



The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 41



LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR

13:8 Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. ⁹ For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. ¹⁰ Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. NKJV

(Romans 13:8-10)

INTRODUCTION

This section of Romans is a commentary on the practicality of the "justification of life" (Rom 5:18). It reveals how spiritual life behaves itself in this world – when men are in a "house of clay" (Job 4:19), hounded by a personal "adversary" (1 Pet 5:8-9), and assaulted with "all that is in the world" (1 John 2:15-17). These exhortations are infinitely more than theoretical goals for successful living. There is a compulsory tone to them that does not permit them to be ignored.

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

This is an Apostolic exposition of the second commandment: "And the second is

like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt 22:39). It is part of the summation of the Law – a sort of heading under which many of the detailed laws were Divinely grouped. The Ten Commandments dealt with interpersonal relationships.

- ' "Honor thy father and thy mother."
- ' "Thou shalt not kill."
- ' "Thou shalt not commit adultery."
- ' "Thou shalt not steal."
- ' "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."
- ' "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's . . ." (Ex 20:12-17).

The Levitical Law gathered these commandments, together with all of their implications, and declared, "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but **thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself**: I am the LORD" (Lev 19:18). These precise words are found nowhere else in the writings of Moses and the Prophets. Nowhere do any of the prophets refer to this as "the second" commandment. If the Holy Spirit had not "moved" holy men to speak in such a manner, I do not believe humanity would have concluded such a thing.

Jesus and the Apostles, however,

OUTLINE

- < ON THE MATTER OF DEBT (13:8)
- < WHAT NOT TO DO (13:9a)
- < BRIEFLY COMPREHENDED (13:9b)
- < WHAT LOVE DOES (13:10)

frequently refer to this commandment. Jesus grouped it with the commands to do no murder, not commit adultery, not steal, not bear false witness, and honor your father and mother (Matt 19:19). When asked concerning *“the great commandment in the Law,”* He said it was *“the second”* great commandment (Matt 22:39; Mark 12:31). Our text affirms it briefly comprehends all of the commandments regarding human relationships (Rom 13:9). Galatians 5:14 declares *“all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”* James 2:8 refers to it as fulfilling *“the royal law.”* We are not, therefore, speaking of something inconsequential, as though *“second”* suggests a lack of importance.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT HONORED FIRST

Notwithstanding, the Holy Spirit is careful to deal first with our relationship to God. Within the framework of that *“first and great commandment,”* the *“second”* obtains its significance. A brief review of this thrust will serve to set the stage for the exposition of this section.

Let me be clear: I am showing here the superiority of our relationship with, and duty toward, the God of heaven. Until this matter is satisfactorily addressed, no person will approach the second commandment with seriousness and resolution.

- ‘ Jesus is preeminently *“the Son of God with power”* (1:4).
- ‘ The Gospel of Christ is *“the power of God unto salvation”* (1:16).
- ‘ The subject of the revelation contained in the Gospel is *“the righteousness of God”* (1:17).
- ‘ The fall of the Gentile world is directly related to its rejection *of God* (1:19-

- 32).
- ‘ It is *“the goodness of God”* that leads us to repentance (2:4).
- ‘ The whole world was guilty because it did not *“seek after God”* (3:11).
- ‘ The Law produces the realization that the whole world is *“guilty before God”* (3:19).
- ‘ The sin of humanity reveals it comes *“short of the glory of God”* (3:23).
- ‘ Abraham’s justification was based upon him believing *God* (4f:2-5).
- ‘ Being justified by faith, we have *“peace with God”* (5:1).
- ‘ The Holy Spirit sheds *“the love of God”* abroad in our hearts (5:5).
- ‘ We are *“reconciled to God”* through the death of Christ (5:10).
- ‘ We are to reckon ourselves to be *“dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God”* through Jesus Christ our Lord” (6:11).
- ‘ We ourselves are to be *“yielded unto God”* (6:13).
- ‘ In Christ, we have become *“servants unto God”* (6:22).
- ‘ We have been married to Christ in order to *“bring forth fruit unto God”* (7:4).
- ‘ With our minds, we serve the *“law of God”* (7:4).
- ‘ The Holy Spirit makes intercession for us according to *“the will of God”* (8:27).
- ‘ Our bodies are to be *presented “unto*

appears to have been given precedence over *“the first and great commandment.”* However, this is never done in Scripture. Man-to-man responsibilities are never delineated until man-to-God obligations are first declared. What is more, issues related to loving our neighbors as ourselves are always expounded within the light of our relationship to God in Christ Jesus. This is absolutely consistent throughout the Apostles’ doctrine.

Our text is a sterling example of this Apostolic manner; i.e., God first, man second. Not until the matter of living unto God has been established, is our duty toward one another taken up. The reason for this is apparent. Man is made *“in the image of God”* (Gen 9:6), *“in the likeness of God”* (Gen 5:1), and *“after the similitude of God”* (James 3:9).

This circumstance is what mandates that we love our neighbors as ourselves. They are the *“offspring of God”* (Acts 17:29), whom we are to love. This is not a heartless social law, but a reasonable moral and spiritual one. It flows more from a perception of the truth than from the compulsion of mere obligation. It is, in the strictest sense of the word, an expression of a new heart and spirit—the result of the Law of God being written within the heart, and put into the mind.

The fulfilling of *“the second”* commandment appears to have been given precedence over *“the first and great commandment.”* However, this is never done in Scripture. Man-to-man responsibilities are never delineated until man-to-God obligations are first declared.

God” (12:1-2).

It is not until these fundamental responsibilities to God are expounded that we are brought to consider human relationships. Right here I must mention what I believe to be an underlying weakness in modern *Christianity*. The fulfilling of *“the second”* commandment

Relation to God is the root of the matter. That is where everything valid begins. Reconciliation to God precedes reconciliation to man. Love for God antedates love for man. You can never begin with man and end up with God. Loving your neighbor will never bring you to love God. Being mindful of your neighbor does not lead to mindfulness of God.

ON THE MATTER OF DEBT

^{13:8} ***Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.*** This is a text that has, in my judgment, been greatly distorted by those with a propensity toward legalism, or cold and lifeless law. While care must be taken not to become loose in our views of debt, equal care must be taken not to impose human opinion upon this text, or make it say something that conflicts with the general tenor of Scripture. Living by faith is difficult enough. We have no need to be brought under the rules and opinions of mere mortals. The early church took care not to impose upon Gentiles too many rules (Acts 15:29). We do well to be as considerate toward those who are genuinely seeking to live by faith. Spiritual life is not nurtured within the framework of regulations. It derives its strength from faith, not rules.

THE CONTEXT

This verse is a continuation of the thought introduced in verse seven. *“Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.”*^{NIV} None of these are to be left outstanding, as though we were free to choose when such dues were to liquidated.

OWING NO MAN

“Owe no man anything . . .” Other versions read, *“Let no debt remain outstanding,”*^{NIV} *“Be in debt for nothing,”*^{BBE} *“Pay all your debts.”*^{NLT} **The thrust of the passage is not to avoid debt, but to satisfy the debt, paying what is due.** The debts to which verse seven refers cannot be avoided. They were created by God, not man, and they are to be honored with dispatch and without hesitation. Once again, the **only** exception to this rule is when the authorities honored require us to dishonor or disobey God. Such occasions, however, are the exception to the rule. **Sound doctrine is always built around the norm, not the exception.**

Many people who would consider it reprehensible to refuse to pay back monies or goods that were borrowed, think nothing of refusing to pay their taxes, or give honor and respect to those to whom it such due. *“Owing,”* in this

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case, is withholding what is due to the person.

Indebtedness for Service

Owing does not always involve those under authority honoring those having authority over them. Sometimes the table is turned, and the one in authority gives honor to the ones under him. The Law sited a rule involving indebtedness that dealt with employees, or hired servants. *“You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether one of your brethren or one of the aliens who is in your land within your gates. Each day you shall give him his wages, and not let the sun go down on it, for he is poor and has set his heart on it; lest he cry out against you to the LORD, and it be sin to you”* (Deut 24:14). Leviticus 19:13 reiterates this law. The labors of a hired servant incurred a debt, and they were to *“owe not man anything.”*

Note, the hired servant was *“poor and needy.”* That is the circumstance that required this law. This does not mean it was wrong to accrue wages, according to a mutual agreement. An example of such an agreement is found in Laban and Jacob (Gen 30:28-29; 31:8). Another such agreement was found between Pharaoh’s

daughter and Moses’ mother (Ex 2:9). The requirement for daily payment did not hold true in these cases.

An Example from Jeremiah

Another example of not paying debts is found in Jeremiah 22:13. *“Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness and his chambers by injustice, Who uses his neighbor’s service without wages and gives him nothing for his work.”*^{NKJV} (Jer 22:13). Here, the service and labor of one’s neighbor is not to be considered worthless. Unless an offsetting agreement has been made with the neighbor, his labor in the behalf of the individual is to be considered a debt to be paid.

This particular example is considerably prevalent in the Christian community. Countless churches regularly expect men of God to expend labor without proper remuneration. While no covetousness is to be found within the laborer, the people receiving spiritual benefit from the work are to consider the following. *“Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches”*^{NKJV} (Gal 6:6). The idea here is that the teacher has shared what God has given him. Those with whom he has shared those things are to share with him what God has given them. It is a matter of debt, and they are to *“owe no man anything.”*

Again, it is written, *“For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things”*^{NKJV} (Rom 15:27). The benefits the Roman brethren had derived from the saints in Jerusalem rippled into eternity. They had become *“debtors”* to them, and were not to leave the debt unpaid.

This exceedingly practical area is regularly ignored among professing

believers. It has, in my judgment, brought great disgrace upon the name of the Lord. With a few gracious exceptions, this has been the manner among churches of the Restoration Movement, with whom I have been affiliated. This is largely owing to the neglect of sound teaching on the matter.

Debts of Ability

Solomon spoke of the debt of doing good to your neighbor in his time of need. *“Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do so. Do not say to your neighbor, ‘Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it,’ when you have it with you”*^{NKJV} (Prov 3:27-28). Here is a different kind of debt, yet it is very real. When a need is experienced by our neighbor, and we have the power and goods to meet that need, we are debtors to him. That debt is to be paid. We have robbed him if we withhold such things from him.

Withholding Is Robbery

To withhold what is due another is to *“owe,”* in the sense of our text. Such debt is actually a breach of the eighth commandment: *“Thou shalt not steal”* (Ex 20:15). In such a case, the theft is failing to pay what is due, rather than breaking into the neighbor’s house and taking something already in his possession. This is the very thing for which God upbraided Israel. They had robbed Him, the Lord declared. *“Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me”* (Mal 3:8). Israel remonstrated, asking how it was possible that they had robbed God. The Lord’s answer unveils something of the magnitude of our text. *“But ye say, Wherein have we robbed Thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it”* (Mal 3:8-10). It is not wise for believers to ignore this text.

Many a professed believer has

committed this very sin – they have robbed God by withholding what is due to Him. Although some teachers are fond of telling us tithing is not valid under the New Covenant, they only betray their own ignorance of the Divine nature. Tithing, like faith, preceded the Old Covenant. Both Abraham and Jacob paid tithes, or the first tenth of their goods (Gen 14:20; 28:22). Further, neither of them was commanded to do so.

“No Man”

“Owe no man anything” covers every aspect of debt, and every individual to whom such debt is owed. Taxes are debts to be paid. Honor is a debt to be discharged. Fear toward the authorities ordained by God is a debt to be paid. Honor for those in places of authority is a debt to be satisfied. Hired services are debts to be cleared. Assistance given men in times of need are debts to be liquidated. Profiting spiritually from those who have

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communicated the truth of God is a debt to be honored. Opportunities to be helpful to those in need are a debt to be settled.

You see what an exceedingly large matter this is. It is to be taken seriously by every believer.

ON THE MATTER OF FINANCIAL DEBT

It is not unusual for certain teachers to used this passage to condemn all financial indebtedness. I now approach this matter with great care, for the strictest allowance must be made for the conscience of every believer. However, the

conscience of one believer cannot be bound upon another, particularly when it is based upon a view of Scripture, and not the Scripture itself.

It should at once be obvious to you that this passage is not condemning debt itself. Where there is no debt, nothing can be *“due.”* The very idea of not allowing a debt to *“remain outstanding”*^{NIV} suggests that one has been incurred. It goes without saying that we should never incur debts we know we will not be able to pay. Debt should always be taken seriously, for in it we become obligated to the world. Debt can cause our roots to sink too deeply in this present evil world, and should therefore always be approached with great sobriety.

Under the Law

Under the Law, provision was made for lending money to the poor among God’s people. No usury, or interest, was to be charged a fellow Israelite. Yet, the money was to be repaid. *“If you lend money to any of My people who are poor among you, you shall not be like a moneylender to him; you shall not charge him interest”* (Ex 22:25). Of course, if it is morally wrong to incur debt, it would be a sin to create it by lending.

Jesus’ Parables

In one of His parables, Jesus likened the Kingdom of heaven to a king to whom certain servants were indebted. The Lord forgave debts, while one of his forgiven servants demanded that debts owed him be paid by those with no means to pay them (Matt 18:23-35). The point germane to our text is this: if debt itself was sinful, it would not be used in as a key factor in the exposition of the Kingdom of heaven. The parable itself presumes the legitimacy of debt. Else, there would be no point to the parable.

The Widow and Elisha

All debt is not self-incurred. On one occasion, a recently widowed wife of one of the sons of the prophets came to Elisha. Although her departed husband was a prophet and feared the Lord, he had incurred a debt. Her crisis was that the debt was due, yet she had no means by

which to pay it. She reported, *"Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the LORD: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen."* The prophet did not rebuke her for being in debt, nor did he cast aspersions upon her husband for falling into debt. Instead, he was used of God to provide a miraculous means for paying the debt (2 Kgs 4:1-7). Thus, by paying the debt, she *"owed no man anything."*

Nehemiah's Day

In Nehemiah's day, the people *"borrowed money for the king's tribute,"* offering their lands and vineyards as collateral. Nehemiah did not condemn the people for borrowing. Rather, he rebuked the Jewish rulers for exacting usury from their brethren (Neh 5:4-7).

Christ's Teaching

Jesus taught us, *"Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away"* (Matt 5:42). Of course, if it was sinful to create a debt, those who acquiesced to it by allowing someone to borrow from them would be causing their brother to stumble. Jesus did forbid lending as a money-making venture (Lk 6:34-35). He did not, however, condemning lending or asking for something to be advanced. Another of His parables was based upon an individual petitioning his neighbor, *"Friend, lend me three loaves"* (Lk 11:5-9). If indebtedness itself was sinful, it could not be an example of obtaining an answer to prayer.

Debt is not wrong. Refusing to pay debt is what is wrong. Our text assumes the existence of debt, not the sin of it. Further, it is not limited to financial matters, and not one syllable of the text suggests financial priorities.

A Word of Caution

This by no means suggests believers can take a loose view of financial indebtedness. Nor, indeed, does it intimate it is proper to pile up needless debts. Such an approach to life requires a covetous spirit and a sense of being at home in this world. Faith will not allow

either attitude. A spirit that grasps after carnal things stands on the precipice of eternal ruin.

It is ever true, *"the borrower is servant to the lender"* (Prov 22:7). Indebtedness is always to be taken seriously. All debts are to be paid, whether they are debts of money, tribute, customs, fear, or honor. **While earthly associations are inferior, they are not to be regarded as beyond godly obligation.** Those who wear the name of Jesus are to live in view of their relationship to God through Christ. They are not free to grasp the things of this world as though they were

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primary, or incur debts as though life in this world was fundamental. At no point are they at liberty to ignore their debts.

As to making laws concerning the extent to which borrowing and debt is allowed, God has not given us license to legislate to our brethren. I have every confidence that when our text is taken seriously, it will move the trusting soul to carefulness in the matter of making debts. Also, as I have shown, there are numerous debts you owe that were not created by you, but by your Lord. They are to be paid as well as the ones we ourselves incur.

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

"... except to love one another." Other versions read, *"except the continuing debt to love one another;"* ^{NIV} *"but to have love for one another;"* ^{BBE} and *"except the debt of love for others."* ^{NLT}

The meaning of the text is this: **loving one another is a debt that cannot be liquidated.** It cannot be fully

paid or thoroughly satisfied. It is not only a large debt, it is a growing one. It is as though the interest on it keeps on accruing at a large rate. What is more, it is a debt that is not intended to be eliminated.

The Reasoning of Flesh

Flesh will reason there is no need to pay on the debt at all, seeing we cannot pay it off. However, this is erroneous reasoning, for the debt is very real. Hence, payment must be made on it, else we have, in fact, stolen from our brethren, taking from them what rightfully belonged to them. It is as though we only paid off the interest on the debt, never really reducing the principle.

A Focused Debt

Love is what we *"owe"* to our brethren. Notice, the debt of love is to *"one another"*—the people of God, or the *"household of faith."* We have a *"special"* relationship to them that transcends all other human relationships (Gal 6:10). This does not mean we are not responsible to love our enemies, bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us, or pray for those who spitefully use and persecute us (Matt 5:44). However, our love toward the saints is of a different order. It is more profound, more extensive, and associated with greater benefits.

The particular comparison being made is between what we owe to civil authorities, and what we owe to the people of God. Our obligation to the *"higher powers"* involves paying tribute and customs, fear, and honor (13:7). Our relationship to the brethren is on a much higher level. That level does include the matter of honor. However, civil authorities make demands of us, the people of God do not. We do not love the brethren because they have required that we do so, but because we desire to. Our hearts are knit with them, and we have been made one with them. That is not the kind of relationship we sustain to other men, whether they be political leaders, those who maintain law and order, or those by whom we have been employed. It is more personal and more rewarding.

Our Relationship to the Saints

The relationship we sustain with the people of God is a frequent subject in Scripture. The variety of references to this association serve to accentuate the importance of our text.

Brethren. Redemption relates its constituents to one another. Because we have participated in a "common salvation" (Jude 3), and have a "common faith" (Tit 1:4), we are "brethren." This is by Divine design. "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among **many brethren**" (Rom 8:29).

Same body. Because of their connection to the Head, Jesus Christ, the people of God are "one body." They are motivated and governed by the same head, and are designed to work together. "That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of **the same body**, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel" (Eph 3:6).

Same Household. God has a household over which He presides. He sustains and cares for this household, giving them exclusive gifts and privileges. "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of **the household of God**" (Eph 2:19).

Members of one another. By virtue of their common Father and life, believers are actually integrated with one another. "So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one **members one of another**" (Rom 12:5).

Same Father. Those who are in Christ Jesus have been begotten by the same Father. "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even **our Father**, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace" (2 Thess 2:16).

Same Savior. Our deliverance from sin has come from a common Source—one mighty Deliverer. "But is now made manifest by the appearing of **our Savior Jesus Christ**, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim 1:10).

Partakers of the same nature. In salvation, people receive the same nature. They have the same mind set,

sense of values, objectives, and appetites. This is the direct result of participating in the very nature of God Himself. "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be **partakers of the Divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Pet 1:4).
Same Status – Strangers and pilgrims. Believers have the same relationship to the world. Ultimately, because they

through all, and in you all" (Eph 4:3-6).

The Work Is of God

Our participation in this blend of human spirits is owing to the work of God Himself. As it is written, "It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption"^{NIV} (1 Cor 1:30). And again, "For we are **God's workmanship**,

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have received eternal life, they are misfits in this temporary and cursed world. "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as **strangers and pilgrims**, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Pet 2:11).

All of One. The saints have the unique privilege of sharing the Fatherhood of God with the Lord Jesus Himself. "For both He that sanctifieth (Jesus Christ) and they who are sanctified **are all of One** (God the Father): for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb 2:11).

Same Family. While men speak of differing organizations and church affiliation, God speaks of a single family. Here is where all spiritual resources are received—the solitary family among whom God has taken up residence. "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom **the whole family in heaven and earth is named**" (Eph 3:14-15).

One Body, Spirit, Hope, Faith, and Baptism. The oneness of God's people is not a mere formality. It is marked by the same initiation, persuasion, animation, and goal. "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is **one body**, and **one Spirit**, even as ye are called in **one hope** of your calling; **one Lord**, **one faith**, **one baptism**, **one God and Father of all**, who is above all, and

created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph 2:10). The effectual willingness and work that is found in us is actually traced back to God, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil 2:13).

The conditions mentioned above are the circumstances that have created the debt of love we owe one another. Our indebtedness is not owing to what we have done for one another, although that is significant. God Himself has created this debt, just as He did in the matter of civil authority.

If we begin to imagine we no longer owe a debt of love to the people God, let us remember they are His people, and He has charged us with their care and encouragement. **The new birth is accompanied by the payment of the debt incurred by sin. It is also accompanied by the creation of a debt to the people of God that cannot be fully paid by us.** Should the time come when this is clearly seen, denominationalism will collapse immediately. **In fact, sectarian walls can only exist to the degree this indebtedness is not perceived.** Such a condition is totally inexcusable. Not only has God spoken extensively on this subject, He has given us a new heart that IS CAPABLE OF sensing and enjoying

that circumstance.

THE ONE WHO LOVES

“... he who loves another.” While we are a part of a large family, our associations with it are intensely personal. Our text does not read “WE who love,” but “HE who loves.” The word “another” refers to “another” member of the household of faith. This is not a selective word, as though we loved only certain members of the body. Rather it denotes the extension of our hearts on a personal and individual level.

There are ways in which we benefit the people of God without knowing it. Our mutual preferences and interests move us to be profitable to those of like precious faith, often without being aware of it. **However, love for another is not inadvertent. It is focused and intentional.** The love of God flows out from one believer to another as an act of the will. It is with a purposed intention to do the person good, bringing eternal advantages to them. It is done at personal expense, and with an objective in mind.

Often the outpouring is wrapped in temporal concerns and ministries, relieving the afflicted, fatherless, and widows. But it is always what the person wants to do, delights to do, and sees a need to do.

This is a love that is taught by God Himself. It is not the result of natural politeness or culture. It is a special kind of love that cannot be generated from the earth. It is sent to the earth, and wrought by God through personal involvement with Himself. The Thessalonians, for example, were commended for the extensiveness and consistency of their love for God’s people. Yet, it was acknowledged their love was not the product of their own natural discipline. “But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for **you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia.**” That Divine instruction was effective indeed, even rippling out to all the brethren in

Macedonia. Yet, their debt of love had not been paid. The Apostle continued, “But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more” ^{NKJV} (1 Thess 4:9-10). They were making payments on a debt that continued to grow. Only God can teach people to love in this manner, and He is quite willing to do so because of the vicarious atonement made by His only begotten Son.

Abounding more and more. The love of the brethren is an area where ever-increasing expressions are to be found. In fact, God can “make” us to increase in our love for one another. Sensitive and perceptive souls will seek this for one another. As it is written, “And the Lord **make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men**” (1 Thess 3:12). The word “make,” or “cause,” ^{NASB} does not speak of forcible improvement that is against both our wills and natures. Such a work would bring no glory to God or benefit to man.

In failing to love the people of God, we have taken from them what belongs to them, thereby becoming robbers instead of those who bless. It is not possible to overstate the seriousness of such a circumstance.

Rather, it speaks of the Lord pushing our love beyond the boundaries of creation and natural aptitude.

In knowledge and in judgment. This love of the brethren is not rooted in emotion, although it is emotional. Here is a love, taught to us by God, that involves both knowledge and judgment. Again, this is a subject of Apostolic prayer. “And this I pray, that your love may **abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment**” (Phil 1:9). The word “judgment” refers to discernment, not condemnation. The love taught by God

perceives the needs of brethren, and rushes with joy to meet them. Such love makes the individual aware of what to do, and the will heartily acquiesces to meeting the need.

The evidence of passing from death to life. The preference for the people of God, coupled with the desire to do them good, is evidence that we have moved from death in sin to life in Christ. “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (1 John 3:14). It should not be necessary to comment on what is evidenced by the absence of such love. Where the love of the brethren is not possessed, death reigns, and people have not been taught by God – profession notwithstanding.

From another perspective, if we do not love one another, we are not making payments on the debt we owe. In such a case, the debt is growing larger while we are getting smaller and less capable. In failing to love the people of God, we have taken from them what belongs to them, thereby becoming robbers instead of those who bless. It is not possible to overstate the seriousness of such a circumstance.

FULFILLING THE LAW

“... he who loves another has fulfilled the law.” A number of versions read “neighbor” in the place of “another” (RSV, NASB, NAU, DOUAY, BBE). The NIV reads “fellow man.” Etymologically, the emphasis of the word “another” is “of another kind or order.” Doctrinally, its meaning is that our love is for those outside of ourselves. That is, we do not love them out of selfish interests, because they are precisely like us, or because we are seeking to gain advantages from them. This kind of love flows from the well of Divinity, seeking the welfare of “another.”

Whereas the Law demanded that love be executed out of mere human energy, for it was a system of merit, this love is of another order. It accomplishes what the Law itself could not achieve. The Law set forth a righteous standard. It was “spiritual,” “holy,” “just,” and “good”

(Rom 7:12,14). However, that very circumstance put its fulfillment beyond the reach of “the natural man.” Instead of the Law becoming a basis for justification, it was the reason for condemnation, for “the strength of sin is the law” (1 Cor 15:56).

The Law was right in demanding such love, but man was too weak to fulfill it. Now, apart from the Law, and by the grace of God, “brotherly love” fulfills the Law, meeting its demands precisely and consistently. This is involved in the wonderful proclamation, “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: **that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit**” Rom 8:3-4).

Apart from its ministry of information – for “by the Law is the knowledge of sin” – the Law, as an enforced code, was necessary because of man’s faulty heart. Apart from Christ, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jer 17:9). However, when the heart is made new, and the law of God is inscribed upon it, the Law is no longer required as an enforcer.

Let it be clear, “the righteousness of the Law” is not the same as “the righteousness of God.” It is more of a goal than a reality, for no one was ever made righteous by keeping the Law. In fact, Christ’s vicarious death was necessary because of man’s inability to measure up to the standard of righteousness set forth

in the Law. As it is written, “I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” (Gal 2:21).

Because of this circumstance, Christ has terminated the Law as a means to becoming righteous. He has inducted a righteousness that is realized by faith, not by doing. Thus it is written, “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes

5:17). It is the result of a more precise image of God (Col 3:10), not a human effort to become like God.

The fulfillment of the Law that is here declared is not inferior. It is not a sort of token fulfillment that lacks spiritual substance. It does not brush the Law aside as though it was not good and holy. This is not a meager fulfillment of a robust and spiritual Law. It is not a kind of reduced righteousness!

Because of this circumstance, Christ has terminated the Law as a means to becoming righteous. He has inducted a righteousness that is realized by faith, not by doing.

about the righteousness which is of the law, ‘The man who does those things shall live by them’” (Rom 10:4-5).

HAS Fulfilled

Notice, the one who “loves another” **HAS**, by that very posture, already fulfilled the Law. While this love is carried out “in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18), it is essentially found in the heart. This is a love that is produced by one’s love for God, which is the fountain from which all other valid human love springs. That is precisely why the “second commandment” is “like unto” the “first” (Matt 22:39). Through the Spirit, Peter admonished us to “love one another **with a pure heart fervently**” (1 Pet 1:22). This love is an expression of the “new creation” (2 Cor

This love not only fulfills the Law, it exceeds the demands of the Law.

All that the Law demands regarding our neighbors is fulfilled when we love them as ourselves. Loving another is not a single deed, nor is it fulfilled at a point in time. By its very nature, it is ongoing – a debt that can never be liquidated. What the Law demanded from without, love compels from within. What the Law required, with threats of death, love delights to do without the need of an enforced code. Love is the fulfilling of the Law, for it desires nothing contrary to the Law! It fervently desires to fulfill the Law. Surely you must see this to be a most marvelous and beneficial circumstance.

WHAT NOT TO DO

“^{9a} **For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet . . .**” When speaking of our neighbor, the Law majored on what NOT to do, rather than things that were to be done: “Thou shalt **not** . . . Thou shalt **not** . . . Thou shalt **not** . . . Thou shalt **not** . . . Thou shalt **not** . . . Thou shalt **not** . . .”

THE RELEVANCY OF THE LAW

As regards human conduct, the Law was put into place to stop the outbreak of the corruption of the heart. **It was the appointed means of restraining the fallen nature.** The days of Noah confirm to us what occurs among sinners when there is no Divine law. Upon beholding the entirety of the human race, young and old, the Lord said, “that the wickedness of

man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” Gen 6:5). The utter devastation of the flood, leaving only eight souls upon the face of the earth, did not change this wicked propensity. This is precisely why the Lord declared He would never again destroy every living thing as He did in the Noachic flood. Following the flood, with a fresh start for humanity, the

Lord said in His heart, *“I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake; for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done”* (Gen 8:21).

In His mercy, however, God did not allow depraved human nature to remain unchecked. **The Law was given to address man’s sinful condition, not to release an imagined innate goodness.**

- ‘ The Law was given *“that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God”* (Rom 3:19).
- ‘ The Law was not intended to produce a knowledge of righteousness, *“for by the law is the knowledge of sin”* (Rom 3:20).
- ‘ The Law, because of its abrasiveness against fallen humanity, became *“the strength of sin”* (1 Cor 15:56).
- ‘ When the commandment of the Law came, *“sin revived,”* producing a wellspring of iniquitous thoughts and deeds (Rom 7:9).
- ‘ Sinful passions, or the *“motions of sin,”* were aroused by the Law (Rom 7:5).
- ‘ The Law was *“added”* to the Abrahamic promise *“because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made”* (Gal 3:19).
- ‘ The Law was designed to be a schoolmaster, or tutor, to *“bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith”* (Gal 3:24).
- ‘ Although the Law itself was spiritual and holy, it was given *“that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful”* (Rom 7:13).
- ‘ The *“Law”* is not, nor ever has been, *“made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine”* (1 Tim 1:9-10).

The Law shined a Divine spotlight on the human condition, but provided no remedy for what was uncovered. It defined sin, but provided no power to overcome it. Although it was spiritual, the Law could not produce spirituality. Even though it was holy, it could not produce holiness. Although it was good, it could not produce goodness. It commanded love, but provided no strength or ability to be loving. It judged, but did not help. It condemned, but did not save.

At least two indispensable needs were addressed by the Law.

Thus the one who loves does not destroy the Law, but removes the need for it by fulfilling the Law. The Law still exists, but in quite another capacity. Rather than condemning the individual, it now confirms the presence of the Divine nature.

- ‘ First, it uncovered the condition caused by sin, thereby preparing men for a Savior.
- ‘ Second, under the threat of death (Ezek 18:4,20; Gal 3:10), it restrained the uncontrollable outbreak of sin – as existed in the days of Noah.

It is with particular regard to the latter, namely the inhibiting of prolific sin, that our text is declared. When love exudes from the new heart, there is no further need for Law to restrain the outbreak of sin. Thus the one who loves does not destroy the Law, but removes the need for it by fulfilling the Law. The Law still exists, but in quite another capacity. Rather than condemning the individual, it now confirms the presence of the Divine nature. It has been *“fulfilled,”* and is thus satisfied, no longer stopping the mouth of the individual, or condemning him.

Unless there is some understanding of these things, the text before us will make no sense. It will be seen as a sort of Divine compromise that brings dishonor to God, and robs the believer of Divine power.

A Critical Distinction

Our text provides a critical distinction that must be seen. The Law that is fulfilled is not a new law, but the one which *“was given by Moses”* (John 1:17). The fact that it is *“fulfilled”* by the one who *“loves another”* confirms that Law has not been eradicated, or replaced by another moral code. You cannot fulfill something that was previously abrogated.

The Law has been ended as a means to righteousness (Rom 10:4), but it still stands in tact.

COMMITTING ADULTERY

“You shall not commit adultery.” While adultery is often committed in the name of *“love,”* our text shows it is the result of NOT loving our neighbor. Adultery is one of the more reprehensible sins in Scripture, and is never taken lightly or excused – in either the Old or New covenants. *“Adultery”* includes infidelity, as well as all manner of sexual corruption. It is all intimacy of every sort outside of the sacred bond of marriage – unity between one man and one woman.

Always Deliberate

Adultery is never accidental, inadvertent, or without intention. It is always deliberate, thought out, and intensely selfish. It involves the prostitution of the body, which has been purchased by God. Thus it is written of fornication, which includes adultery, *“Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body”* (1 Cor 6:18).

A person who commits adultery – particularly one who wears the name of Jesus – must do the following.

- ‘ The Holy Spirit must be quenched.
- ‘ The Holy Spirit must be grieved.
- ‘ The Word of God must be ignored, and even stifled.

' The conscience must be ignored and suppressed.
 ' The coming of the Lord must be forgotten.
 ' The day of judgment must be put out of the mind.
 ' The world must be viewed as primary.
 ' The conviction of the Holy Spirit must be ignored.
 ' Personal desires must be exalted above the will of the Lord.
 ' The individual must refuse to present their bodies as a living sacrifice to God.
 ' The one who is the object of lust must be seen after the flesh.
 ' The way of escape, which accompanies all temptation, must be refused.
 ' If married, one's spouse must be despised.
 ' The presence of holy angels must be forgotten.
 ' One must cease to fear God, who has spoken clearly on this matter.
 ' One must cease to love God, who has supplied what is required to avoid such sin.
 ' It is necessary to frustrate the grace of God.

' The love of the truth must be suppressed.
 ' Rather than subordinating the body, it must be allowed to rule.

In a revelation of the scope of this commandment Jesus said, *"But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart"*(Matt 5:28). Again, the voluntary nature of this sin is underscored. The individual described in this text looked in order to lust. But whether it is looking to lust, or engaging in the sinful deed itself, the Law powerfully declares, *"Thou shalt not commit adultery!"*

Those who commit this sin need not give us an explanation for what they have done. We already know why they sinned. They had no regard for the commandment of God. They did not hide His Word in their heart. Instead, they nurtured the nature the Spirit commanded they crucify and mortify (Rom 6:6; Gal 5:24; Col 3:5).

I have taken the time to mention these things because of the remarkable rise of

God and their neighbor as well.

I understand there is forgiveness and plenteous redemption with the Lord, but it is that He *"might be feared"* (Psa 130:4,7). When faith takes hold of the forgiveness and redemption of God, it will never condone involvement in sin, or the transgression of the Law.

The principles I have cited apply to the remainder of these sins. There is no need to repeat them.

NOT KILLING

"You shall not murder." The second recorded sin is that of murder. Cain killed his own brother Abel. Before he committed this dastardly deed, the Lord reasoned with him about doing good. 'So the LORD said to Cain, *"Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."*^{NKJV} But Cain's heart was hard, and he gave no heed to the words of a gracious God. Immediately after that, while talking with his brother in the field, *"Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him"* (Gen 4:6-8). Thus the first murder was committed.

What Is Murder

Murder is taking the life of one who is made in the image of God – a fellow man. Capital punishment is not murder as the opponents of it claim, for it has been ordained by God, and civil authority has been put into place to carry it out (Gen 9:6; Rom 13:4). Killing an animal is not murder, as the animal-rights people affirm.

Murder, or killing, is taking the life of another out of anger, like Cain did Abel (Gen 4:8). It taking the life of another for personal advantage, like Pharaoh did the newborn male children of Israel (Ex 1:16,22), and Herod the males under two years of age around Bethlehem (Matt 2:16). It is plotting the death of another, like David did Uriah (2 Sam 11:14-17), or Barabbas in an insurrection against the government (Mark 15:7; Acts 3:14).

Abortion is murder. Suicide is self murder. The least conspicuous murder is

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' The Gospel of Christ must be violently thrust from the mind.
 ' Eternity must be forgotten.
 ' The Law of God must be ignored.
 ' All of the warnings of Scripture concerning this sin must be rejected.
 ' All of the Scriptural examples of those committing this sin must be pushed out of the mind.
 ' One must make a place in their heart for Satan to work.
 ' Satan is not resisted.
 ' One must yield to Satan.
 ' It is necessary to step out of the light and begin walking in darkness.

adultery within the professed church. It is found among the leaders as well as those who are being led. It is found among the old as well as the young. However, no matter how prevalent it may be, and whatever reasons may be cited for its existence, it is forbidden by God. ***"Thou shalt not commit adultery!"*** There are no "ifs" or exceptions. The Law forbids adultery, and the Law is spiritual, holy, just, and good. That means adultery is unspiritual, unholy, unjust, and evil. Those who commit it have broken the commandment, and done so willingly. They have become unspiritual, unholy, unjust, and evil. They have sinned against

You cannot “briefly comprehend” error. All error deviates from the truth, and thus cannot be pulled together. Truth, on the other hand, can be stated in a concise manner without losing any of its power. When a lie is stated concisely, if that is possible, it loses its power.

hatred for a person within the heart. As it is written, *“Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him”* (1 John 3:15). The most atrocious of all murders was the killing of the Son of God. As it is written, *“Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers”* (Acts 7:52). But whether in the heart, or in actuality, the Law cries out, *“Thou shalt not murder!”*

A murderer has assumed the prerogatives of God, who alone is *“able to save and to destroy”* (James 4:12). Murder is an affront to God, in whose image man is created.

NOT STEALING

“You shall not steal.” Stealing is taking what belongs to another, assuming the ownership of something that has not been given to us, or for which we have not paid the price. Stealing can also be withholding what rightfully belongs to another—like not paying tithes and offerings to God (Mal 3:8). Kidnaping is stealing – man stealing (Ex 21:16; 1 Tim 1:10). Stealing disregards the things God has given to others, and presumes to take them for oneself.

NOT BEARING FALSE WITNESS

“You shall not bear false witness.” Modern versions omit this prohibition (NASB, NIV, NRSV). Jesus, however, cited a nearly identical summary of the

commandments regarding men in Matthew 19:19, including the prohibition against *“false witness.”* We are in strict accord with the Law and its Scriptural representations by including false witness here. False witness is a lie offered as evidence – as the false witnesses at the trials of Jesus (Matt 26:60), and Stephen (Acts 6:13).

From another view, *“false witness”* is a misrepresentation of the facts—a total fabrication. Solemnly we are told, *“lie not one to another”* (Col 3:9). We are told that God *“cannot lie”* (Tit 1:2), and therefore men should not lie. Israel *“lied”* to God *“with their tongues”* (Psa 78:36). Ananias and Sapphira *“lied to the Holy Spirit”* when they misrepresented the amount of money they gave to the work of the Lord (Acts 5:4). Men can lie by exaggeration, and by deliberate understatement. They can preach lies, write lies, and even sing lies. Those with a love of the truth really have no desire to lie. All such speaking is to be thrust from us. As it is written, *“Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another”* (Eph 4:25). Let it ever be remembered that whoever *“makes a lie”* will not be allowed to dwell forever with the Lord (Rev 21:27; 22:15). Instead, *“all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death”* (Rev 21:8). We do well, therefore, to take the Divine prohibition against false witness and lying seriously.

NOT COVETING

“You shall not covet.” Coveting precedes stealing. It is desiring what has been allotted by God to another. In this text it is to set your heart upon something that rightfully belongs to another. From another view, it is longing for something God does not intend for us to have – like Israel longing after the foods of Egypt when God was giving them angel’s bread (Num 11:15). Another example is Achan, who *“coveted”* and *“took”* what God had cursed (Josh 7:21).

A man can covet another man’s wife, like David did Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:3). He can covet another man’s possession, like Ahab when he coveted Naboth’s vineyard (1 Kgs 21:1-5). A person can covet after money, causing him to err from the faith and be pierced through with many sorrows (1 Tim 6:10). A covetous individual has no regard for the person or possessions of his neighbor, and thus feels at liberty to violate the holy commandment of God (Ex 20:17).

THESE ARE THE DEMANDS OF THE LAW

“The Law” is God’s Law, and hence represents God’s demands. They are not suggestions, or mere targets toward which men are to casually aim their lives. The transgression of the Law, in all forms, caused the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those violations were what was *“laid”* upon Christ, making Him to *“become sin for us,”* and mandating that God make Him *“a curse”* (2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13).

It is not the purpose of this text to lay out the scope of sin. Rather, it deals with sin as it regards our neighbor: person-to-person relationships. **The Law actually protected men against those with calloused and unbelieving hearts, by enforcing civility.** The new creation enforces civility in a better way. It is implemented by means of a new heart and spirit, not by fleshly discipline or threats. It is effective by grace through faith.

BRIEFLY COMPREHENDED

“^{9b} . . . and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely,

Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Here is an example of instruction calculated to impact the life of

the hearer or reader. Sound instruction is more than passing along information, or providing a thorough and orderly account

of some facet of the truth. Much of the instruction of our day is too academic. It does not seem to be aiming at anything, and leaves the hearers in a state of spiritual confusion.

In our text, the aim is to show that love meets the demands of the Law, fulfilling its requirements. **Those who are changed within do not need to be regulated from without.** In this sense, salvation is not merely a “*way of life*,” as some suggest. Rather, it is a Divine accomplishment in which the individual is conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, God’s Son. God is not honored by people who must be forced to live godly, if such a thing is even possible. Those sophists who promote accountability to one another in order to the maintenance of moral purity do well to rethink their distorted theology. If “*love is the fulfilling of the Law*,” then lawlessness reveals lovelessness. You cannot legislate love. That is something that must be taught by God and advanced by faith.

OTHER COMMANDMENTS

“ . . . if there be any other commandment.” Other versions read, “and any other commandment,”^{NASB} “and whatever other commandment there may be,”^{NIV} and “and all the other commandments that there are.”^{NJB}

Here we see there is a commonality in all of the commandments, so that one cannot be pitted against another. **It is as though they were all one gender, even though they may have differing personalities.** Here the Spirit views all of the commandments from the standpoint of the common thread that is woven through each one of them – LOVE.

BRIEFLY COMPREHENDED

“ . . . it is briefly comprehended.” Other versions read, “are all summed up,”^{NKJ} “are summed up in this sentence.”^{NIV}

Only statements that are interrelated can be “summed up.” In this case, the summation is a single statement from which all of the others are derived. To put it another way, if you did all of things

commanded, the Divine commentary would be the single phrase into which they have been summed.

Divine summations occupy an important place in “*sound doctrine*.” **I have found that one of the marks of false doctrine is the requirement for extensive explanation.** You cannot “*briefly comprehend*” error. All error deviates from the truth, and thus cannot be pulled together. Truth, on the other hand, can be stated in a concise manner without losing any of its power. When a lie is stated concisely, if that is possible, it

Much of the instruction of our day is too academic. It does not seem to be aiming at anything, and leaves the hearers in a state of spiritual confusion.

loses its power. **Truth lends itself to conciseness and summation, falsehood does not.**

LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR AS OURSELVES

“ . . . and all the other commandments that there are, are summed up in this single phrase: **You must love your neighbor as yourself.**”^{NJB} There is a marvelous principle to be seen here. The commandment to love our neighbor as our self is completely contrary to the flesh. It demands the same kind of concern for our neighbor that we have for ourselves. We seek to meet his needs with the same enthusiasm as we address our own. This is, in fact, beyond our ability. Yet, if we will believe the Word of the Lord, and seek with our whole hearts to do it, our great God will enable us to do precisely what He has commanded.

In the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus taught us that our neighbor was the person who stands in need of our assistance. In answer to the question, “*Who is my neighbor?*”, Jesus delivered this parable. At the conclusion He asked the interrogating lawyer, “*Which now of*

these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves?” When the lawyer wisely answered, “*He that showed mercy on him,*” Jesus replied, “*Go, and do thou likewise*” (Lk 10:29-37).

Loving our neighbor as our self, therefore, has more to do with meeting his need than with a mere emotional feeling. From one point of view, “*your neighbor*” is all men, with a particular focus upon those who stand in need of consideration and mercy. From another point of view, it is everyone within the sphere of our influence. For example, the good Samaritan was not in his native area. He was journeying when he came upon the wounded man. Yet, he did for that man what he would do for himself. He “*went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him*” (Lk 10:34). He also made provision for his care until his recovery was realized (verse 35). The sphere of his influence had been extended.

Within the Body of Christ

This commandment is brought to its highest level within the body of Christ. There, our neighbor is all of the saints, particularly those with whom we are journeying to glory. Of such it is written, “*Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification*” (Rom 15:2).

Again, an application of this commandment is made in the Spirit’s word concerning those who are not yet mature in Christ – those who can be harmed by thoughtless living. “*For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; **Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself***” (Gal 5:14).

James also deals with this commandment, applying it to having respect of persons, and the consequent neglect of the needy. “*But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy*

name by the which ye are called? If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, **Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself**, ye do well: but if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are

convinced of the law as transgressors" (James 2:6-9).

The point of our text is that all of the details of Law concerning not harming or

disadvantaging others are only delineations of having love for another. They are a kind of breakdown of how love reacts to the need of our neighbor. It is both consistent and effective.

WHAT LOVES DOES

"¹⁰ Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." The strength of this text is seen in the manner in which it is stated. Here is a statement – an unwavering utterance – based upon the nature of love. Two affirmations are made. Both of them are strong, and neither of them can be negated. We are told what love does NOT do, and what it DOES do.

THE STRENGTH OF LOVE

In the world, love is not considered strong. It is one of those "weak things" through which God chooses to "confound things which are mighty" (1 Cor 1:27). Solomon once wrote, "love is strong as death" (Song of Sol 8:6). While he was writing of romantic love, the principle he stated also applies to spiritual love. The phrase "strong as death" conveys the idea that nothing but death itself can interrupt love. Just as death in the flesh finally triumphs over life in the body, so love triumphs over all of the challenges of life. Thus "many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it" (Song of Sol 8:7).

However, allow me to state the strength of love in the superior words of Apostolic doctrine. These come more to grips with the intention of our text. "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth" (1 Cor 13:4-8). Where is a human virtue with such strength and stability? Can such things be

accomplished by will power? Is the free will of man sufficient for such an assignment? Can human discipline or regimentation produce such consistent and powerful results? There is no need to answer these questions. The answer is obvious. Love is superior!

This is the love that, "with faith" comes "from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 6:23). It is the love that is part of the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22)P. It is personally "taught by God" (1 Thess 4:9). He alone can "make" us "increase and abound in love one toward

We see from this that the first and greatest commandment, together with the second, which is like unto it, cannot be separated. It is not possible to keep one and violate the other.

another" (1 Thess 3:12). This is the love of which our text speaks.

WORKING NO ILL TO ONE'S NEIGHBOR

"Love worketh no ill to his neighbor." Other versions read, "Love does **no harm** to a neighbor,"^{NKJV} "Love does **no wrong** to a neighbor,"^{NASB} "Love does **no evil** to the neighbor,"^{NAB} "Love **can cause no harm** to your neighbor."^{NJB}

Just as God "cannot lie" (Tit 1:2), and a "good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit" (Matt 7:18), so love "cannot" harm, do wrong to, or commit evil against one's neighbor! Just as a "house divided against itself cannot stand" (Mark 3:25), and

Satan "cannot rise up against himself" (Mark 3:26), so love **cannot** cause harm to one's neighbor. Just as we "cannot serve God and mammon" (Lk 16:13), and a man "cannot enter the kingdom of God" without being born of the "water and of the Spirit" (John 3:5), so love **cannot** sin against one's neighbor.

Working ill toward, or harming another person is not something love should not do, it is something love **cannot** do. It is impossible for love to yield harm, hurt, ill-will, or disadvantage. It simply **cannot** be done. Wherever, therefore, inconsideration, neglect, and harm are done, love is not present. It is not in the heart of the evil doer.

The Implications of this Truth

The implications of this are alarming. John states it this way. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also" (1 John 4:20-21).

We see from this that the first and greatest commandment, together with the second, which is like unto it, cannot be separated. It is not possible to keep one and violate the other. The knowledge and embrace of this reality will assist us in evaluating our own heart in these matters. If we are deficient in one of these areas, we are deficient in the other as well.

THE IMPOTENCY OF THE LAW

The fulfillment of the Law by love reveals the impotency of the Law itself. Love comes to us outside of the

boundaries of Law. It is granted to us through the grace of God, not developed in the energy of the flesh. The Law simply cannot impart life, which is required to have love. Thus it is written, *“for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law”* (Gal 3:21). It is not possible for spiritual life to result from Law – any law. For this reason, those with a propensity to Law are consistently lacking in the matter of love.

FULFILLING THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE LAW

The righteousness of the Law must be

satisfied! Wherever this does not take place, the Law rises to stop the mouth of the pretender.

The righteousness that is imputed to us through faith is very real. One must not begin to imagine that because it is imputed it does not penetrate into the various expressions of the individual. That imputation is preceded by the very real remission of sin. God is fully satisfied with the atoning death of Christ, and therefore sends the Holy Spirit into the hearts of His sons and daughters. He empowers them to do what the Law demands, and

thus the Law is satisfied.

When the Law is written upon our hearts and put into our minds, we are brought into accord with that Law. The love that it demands finds a place in our hearts and minds. That means we are in accord with the Law, love it, and serve it with our minds (Rom 7:25). Those so characterized will do no harm to their neighbor. *“Therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”* It is a fulfilling of the Law that is pleasing to God. It also genders confidence in the person motivated by such love, and benefit to those around him.

CONCLUSION

The Fulfilling of the righteousness of the Law is not the pinnacle of spiritual life, although it is imperative. **There are higher expressions of spiritual life than obeying commandments.** This does not diminish the necessity of obeying the commandments, for *“Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God”* (1 Cor 7:19).

The Words of Jesus

Jesus once said, *“And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come*

in from the field, ‘Come at once and sit down to eat’? But will he not rather say to him, ‘Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink’? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do’” (Luke 17:7-10).

If our service to the Lord ends with simply doing what we are told to do, we

remain *“unprofitable servants.”* That is what the Lord affirmed! This means it is not enough to live by a code of Law. That may appear wise to men, but it is only evidence of a fundamental ignorance of, and enmity toward, the Living God.

The blessing of genuine spiritual love is that it moves you to fulfill the righteousness of the Law without having to continually be reminded to do so. That condition, dear child of God, brings honor to the Lord. It confirms before men and angels that God has provided a just and effective salvation for a hopeless race!

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 8/24/2001. Continuing in our overview of the book of Romans, we will be covering verses 11-14 of the thirteenth chapter. The theme will be, “PUTTING ON CHRIST.” There is an urgency involved in spiritual life. The night of moral darkness is drawing to a close, and the eternal day is getting ready to dawn. In view of these sobering realities, certain initiatives on our part are required. Those initiatives are briefly comprehended in the expression, “put on Christ.” Our text will expound these things. Our meeting will convene at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

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