

“LOVE FULFILLS THE LAW.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Romans 13:7-10

Introduction.

I just prayed asking the Holy Spirit of God to do something here more than we can humanly do. If the Holy Spirit doesn't attend to what we are doing now, it will be the form of godliness without any power. Are you willing for God taking my words and applying them to your heart in a way that changes you?

This text challenges all of us out of complacency and into genuine love for each other.

Owe no one anything.

Since our text begins with this phrase, “owe no one anything,” and since everyone right away asks, “Does this mean we should neither a borrower nor a lender be?” Is it wrong to have a mortgage or a car loan or borrow someone's lawn mower?

When we come to questions like this, we should always ask what does the rest of Scripture teach? Let Scripture interpret Scripture. Like the verse right before this one. “Pay to all what is owed them.” That assumes debt. So when verse 8 says, “Owe no one anything” it doesn't mean you should never incur debts. It means, when you do, pay them.

The NIV has *Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another.*

Luke 6:35 Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.

Jesus not only commends lending and He even commends making dumb loans out of a desire to show love and do good to our enemies. Money

isn't the most important thing to Jesus, love is. For in so doing we heap burning coals on their head and perhaps convict their consciences. There is a higher law at work here, the law of love.

The parable of the unforgiving servant presupposes debt. The parable of Good Samaritan has the good Samaritan going in debt to the inn keeper.

Paul is not issuing an absolute prohibition on any financial debt. Paul is not speaking against debt, but unpaid debt. Pay what you owe, and the greatest debt of all is the debt of love. It is not about not loaning, but about loving.

Let's look more closely at this command to love each other and the reason for the command, and the proof of the command.

The command to love each other.

ESV Owe no one anything, except to love each other.

NIV Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another.

Paul is transitioning from verse 7 where he said pay to all what is owed them— taxes to whom taxes, revenue to whom revenue, respect to whom respect, honor to whom honor. Now in verse 8, Paul is saying the one debt you are never going to be able to pay off is the continuing debt to love one another.

How did we get into this debt of love? How did my love to you become a debt? Or even more pressing, how did my love to my enemies become a debt I owe every day? Why am I your debtor and you are my debtor?

The debt of love is never discharged because it flows from God's ongoing love to us in Christ.

I John 4:10-11 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

This love is not a burden but the joyful fruit of our salvation and our gratitude. This unpayable debt is a beautiful thing. Is there a better debt? Are we not called to love one another more and more, to grow in this grace of loving, and all of this as an outpouring of God's endless love toward us.

The more we pay it the richer we become. I defy you to show me a person who has been loved too much or who loves too much.

Is your debt of love or your obligation to love your husband or wife or children ever paid off? No, it is a beautiful, perpetual, joyful duty.

Suppose today I loved you as myself and I did it perfectly. When I wake up tomorrow morning I will owe you exactly the same debt as I owed you this morning. If you love someone at 11 o'clock you still owe them love at 12 o'clock.

We weaken this command in a couple of ways. *First*, by when we say something like you know, I love everybody. That's nice, but it is too vague, too sweeping of a generalization.

We are to love our neighbor, and that means whoever God puts in our path. Like the Good Samaritan. This includes our parents, our spouse, our siblings, our children, our classmates, our co-workers, our brothers and sisters here.

We are called to love each other as Christ loved us and for as long as Christ loves us. We are to be a congregation of debtors. Every time we see each other, we should remember our obligation to love. Like when we see someone we owe money to and are reminded of our debt.

Not just Christians but anyone God puts in our path. And it includes some people you find difficult to love, and some people who find it difficult to love you.

This brings up the second way we try to limit our obligation to love others, we try to find ways not to do it. We are like the lawyer who pushed back

at Jesus and said who is my neighbor. He was trying to justify himself and his little love.

We all have people we don't like, people we don't love and we all try to justify why we don't love them. We all do that, I do that, you do that. And we all have our good reasons, well I should say our reasons, because they aren't good. They won't hold up in God's court of the law of love.

We try to limit our obligations, especially to those we don't like, or despise, or are different from us, you know, not apart of our tribe.

We love some more than some others, and some but not others. We default on our debt to love certain people, and we look for ways to excuse it.

The reason for the command.

... for the one who loves another *has fulfilled the law*. And Paul will repeat the reason for good measure in verse 10.

Paul reduces the whole law to love. Which is just what Jesus did when asked what is the greatest commandment. In other words, to love one another is what God wants. It is His law, His will.

But how does loving one another fulfill the law? What about the first part of the law, to love God? The whole law is fulfilled when we show love to our neighbor, because true love for others can only flow from the love of God.

Do you say you love God? The evidence and fruit and proof of that will be seen in our love for our neighbor. He who loves his neighbor as himself, has fulfilled the whole law.

The pinnacle of Scripture is, love your neighbor. True religion is visible, tangible, practical.

The Good Samaritan showed true love in action, he did something to help someone in need. He sacrificed, he went above and beyond. He fulfilled the law of love.

The proof of the command, verse 9.

The command is to love. The reason is the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. Now we come to the proof.

The law of God shows us how to love, how to fulfill the law of love. The whole point of God's law is love. Do you see that? God's law is not heavy, not hard, not mean, the does and don'ts are all ways to love.

A common misunderstanding among Christians is that we have to pick between the law or love. Which one will we live according to? But to live by love is the law, the two great commandments. And to keep the law, is really to love.

9 For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

How are these loving my neighbor?

Adultery.

Of course, adultery is not love, destroying marriages and family is not love.

But the major sin of adultery that floods our nation today is pornography and the lust that fuels it. How can we avoid the temptation or get free from it? By loving our wife, our daughter, our mother, our sister. By loving them more we will stop selfishly hating them and destroying them when we look. Love will not do that to the women we love. Love does no harm to others.

Let love guide what we do, let love guide what we wear, how we act around each other. It is not love to have sex outside of marriage, it is lust, it is selfish. It is violating the law of love.

The world says because you love someone you can commit adultery with them; the Bible says, "Because you love them you don't commit adultery with them."

Murder.

Of course, murder is not love, it is fueled by hate or anger. Which is why Jesus said those things that are the roots of murder are also murder, our anger, bitterness, hate. Love with our words.

And of course, this command extends to loving our littlest neighbors, babies in the womb, including taking pills that destroy the life already begun.

The baby is your neighbor, love your neighbor. Certainly don't displace children with pets. Of course love your pets, but not the way the world does, loving them more than babies or kids.

Steal.

Again, stealing what belongs to someone else is not love. And we can act righteous that we haven't done that, but there are other ways it happens.

Lottery tickets are a way our government steals from the poorest of the poor. But isn't that their choice? Have you seen the ads and how they use deception to entice and tempt people to buy. There is culpability, it is theft, not love. And to buy a lottery ticket in hopes of winning something, it is stealing from the poor who paid for your winnings.

Ephesians 4:28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

Have something to share with one who has need. The law of love says if I only work for myself, I am stealing from those in need. We owe a debt of love to those who are poor or in need, worse off than us.

Covet.

Coveting leads us into debt when our envy, greed, jealousy, lust cause us to desire to have what others have but can't afford or shouldn't buy.

This afternoon is going to be feast of stirring up coveting through 10 million dollar 30-second commercials enticing you to want something. How many of you say you watch for the commercials as much as for the

game? You don't think they want you to covet? They aren't spending that kind of money out of love for you or your soul.

Verse 10.

10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Those who live by the law of love, who have true love for their neighbor, will do nothing that injures or harms or defrauds his neighbor.

No adultery means loving with our eyes in a way that does no harm.

No murder means loving with our lips, our words, speaking in a way that gives life, not takes it.

No stealing means loving with our actions, being selfless in helping others.

No coveting means loving with our hearts, our attitudes, desiring good things for others.

Love would prevent all forms of adultery and lust.

Love would prevent all forms of murder, hatred, anger.

Love would prevent all forms of stealing and withholding what is due.

Love would prevent all forms of coveting and discontentment.

This is the whole law, do no harm, do nothing and say nothing that hurts your neighbor, your spouse, your children, your friends, co-workers, fellow church members, strangers on the street.

John 13:34-35 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Brothers and sisters, let us outdo one another in showing honor and loving one another.

The source of all the problems in our world, of all our conflicts in our nation and in our homes and churches, is from a lack of love. Love would

prevent everything the law forbids, and love would fulfill everything the law commands.

Implications and application.

When the children of Israel gathered at the holy mountain in the wilderness they were told if you touch this mountain you will die. How scary is this holy God. And what did God do? He wrote on two tablets, on one tablet He wrote, "Love God" and on the other tablet He wrote, "Love your neighbor." This is our God, the God of love.

Have you been loved by God? Has God been generous to you? Has God given you every good and perfect gift? Has God saved your soul from an eternal hell? Has God poured out His love on you again and again? Were you not poor and God was rich and generous to you?

Jesus emptied Himself of His glory and came down and suffered and took our sin on Himself and saved us with His blood shed on the cross. Do you know how much you have been forgiven; how great your sin is and how much greater God's love is? Can we be as generous as God has been to us?

Christians are a people whose whole life flows from Romans 5:8, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

If you fix your eyes on Jesus, love for others will be your fruit.

This week let your love for all God has done for you in Christ spill over onto others, even those who do not deserve it any more than you did, and in so doing you will fulfill the law of love.