

The Law and Love

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[0 : 00] I'd like you, if you would, to open up your Bibles to Romans chapter 13.

! We're back in Romans this week after taking a week off. So open up your Bibles to Romans chapter 13. If you're using one of the Pew Bibles, it's going to be on page 948 in our Pew Bible. Romans chapter 13. Some of you woke up this morning with a little bit of extra energy. And if you're like me, you didn't initially realize why. I knew that our clocks changed last night. I knew that earlier in the week, but I kind of forgot about it yesterday. And I woke up this morning before my alarm ever went off, feeling as though I had slept all the way up to and maybe even past my alarm.

And then I realized after laying there for a minute thinking, should I get up? The alarm hasn't gone off yet, but I'm fully awake. I realized that the time had changed. And I thought, oh great, this is my favorite weekend of the year.

[1 : 05] And I didn't even realize it. Some of you might have thought the same thing, but I bet we'll all be thinking the exact opposite when it comes springtime. And it's time to set our clocks ahead. And we lose that hour of sleep.

That's when everybody will say, let's get rid of this whole thing. No more daylight saving time. It was a good idea 200 years ago, but it's not a good idea today. Let's get rid of this thing. Because that's the way that we are.

We either like something, we're all on board with it, or we want to get rid of it all together.

Sometimes we're going to see that we do that in regards to certain portions of God's Word. So that we're going to talk a little bit this morning, after we read the text in a bit, about how we should interact with God's law.

What do we do with the Old Testament law? What do we do with the Ten Commandments and the other portions of the law? It's something that we've had to talk about many times as we've been walking through the book of Romans, because Paul, in this book, so frequently discusses the role of the law in the lives of those who follow Christ.

And so we're coming back again to think about and to consider, what do we do with the law? And how do we think about the law? Our tendency is to simply say, let's get rid of this whole thing, or let's hang on to as much of it as we can, and every day we're going to live our lives trying as best we can to live in obedience to these various commandments.

[2 : 26] We tend to be extreme in those ways, and this morning as we look at the text, we're going to see that Paul doesn't encourage us to those two extreme options, but he has something else to say to us, and he wants to teach us another way to think about our relationship to the law.

And so I want to ask you guys to stand, we're going to read the text together, beginning in verse 8 of chapter 13, and only going down through verse 10 this morning. We read this, O no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

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. Lord, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. Father, we give you thanks for this word, and we ask that you would open our eyes to see wonderful things in it this morning.

We ask this in Christ's name. Amen. So last week, we took a break from Romans, so that we could spend that Reformation Sunday morning talking about the great teachings, the great doctrines that were upheld in the Protestant Reformation, and that we still today cling to and hang to the five alones of the Reformation.

[3 : 53] And of course, standing and rising chief above all of those alones is the doctrine of justification by faith alone, which we have, again, talked about as we've walked through Romans.

We've spent a lot of time dealing with the reality that we cannot get right before God by doing all the right things. We can't get right before God by attempting to obey the law or to live good lives, because we are fallen sinful people, and we will fall short and have fallen short every time.

So that what we need is not necessarily a list of rules or a new list of rules to enable us to become righteous in the sight of God. But Paul tells us over and over throughout this letter, and the Reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin and others came onto the scene to remind us that we get right with God, we are justified before God and by God on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ alone, and not on the basis of anything that we ourselves do or accomplish.

That when we put our faith in Jesus, His life of perfect righteousness and of perfect obedience to the law of God is counted as ours. We get to claim His obedience as our obedience, and He takes the punishment for our disobedience upon the cross.

And that is, in a nutshell, the gospel message. And we have seen that and read that and proclaimed that over and over and over as we walk through the book of Romans. But we've also seen in this book that tendency toward extremes.

[5 : 28] That tendency to say, well then let's get rid of the law together. Let's not worry about the way that we live our lives if we get right with God, not based on anything we do but on faith.

Let's just trust in Jesus and then go out and live any way that we want to live and not worry about the kinds of lives that we live. Paul addresses that kind of extreme response to the gospel message a number of times in the middle of this book.

So he asks a very simple question. He says, what shall we do? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may abound? If we're saved by grace and we're justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, should we just say, let's stop trying?

Let's get rid of all of the effort and let's just bask in grace and live our lives any way that we see fit? And of course Paul's answer is, no, absolutely not.

Or God forbid. Or by no means. It's the strongest way that he can react to that kind of a question. No, absolutely not. Not. So then what should we do?

[6 : 31] What should be the motive and what should be the driving force behind our lives as followers of Jesus? And really, chapters 12 and 13 and 14 are devoted to painting a picture for us of what the life of a person who has been justified by faith in Christ, who is a follower of Jesus, what their life should look like.

And these chapters are designed to give us that picture of the Christian life. A life lived for the glory of God. So let's jump in here in chapter 13 and see how Paul ties this idea of a life lived for the glory of God.

A transformed heart and a transformed mind. Let's see how he ties that into our relationship to the law of God. Notice he says in verse 8, Owe no one anything except to love one another for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

Now this language of owing nothing or owing someone is derived from the previous verses which we spent three weeks looking at what Paul has to say about our relationship to the governing officials in the first part of chapter 13.

So that Paul tells us that we ought to just give to those what we owe them, give them what we owe them. If we owe taxes, we pay taxes. If we owe revenue, we pay revenue. If we ought to honor somebody, we honor somebody.

[7 : 55] If we ought to fear somebody in an official capacity, we render to them the respect and fear that they deserve, that we owe to them. And so now he latches on to that owing language and he begins to address our relationships more broadly with everyone around us.

Owe no one anything except for one thing, he says, to love each other. And here's the reason. For the one who loves has fulfilled the law.

That's the relationship that we have as a follower of Christ to the law. Our pursuit of love ought to result in the automatic fulfillment of the law for us.

And this is not the only time that he says this in this short little passage. The one who loves another has fulfilled the law. And then again in verse 9, that all the commandments are summed up in this word, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

And the third time in verse 10, love is the fulfilling of the law. So twice he refers to love being the fulfillment or the fulfilling of the law. And then once he says that the law is summed up in love for your neighbor.

[9 : 07] So that Paul's explanation of the relationship of the Christian to the law of God is not to say, you need to know all of the laws and put them on a list and daily make sure that you're not violating any of those.

No, he says something quite different from that. He says, you fulfill the law when you love another. When you love your neighbor or when you love one another, when you love other people, you are fulfilling the law.

But we have to ask the question, what does Paul mean when he uses the language of fulfillment? Love fulfills the law. What does that mean? Because many have taken that to say, so if love is the fulfillment of the law, we don't need the law anymore at all.

We don't need it. We only need to focus on loving people and we don't have any more use for the law as followers of Jesus. In essence, what they're saying is that now that we have faith in Christ, that we are under the new covenant, now the law has been abolished, has been set aside, and it plays no role for the follower of Jesus.

But I don't think that's what Paul means when he uses the language of the law having been fulfilled. I don't think that's what he means because Paul is drawing his language here from the teachings of Jesus himself.

[10 : 27] And when Jesus uses the language of the fulfillment of the law, he specifically tells us that the fulfillment of the law does not mean the abolishing of the law. In the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew chapters 5 through 7, in Matthew chapter 5, Jesus begins that sermon by telling us, do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets.

I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. He has not come to set aside the law or to destroy the law or to get rid of the law. He's come to do something else.

He's come to fulfill the law. Now, as far as Jesus is concerned, he does that in two ways. On the one hand, when he speaks of fulfilling the prophets in that passage, it means exactly what we might expect him to mean.

He means that all of the prophecies of the Old Testament, and all of the types and shadows of the Old Testament, find their ultimate meaning and significance and fulfillment in him.

So that all the language about the promises made to Israel are fulfilled in Christ who is himself, the true Israel. This is why the apostles are perfectly happy to take passages that over and over refer to Israel and use them in reference to Jesus himself.

[11 : 44] A good example can be found in the Gospel of Matthew. In the first chapter of Matthew, Matthew quotes a passage that clearly refers to Israel, Out of Egypt I have called my son from the prophets. And yet Matthew says that that is about Jesus.

That that passage is fulfilled with Jesus as a small child going down into Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod, and then later coming back up out of Egypt to return back to the land of Israel.

A passage clearly about the nation of Israel, and yet Matthew says it's fulfilled in Christ. So that when Jesus says, I've not come to abolish the law and the prophets, I've come to fulfill them, part of what he means is, all of the hopes of Israel find their ultimate significance and meaning in Jesus himself.

But also another aspect of fulfillment that Jesus has in mind, as we'll see in a moment when we turn back to the Sermon on the Mount, is that in Christ, we come to understand the true meaning and significance of the law of God.

In Christ, we come to see what lies beneath the surface of the commandments. And what lies beneath the surface of the commandments is motive.

[13 : 04] What lies beneath the surface of the commandments is heart. Why would you not murder? Why would you not steal? Why would you not lie?

Why would you not commit adultery? Why? What lies behind those things? What attitudes of the mind and of the heart move a person to do those things? And then what attitude of the mind and heart would move a person to avoid those things and not even come close to violating those commandments?

Jesus does not say that with his coming, the law has been destroyed and discarded and we never think about it again. But he says, in his coming, the true meaning of the law has been manifested

and has been made known.

And now we can understand that the law is not merely about external obedience to a list of demands, but the law is ultimately about the condition and state of your heart.

So that when Paul says that love is the fulfillment of the law, he does not mean love does away with the law, but he means that love gets to the core. Love gets to the essence of what the law was all about all along.

[14 : 15] The law was never meant to be merely a list of things that we externally obey. The law was always meant to pierce into our hearts to show us not just what to do, but how to think and how to feel and how to interact with others around us.

And that's where Paul is taking us. That's why Paul is able to say, love is the fulfillment of the law. Because love is the ultimate motive that leads you to avoid the violating of the commandments of God.

So, the word fulfilled does not mean get rid of. It means and shows us that there is something beneath the law that love takes us toward.

There's something greater than just the external demands of the law. But what about the law itself? What specifically does the Apostle Paul have in mind in Romans chapter 13 when he says that the one who loves another has fulfilled the law?

Obviously, he means the Mosaic law. He means the law that God gave to Israel through Moses on Mount Sinai. Most of you, if not all of you, are at least somewhat familiar with what that law is.

[15 : 33] It contains over 600 individual commandments. And they cover all sorts of aspects of life. They cover the ways in which various crimes should be punished.

They cover all sorts of ceremonial laws concerning the temple and sacrifices and rituals and festivals and days that ought to be recognized by the people of Israel. Is that what Paul has in mind?

I don't think that those are the things that Paul has in mind. In fact, I would not even go so far as to say that he has in mind in this paragraph even all of the Ten Commandments.

When we talk about the Ten Commandments, a lot of times we divide them up into two parts. Sometimes we call them the first table and the second table. And if you read through the Ten Commandments, it becomes obvious why. Because the first four commandments relate directly to our relationship with God Himself.

That's exactly what they do. And then the last six commandments tell us how we should relate to others in terms of honoring your father and your mother. You shall not murder. You shall not lie.

[16 : 37] You shall not steal. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife or any of their other things that are listed there. All of the second table of the Ten Commandments are aimed at how do we treat others around us?

What should we avoid in our relationships with others? And I think that it is that second table of the Ten Commandments, the commands that relate to our relationship with our neighbor or the other people around us that Paul has in mind specifically in this particular paragraph.

Now I say that for a number of reasons but the clearest reason is that Paul goes on to cite four of the Ten Commandments. You can see them there. They're very easy to see. You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not murder. You shall not steal. You shall not covet. He cites four commandments and all four of these commandments come from what we call the second table of the Ten Commandments. So that when Paul says that love for one another fulfills the law, I think that he means that second half or the second part of the Ten Commandments that all detail our relationships with other people around us.

[17 : 49] So he does not have in mind, he's not saying that if you love your neighbor you will have fulfilled all of the ceremonial law. We're not under the ceremonial law in any respect or any sense anymore.

We don't have to deal with the dietary restrictions of the Old Testament. Jesus himself does away with those. God confirms to Peter in the book of Acts that those laws have indeed been set aside in their entirety.

And the civil laws of the Old Testament, those laws that applied to the government of the nation of Israel, most of those have been set aside in the sense of us trying to apply them directly to modern day civil governments.

In fact, as we saw when we went through the first part of Romans 13, the role of civil governments today is in fact to enforce the second half of the Ten Commandments.

That part of what we sometimes call the moral law of God in distinction from the ceremonial or the civil, that part of the moral law of God that concerns our relationships with others around us or the second table of the Ten Commandments.

[19:07] The role of the government is to ensure that when those laws are broken, people are punished. So that when you murder, the role of the civil government is to punish you. That's their job.

If you steal something from your neighbor, it is the job, it is the duty of the government to come in and set things right and make sure that justice is done. But we should have a higher and better motive for not robbing our neighbors than fear of the government.

And it's that higher and better motive that Paul is enjoining upon us in this particular passage. This is the heart of it. This is the Christian ethic.

The Christian ethic says, I will love my neighbor. I will devote all of my energies toward loving others as I myself would want to be loved and treated.

I will give all that I can to loving them. And when you do that, you find yourself in the position of not violating the commandments of God. You can't murder your neighbor if you're loving them.

[20:12] You can't steal their things if you love them. It's not possible. You cannot do it. Which, by the way, is exactly what Jesus teaches us in the Sermon on the Mount.

As Jesus begins to dig beneath the commandments themselves to the motives that lie behind either our failure to obey the commandments or our obedience to the commandments, He says something very similar to what we're seeing the Apostle Paul say here in Romans 13.

In fact, we can see a couple of these, a few of these commandments that Paul lists here mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus digs beneath and He goes to the issue of motive. Hold your place there in Romans chapter 13.

I want you to turn back to Matthew chapter 5 because I think it's important for you to see this for yourself. Now, you may be familiar with some of these passages and I hope that you are, but even if you're not, I think, I think that you're going to see some things in here that are life-changing.

Jesus says, for instance, the first commandment that Paul mentions is that of adultery. Do not commit adultery. One of the examples of the law that is fulfilled through love. Do not commit adultery.

[21:20] But listen to what Jesus has to say about adultery in Matthew 5, 27. And notice how He immediately gets to the heart. He doesn't waste His time on externals. He immediately goes to the heart. You have heard that it was said, you shall not commit adultery.

But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. He doesn't waste time.

He goes to the heart immediately because it's always a heart issue when it comes to obedience to God's commands. If all that we're trying to do is avoid committing adultery, then we will have missed the point entirely.

In fact, the example that Jesus gives here is as someone who has not technically, outwardly violated the command, you shall not commit adultery. And yet Jesus says, in their heart, they are guilty before God.

Why? Because something has gone wrong in motive. Because something has gone wrong internally. Externally, they haven't done anything.

[22:27] Externally, they haven't pursued anyone. Externally, they haven't engaged in any inappropriate relationships. relationships, but internally, they have. There are few things that are more immediately applicable today than what Jesus has to say about adultery here.

Very few things. Because I would venture to guess that there are probably a lot of people today here who would be able to say, I've never committed adultery. And yet, there would be very few who would be able to say, I've never lusted in my heart.

Because we live in a world that invites lust on a continual basis. We live in a world that would pressure us to normalize lust. To act as if it doesn't matter.

It's not a big deal. You haven't done anything wrong on the outside, so why bother with it? It's okay to visit certain websites or to watch certain movies. It's okay, people say.

As long as you don't do anything, it's alright. And Jesus says, no. Do not lust. The commandment is ultimately not about what you do outwardly with your body.

[23 : 40] What you do outwardly with your body flows from your heart. You know, Jesus tells us elsewhere that it's out of the heart that the mouth speaks, but we could say that it's out of the heart that all of our actions flow.

And we compromise so easily on this. We so easily say, well, I'm not watching this movie because of those explicit scenes.

I'm watching it because I enjoy the cinematography or I enjoy the acting or I enjoy the story and I'm ignoring those things. It's a rare person who can watch them and not be affected by them.

It's a rare, rare person. And all the time we are excusing our failure to truly love our spouse the way that we're supposed to love them internally.

Not merely externally, but internally. The second commandment that Paul mentions, you shall not murder. Jesus also deals with that and again, he goes straight to the heart. Just look up a few verses to verse 21 in Matthew 5.

[24 : 53] You have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not murder and whoever murders will be liable to judgment. 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. Whoever says you fool will be liable to the fire of hell. He goes straight to motive. It's not merely a matter of whether or not you club someone in the head.

Right? It also matters whether or not you want to club them in the head and you think about clubbing them in the head or you wish somebody else would club them in the head. That matters. Having that kind of anger and bitterness well up within your heart is a failure to love other people. We do that all the time. We really do. We do it with people that are complete and total strangers to us because we see them on the news, see them on the television, and we decide we hate that person.

we hate them absolutely. You turn on the news today, any day, and there are individuals on the news that half the country absolutely hates.

[26 : 04] Right? Right? I've heard plenty of people say, I hate the Clintons, I hate everything about them. I hate them. Wouldn't bother me, but building fell on them.

Something worse. Right? Same thing about Donald Trump. I hear people say all the time, I mean, I can't stand him. I can't stand everything that he says and does. I wish that somebody would do something about him.

It's not a matter of who they are. It's not a matter of what they've done. It's a matter of the anger and bitterness that we allow to build up in our hearts because we disagree with someone. because we find their actions or their words offensive. We allow anger to creep in and it becomes bitterness.

And Jesus says, not okay. Just because you don't sneak up on them with a sniper rifle and take them out doesn't mean that you're innocent.

[27 : 11] You long for them to be hurt. long for something to happen to them. It's not just the people that we see on the news. Sometimes it's the people that we interact with every day that you just wish that they would get fired.

You wish that something terrible would happen to them. You wish that they could really come to understand just how mean and nasty they are. Somebody should set them straight.

You want that to happen. You're angry with them. You're bitter at them, whether they're a family member or someone who lives next door or someone at work. You're angry and you're bitter with them and Jesus says, you can't do that.

It's not enough to say, well, I didn't punch them. I didn't kill them. I didn't do anything to them. It's not enough, Jesus says. It's not enough. Why? Because it's the antithesis of loving your neighbor. Why does love for neighbor fulfill the law? Because love destroys the motives that lie behind the actions that the law forbids.

[28 : 15] It destroys them. Love annihilates anger. Love lays to waste the lust of your heart.

That's the work of love in the life of a person who has been fundamentally transformed by the grace of God in Christ. What about the last commandment that Paul mentions?

He mentions four. What about the last one? What about coveting? What shall we say about coveting? I think we can say about coveting that coveting lies so close to the issue of love that it's difficult to think about one without thinking about the other.

Because coveting is fundamentally an attitude of the heart and mind. Of all of the ten commandments, coveting is the only one that takes place entirely on the inside of you. Obviously all of them flow from out of you. All of them come from motives and feelings and thoughts on the inside. But coveting itself is an internal action. It's the only one of the ten commandments that we could say is entirely internal.

[29 : 26] Even our worship of God is something that happens externally. But coveting, coveting itself happens on the inside. And coveting is what produces the other violations of the ten commandments.

You don't steal things unless you first covet them. Most of the anger that we have towards others begins as envy and coveting because we don't think that they deserve what they have.

We think that they ought to be paying a price for something they're not paying for. We don't think they ought to be living in the peace in which they're living. And we begin to covet that and be angry and envious over those things and it produces bitterness and anger which leads to murder.

or we begin to covet as the ten commandments specifically say. Do not covet your neighbor's wife which leads to lust which leads to adultery of the heart if not actual real adultery.

It begins with coveting. And what is the antithesis of coveting your neighbor's things? It's loving your neighbor.

[30 : 36] It's longing not for you to gain and them to lose but it's longing for them to gain that which is best for them. That's what it means to love your neighbor.

And so therefore if you love, if you genuinely, authentically, fully love, you will in fact fulfill the law. That is you will fulfill the second table of the law.

The moral law as it applies to other people will be fulfilled in your life if you can learn how to love them. How does that happen?

How do we become the kind of people for whom that kind of love flows forth so that on a daily basis our concern is not whether or not we're going to steal or lie or covet or murder, but our concern is whether or not we're going to love instead of be angry.

Our concern is whether or not we're going to love rather than covet. Our concern is whether or not we're going to love rather than lust. How do we become that kind of person?

[31 : 45] The answer is at the beginning of this section in Romans. This is all of a part. You can't fully understand what to do with Romans 13 if you don't have Romans chapter 12.

I want to remind you of the opening words of Romans 12. I appeal to you therefore brothers by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual worship.

Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind that by testing you may discern what is the will of God what is good and acceptable and perfect.

A life lived as a living sacrifice to God himself will result in a heart that loves other people. Our focus where we begin is where the Ten Commandments begin.

We begin with God himself and though Paul's concern in Romans 13, 8-10 is not the commandment to love God. You cannot love others unless you first love God because the root of our love for other people is that they are made in the image of God and if we want with all of our being to glorify and honor God we should want to uphold and honor those who reflect his image to the world even though they do it imperfectly even though that image may be marred and fallen and broken in them nevertheless they are the image of God they bear his image and our desire ought to be to glorify God in the way that we treat those made in his image and that means that we love them with all of our heart we do that we pursue that it begins with a life lived in sacrifice to God and a life fundamentally transformed by God himself the key to becoming a loving person one who does not fear violating the external commands because their focus is on internal motives so often and so frequently the key to becoming that kind of person is to first be a person who is fully devoted by

[34 : 07] God so that his spirit dwells within you so that his spirit empowers you and so that his spirit transforms you that's exactly what the apostle Paul tells us in Romans turn back a couple of pages to Romans chapter 8 I want to finish here because I think this takes us to where we need to be Romans chapter 8 beginning in verse 3 for God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin he condemned sin in

the flesh that's justification that's salvation this is what he has himself done now notice verse 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled there it is same language in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh but according to the spirit the spirit of

God at work in the hearts of those who live their lives as living sacrifices to God himself in response to the grace of God in Christ that spirit can so fundamentally love not a list let's pray God