

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

A popular song some years back went like this: “*All the world needs now is love, sweet love.*” The songwriter had a good idea but missed the real point. We talk about the national debt, credit card debt, personal debt, but when was the last time you heard the evening news talk about our debt of love? The world does need love, but our headlines scream of war and terrorism, murders, kidnappings, and many crimes against humanity. Today’s message is going to speak to the most important debt every individual on the face of this earth has, the debt to love one another.

Let’s turn in our Bibles to Romans 13:8-10. I am going to read from the Amplified Bible:

8 Keep out of debt and owe no man anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor--who practices loving others--has fulfilled the Law [relating to one's fellowmen], meeting all its requirements.

9 The commandments, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet (have an evil desire), and any other commandment, are summed up in the single command, You shall love your neighbor as you do yourself.

10 Love does no wrong to one's neighbor--it never hurts anybody. Therefore love meets all the requirements and is the fulfilling of the Law.

Note that this passage tells us two important things. One relates to money and the other relates to an essential spiritual quality. First, we are told not to get ourselves into financial debt. Secondly, we are to maintain a debt of love, a debt that should never be fully paid. Then right after saying that, Paul shifts to talking about obeying the Law, the commandments. Paul is trying to make us understand that obedience and love are inseparable one from the other. To help us see this even more clearly let’s go back to Christ and His teachings in the Gospel of John, **John 13:34-35, NAS:**

34 “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”

35 “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

John 14:21, 23, NIV:

21 Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”

23 Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”

John 15:9-10, 17, NAS:

9 “Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My

love.

10 *“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments, and abide in His love.*

17 **“This I command you, that you love one another.”**

What is Christ saying here? In very plain language He is telling His followers that

if they truly love Him, they will love each other.

Now let me ask you a question. Would you agree if I were to say that, *“enthusiasm is easier than obedience?”* I believe Paul would agree because back in Romans 7, Paul said in verses 15,18,19 NRSV:

15 *I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.*

18 *I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.*

19 *For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.*

No matter how much we want to obey, we sometimes find it hard to do that. No matter how eager we are to do the will of God, we find ourselves bound to our humanness and unable to fulfill all of the good that we desire to do in our hearts. However, as difficult as it is, **obedience is still essential for the believer. OBEDIENCE means to follow the truth, Spirit, and Word of God.** Without obedience there’s no power, no blessing, and no joy. The necessity of obedience is a theme that runs throughout the Bible from start to finish. God puts it plain and simple, 1 Samuel 15:22,23 NLT:

22 **OBEDIENCE** *is far better than sacrifice. Listening to him is much better than offering the fat of rams.*

23 *Rebellion is as bad as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as bad as worshiping idols.*

Matthew 7:21 NRSV:

21 *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.*

In our culture the word, *obedience*, is far from being a popular word. To a child, *obedience* is a very threatening term. It is a word that forces them to go from doing what they most want to do to the thing that they least want to do. And some of that childhood aversion to obedience carries on into adulthood, doesn’t it? To a person who doesn’t know God, there’s no desire to obey God or the Word of God. The unbeliever does exactly what he/she wants to do. But a believer has, according to Romans 7 that we just read, a great desire to obey. The difference between a true Christian and one who is a Christian in name only, **is a true desire to obey**. Turn in your Bibles to Psalm 119, and look with me for a moment at the greatest statement or series of statements ever made by any child of God regarding the desire for obedience. Psalm 119, selected verses NRSV:

10 With my whole heart I seek you; do not let me stray from your commandments.
 16 I will delight in your Word.
 34 Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.
 47 I find my delight in your commandments, because I love them.
 48 I revere your commandments, which I love.
 97 Oh, how I love your law!
 98 Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is always with me.
 111 Your decrees are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart.
 127 Truly I love your commandments more than gold, more than fine gold.
 143 Your commandments are my delight.
 163 I hate and abhor falsehood, but I love your law.
 165 Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble.
 174 I long for your salvation, O Lord, and your law is my delight.

These verses show us the true hunger of a redeemed heart. They are thought to have been penned by Ezra, the priest who led the Jewish people in a religious reform following the Babylonian captivity. However, it is not possible to confirm who the author actually was. Some think it could have been David and others suggest Daniel. **David** was the author of many of the Psalms that inspire us today. David was called “*a man after God’s own heart*” (1 Samuel 13:14) because he had such an earnest desire to live a life that pleased God. Yet David, like us, lived in a sinful world. And even David, the man after God’s own heart, stumbled and committed some serious sins. After those sins he was truly repentant, as we see especially in Psalm 51. It is significant that even though David committed adultery and murder, he never engaged in idolatry. Now be careful lest you prematurely breathe a sign of relief thinking, “*I’ve never bowed to an image or called a piece of wood, silver, or masonry god.*” An idol is anything that you love more than the Lord God. It could be cars, computers, alcohol, drugs, sex, your career—anything.

It is the mark of genuine salvation to have a great and consuming passion for obedience; to love the Law of God to the point of desiring to obey it. This marks the attitude of a true child of God; a spirit that is willing to obey, not out of fear but out of love.

The identifying mark of your Christianity is a life of obedience. Just like it says in Romans 7:22:

22 I love God’s law with all my heart.

Now let’s look again at Romans 13:8 and 10, NRSV:

8 Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the ONE WHO LOVES ANOTHER HAS FULFILLED THE LAW.

*10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, **LOVE IS THE FULFILLING OF THE LAW.***

Now turn over to the first epistle of John near the end of your Bibles and let's read 1 John 4:10,11 NLT:

*10 This is real love. It is not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.
11 Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other.*

I John 4:19, NKJ

We love Him because He first loved us.

Now one more Scripture, this time in the Old Testament. **Ezekiel 36:26-27, NIV:**

*26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.
27 **AND I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT IN YOU** and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*

Do you see where all this begins? It begins with God. He first loved us, so **HE SENT JESUS TO BECOME OUR SAVIOR FROM SIN BY DYING ON THE CROSS AND COMING TO LIFE AGAIN.**

When we realize what Christ has done for us and bow before Him accepting Him as our Lord and Savior, we are filled with His love. Then God gives us a new heart, a heart that has a strong desire to love and obey the Lord God. Christ boiled all the commandments down to two: Love God with all your heart and love other people. **God's Spirit** within us motivates us to be obedient to God, especially to the command to love.

So salvation affects everything. It affects how we relate to God, to the world around us, to the church, to people in general, to the government, and to society. This whole section in Romans 13 is about right relationships that result from salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul says in verses 8-10 that the key thing in your relationships within society is the word, *love*. And you will see as we study this passage further **THAT LOVE IS THE KEY TO OBEDIENCE**. We've tried to say already that it is obedience in our hearts that we seek to accomplish, and we're trying to get a handle on how to do it, and **the key to understanding that is to understand love** because as Paul says twice in the passage this is, "the fulfilling of the whole Law."

Now what does obedience involve? If a true Christian has a heart that longs to obey, what does it involve? Simply, as we saw in Psalm 119, **TO KEEP GOD'S WORD. The heart of obedience says that the consuming passion of the believer's life is to obey God's Word.** Now someone is going to come along and say, "*If we're saved by grace through faith and*

are no longer under the Law as Romans 6 indicated, then is it not so that we are no longer bound to the Law?" That's true in one sense and not true in another. We are not bound to the Law as to its power. In other words **after we're saved the Law has no power to condemn us**. We are not bound to the Law as to its penalty, it has no power to execute us, but **we are bound to the Law as to its precepts** (a command intended to be a general rule of action). For God has not abandoned His standard of morality or His standard of truth just because someone has been saved by His grace. It says in Romans 8:1, that, "There is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus." The Law no longer has any power over us who are saved; and the Law cannot execute a penalty against us as verse 2 says:

*2 For **THE POWER OF THE LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT** has freed you through Christ Jesus **from the power of sin that leads to death.***

The Law no longer has the ability to cause us to be guilty of sin unto death. Verse 3:

*3 The law of Moses could not save us, because of our sinful nature. But God put into effect a different plan to save us. He sent his own Son in a human body like ours, except that ours are sinful. **GOD DESTROYED SIN'S CONTROL OVER US BY GIVING HIS SON AS A SACRIFICE FOR OUR SINS.***

Because of the sacrifice of Christ, the Law can no longer declare us guilty. He died in our place. But when we were saved, and although we are no longer under the Law's power and penalty, the purpose of redemption is in verse 4:

*4 He did this so that **the requirement of the law** would be **fully accomplished** for us who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead **FOLLOW THE SPIRIT.***

NOW THAT WE WALK IN THE SPIRIT WE NOW HAVE THE CAPACITY AND ABILITY TO FULFILL THE LAW. We are free from the Law only in the sense of its power to dominate and condemn us and to sentence us to eternal death. We are not free from the Law as to its precepts. **WE ARE STILL CALLED AND COMMANDED TO A LIFE OF OBEDIENCE TO THE REVEALED WORD OF GOD.**

Now the question arises, "How are we going to keep the Law?" Yes, **believers have the power of the Holy Spirit within them.** But we also see that we still have within us that sinful nature that calls us not to do the right thing, not to be obedient to the will of God. Therein is the battle. So we have the sin principle in our humanness warring against the heart of obedience, and **every Christian** fights that battle. The more one fights the battle, however, submitting their will to the will of the Holy Spirit of God living within them, the more victorious they will be.

So all of us are faced with a heart of obedience if we're truly Christians. We have a

longing to do what is right, and it is sometimes restrained by our humanness. How then do we overcome that? What is the key to obedience? I suggest the answer is in Romans chapter 13. Beginning in chapter 12 of Romans, we get into the practical part of the epistle. Paul is talking about those

things that will result from our salvation.

- ↪ **A right relationship with God** is discussed in verse 1.
- ↪ **A right relationship to the world** is found in verse 2 of chapter 12.
- ↪ **A right relationship to the church** is found in verses 3-8.
- ↪ **A right relationship with everyone** comes in verses 9-21.
- ↪ **A right relationship with the government** appears in Romans 13:1-7.
- ↪ **A right relationship to society in general** will now be dealt with in verses 8-10.

This is just another dimension of life that is affected by a person's salvation.

SALVATION AFFECTS EVERYTHING.

Paul reduces all of obedience to one thing, and that is *love*. Paul says that the key to everything in the Christian life is *love*.

Paul says in Romans 13:8: "*Owe no one anything, except to love one another.*"

What does Paul mean by "*Owe no one anything?*" He's just been talking about paying your taxes in verse 6 and 7. Now Paul is talking about not only paying your taxes but paying all your debts. This verse applies to every single debt we might have in our relationships. No believer is to have unpaid debts. Don't owe anybody anything. Does this mean that we're not to be allowed credit, that we're not to borrow money on the basis of interest, that we are not to have any financial obligations at all? Does this mean that we must pay cash for everything we buy? Let's find out. Let's go back to Exodus 22: 25. We see here in Exodus where God is laying down some societal rules and principles. Verse 25:

25 "*If you lend money to a fellow Hebrew in need, do not be like a money lender, charging interest.*"

The original word used in the King James translation for interest was *usury* and the original word in the Hebrew meant "*excessive interest*", interest that is unfair. The assumption of verse 25 is that it's OK to lend money. The other assumption is that if it's all right to lend it then it must be OK to borrow it. Remember this applies to a person who is in need, who has to have it. So if you lend such a person money, you are not to charge an unreasonably high rate of interest. In Deuteronomy 15:7-11, we get some additional instruction on this subject:

7 "*But if there are any poor people in your towns when you arrive in the*

land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tightfisted toward them.

*8 Instead, be generous and **lend them whatever they need.***

9 Do not be mean-spirited and refuse someone a loan because the year of release is close at hand. If you refuse to make the loan and the needy person cries out to the Lord, you will be considered guilty of sin.

10 Give freely without begrudging it, and the Lord your God will bless you in everything you do.

11 There will always be some among you who are poor. That is why I am commanding you to share your resources freely with the poor and with other Israelites in need.

Lending was a very important thing. If a farmer's crop didn't turn out right, or he made an unwise investment, or was robbed, or whatever might have caused his poverty, **we are to lend to those people.** Lending is approved by God as long as there is not an exorbitant rate of interest. And we see that

IT SHOULD BE DONE WITH A WILLING HEART.

Look to Psalm 37:26. Here we see a commendation of a righteous and good man:

26 The godly always give generous loans to others, and their children are a blessing.

It is a blessed thing to lend to those in need. And look at what Proverbs 19:17 tells us:

17 If you help the poor, you are lending to the Lord—and he will repay you!

When you lend money to someone who is in need you are lending to God, and you don't have to worry about whether the person will pay you back, because in one form or another **God will repay you for doing what is right.** Look at what Jesus had to say in the New Testament. Matthew 5:42:

42 Give to those who ask, and don't turn away from those who want to borrow.

So both the Old and New Testament of Scripture consistently tell us to lend to those in need, that lending should be done without a high rate of interest, that it be done with a willing heart, a spirit that says, "*I am lending to the Lord,*" and it should be done with the assurance of receiving a reward from God. However, **I need to add that the Scripture says nothing about lending or borrowing for things that are not related to need.** Scripture certainly does not teach that we should get into debt in order to satisfy desires for things we simply want, or to live in luxury. Someone has said that people today buy

things they don't need with money they don't have from people they don't like. It's one of those sayings you need to think about for a while to get the full impact of the meaning.

But the Lord sees the need in certain cases for people to borrow money. In Matthew 25:26,27, Jesus is highly critical that His servant didn't at least put the money he was given in the bank so that it would earn interest. Wise investment of God's resources is considered good stewardship by Jesus. Certainly some of us could not own businesses if we were unable to borrow money. But because we can borrow money to make the business prosper, we can earn an income to support our families, our church, pay our employees, and give to those in the community who are in need. Few of us could afford to own our own homes if we couldn't borrow money to buy them. But keep this in mind. **The borrower is the servant to the lender.** So you want to be very careful how much you borrow because if you overextend yourself, it will cause you unnecessary stress and misery, as many people in our society are acutely aware. But remember what Romans 13:7 told us. We are to pay all our debts, and not to pay everything that we owe is unacceptable to God. Look what He tells us in Psalm 37:21:

21 The wicked borrow and never repay.

That is not acceptable to God. Pay your debts, and this also tells us that we are not to declare bankruptcy. Owe no one anything and do not allow any debts to be outstanding and overdue. Then Paul makes a tremendous transition going on in verse 8 of chapter 13:

8 Pay all your debts, except the debt of love for others. You can never finish paying that!

The only debt you'll always owe is love for others. That's a debt you constantly owe, you constantly pay, and you never pay off. You spend your whole life paying it and yet you never pay it off. This is something that we owe everyone around us. This is something that marks our life as followers of Christ, just as John recorded Jesus' words in John 13:34,35:

34 So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. 35 Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

It is the mark of a dedicated and faithful follower of Christ to love all people. We owe that debt to people and that debt is never ending. Jesus said:

*44 **Love your enemies!** Pray for those who persecute you!
45 In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and on the unjust, too. (Matthew 5:44).*

Jesus is saying that because your Father in Heaven loves those who are His enemies, you are to love those who are your enemies. We are to share our Christian testimony with a genuine demonstration of love toward all people. People were meant to be bound together by the bond of perfection which is **love**. Is that the first thing you think of today about Christians? Our individual answers to that question could prove both discouraging and frightening.

Now what is love? How do you demonstrate love? Paul described love as well as anyone could in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7:

4 Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud

5 or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged.

6 It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out.

7 Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

1 Corinthians 13 is, of course, the classic description of agape love, of the pure love that God has for us and which we are to show to others as Christ commanded. You will notice that what is described in these verses is actions and behavior. There is no mention of that warm, glowing feeling that we often tend to equate with love. True biblical and godly love is not a feeling, it is a behavior. That's where we often get hung up when Christ commands us to love our enemies. We don't have to necessarily take them in our arms and embrace them, but we are being commanded to be patient and kind with them, and not to keep a ledger of their offenses.

How do you demonstrate love? In thousands of ways. We could spend hours giving examples of how those verses in 1 Corinthians 13 work out practically. But we are sure you are also able to imagine some of those examples. Biblically, love is many things as well. It includes teaching others about the truth of God. We can see this in Ephesians 4:15,16:

*15 But **speaking the truth in love**, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,*

*16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, **promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.***

Love involves teaching others what needs to be taught, what they need to know to go to Heaven.

IT IS NOT ONLY A FEELING, IT IS ALSO AN ACT.

We'll have to stop at this point because we're running out of time. But we'll pick up right at this point next week.