

## **What Love Demands**

### **Romans 13:8-10**

#### **Introduction**

In chapter 12 the theme was service. He ended the chapter exhorting his readers about their Christian conduct to friends and neighbors and others. In chapter 13 Paul begins with instructions about our citizenship. Paul's focus is always on practical application and anticipates the question why do this? Paul's consistent teaching is our urgent requirement of love. We are to live our lives as if it were our last day; and one day it will be our last day. In chapter 12 it was personal consecration and self-evaluation that led to the exercise of God-given gifts. But whether the subject is government (chapter 13) or personal convictions (chapter 14) we are informed, governed by love. How do we behave amongst ourselves, towards enemies, or government? Paul's attention turns to the law of love. Paul points out our debt to love (v.8); our duty to love (v.9) and our desire to love (v.10). Jonathan Swift, the author of Gulliver's Travel wrote; "We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another."

Warren Wiersbe: "Christians are 'taught of God to love one another (1 Thes.4:9). God the Father taught us to love by sending His Son (1 John 4:19), and God the Son taught us to love by giving His life and by commanding us to love each other (John 13:34-35). The Holy Spirit teaches us to love one another by pouring out God's love in our hearts (Rom.5:5). The most important lesson in the school of faith is to love one another. Love enriches all that it touches" (TBEC; Vol. 1; 610-611).

Paul has spoken of our duty toward the rulers of government (vv.1-4); and why we are to do it (vv.5-7) and an exhortation to love; because love satisfies the demands of the law and seeks what's best for neighbors (vv.8-10).

The simple phrase; 'love one another' appears 16 times in the New Testament.

#### **Our Debt To Love (v.8)**

*Romans 13:8 (NKJV)* *Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.*

Legitimate debt requires legitimate payment. "Owe no one anything" is in the context of dealing with people—enemies—government. We are to 'love one another'. This has been called the basic principle of the Christian life.

Does that mean the Christian is forbidden to incur debt? Does the presence of debt indicate sin? There are well known Christian leaders and thinkers who have refused debt for this scripture alone. J. Hudson Taylor, the godly missionary to China refused debt in all forms. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the greatest Baptist preacher had the same conviction.

The Bible does not forbid borrowing or legal transactions that involve interest.

The Bible does forbid the charging of high interest rates; robbing the brethren, and failing to pay honest debts (see Ex. 22:25-27; Neh. 5:1-11). Matthew 25:27 and Luke 19:23 indicate that banking and investing for gain are not wrong (see Wiersbe p.557). Jesus taught us to pray; "forgive our debts, as we forgive our debtors". Some have twisted our Lord's words into a statement of absolution from all monetary obligations.

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The verb tense is continual presence ('continue to avoid owing anyone anything') which suggests Paul is saying; 'don't develop a lifestyle of where you are continually owing people money. Pay your bills. Avoid unnecessary debt. Never sign a contract you cannot keep. To make Romans 13:8 apply to all kinds of legal obligations involving any kind of debt is a bit of a stretch. Why? Think about Matthew 5:42 where Jesus says; "Give to him that asks you; and from him that would borrow from you—do not turn them away".

The context is the payment of custom, tribute, taxes.

Never borrow money if you know you will not repay the money. It is dishonest to borrow money and make the creditor wait. It is the same as stealing. Few things ruin a Christian's testimony than chronic indebtedness. Christians are frugal, faithful, honest.

Leave no debt outstanding, pay your debts, except the obligation to love. It would appear debt takes two forms; things we can repay—and things we can never fully repay. We have a continual obligation to love; and this love never brings the balance back to zero. We can never go to our love file and write; 'paid in full'. We have a continual obligation to love everyone—at all times—in every circumstance. We pay everyday. We owe every day. Roy Laurin calls this "our magnificent obligation".

The love Paul speaks of is agape. It is sacrificial love. It is the love that looks out for the other. We might think of this as the kind of love willing to say and do what is in the best interest of the one loved. This is the kind of love that is not restricted to people who are close to us; but rather this is the kind of love that reaches out to those who are bent on harming us. We might best think of this love in terms of our Lord Jesus. This is the kind of love evidenced by Jesus' own life. This is a love we struggle to define and find even harder to live. This is the love described and expanded in 1 Corinthians 13 and Romans 12. This is the love epitomized by the very character and conduct of Christ. This is the love that goes beyond platitudes and pithy sayings and rests comfortably in the full identity, mission and destiny of our Lord Jesus. Love can only be known by the action it prompts—and perhaps one of the best definitions of this agape love—is God's attitude toward His only begotten Son.

This love in part fulfills the law. Does the believer owe a debt to the law? Jesus satisfies our debt to the law. Christianity is not a life of regulation—but principle. Love is an obligation—and more—it is an opportunity—to share Christ—to lift the restrictions and prohibitions that keep people apart from one another.

### **Our Duty To Love (v.9)**

*9For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other*

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*commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

**"Duty makes us do things well; but love makes us do them beautifully."**

**\* Phillips Brooks, Leadership, Vol. 5, no. 2.**

**Love is both a debt and a duty; the highest form of duty.** The Bible links love and belief and behavior into one unit. People who do not love do not really believe. Love is the divine mark that we are born again (1 John 4:16-17). Love is the unanswerable testimony of allegiance to Christ (John 14:15). Love is the legible seal—the tangible proof that we know the love of God (1 John 4:9).

Since love is the evidence of our faith in Jesus; our proof of life in Christ, and the stamp of genuine authenticity; since love is our motive for service—we are careful to obey—Jesus. "If you love Me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15 RV).

There are two main divisions of the Decalogue. One is vertical—towards God; the other horizontal, towards man. Paul is assuming people have a vertical relationship of love towards God.

Paul is making an extraordinary claim. If you love, if you honestly seek to discharge the debt of love, you will fulfill whatever outstanding duty towards the law. If you love, and when you love, you will automatically keep all the commandments. Love's duty is to obey the commandments; not because we are under the law—but rather because we are under grace. Grace brings love and love's commands inform our obligations. Paul zeros in on the last five commandments because they deal with love's duty toward our fellow man.

"You shall not commit adultery." "But we love each other!" Adultery does not take place because people love too much—but rather too little. Love does not allow physical passions to sweep you away into uncharted waters. In real love—there is real restraint and real respect. William MacDonald: "Love doesn't exploit another person's body; immorality does. Love doesn't take another person's life; murder does. Love doesn't steal another person's property; theft does. Love doesn't deny justice to others; false witness does. Love doesn't even entertain wrong desires for another person's possessions, coveting does" (see pp.1734-1735).

My archeologist friend says; "an archeologist is the best husband any woman can have; the older she gets, the more interested he is in her".

"You shall not murder." It seems odd to ask the question; 'why'? You would think the answer is self-evident. Love brings life. Love builds up. Love does not tear down. Love longs to make an enemy a friend.

"You shall not steal". Love is always more concerned about giving than getting.

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“You shall not covet”. The word covet is *epithumia*—it means uncontrolled desire for the forbidden thing. To covet means to want more of something—something already provided, already given.

Love respects the rights of others; the rights of marriage; the right to life; the right to property; the right to truth (do not bear false witness); the right of ownership; (don’t desire what others have and do not belong to you!). Paul cites the commands—not to legalistically call the Christian back to the Law—but rather that authentic love seeks what is best. If we really love someone we will not take advantage of others, ruin their lives or steal their belongings; instead we will live our lives in such away that our love benefits others.

Love cleanses our heart. Love cleanses until the desire is gone. Love satisfies. Faults are thick where love is thin.

To keep you marriage brimming,  
With love in the loving cup,  
Whenever you’re wrong admit it,  
Whenever you’re right shut up.  
Ogden Nash

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Leviticus 19:18 (NLT) “Never seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.”

Matthew 22:39 (NLT) “A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’.

“The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also love our enemies; probably because they are generally the same people” (G.K. Chesterton who may have borrowed it from Mark Twain!).

Catherine Voss tells this story: “I teach Kid’s Club at my church. Arriving home after a rough evening, my husband asked me how things had gone. “Our lesson was on loving your neighbor, and two girls kept bothering each other.” “Which ones were the problem?” He asked. “Faith and Charity”.

Charles Krauthammer; “The reigning cliché of the day is that in order to love others one must first learn to love oneself. This formulation—love thyself, then thy neighbor—is a license for unremitting self-indulgence, because the quest for self-love is endless. By the time you have finally learned to love yourself, you’ll find yourself playing golf at Leisure World.”

Saint Francis de Sales was right when he wrote; “Self-love is cunning, it pushes and insinuates itself into everything, while making us believe it is not there at all.”

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But it is there. No wonder Jesus said, “The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (John 12:25 NIV).

Love is pure when self is slain. Billy Graham said, “You have an ego—a consciousness of being an individual. But that doesn't mean that you are to worship yourself, to think constantly about yourself, and to live entirely for yourself.”

It is not normal to want to hurt yourself. Are there times when people try to harm themselves? Of course.

### **Our Desire To Love (v.10)**

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

The NLT translates this; “Love does no wrong to anyone, so love satisfies all of God’s requirements.” Paul tells the Galatians (5:14) “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; you shall love your neighbor as yourself”. Galatians 6:2 “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

There is a well known saying; “Love God and do what you like.” If love really is the guiding principle, the driving force, if love is a person—Jesus Christ, you need no other law.

Love’s moral conscience fulfills the law, out of debt and duty and desire. We do not desire to harm ourselves. We do not desire to harm others. Rather we desire to help and hope and be an instrument of healing. If you really love your neighbor as yourself; you will not contemplate or plan to harm their soul, or their body or their possessions. In fact you will desire opportunity to pray for their soul; insure their safety and protect their possessions.

Jesus defines neighbor—not simply as the person who lives next door—but rather the person who God brings into our lives to help (remember the story of the good Samaritan).

It is natural to love them that love us, but it is supernatural to love them that hate us.

Alexander Maclaren of Manchester wrote; “When the words were spoken, the then known civilized Western world was cleft by great, deep gulfs of separation, like the crevasses in a glacier, by the side of which our racial animosities and class differences are merely superficial cracks on the surface. Language, religion, national animosities, differences of sex, split the world up into alien fragments. A “stranger” and an “enemy” were expressed in one language, the same word (*note Gino: the language is Greek—and the word is Zenos*). The learned and the unlearned, the slave and the master, the barbarian and the Greek, the man and the woman, stood on opposite sides of the gulf, flinging hostility across” (quoted in Kent Hughes p. 249; who quotes Expositions of Holy Scripture Vol. 10; pp. 227-228).

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Love saw the guilt of sin, and sought a basis of pardon.

Love saw the alienation of sin, and sought a ground of reconciliation.

Love saw the defilement of sin, and sought a way of cleansing.

Love saw the depravity of sin, and sought a means of restoration.

Love saw the enslavement of sin, and sought an instrument of emancipation.

Love saw the malady of sin, and sought a balm of healing.

Love saw the condemnation of sin, and sought a method of justification.

Love saw the death of sin, and sought a way of life.

Love sought, and love found.

What does Paul mean when he says; “love is the fulfillment of the law”? Paul recognized and believed what Jesus said; we fulfill the very essence of the Lord’s commands to us. Does the law reveal our sinfulness? Yes. Does the law compel us to go to Christ? Yes. Can the law give us the capacity to love? The answer is no.

Only Jesus can do that. Jesus said that he came not to abolish the law but rather to fulfill the law. And now we understand—the God of love is the source of love (2 Cor.13:11). Love is the fruit of a Spirit-filled and Spirit led life. Love is the royal badge of discipleship (John 13:35). Love is the plain assurance that we have passed from death to life (1 John 3:14).

## **Conclusion**

**What are the principles that we glean?**

**There is a debt that honors the Lord. We love other people.**

**There is one penetrating command that fulfills the law. We love people who are utterly different than we are.**

**There is one truth that can release God’s love in us—the truth that we can love others with God’s help.**

**Love respects the rights of others; love refuses to harm others; love seeks and finds a way to point people to Christ. And now we go—and now we show—just what that means!**