

# Fulfilling Love

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Romans 13:8-10

The call in verse 7 to render to all around what is their due, leads Paul to the great topic of fulfilling love in the next three verses.

If we owe the civil authorities in such a limited way our honor and respect and obedience, what is the greater Christian principle behind all of our relationships?

In love, Paul sees the great answer to fulfilling all of our obligations which God's character expects of us.

Love one another! Love is the badge of the Christian. It is the Master's new commandment. It is to be the leading affection of the heart and the life says Matthew Henry. As important as service is, what is service without love? One has said: "You can give without loving but cannot love without giving."

(repeat)

Paul goes on to show the urgency of the matter.

In verse 11 and following, we are in danger of being swallowed up by darkness, by sleepiness, by the night. We should be filled with the light as armor for the day is at hand.

So fulfilling love and living fully in light is through our Savior Immanuel, who is God with us and in us, and is he not to be growing more and more in us?

Our text demands answers of us. How are we to act toward our neighbor? How are we to treat them? What is this love about? How does this relate to God's law – and in particular, what Jesus called the second and great commandment?

This is part of your God-glorifying, living sacrifice of your body, mind and spirit, from Romans 12. Paul said there to love the members of the body, and then love our enemies.

After speaking about government, we now move more widely to our neighbor.

[Paul] has just said that we should pay what we owe to officials. Now he moves the same obligation into private life. But he goes beyond the payment of debts in the ordinary sense to that of a debt which can never be paid in full – the debt of love. We may pay our taxes and quit. We may give respect and honor where they are owed and we are done. Be we never say, ‘I have done all the loving I need to do.’ Leon Morris

‘Love fulfills law’s claim; but nothing fulfills the claims of love.’ That is a never-ending debt, isn’t it?

Let us look **first** to having the proper footing beneath us to love each other.

The frequent command of love arises first and foremost from the love of God. How dare we ever speak of human love, of creaturely love without first, without beginning with the giant love that stands above?

God’s love must precede our love. Love to each other is not a ladder to climb to God’s love. No, we begin with God, in Him, who is love, and that is our setting.

Romans 5 says of the saved that the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts through Christ.

A striking illustration is drawn from the Roman Colosseum where Caesar would please his guests by having great heaps of sweet-smelling spices poured out from the canopies on the unsuspecting and happy audience.

Our God perfumes us every day with His Son, His attributes, His Name, His love and grace.

From this we turn and love our neighbor – even our enemy. Without God’s love in the Gospel, human love becomes self-centered and selfish.

So that is first; then what comes second if not your love to Christ? This too precedes love to neighbor. He said the one who loves father, mother, son or daughter more than Me is not worthy.

Jesus will not let you love others without loving Him. Has he not said that inasmuch as you love and serve the least, you have done it unto Him?

So here are two loves constraining our love; Christ's love to us, and supreme love to Christ.

And how worthy Jesus is of all your love, all your heart! How deserving!

Now one more thing prior to your loving, and that is your faith.

“Whatsoever is not of faith is what?” Sin!

Faith precedes love. Faith produces love. Faith works through love, or energizes love. Love begins in you not by looking within but by looking without; to God who is love, your Savior who is gracious, the Word of God dwelling in you richly by the Spirit – and that comes by a warm welcome of faith.

These three things form the only way, the Trinitarian way, we might say, that love fulfills the law and overcomes the world. It is this Christian love that stands out and overcomes.

Christian love increases with the increase of God, and must find a vent, an outlet. How different to the world's love!

Christian love says serve and help others. Worldly love says we must be free, unfettered, to take rather than give.

Christian love engages and unites with our neighbor, serving and sacrificing. Worldly love is too often spiteful to one's neighbor, making them into enemies, and showing the true colors of a hard and fallen heart.

The famous existentialist, John Paul Sartre, said – “Hell is other people.”

So come to our second matter: Love and Law.

Paul repeats the command to love our neighbor, and quotes the Law, Leviticus 19:18, in 13:9. Love does no wrong to a neighbor is what the law says. But love goes further, to does good to our neighbor.

And who is our neighbor? Jesus taught the parable of the good Samaritan! It means we do all we can, for all that we can, with all that we have.

See how we are to feel obliged, feel our debt, by your Lord's authority and command! "If you love Me, keep my commandments." What commandments? The commandments He kept, of course!

Did Jesus replace law with love? Not at all! He strengthened the law! He made a difference between them when he said: "If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love."

The law is the transcript of God's own character! Can we ever possibly erase conformity to God from our sanctification? Or why would we?

The law is rewritten on your hearts, in your new nature. And what law is that, if not the Ten Commandments?

But we have the problem of loving others so hard, that we run into the easier arms of external, shallow commands. 'Well I haven't killed anybody and I am not an adulterer, and I don't steal or lie... much.'

It was Karl Marx who said he preferred Judaism to Christianity; Judaism just commands the outward life, but Christianity commands both heart and life! And what heartless, mindless robots does Marxism produce!

Paul says here that love is the summary of the second table of the law, and gives a sampling. The 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> commandments are left out for some reason.

The word "sum" is a compound word meaning "to head up, to order things under a heading."

Our books have this concept in what we call a table of contents, heads on what the writer is to talk about.

But does the table of contents replace the body of the book?

So the word “fulfill” does not cancel the full contents of God’s law.

Love answers the commands of God’s law to our neighbor. Love does not displace or replace it. Love and law are distinct. Love is not law and law is not love.

They are as well inseparable. You are commanded to love and you are to love His commands! Think of Psalm 119!

Law and love are co-ordinated to one another. Law is the expression of godly love; love is the obedient fulfillment of law. They are like hand in glove. They do not originate one another. Love cannot generate its own law; law cannot produce of itself love. Both come from – who? God. Right?

The two are incomplete without each other. The one should drive us to the other. They need each other.

What can law do apart from love? Command you, demand you, and damn you if you fail – and you will fail! So the law convicts and even incites sin in the unredeemed and loveless heart! The law cannot forgive you, release you from your debt to obey, or make you righteous. One infraction breaks the whole law!

And what can love do without law? She only lives where she is commanded! Love desires to submit, to serve, to obey – but How? What? Who? Only when love touches our Father’s will can we say, ‘This is obedience! This is satisfying!’

There is a circular quality then between love and law. Take any part away, and the circle is broken and its fullness runs out on the floor.

“Love fills to the brim the cup which the law puts in our hands. Love is the first drop; it is the last drop; and it is all the drops in between. When love is all

pervasive and inclusive, then the fulfillment of the law is completed.” John Murray

Love is the dynamic of law-obedience; love embraces the Lord and follows in his steps.

This by the way is how walking according to example comes in, doesn't it? The example of Jesus does not replace the commandments but fleshes them out – pun intended!

We close with four questions:

**What will you do without love?** Calvin said, where there is no love, the Spirit of God does not rule there. ‘Whatever is devoid of love is of no account in the sight of God’. Think of the love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13.

What a difference love makes! With it, we are unconquerable like a ship under full sail! Without it, how easily sunk! To have left your first love – oh what a dangerous boat that is!

**Second, what will you do without law?** You are remade in God's image, Christian! You are to be imitators of God! The Law is the transcript of his character – his holiness, his goodness, his righteousness.

The law is not just negative – as important as negatives are. You are called to put on the new person as well as to put off the old.

**Then, what will you do without both love and law?**

This is the antidote to all self-centeredness; the golden rule turns from yourself to others and treats others the way you want to be treated.

The idea that we first have to love ourselves, to live in ourselves, to live for ourselves before loving others will never get to serving others!

This doesn't mean you can totally forget yourself – there is a place for self-preservation. But it is looking first to self-forgetfulness.

This leads to a fourth question: **What will your neighbor do without both law and love in your life?**

We are called to show mercy, kindness, benevolence to others. This and this alone is to walk in the Spirit, who belong to Christ Jesus, and have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Luther saw this. “We conclude that a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and his neighbor. He lives in Christ through faith. And he lives in his neighbor through love” (*Freedom of a Christian*, LW 31:371).

What a gospel to make such a change in selfish men! Amen? Amen!