul condemned works as a means to salvation and grace, why does he now command us to do very specific things? Aren't the commands of the New Testament just a slightly modified repetition of the Old Testament Law?

We must remember that the requirements of the Law are not evil; they are holy and just and good (Romans 7:12). The Law was intended as a standard of righteousness. The Law as a standard or a goal is just as valid as it was in the Old Testament. It defines sin (Romans 7:7) and correspondingly defines righteousness.

The problem with the Law was that what it demanded it did not produce. It was an excellent goal, but did not provide the means. In this way it revealed man's inadequacy to please God by his works.

The grace of God to the Christian is that God not only bestows on him salvation and forgiveness of sins, He also provides the motivation and the means to live a godly life—that is to keep the Law. Rather than by the striving of human effort, God produces love in the life of the Christian which motivates him to accomplish what the Law demands. In other words, God makes the heart delight in what the Law demands.¹¹¹ The requirements of the Law are met, but in a different way than legalistic Law-keeping.

It is the Holy Spirit of God Who works within us to give us the love which seeks to bless others at our own expense. The Law is still valid as a standard by which to measure our expression of the righteousness of God, but it has never been, nor will it ever be, the means by which the individual may win God's approval.

To be 'no longer under Law, but under grace' does not mean that there are no standards, no commands, no necessity of obedience. The New Testament is full of imperatives and God is just and righteous in expecting us to meet them, out of gratitude, out of a desire to worship Him in Christian service, and by the power God has provided in the Holy Spirit. He is at work in us 'both to will and to do what is pleasing to Him' (Philippians 2:12-13).

Our Obligations in the Light of His Soon Return (13:11-14)

What Paul has said in verses 1-10 is now discussed from the standpoint of our motivation to keep our Christian obligations, both to civil government and mankind in general. This is reflected in the translation of verse 11 by the NASV: "And this do knowing the time ..." Paul's interest in these verses is not to explicitly outline the details of eschatology,¹¹² but rather to motivate the Christian to diligence and obedience by a reminder that the return of our Lord is at hand. Truly our salvation (cf. Romans 8:18ff.) is nearer now than it has ever been. Paul speaks of the present age as 'night' and the future age of restoration as 'day.' We should awaken from the sleep of indulgence (v. 13) and indifference. We should take off the night clothes of our old self and put on our daytime garments of righteousness.

Not Catering, But Control (vv. 13-14). The last two verses should make every Christian uneasy, for they speak of the need for the Christian not to cater to the lusts of the flesh, but to control them. "Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts" (Romans 13:13-14).

Those things which are condemned in verse 13 are excesses of the flesh. Paul, in verse 14, summarizes by calling them 'making provision for the flesh, in regard to its lusts.' The sins of the flesh which Paul specifies are indulgences, excesses. A little wine is not sinful (cf. 1 Timothy 5:23), but drunkenness is. Sex in marriage is holy (Hebrews 13:4, etc.), but promiscuity is evil.

There is probably no age in which excess has been so commercialized and emphasized as our own. We, as children of the 'day,' must put this kind of living aside, and be ready for our Lord's return.

Application

In the light of our Lord's return, we have two pressing responsibilities:

(1) To submit to civil government. This responsibility can be summarized in three words: (a) **Obey**—keep the Law. (b) **Pay**—your taxes. (c) **Pray**—for those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1-3).

(2) We are to love our 'neighbor,' and by doing this fulfill the requirements of the Law (cf. Romans 8:4).

It is apparent that Paul has written during a time when government was fulfilling its responsibility of restraining evil and rewarding righteousness. But what of the times when this is not the case? In view of the general nature of Paul's exhortation, we will ask and answer several critical questions.

(1) Are there times when a Christian should disobey government?

Yes, if the government commands a Christian to do what is clearly contrary to God's Word. When one disobeys, he must nevertheless submit to the punishment which government prescribes for this disobedience. Since government has the delegated authority of God, government's authority is subordinate to God's orders if they differ. Daniel (Daniel 6) disobeyed the law of the Medes and the Persians signed by Darius which forbade prayer for 30 days. He, however, submitted to the penalty for his actions. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3) are a similar example. Peter and the apostles (Acts 5, note especially v. 29, 40-42) refused to obey the order that they "speak not in the name of Jesus." Our Lord's statement in Matthew 22:21 "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's," demonstrates the fact that the Christian finds himself in two spheres of authority. Whenever these two spheres of authority come into conflict we must say with Peter and the apostles, "we ought to obey God rather than men."

(2) Should a government become corrupt and cease to fulfill its proper functions (i.e., to restrain evil and encourage good works), should the Christian engage in revolution to attempt its overthrow?

Instances can be found in the Old Testament in which the Lord instructs an individual to rebel against the existing government and overthrow it. One such instance is in 1 Kings 11 and 12 where God instructs Jeroboam through the prophet Ahijah to rebel against the united kingdom of Solomon and ten tribes from the kingdom. All of the instances such as this in the Old Testament to my knowledge are due to the direct revelation of God. To use these instances as arguments for rebellion today we would need to be consistent and require a direct revelation from God to do so. It is God Himself Who raises up kings and puts them down (Psalm 75:7).

We must also remember that God uses evil governments, as well as good ones, for His purposes (cf. Habakkuk 1:6-11, Exodus 7:1-7, Amos 6:14). Romans 13:1 seems to say that any government which exists is, by virtue of its existence, ordained of God. To resist any existing government, by attempting to overthrow it (if the above assumption is true), is to resist God (Romans 13:2). God has no difficulty in performing His will apart from our assistance.

In the Old Testament Saul was to have his kingdom taken away due to his disobedience (1 Samuel 15) and David was anointed as the new king (chapter 16). Although Saul was no longer fit to be king, David waited until God removed Saul, even though he had several excellent opportunities to remove Saul himself (cf. 1 Samuel 24:1-15; 26:6-12). It is God's desire that we live a "tranquil and quiet life" (1 Timothy 2:2, 3). Revolution does not lead to tranquility.

(3) Does Romans 13 or any other Scripture teach passivism toward government?

No. Remember Paul refused to leave the prison in Philippi until he was escorted out by the magistrates who had illegally beaten and imprisoned them (Acts 16). We uphold the law by insisting upon adherence to it, even by the law officials themselves.

(4) What should a Christian do when the government to which he is to be subject persecutes Christians unjustly?

The Book of Romans was written before severe persecution of Christians began, although Paul was writing with Nero in mind. The entire Book of 1 Peter is written with this very issue in mind. Nevertheless, Peter instructs: "Be subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as sent by him for vengeance on evildoers and for praise to them that do well" (1 Peter 2:13, 14). Peter's example is that of servants, who are to be in subjection to their masters, even the cruel ones (2:18). It is only when suffering unjustly that it is pleasing to God (v. 20). The supreme example for us to follow is our Saviour, Who died unjustly for our sins (1 Peter 2:21-25). The thrust of chapters 2, 3, and 4 of Peter's first epistle is that we are to suffer patiently when persecuted unjustly. We should remember the Lord's words, "A servant is not greater than his lord. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you ..." (John 15:20).

(5) Is it wrong for a Christian to be in politics?

In the Old Testament many men such as Daniel, Isaiah, and Jeremiah (not to mention the kings) were involved in the politics of their day. In the New Testament one would be harder pressed to find an individual deeply involved in politics—although it is readily conceded that an argument from silence is not very compelling. In the Old Testament theocracy, government and religion (church and state) were not separated as in the New Testament. The issue is one of priorities and personal convictions ultimately, as well as the individual leading of the Lord.

Civil government in the time of the Great Tribulation. We should take just a moment to consider the institution of civil government during the time of the Tribulation. Government was ordained of God in Genesis chapter 9 to restrain the evil intents of the hearts of men. To the present day, government to a greater or lesser degree continues to carry out this responsibility. This is the reason why Paul exhorts the Christian to submit to human government.

During the Tribulation, the restraining force of government (as God ordained it) will be removed (2 Thessalonians 2:6ff.) and Satan will be allowed to have his day. Government during this time will not exist for the purpose of preventing evil, but for promoting it. Such government should not be viewed as ‘authorized’ by God, but simply allowed in order to reveal what men are capable of doing apart from God’s restraining influence. If the violence we see today takes place in spite of human government, think what those days will be like. Thank God we shall not have to be a part of those evil days, “For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

It is my prayer that you have come to trust in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, Who died in your place and bore the penalty for your sins. He offers to you the righteousness which God requires for eternal life. He offers the riches of heaven in place of the torment of Hell. May God work in your heart to trust in Him.

(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/christian-obligations-romans-13>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Although only five verses total, our lesson text is packed with imperatives that resonate in our lives today. We are centuries removed from Paul and his Roman audience, yet these verses are great examples of the living Word, affecting every generation of Christians. How much are you willing to sacrifice for God? How deep does your desire to serve him really go? We normally think of sacrifice as foregoing things and activities that people typically enjoy. But it is no sacrifice for me personally to say, “As a sacrifice, I will not drink beer,” because I do not drink beer anyway (my personal choice). Similarly, our claims of sacrifice are often shallow and painless in that we tend to give up things we don’t care much about anyway. So the question remains: How and what are you willing to sacrifice for God? Paul is not telling us to give up beloved things. He is not advising us to make our lives more painful and less enjoyable as a sign of spiritual maturity. He is urging us to be a sacrifice. If we do this, we hold nothing back. All our possessions, actions, attitudes, abilities, relationships, etc., are surrendered to God’s will. This is what it means to be a living sacrifice. To be a sacrifice means we are ready for God’s transforming power as we consider how best to live as his servants among his servants (1 Corinthians 8:13; etc.). We cannot transform ourselves. If we try to achieve godliness through conforming, we will fail. We must allow the great transformer—God working through his Holy Spirit and his Holy Word—to change us.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

1. God’s desire that we walk with Him supersedes any list of dos and don’ts (Matt. 22:35-36)
2. As we grow in love for God, our relationship with Him and with others will flourish (vss. 37-40)
3. Be transformed, remembering that God wants a new you—not a copy of someone else (Rom. 12:1-2)
4. We can never repay God’s love, but we are to pay it forward to others (13:8)
5. We learn to love others as we understand the value that God has placed on their lives (vs. 9)
6. As we reflect God’s love, we go beyond what is required by mere earthly law (vs. 10)