

97-05-04a

We have been studying on Friday nights some of the fundamental principles that belong to our faith as believers. And of course on Sundays we've been studying Romans as we will this morning. But our studies quite often interact, especially in my mind, and of course that has a big effect on how they go.

And this morning we're actually going to see a very strong relationship. We've spent two nights on Fridays looking at what Scripture has to say about our calling. And we're going to see Paul addressing that issue this morning as we continue and resume our study in Romans in chapter 13, verse 8. But as we have our Scripture reading this morning, it is going to come from the Gospel of Luke.

And it addresses something that's familiar to us. You recall the story of the good Samaritan. This story, interestingly, is only recorded in the Gospel of Luke.

Actually, the Gospels mention Samaritans only twice. The one other time when they turn up is the healing of the ten lepers. So interesting, there are ten lepers who are healed and they run away rejoicing and then one returns to thank Jesus.

And the one who returns is a Samaritan. The other nine are Jewish. And so it is interesting that these things both are mentioned in the Gospel of Luke because Luke is aimed more directly at Gentile audiences than say Matthew or even John.

And so in Luke chapter 10, we're going to find our Scripture reading this morning. And this is occasioned by a question. Jesus has been talking about the fact that what He is presenting has never been offered before.

He says in Luke 10, 23 to His disciples privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear and have not heard it. And when He says kings and prophets, in particular when you think of kings, what kings do you suppose would have desired to see the things that Jesus was talking about? These are kings like King David and King Solomon, Asa and some of the faithful kings in the history of Israel.

And with all of their standing and with all of their importance in God's plan, they didn't have the opportunity to see some of the things that Jesus was revealing in His teaching. But a certain lawyer stood up in Luke 10, 25 and tested Him saying, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? One of the things we notice right away is when it says a lawyer, this is not someone who goes and engages in civil cases. This is a scholar of the law.

He is an expert in the law of Moses. Now, do you think that this man would be a believer or an unbeliever? It goes without saying he's a believer. And yet he says, Teacher, what shall I do to

inherit eternal life? This is another of the passages that reminds us of what eternal life means as a phrase.

It's life in the sense of quality. This man is not concerned about going to the lake of fire. In fact, there's no teaching about the lake of fire in the Old Testament.

Can you think of an Old Testament passage that mentions the lake that burns with fire and sulfur? It's not there. The Israelites assumed their salvation. They weren't worried about death or the afterlife.

When this scholar of the law stands up and says, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He's asking, what shall I do to please God? How can I be in the forefront of blessing and reward from God as a believer, as a Jew in this case? Jesus said to him, well, let's talk about your area of expertise. What is written in the law? What is your reading of it? So he answered and said, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself. Jesus replies and says, you have answered rightly.

And by the way, this is quite a good answer, isn't it? Jesus himself sums up the law and the prophets with these two commandments. And this man is a good ways along in his understanding of the message of the Old Testament scriptures. Jesus says, you have answered rightly.

How many people does Jesus ever say this to? Wouldn't it be great if Jesus could turn to us and say, you have answered rightly. You've drawn the right conclusion. What a wonderful commendation.

You have answered rightly. Do this and you will live. Now, what does he mean? That loving God and loving one another is a means of salvation? Not at all.

This is live in the sense of the abundant life. Eternal life in the sense of its quality. Life that partakes of the divine.

Life that pleases God. Life that reflects communion and fellowship with God and fulfilling of God's purpose. However, look at verse 29.

This lawyer wanting to justify himself said to Jesus, and who is my neighbor? He's, even though he's got a good understanding of the law, he's still, he's now in a little bit of competition with Jesus. He recognizes that Jesus is the most profound scholar of the law that he has ever run into. And Jesus is not a lawyer, quote unquote.

He's not a school trained, certified, diploma on the wall graduate of any theological school. And so this man is not content with his understanding of the law. He wants to compete in the eyes of the surrounding people with Jesus reputation wise.

And this is where we now wind up being a little disappointed in this man. He wanting to justify

himself said to Jesus, who is my neighbor? Let me give you a technical. See, I was tempted to do this.

You know, Joseph was on the radio several weeks back on one of these Ask the Computer Man programs. And calls were coming in from the wide many state area. They were getting calls from Arkansas and so forth.

Well, I've had this problem with my computer and Joseph was answering these questions and I will confess to having a similar instinct. I thought, well, I could probably call Joseph up and ask him a question he couldn't answer. And I resisted that impulse, but this man did not.

He wanting to justify himself said to Jesus, who is my neighbor? Then Jesus answered and said, a certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance, a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

Likewise, a Levite, when he arrived at that place, came and looked and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan as he journeyed, came where he was and when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine.

And he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper and said to him, take care of him and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you. So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves? And he said, he who showed mercy on him.

Then Jesus said to him, go and do likewise. I could easily make a series of lessons on the parable of the good Samaritan. There are so many fascinating things in here.

Let me just point out a few. First of all, the clue that we have up in verse 29 that this lawyer wants to justify himself. This is one of the chronic problems among believers in Israel historically and in that generation.

And so when Jesus talks about the two who pass by on the road, who does he choose? A priest and a Levite. Like the lawyer, they are supposed to be keen on the law. They're supposed, if anyone knows what pleases God and what scripture requires, it would be a priest and a Levite.

And when they encounter this bloody man in the ditch, they walk by on the other side. So there is an opportunity for personal application on the part of this man who considers himself to be an expert in the law. If these men had really been experts as priests, as a priest or as a Levite, he would have understood the intent of the law and not just the letter of the law.

They violated no law by walking by on the other side, did they? They broke no commandment except the one to love your neighbor as yourself. But depending on how you define neighbor, it's

easy to define someone out of the problem, which is what they did. And so in their mind, they had broken no law, even though they were experts in it.

And Jesus' point is that you can know a lot and miss the point. That's the danger that we run. We come from a tradition and we maintain an emphasis on knowing the Scripture.

We know that it's vital, it's central. It is the means to be in a position to exercise faith. You can't have faith in something you don't know.

And faith is the means of pleasing God. Faith is the means of being declared righteous. That's what the message of Romans has been all about.

And we understand that we have to grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, so that we have something to have faith in, something that changes our mind and our priorities. But the danger in that is one that we must be aware of. And that's the area of failure illustrated here.

You can know a lot and miss the point. It is possible to be a pastor and know an incredible amount and miss the point. It's possible to be a believer with years of Bible study and notebooks and interlinear scribbles in your Bible that have accumulated for years and years.

And yet, miss the point. And that's what Jesus is communicating in this parable to this expert in the law. You're an expert in the law.

Here's a couple of other experts in the law. And yet, you've just said that the way to pleasing God that's communicated in the law is to love God and love your neighbor. And yet, do you really understand what that means? Are you really bringing that about? It's also interesting that the one who succeeds in exercising love, obviously, there were Jews who quietly lived their lives and understood the meaning of the law, the intent of the law, and fulfilled it.

But Jesus chooses a Samaritan as the person who genuinely loves his neighbor because this was an area of great difficulty. If there's anyone in Israel who was looked down on, it was the Samaritans. They, of course, were left over from the days of conquest, from the days when Israel, the northern kingdom, had been conquered and had been carried away captive in the Assyrian conquest.

And these were Jews who had remained in the land and, in many cases, had intermarried with the conquering peoples. They were half-caste Jews. They had their own version of the law, which we have copies of today, the Samaritan Pentateuch, which is interesting for text-critical purposes because it has a separate tradition of preservation, and it also has a lot of changes in it to favor the Samaritans.

It already happened by Jesus' day. Remember when he's talking to the Samaritan woman at the

well? And she brings up the point that the Israelites think they need to worship in Jerusalem, and the Samaritan Pentateuch said they should worship up in Samaria. And Jesus said, the time is coming when you won't worship either place.

Those who worship him will worship in spirit and in truth. But the Samaritans were an issue for Israelites because they were considered to be beneath. They were corrupted.

They were intermingled. They weren't a pure strain. And so Jews put faith and pride in their lineage, their ancestry.

But Jesus points out that that's not what's important. Here's someone who isn't a priest. He's not a Levite.

He doesn't even consider himself to be under the law as we hold it here in Israel. They've got their own version of the law up there. But he has figured out what God was after in the law.

And when he saw the man in the ditch, he had compassion. You know what I find most interesting about verse 33? It says a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where this man was. We have a lot of emphasis in Christianity today on formalizing a ministry.

Jesus doesn't say, but there was a certain Samaritan who had a ministry to beat up people in ditches, who was canvassing the highways looking for someone to help. This came about in the normal course of business. We don't have to formalize a ministry.

The danger of formalizing a ministry is that then you feel like, well, it's only when I'm wearing that hat that my Christian life or my spiritual gift is functional, rather than realizing that our entire life is a ministry. As has been pointed out in the past, all of us are in full-time Christian service. And so here's a Samaritan who is going about his daily tasks.

He's making a journey from one place to another. And he encounters this opportunity as he's going about his routine. And he's alert.

He sees this. He doesn't pass by on the other side. He doesn't say, I'm too busy.

He sees him and he has compassion. He goes to him, bandages his wounds. He pours on oil and wine.

This man has the oil. He has the wine. He has something with which to minister.

And that's an important point for us. Do we have something in our souls with which to minister? Some people are so anxious to go out and have an impact or evangelize or whatever, and we don't always stop and inventory our travel bag. What do we have oil? Do we have wine? Are we prepared to minister to someone else? But this Samaritan, by the very fact that he looks over there and has compassion, we know that in his soul, he's got something that the priest and the

Levite lacked.

And that is, he has closed the loop in his understanding of God's plan and God's character. He's not only prepared spiritually, but he's prepared physically. We don't know how long or short a journey this is, but he has things with him that enable him to minister.

He's got something to bind up wounds. He's got something to disinfect wounds. He's got something to comfort and to stimulate.

Wine was a very common medicine. It was good for what ails you. Paul tells Timothy, take some for your stomach.

It was administered to people who were grieving. It was administered to people who needed a mild anesthetic, which was necessary in this case. He set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn and took care of him.

He went out of his way. He wasn't on his way to an inn. But at the point that this opportunity came up, he treats this beat up individual without knowing anything about him, doesn't know if he was perhaps a criminal himself and was bested by someone that he was trying to rob.

He doesn't ask questions. He sees his need and ministers to it. And this is a classic example of what love is.

Love is based on who and what the lover is, not who and what the object of that love is. Human love often bases itself on the quality of the object. That's why a lot of marriages break up.

People find each other stimulating or attractive in some way. And if something happens to diminish that, the relationship falls apart because a lot of human love is based on the merit of the object. Christian love, the love that reflects God's character, is based on the character and the quality of the person who's doing the loving.

And it doesn't depend on any quality or any merit in the object. This is illustrated here in the Samaritan's actions. And on the next day, when he departed, notice he stays there with this man overnight to make sure that he's okay.

And he then takes out two days' wages. A denarius was a day's wage. We know that from the parable of the laborers.

And so here's two days' pay. You could figure out what that might equate to in modern dollars. But this man pays in advance for another two days of full-time care for this man.

Gives them to the innkeeper and says, take care of him. This is going to cover the next two days. And if he needs anything beyond that, I'm going to come back and check.

Notice he says, whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you. This Samaritan is

going to make a point of stopping back by and making sure of two things. A, that the man recovers and is on his way and on his feet again.

And secondly, that the innkeeper is not out anything for his trouble. The Samaritan takes it upon himself. He doesn't put pressure and say, you know, I've done a lot for this man.

Now I think if you'll chip in and use some of your resources to help this man. He doesn't obligate anyone else in the course of doing what he thinks is right. He obligates himself.

He pays. He doesn't put pressure on the innkeeper. He doesn't recruit some Jews and say, hey, you're this guy's countryman.

Don't you think you all can kind of, let me hand this off to you now that I've got it started. Which is something we also see a lot of in Christian ministry today. He takes personal responsibility for every aspect and he follows up.

He makes sure that the job is complete and that no one else is out anything. There is, as you can tell, there's quite a lot in this parable. You could spend a lot of time and I can't even get through it in a Scripture reading without pointing some of them out.

It's just a very doctrine filled illustration that the Lord uses here. And he concludes by saying, which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among thieves? This word for neighbor is sort of vague in Greek. We're always talking about how precise Greek is and so forth.

But this word in Greek means someone who's nearby. We have a pretty restricted definition of neighbor. We say a neighbor is wealthy.

He lives next to me in my neighborhood. It's a neighborhood and that's where my neighbors live. And my neighbors are more and more neighbors the closer they are to my house.

But in Greek, this word means someone who's in the vicinity and that changes depending on where you are. Wherever you are, you have a vicinity and anybody that's in that vicinity is a, I believe the word is plesion, a neighbor. I believe that's P-L-E-S-I-O-N.

So which of these three was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves? The lawyer answers and says, the one who showed mercy. Jesus said, go and do likewise. Why does Jesus tell him to go and do likewise? Because this is the answer to the question that was asked in verse 25.

Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? If we want to please God, if we want to fulfill his purpose and be blessed and rewarded by him and partake of his life, this is the mentality to have. To not just have the knowledge, but know what it means to get the point and to apply it. Rather a lengthy scripture reading, but nevertheless, that's it.

If you'll turn now over to Romans chapter 13, we'll see a very close correspondence between this

teaching of the Lord in Luke and what Paul picks up with. We saw last time in Romans chapter 13, our obligation as citizens, our obligation as believers involves respect for authority and being subject, standing under, hupotasso is the word here, respecting authority. And Paul spends several verses and says about six different times in this passage that civil authority is granted by God, whether it's right, whether it's wrong, whether it's good, whether it's evil, it is permitted and maintained by God.

And it has a purpose. And if individuals hold those offices and fail, they're accountable to God. God will hold them responsible.

God will deal with them. It's our responsibility to be submissive. We also saw last time that there are limits to that submission.

We do not submit at the expense of moral principles, at the expense of what is right and wrong in the spiritual sense. And this is a qualified submission. We submit as long as it doesn't involve compromise of higher priorities.

And we saw what an important and valuable principle that is, not just in the area of civil authority, but also in areas of family authority, church authority, any area of authority has that same qualifier, military authority even. So what's interesting here is where we left off last time in Romans 13, seven, Paul concludes that section verses one through seven by saying, render therefore to all their due. And that's a really good translation because this is from the word Ophelio in Greek.

We get the lady's name in English. It's not a very common name now, but Ophelia is from this Greek word. And it means to owe or in the noun form, it means a debt.

So he says, render therefore to all what they are due. Whatever you are obligated to render to them, render it to them. Taxes, to whom taxes are due.

Custom, to whom custom. Fear, to whom fear. Honor, to whom honor.

And then we pick up this morning in verse eight. And at first it seems almost contradictory. Paul says in verse eight, owe no one anything.

And the word therefore owe is the verb form of Ophelio. He says, you owe a bunch of people in verse seven. And then in verse eight, he says, don't owe anyone anything except to love.

But what is he saying? We have obligations for taxes, for customs, for fear and for honor. Don't be lacking. Don't be caught short.

Don't fail to fulfill those obligations. If you fulfill those obligations, you will owe no one anything. You won't be in debt to someone monetarily.

You won't be in debt to someone in terms of respect or honor. Or obedience. Owe no one anything.

Don't be found lacking. Now this, some people have said, well, you should never take out a loan. You should never borrow anything because now you owe someone something.

Well, if you think about that for just a minute, it makes sense. If I go to a bank and I take out a mortgage for a house, I obligate myself to pay a certain amount each month. And the bank is satisfied.

And if I'm timely with my payments, I don't owe the bank anything. I have fulfilled my end. They have fulfilled their end.

They're happy with me and I'm happy with them. So it doesn't mean don't incur a financial debt. It means if you are going to borrow money on time, never be behind in your payments.

If the lender is happy with you and is satisfied that you are holding up your end of that contract, you don't owe them anything in that sense. What's unsatisfactory, what violates this exhortation is to obligate oneself to payments on time and then to be late or to be behind. Now you owe someone something.

And if all of us in the vagaries of life, we may find ourselves in a position where we've obligated ourselves to something we can't pay. It's our responsibility to go and renegotiate and find a way to reach a satisfactory arrangement with that lender. You sometimes can renegotiate the length of time versus the size of payment.

You may have to have emergency care at the hospital and maybe you don't have insurance that covers that specific form of care. And they say, well, you now owe us \$50,000. You say, I haven't got \$50,000.

And they say, well, this is due and payable now. And you say, well, I can't do and pay that right now. Nearly everyone will work out some mutually satisfactory arrangement by which that debt can be satisfied.

And if you keep up with the terms of that arrangement, you do not owe them anything. You have paid them our taxes. We don't pre-pay our taxes to the government, do we? They come due once a year.

Well, actually we do sort of pre-pay our taxes, don't we? That's a bad example. But they're happy with us. The government doesn't come after us.

If we pay the taxes that we owe and yet we keep on incurring that debt through the year. And so I think it's clear that when Paul says, owe no one anything, he says there shouldn't be people who are unhappy with you and feel that you have not discharged a duty, whatever that duty may be,

whether it's financial or civic or whatever that may be. Owe no one anything except to love one another.

And this seems almost like a contradiction, isn't it? Because the whole idea of love in the divine sense is that it's not an obligation. Love is an expression of God's grace, His love for us. He didn't owe us love.

We weren't worthy of love. We had not arranged for love from God. He loved us freely and without any action on our part.

And we say, well, God isn't obligated to love us. That's an expression of His grace. And yet we are obligated.

We owe a debt to others for love. So Paul says that there is one obligation. And so how do we sort this out? What does this really mean? Well, when I think about the government and I am in a satisfactory tax status with the United States government, the IRS has no complaint with me.

So I don't worry about them anymore. Not until next April. That's covered.

That's taken care of. I have adequate withholding coming out of my pay. So I consider that to be handled.

I have other debts that have been satisfied. My grandmother very graciously loaned me money for some of the semesters of seminary. And I have repaid her.

I don't owe her that anymore. And so I don't worry about that anymore. It doesn't come to my mind and I don't think, well, what about the loan I got from grandmother? It's satisfied.

I don't sit and think about the IRS on a daily basis and fret whether or not there's enough withholding or whether I paid taxes last year or the year before. It's handled. But the obligation to love, Paul says, is one that should continually be in our mind.

It isn't satisfied. I don't say, well, you know, I engaged in the ministry on Monday. And so my debt to my fellow believers is satisfied.

Or I gave an offering to this missionary, so my debt in terms of caring for others and whether or not they're saved is satisfied. Paul says there's one obligation that ought to continually be in our mind and that's the obligation for love. Anyone that we come in contact with, we owe them something.

And we ought to have the same sort of desire to satisfy that debt that we have in these other areas. And so that's one that doesn't ever get paid off. It's one where we can't say, well, you know, I was really nice to someone this morning, so I can be a grouch the rest of the day.

Or I put money in the offering on Sunday, so I don't have to worry about any needs among

believers or unbelievers now because I've discharged that. I've handled that. Love is a constant obligation.

And that's his point when he says, owe no one anything except to love one another. That's always, we're always in debt in that area. It should always be an issue in our mind that we have a responsibility to be of benefit, to be sensitive to need.

Think about the parable of the Good Samaritan. What was the difference between the priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan? When the Samaritan walked by and saw the bleeding man in the ditch, he had compassion. He felt a sense of obligation to not walk on by, to stop and to render aid.

And he put himself out. He spent his own money. He took his own time.

He took an extra day on his journey. He made arrangements to come back and check and make sure that that problem was fully resolved. It was his opportunity and he treated it as an obligation.

And he could not have done any more if that had been Jesus Christ himself in the ditch. You know, you ask yourself the question, well, if it was the Lord Jesus Christ, how much would you put yourself out? The Samaritan did everything humanly possible. There's nothing more he could have done.

He knew first aid. He had the supplies. He rendered aid.

He transported him to a place of safety and care. He made arrangements for his continued care and promised that he would come back and fulfill any additional financial responsibility and make sure that the problem was solved. If it had been the Lord Jesus Christ, in retrospect, he would not have done anything any different, I don't believe.

And that's the sort of sense of obligation that we should have as we journey through our daily life. And as opportunities arise, we have to ask ourselves the question, is this within my sphere of opportunity? Not every opportunity qualifies. Not every ministry that sends us something in the mail is worthy of financial support.

Not every person who comes into our periphery is ready or willing to receive aid or the speaking of truth and love and so forth. We have to exercise some perception and some discernment and some common sense. But there are times when a situation comes into our neighborhood, if you will, and we have the means and we have the motive and we have the opportunity, and here's a chance to discharge this obligation for love.

And so we don't want to do it by halves. We want to do it to the very best of our ability. So Paul says this is an obligation that we constantly owe, to love one another.

Then he says something very interesting. He who loves another has fulfilled the law. Now for me,

at this point in Romans, this is almost a startling statement to make.

Paul has been, in a sense, arguing against the law through this whole book, hasn't he? People have been using the law to try to justify themselves, use it as a means of righteousness. And Paul says, well, if you want to fulfill the law, here's a way to fulfill the law. There is a way to fulfill the law, and this is good.

He's presenting love as a good thing and that fulfilling the law is a good thing. And so it makes us stop and think again about, well, what does it really mean to fulfill the law? We're reminded of things we've talked about before, the rich young ruler who comes and says, I've kept the law from my youth. And Jesus says, one thing you lack.

And it was the priority in his soul that is revealed at that point. Are you willing to set aside everything you own and become an itinerant with me? And the man goes away sorrowing. Fulfilling the law isn't a matter of keeping the ordinances in the physical sense.

It's a matter of having the heart that the law describes. In my mind, it's almost backward. Instead of saying love fulfills the law, the best way to understand it is the law fulfills love.

If you have a soul that's characterized by love, the law is a description of how you will behave. You'll be sensitive to your neighbors. You will not harm anyone.

You will be a source of blessing and not a source of ill. So he who loves another has fulfilled the law. Well, think about this for a moment.

Turn back a few pages to Romans chapter three. Romans chapter three, verse 28. After talking about the propitiation and the redemption that is in Christ Jesus and God passing over former sins, as you recall, Romans three talks about the fact that being Jewish isn't an advantage in God's love.

It's an advantage in God's plan. Paul makes the point in Romans three that there are many passages in the Old Testament that describe the gross sinfulness of Israelites. He quotes an extensive portion of scripture that talks about people not understanding and seeking after God.

They've turned aside. In verse 12, they've become unprofitable. There is none who does good.

No, not one. Their throat is an open tomb. They practice deceit with their tongues.

The poison of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood.

What is this scripture describing? The Syrians, the Ninevites, the Egyptians? No, it's describing a generation in Israel. And Paul makes that point in verse 19. We know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law.

These people are believers. They're the people of God. And yet they are exceedingly sinful and exceedingly evil.

Paul says, we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore, by the deeds of the law, no flesh will be justified in his sight. Many of these people who had deceitful tongues and who had cursing and bitterness in their hearts were keeping the law.

They were like the rich young ruler. Nobody could fault them in terms of sacrifices or feast keeping and not being guilty under the civil code and so forth. They weren't defiled.

They hadn't violated the ritual code in any sense. But Paul says, the scripture still convicts them of being sinful, even though they're believers and even though they're keeping the law to demonstrate the fact that they are guilty before God. And by the deeds of the law, no flesh is declared righteous.

God doesn't declare you righteous because you kept the feast, because you offered the sacrifice, because you did not violate the ordinances. The law gives us knowledge of sin. And so he says in verse 21, now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed being witnessed by the law and the prophets, but it's the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

To all of those who are trusting, this is living righteousness that he's talking about in Romans 3. So he draws a conclusion. He says in verse 27, where is boasting? Where's bragging? It's excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith.

The law of faith excludes boasting, excludes self-satisfaction because of what one does. This is the risk that we run in our obligation for love, our obligation for pleasing God. And this is a common malady in Christianity today.

People say, well, you know, I'm a member of the this and that club, the women that do this club or the men who do that club. I participate in this ministry or that ministry. I go to this stadium or that meeting.

I have personal accountability. I have a study here and a ministry there. And when people think about their relationship with God, they say, well, surely God is pleased with me.

Look at all that I'm doing. Look at all that I'm participating in. Look at all the things that I contribute to with my time or with my money or whatever.

This is the very thing that Paul is trying to point out and eradicate from our lives as believers is that we don't get justified. We're not declared righteous. We're not pleasing to God because of what we do.

Therefore, in verse 28, we conclude that a man is justified. A man is declared righteous in the

experiential sense. Unfortunately, much of Romans 3 has been applied to salvation only.

These principles are true at salvation, but that's not what Paul is talking about in Romans 3. We use Romans 3.23 to lead someone to the Lord, and the principle is valid at the point of salvation. But Romans 3, no Jew thought that salvation came by keeping the law. They assumed themselves to be saved.

What they were looking for was justification, being pleasing to God, being pleasing and declared righteous in the eyes of others. And this whole idea of salvation by works is not something that Paul argues about. Nobody thought that in this generation or the preceding ones.

They assumed themselves to be saved. They assumed themselves to be the people of God. The Pharisees in Jesus' day, we are sons of Abraham.

We're in good with God. We don't have any question about our salvation. We're not trying to get saved by keeping the law.

We're trying to be righteous. We're trying to be those who are at the pinnacle of spiritual achievement. And the whole argument of Romans is that you don't achieve spiritually by what you do.

You don't please God and get declared righteous by what you do. It's who you trust. It's what you trust.

A man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. Apart from the deeds of the law. Paul doesn't say the deeds of the law are a bad thing.

He says, that's not what determines whether or not you're pleasing to God, whether or not you are righteous in the true sense. It's what you trust. It's if you trust, when you trust.

Look at verse 31. Do we then make void the law through faith? Does that mean that the deeds of the law are not important? Certainly not. Meganoita, may it never be.

God forbid. On the contrary, we establish the law. Jesus said, I have not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it.

Paul says, we do not make void the law. We establish the law. There's nothing wrong with the law.

By the same token, as we go through our study in Romans here, there is nothing wrong with ministry. There's nothing wrong with evangelism. There's nothing wrong with the women who do this and the men who do that.

If it is done out of faith, if it is the fruit of faith, if it's the result of faith, if it is an expression of faith and hope and love that have been generated in the soul because we went to God asking and

seeking and knocking, because we have been pursuing as our first priority, Romans 12, one and two. Transformation, renewal in the inner man, growth in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior. Then all of these things become fulfillments.

Now they achieve God's purpose. The law, Paul says, is just and holy and good. It is the perversion of the law that is bad.

There's nothing wrong with Christian ministry, with meeting needs, bringing hope to a lost and dying world, and all of the other phrases that we hear bandied about. The difficulty is that so many of us as believers short-circuit getting there, and we bypass the essential step of faith. We give it lip service.

We give it a nod. We say, well, of course. I mean, I know that prayer and Bible study are important, but the default definition of Christianity is still getting out there flying knees and elbows and having an influence on people.

And we tend to either consciously or unconsciously measure our worth and our value and our level of achievement in spiritual things by how much effect we have had. And it's just wrong, wrong, wrong. And that's what Paul is arguing in this book.

Patty and I were talking recently about this hymn. We heard it this morning, sung by a very strong baritone voice. What's the man's name? John Charles Thomas.

I think that was his name. He's a very famous singer of a few decades back. They played it on Hymns We Love this morning.

And he sang, I Love to Tell the Story. And it's a sweet old hymn that we know and we smile when we hear it. It's one of those traditional things.

But Patty made a very good point. If you think about the words, she was going to make a visual out of it for the girls to teach in that song. And when you start looking at the words, it doesn't really say much, except I love to tell the story.

There are unseen things above. It's Jesus and His love. And that's the sum total of what you hear about the story.

And the rest of it is, I want to go to those who haven't heard and it's fresh each time I tell it. And my whole life revolves around telling this story. Well, I'm not throwing rocks per se at that hymn, but there is a kind of thinking that revolves around that center that my life is telling the story rather than becoming the story where God is at work in us to will and to do.

And we're anxious to go tell the story to some other people. And all I'm going to do is just run around telling the story. Well, we need to listen to the story.

We need to have faith in the story. We need to be transformed by the story and have the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, as Paul will say in a chapter later here when we go to Romans 5.5, the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. So we're not disabling the law when we focus on love.

Love fulfills the law. Jesus said all the law and the prophets are summed up in loving the Lord our God and loving our neighbor as ourself. And that is true in the Old Testament and it's true in the New Testament.

And what is the law? The law is the description of what a person does with his life, how he lives, how he interacts with other people. There is nothing at all wrong. We should be alert and watching for opportunities to evangelize.

We should be alert and watching for opportunities like the Samaritan man did. There's means, motive, and opportunity. It's just like committing the perfect crime except it's in the positive sense.

We don't always have means. We don't always have opportunity. We don't always have motive.

We look at something and we say, here's a person who's in need, but there is nothing I can truly do for this person. I would be spitting into the wind. Sometimes the worst thing you could do for someone is to help them because God is in the midst of showing them something through what they are suffering.

And to go in and ameliorate that suffering is to step in the way of what God is doing. So we have to have all three of those things. We need to have the means, we need to have the opportunity, but we need to also have the right motive.

And it needs to be something that springs out of faith. Faith is understanding God's plan. Faith is knowing when and how to act.

And when and how not to act. Sometimes the best expression of love is to step away. We do that sometimes with our children.

We do that sometimes with one another. We're going to pause now and take our break. And when we come back, we're going to see what Paul has to say about this whole idea of love fulfilling the law.

Let's pause here and take our break.