

## **LOVE FULFILLS THE LAW**

As I was working on the message for this week, I suddenly began to think about all the people that I know that are very uncomfortable with such terms as religion, salvation, church, Jesus, the Bible, and other topics that are related to these things. I know the frustration of listening to people who say things such as: *“You can believe whatever you want about God, but I believe in Him in my own way. We all have that right.”* Or, *“The Bible is a book like any other book. It was written by men and women thousands of years ago and doesn’t apply to life today.”* My frustration is not due to the fact that they don’t share my feelings about God, but that I once thought the same way as an atheist, and I know how justifiable those feelings were in my own mind. I then prayed that God could use me to help them find what He helped me to find, taking me from total unbelief to a confident knowledge of the truth that is expressed throughout the Bible.

As I meditated on those thoughts I couldn’t help but think of the lasting eternal effect there will be on those who refuse to seek the God who created them. It was my prayer that He somehow would reveal Himself to them. There is a reality stated clearly in the Bible that many people never hear, even if they go to church every Sunday, and I’d like to just take a few moments this morning before we resume our study in Romans to address that reality.

If you’re a believer in Jesus Christ, how do you feel about death? If you’re not a believer in the work of Jesus, if you do not believe that He died for your sins, do you ever think about death and what will happen to you when you die? I bet you do, but you probably try to push the thought aside as soon as possible hoping that day will never come, or at least taking some comfort in the fact that it probably isn’t going to happen to you today. So you postpone thinking about it, out of fear, until another day. But no matter how often you postpone it, the prospect of dying is frightening to almost everyone.

Well, if you’re one of the people who think like that, we want to share with you what the Bible, the Word of God, has to say about what happens to a person the day they die. If you don’t agree with what we have to say, please don’t get mad at us because we’re doing this out of love for you. The easiest thing for us to do would be to ignore this topic, as most pastors do, and preach on something that will make you feel warm and fuzzy. It matters to us that we tell you what the Bible has to say on this subject so that you can take the necessary action to insure that you will spend your eternity in a place of indescribable beauty and perfection rather than a horror filled Hell.

Within the blink of an eye after your death, you will find yourself in one of two places. You will either find yourself in Heaven or in Hell. The only people who go to Heaven are those who have a confessed belief in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. People who know they couldn’t get into Heaven on their own merit because like everyone else who has ever lived, they’ve sinned. People who also know, however, that because God loves us so much, He came to earth in the form of the man, Jesus, to be the perfect sacrifice for the

sins of all people. People who know that if they want to go to Heaven there's only one thing they have to do, and that is they have to accept that free gift of eternal life offered through the grace of God. And one who accepts the gift by believing what God tells us through His Word, that Jesus' willingness to die and be that sacrifice for us covers our sin and the penalty we would have to face without His sacrifice, will be saved. One must be willing to say in effect, *"Thank you, God, thank you, Jesus, for paying the penalty for my sin. I now want to turn control of my life over to you so that I might receive the free gift of eternal life when I die as well as the promises you've made for a good life on earth until that time."*

Those are the only people that will get into Heaven. So if, for whatever reason, you don't want to believe that, you at least now know what the Bible tells us about death. I sincerely hope and pray that you will give this careful and prayerful consideration. God longs for you to come to Him, no matter what you've done in the past, and simply say to Him, *"God I am open to the truth, please help me to understand it."* If you do no more than that, He will reveal it to you because Jesus said in Matthew 7:7,8:

*7 "Keep on asking, and you will be given what you ask for. Keep on looking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened.  
8 For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And the door is opened to everyone who knocks."*

So when a person arrives in Heaven he/she will be able to thank God for His free gift. When a person arrives in Hell, he/she will only have themselves to blame for rejecting His free gift.

And you can be certain that the tendency you have of putting off those thoughts about death for another day, will one day catch up with you because one day we'll all die. In fact that day could be today. Accidents happen and once you're dead it's too late to reverse the decision you've made about Jesus. So, if you have any questions about the process or how we know it's true, you had better get those questions answered as soon as possible. Betty and I are available to you 24/7. Please don't hesitate to ask.

Now, for a number of months we've been studying through the book of Romans. All of these messages are available on our web site which is printed in your bulletin. There could be no better place to get most of your questions on this subject answered and we encourage you to also use that resource.

We'll now get back to that study as we pick it up in Romans 13:8-10. And in order to get the necessary background let's review this chapter beginning in verse 1. Romans 13:1-10:

*1 Obey the government, for God is the one who put it there. All governments have been placed in power by God.  
2 So those who refuse to obey the laws of the land are refusing to obey God, and punishment will follow.*

3 *For the authorities do not frighten people who are doing right, but they frighten those who do wrong. So do what they say, and you will get along well.*

4 *The authorities are sent by God to help you. But if you are doing something wrong, of course you should be afraid, for you will be punished. The authorities are established by God for that very purpose, to punish those who do wrong.*

5 *So you must obey the government for two reasons: to keep from being punished and to keep a clear conscience.*

6 Pay your taxes, too, for these same reasons. For government workers need to be paid so they can keep on doing the work God intended them to do.

7 Give to everyone what you owe them: Pay your taxes and import duties, and give respect and honor to all to whom it is due.

8 Pay all your debts, **EXCEPT THE DEBT OF LOVE FOR OTHERS. You can never finish paying that! If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill all the requirements of God's law.**

9 For the commandments against adultery and murder and stealing and coveting—and any other commandment—are all summed up in this one commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

10 **Love does no wrong to anyone, SO LOVE SATISFIES ALL OF GOD'S REQUIREMENTS.**

Paul tells us in the first seven verses of Romans 13 that we are to obey the government and pay all our debts. Then Paul builds a bridge in verse 8 and that bridge is **love**. And **love** is a debt Paul tells us we owe to everyone. He then takes a giant step and tells us that if we give our love to everyone we will fulfill all of God's Law. Love is the only debt we will never pay off. And We don't want to pay this debt off because we have been given the same capacity to love as God loves according to Romans 5:5:

*For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.*

**Any Christian who doesn't love like this isn't drawing on the capacity God has given a true believer.** Paul describes in verses nine and ten what James calls the “royal law of love (James 2:8).” If you've ever asked yourself how you could do everything that God commands, how you could keep His Law perfectly, the answer is to **love your fellow men and women**. In that way you'll fulfill everything that God expects of a person. In that way you'll fulfill all of God's Ten commandments. Paul selects a sampling of the Ten Commandments in verse 9.

The point here is that the commandments are not really necessary for the person who loves in accordance with verse 8. You don't have to tell someone not to kill if they love people. You don't have to tell them not to steal from people if they love people. Love fulfills the whole Law. Love is obedience to the whole Law. And **God is not just looking for outward obedience**, but He is also looking into the heart, the way people feel, the

way they think. That's what makes love the key ingredient for obeying the Law. If you love someone, you love them with your heart and mind, and then that love is demonstrated by the way the person treats the object of their love. Keeping the commandments flows from a heart of love. The intention of the Law is to cultivate love from the heart. Matthew 22:37-40 says it all:

*37 Jesus replied, " 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.'*  
*38 This is the first and greatest commandment.*  
*39 A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'*  
*40 All the other commandments and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."*

What a marvelous concept, isn't it? Now we want to take you back to Exodus 20 to show you how the Ten Commandments are the law of love. The first four pertain to God and the next six to people. Exodus 20:3:

*3 "Do not worship any other gods besides me.*

This commandment tells us that **love is loyal.**

Exodus 20:4:

*4 "Do not make idols of any kind, whether in the shape of birds or animals or fish.*

This commandment tells us that **love for God is faithful**, is devoted to the object of its love, and it obeys. This is yet another dimension of love.

Exodus 20:7:

*7 "Do not misuse the name of the Lord your God. The Lord will not let you go unpunished if you misuse his name.*

**Love is reverent.** If you love God, will you curse His name? If you love God will you be unfaithful to His Word? If you love God will you be disloyal to Him and tolerant of the gods of other religions?

Exodus 20:8:

*8 "Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.*

**Love of God sets itself apart for pure devotion and worship.** If you say you love God, you're going to meet with fellow believers and worship Him. You're not going to push God aside on the Sabbath to do other things. Get yourself to church on Sunday and don't come up with any lame excuses. The first four of the Ten commandments sum up the first and greatest commandment of Deuteronomy 6:4-6:

4 *“Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.*

5 *And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.*

6 *And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands I am giving you today.*

And this is the commandment that Jesus quoted in Matthew 22:37-40 that we read a few minutes ago. If I love the Lord this way, am I going to have to worry about keeping the Law, the Ten Commandments? Love fulfills all the Law. It’s just that simple. Joshua, the man who took over after Moses died, made that very clear. Joshua 22:4,5:

*And now the Lord your God has given the other tribes rest, as he promised them. So go home now to the land Moses, the servant of the Lord, gave you on the east side of the Jordan River.*

5 *But be very careful to obey all the commands and the law that Moses gave to you. Love the Lord your God, walk in all his ways, obey his commands, be faithful to him, and serve him with all your heart and all your soul.”*

The remaining six commandments are the ones Paul refers to and they speak of love towards men and women. Exodus 20:12:

12 *“Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the Lord your God will give you.*

### **Love is respectful.**

Exodus 20:13:

13 *“Do not murder.*

**Love is protective.** Love is sacred. Everyone created in the image of God is sacred. You don’t murder God’s precious creations like Terry Schiavo.

Exodus 20:14:

14 *“Do not commit adultery.*

**Love is pure.** Love doesn’t defile other people.

Exodus 20:15:

15 *“Do not steal.*

**Love doesn’t take what belongs to someone else.** Love gives rather than takes.

Exodus 20:16:

16 *“Do not testify falsely against your neighbor.*

**Love doesn't lie.**Exodus 20:17:

*17 "Do not covet your neighbor's house. Do not covet your neighbor's wife, male or female servant, ox or donkey, or anything else your neighbor owns."*

**Love is content with what one has.**

Love fulfills the whole Law

Leviticus 19:18 in the Old Testament says:

*18 "Never seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord."*

What is God saying in the Ten Commandments? He's saying, "*Love Me, love people.*" That's it. On that hang all the laws that God gave and all the teachings He gave to His prophets. Some people look at the Bible and wonder: "*How can I know all that? How can I keep all those things that God wants?*" It's simple.

Love God, love people, and then do what you want.

If you're living under the conditions we've been describing, what you want will be the same thing God wants. And that is how the Law is fulfilled. If you do this, you won't want to steal. You'll be protected. By what? **By the Holy Spirit of God cultivating in your heart** the Law that precludes any desire for that.

Now what does Paul mean when he says, "*Love your neighbor as yourself?*" He's not necessarily making a case for people to develop a healthy self image. He's saying that most people will be most caring about themselves. So he tells us to think about and care for others with that same degree of intensity. Philippians 2:1-5 reminds us of this:

*1 Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and sympathetic?*

*2 Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, **loving one another**, and working together with one heart and purpose.*

*3 Don't be selfish; don't live to make a good impression on others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself.*

*4 Don't think only about your own affairs, but be interested in others, too, and what they are doing.*

*5 Your attitude should be the same that Christ Jesus had.*

Paul says to be as concerned about the happiness, peace, and joy of others as you are about your own. Whose face do you wash in the morning? Whose hair do you comb? Whose clothes do you buy? Pay as much attention to other people as to yourself and you'll always be loving, loving, loving.

Now some people wonder who their neighbor is. Well it's anyone who crosses your path. It's anybody. Now if you want to know how that love acts, read 1 Corinthians 13. Any one who crosses your path should feel your love and in that way you will fulfill the Law. You'll never hurt anyone if all you do is love them.

Now for the last thought today. Romans 13:8 literally says: “*For the one loving has fulfilled the other law.*” You know what the other law is? It's the second part of that two part statement in Matthew 22: 39. The part that says:

*Love your neighbor as yourself.*

That's the other law and the one who loves fulfills that law. Verse 10 of chapter 13 then tells us that loves is the fulfillment of the Law. In the time of Christ a Pharisee was a legalist, someone who kept the Law of God out of fear, or pride, or self interest. We have a lot of people like that today too. **Such a person can never fulfill the Law.** You may be able to restrain yourself from murder or adultery, but you'll never be able to fulfill the Law because that type of thing is superficial. To fulfill the Law, the behavior has to come from the way you feel in your heart, a love that is a reality because of the work of Jesus. Matthew 5:17 says:

*17 “Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to fulfill them.*

You can take that statement about Jesus fulfilling the Law in many ways. He fulfilled it by being its fulfillment prophetically. He fulfilled it by keeping it perfectly, and He fulfilled it by being the perfect expression of love. So we too are called to love, and if we love we fulfill the whole Law. That is our unique relationship to society. Let's go back to Romans 12:1 where all of this begins to unfold. From Romans chapter three to chapter eleven the emphasis was on salvation and redemption. Then as we get into chapter 12 the emphasis shifts to those of us who are redeemed. First we present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God and then we stop conforming ourselves to the world. After that we begin to use our gifts and demonstrate certain virtues and graces to the church and to the world around us. We see that, regarding the government, we are to submit and pay our taxes. With regard to our relationship with all of society, **we are to be characterized by love.** We read 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.”*

The new commandment is love and love is the fulfilling of the Law. Let's try to illustrate this by looking to music. In music there are twelve basic notes. A little child could learn those notes in an hour, but a Bach, Mozart, or Beethoven couldn't exhaust these notes in a lifetime. It's incredible what those twelve notes can create because of the infinite number of combinations and interpretations. Love can be expressed in many ways as well. Love can be heroic, love can be courteous, love can express martyrdom. Sometimes it's only a small little act, a kind word, a loving touch. Love, like music, is so simple a child can understand it, and it's combinations are so infinite that a whole lifetime couldn't exhaust its possibilities. Love is a grace that includes everything in terms of Christian living in attitude, speech, and action.

It is possible to fulfill the Law and the way to do it is to love. So love should characterize your relationship with everyone.

We owe a debt and the debt we owe is to love. It's possible because we have a new capacity through the power of the Holy Spirit living within us. We have been given a new commandment. We are to fulfill the Law of God by demonstrating this love in every aspect of our lives.

What could never be done by our trying to keep the Law in a legalistic fashion, can be done in us through love provided by salvation, which is the work of the Spirit of God.

There is a story many years ago of an elementary teacher. Her name was Mrs. Thompson. As she stood in front of her 5th grade class on the very first day of school, she told the children a lie. Like most teachers, she looked at her students and said that she loved them all the same.

But that was impossible, because there in the front row, slumped in his seat, was a little boy named Teddy Stoddard.

Mrs. Thompson noticed that Teddy didn't play well with the other children, that his clothes were messy and that he constantly needed a bath, and Teddy could be unpleasant. It got to the point where Mrs. Thompson would actually take delight in marking his papers with a broad red pen, making bold X's and then putting a big "F" at the top of his papers.

At the school where Mrs. Thompson taught, she was required to review each child's past records and she put Teddy's off until last. However, when she reviewed his file, she was in for a surprise.

Teddy's first grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is a bright child with a ready laugh. He does his work neatly and has good manners.... he is a joy to be



around."

His second grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is an excellent student, well liked by his classmates, but he is troubled because his mother has a terminal illness and life at home must be a struggle."

His third grade teacher wrote, "His mother's death has been hard on him. He tries to do his best but his father doesn't show much interest and his home life will soon affect him if some steps aren't taken."

Teddy's fourth grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is withdrawn and doesn't show much interest in school. He doesn't have many friends and sometimes sleeps in class."

By now, Mrs. Thompson realized the problem, and she was ashamed of herself. She felt even worse when her students brought her Christmas presents, all wrapped in beautiful ribbons and bright paper, except for Teddy's. His present was clumsily wrapped in heavy brown paper that he got from a grocery bag.

Mrs. Thompson took pains to open it in the middle of the other presents. Some of the other children started to laugh when she found a rhinestone bracelet with some of the stones missing, and a bottle that was one quarter full of perfume. But she stifled the children's laughter when she exclaimed how pretty the bracelet was, putting it on, and dabbing some of the perfume on her wrist.

Teddy Stoddard stayed after school that day just long enough to say, "Mrs. Thompson, today you smelled just like my Mom used to." After the children left she cried for at least an hour. On that very day, she quit teaching reading, writing and arithmetic. Instead, she began to teach children.

Mrs. Thompson paid particular attention to Teddy. As she worked with him, his mind seemed to come alive. The more she encouraged him, the faster he responded. By the end of the year, Teddy had become one of the smartest children in the class, and despite her lie that she would love all the children the same, Teddy became one of her "teacher's pets."

A year later, she found a note under her door from Teddy, telling her that she is the best teacher he ever had in his whole life. Six years went by before she got another note from Teddy. He then wrote that he had finished high school, third in his class, and she was still the best teacher he ever had in his whole life.

Four years after that, she got another letter, saying that while things had

been tough at times, he'd stayed in school, had stuck with it, and would soon graduate from college with the highest of honors. He assured Mrs. Thompson that she was still the best and favorite teacher he ever had in his whole life.

Then four more years passed and yet another letter came. This time he explained that after he got his bachelor's degree, he decided to go a little further. The letter explained that she was still the best and favorite teacher he ever had. But now his name was a little longer, the letter was signed, Theodore F. Stoddard, M.D.

The story doesn't end there. You see, there was yet another letter that spring. Teddy said he'd met this girl and was going to be married. He explained that his father had died a couple of years ago and he was wondering if Mrs. Thompson might agree to sit in the place at the wedding that was usually reserved for the mother of the groom. Of course, Mrs. Thompson did.

And guess what? She wore that bracelet, the one with several rhinestones missing. And she made sure she was wearing the perfume that Teddy remembered his mother wearing on their last Christmas together. They hugged each other, and Dr. Stoddard whispered in Mrs. Thompson's ear, "Thank you Mrs. Thompson for believing in me. Thank you so much for making me feel important and showing me that I could make a difference."

Mrs. Thompson, with tears in her eyes, whispered back. She said, "Teddy you have it all wrong. You were the one who taught me that I could make a difference. I didn't know how to teach until I met you."

What a difference love made in that little boy's life! And what a difference it will make in the lives of the people with whom you have contact.