

97-05-04b

Okay, we're back from our break, and we're looking at what Paul has to say in Romans chapter 13, beginning in verse eight, about our obligation in the area of love. Now, the interesting thing about this, if you think about love, and you'll forgive me because I know I've made this point before, but if I take some random person and stand them in the middle of this room and say, I want all of you to love this person. Well, it reminds us of the fact that you can't love on command.

You know, people may be in a troubled marriage or something, they look in the scripture and it says, husbands, love your wives. And the typical husband reading down through there says, husbands, love your wives. You can't say, oh, okay.

And by an act of will, suddenly be filled with love and know how to express love and so forth. And of course, this has fueled a great book and tape industry in the Christian community because we now have a wealth of literature seeking to try to tell us how to love and how to fulfill that command. But the point is, love doesn't come by an act of will, does it? Whatever kind of love you want to talk about, whether it's emotional love or whatever else, we don't just decide to love and we suddenly love.

That's one of the things that is addressed in passages like Romans chapter five, verse five. It's the love of God that is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. And love is not something that we will to do.

Love is an attitude that we acquire through faith and through the transformation and renewal that God the Holy Spirit does in our soul through the word of God. You cannot love by an act of will. And this is one of the things that points out the shortcoming in the old way of thinking, the very old way of thinking that Israel engaged in in trying to jump directly to the execution of the mandates of the law without going through the intermediate step of faith.

You can't become righteous simply by performing an action and you can't be loving simply by performing an action. And a lot of these things that come out by way of guidance for love, 10 ways to be a better husband or 10 ways to be a better wife, and buy flowers, get candy, schedule a date, dress up and pretend like you don't know each other and rendezvous somewhere else. You laugh, you laugh, but those are out there.

That is not going to create love. That may create a lot of things, but it's not going to create love. So we should realize that this isn't going to happen in the spiritual realm any more than it's going to happen in the human realm.

We are urged to fulfill this obligation and to be aware of this obligation, which is, although we're urged to fulfill it, it's never fulfilled. It's an ongoing debt. It's an ongoing obligation to love one another.

So we can't just walk out of here today when the lesson is over and say, you know, I'm just going to love everything and everybody. I am just love looking for a place to happen. This is something that is a part of what God does.

God is at work in us to will and to do His good pleasure. The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. What we can will to do is to be a person upon whom those operations are taking place.

We can will to be a person who knows the Word of God. We can will to be a person who is susceptible to the ministry of the Holy Spirit because we keep short accounts. We are aware of, confess, and walk away from sin and evil in our lives.

We make decisions to walk in the light. We make decisions to meditate on the Word of God. We make decisions to communicate with God through prayer and to let God communicate to us through the teaching of His Word.

Those are things that are within the scope of our will. We cannot will to love, but we can will to be people who have love, who have the love of God. We can will to become people who are intrinsically capable of love, who have capacity for love.

And so when we see these exhortations, when Jesus says you can fulfill everything that God expects, you can fulfill the law through love, we don't jump to the last chapter of the book and skip all of the intermediate. You know, this is what people do a lot when they say, well, I've been reading to the girls at night from some of these children's books and each chapter is sort of a cliffhanger and I stop at the chapter and the preceding chapter will end with a question. One dog is talking to another dog and he says, well, I'm gonna reward you and here's what I'm going to give you.

And then the chapter ends. And so the girls are saying, well, what's he gonna give him? Can you just go ahead and tell us that before we go to bed? And I say, no, you've got to wait till I read you the next chapter. And a lot of us like to just jump, you know, cut to the chase, jump to where the denouement, the resolution of the conflict is in a novel or in a book or whatever.

And in Christianity, a lot of people say, well, let's just cut to the chase. If God wants us to do good deeds, let's just jump to the good deeds. Well, that's not what God wants.

God wants us to become people of faith. He wants us to become people who are characterized by faith and hope and love. And we can make decisions to bring that about.

And when we do that, we'll be like the Samaritan. We will be equipped to minister. We will have the means, we will have the motive, the proper motive, and we will have the opportunities.

God uses prepared people. And we will not have to organize a formal ministry per se. These

opportunities will come up on a day-by-day basis.

Owe no one anything except to love one another. He who loves another has fulfilled the law. There's nothing wrong with the law and there's nothing wrong with fulfilling it if it's fulfilled in the right way.

In fact, that's God's goal is for us to fulfill the law. Turn with me to Galatians chapter five. We've noted before that there is a very strong correspondence between Romans and Galatians.

They are two letters that were written at the same time to two separate destinations. And it is a very instructive thing to lay Galatians and Romans side by side and see the very close correspondence of ideas, of teaching, of principles and doctrines. Galatians chapter five, Paul says, stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

And that yoke of bondage is righteousness by works, misusing the law of Moses and looking at it as a system of life whereby one can be righteous, can be pleasing to God and pleasing in the eyes of others. That was a misuse of the law and it had been turned from a way of expressing what God had done on the inside to a yoke of bondage. Paul says, indeed I Paul say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.

Now that's a pretty severe statement to make about a believer that someone can be redeemed, reconciled, have the benefits of propitiation, all the things that happen at salvation and yet Christ profits us nothing. I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is what? A detour to keep the whole law. If you put yourself under that system, now you have put yourself under an obligation that Paul talks about over in Romans 13 and says you shouldn't owe anyone anything except love.

But now you've obligated yourself to keep these ordinances. When you wake up and when you go through your day, you're thinking what do I owe the law? What ordinance might I be violating? What ordinance applies in this situation? And your sense of obligation is toward a code of rules, toward a standard of behavior rather than the principle of love, to be a person who is capable of love in the divine sense. And so what is the focus of our life going to be? What will our thoughts and priorities revolve around if we obligate ourselves to the law? There's nothing wrong with the law but to have a sense of obligation in that area is to be constantly thinking in terms of rules and to assume that one has completed the task when all the rules have been obeyed, when that's not what God is after from us at all.

So when you see Galatians chapter five, verse three, the key word in that verse is debtor. And you can circle that and note beside it, Romans chapter 13, verse eight. We are not to be a debtor to a standard of behavior.

We are a debtor in the area of love to be a person that has been transformed, to be a person who

has capacity to love in the divine sense. And Paul says, this is a bad thing if you become a debtor to keep the whole law. And in so doing, look at verse four of Galatians five, you have become estranged from Christ.

You who attempt to be justified by law, you have fallen from grace. Now there are people who come to this and say, well, he's evangelizing here. He's saying you weren't really saved to begin with because a believer can't fall from grace.

Oh yes, a believer can fall from grace. Let's look at, for example, Hebrews chapter 12. And I think it's verse five.

In Hebrews chapter 12, it's down in verse 14 and 15. Pursue peace with all and holiness without which no one will see the Lord. Remember our study of calling on Friday night.

What is one of the main components of our calling? God has called us to peace. It's one of the aspects of our call that's mentioned more than once in the Scripture, isn't it? It's mentioned in 1 Corinthians 7.15. It's mentioned in Colossians chapter three, verse 15. And it's mentioned here in Hebrews 12.14. This is one of the things that we are to pursue.

Pursue peace with all and holiness. We also saw Friday night that we are called to holiness. Peter reminds us, be ye holy for I am holy.

And that call to the Old Testament saints is repeated in the New Testament. And the author of Hebrews understands that these are two primary components of our responsibility as believers. Our obligation to God is to pursue peace and to pursue holiness.

And notice what he says. Without these, no one will see the Lord. Now there's a crux of interpretation in the Scriptures.

If you're not living a life characterized by peace, if you're not living a life characterized by holiness, you won't see the Lord. Many people look at this and see a synonym for salvation. That if you're saved, you're going to see the Lord.

And if you're unsaved, you won't see the Lord. But that's not it at all. And our studies help us out here because we know that one of the rewards for the overcomers, one of the rewards for believers who respond to their calling and who fulfill their calling is to be with Christ, to enjoy the personal presence of Christ and proximity to Christ in the coming millennial kingdom.

Jesus tells the church in Revelation chapter two and chapter three that one of the blessings to the overcomers is to walk with Christ in white, to sit with him on his throne, to be close to Christ, to see Christ. And if we don't have a life that's characterized by peace, if we don't have a life that's characterized by holiness, and notice this is the pursuit of peace and the pursuit of holiness. Doesn't necessarily mean that we have achieved it, but that's our goal, that's our priority, that's what we're thinking about, that's what we consider to be our obligation in life.

Peace is an aspect of love, isn't it? Because many times in order to maintain peace, we sacrifice, we give up an issue, we grant a point, we spot someone the benefit that might rightfully be ours. The selflessness, the humility, the putting of others and considering of others ahead of ourselves makes for peace. A soft answer turns away wrath.

Part of love is sacrificing for the sake of peace. It's not worth giving up peace to gain what is rightfully mine, I'll grant it. I'll spot you that.

This is not a matter of compromising principle, it's a matter of not giving in to the desire to satisfy our ego or to justify ourselves or to be vindicated or to be declared right in some circumstance. Paul used the example in Corinthians of when they took each other to court. One side at least had a valid legal right to something, and Paul says, you're wrong.

You're violating the peace, you're violating unity, and everything that Christ died to give us as believers in his body by trying to get what is rightfully yours in court, it's not worth it, don't do it. Don't take each other to court. Would you not rather be wronged? Wouldn't it be better to be wronged instead of to parade this sort of disunity and division and bitterness in front of unbelievers? So we are called to peace, and without pursuing peace and without pursuing holiness, we're not going to see the Lord.

What does that mean? Loss of reward, loss of blessing. We're not fulfilling our call. We're not laying hold on the eternal life that Christ died to give us.

We're not gaining the victory of faith. We're not trusting in God to vindicate. We're not trusting in God to justify.

We're not satisfied with God's good opinion of us. We've got to get something else. We think that there's only one way that an issue can be resolved, and that's in the human realm rather than putting it in God's hands and waiting for God to resolve it, for God to vindicate.

Looking carefully, lest anyone fall short of the grace of God, Hebrews 12, 15. A believer can fall short. A believer can fall from grace in Galatians 5. A believer can fall short of the grace of God in Hebrews 12, 15.

Turn a few pages over to 2 Peter chapter three. He talks about the fact that people are misusing, twisting, and abusing the Scriptures that Paul is writing in 2 Peter chapter three. He's talking about the patience and long-suffering of the Lord and that that is deliverance.

Look at verse 14 of 2 Peter three. Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things. What is that? That's hope.

That's the motivation. Our triad of Christian virtues, faith, hope, and love. Faith is the means by which we fulfill our calling.

Hope is the motivation. We have an expectation that God will vindicate. God will return.

God will bless. God will reward. Looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him, what? In peace.

Peace is one of the primary principles of application in our life. If we're doing something that violates that principle of peace, we need to take a very close look at it and see if we're doing the right thing. God has called us to peace.

And it's one of the most under-emphasized principles in the New Testament. Sometimes just for fun, do a concordance study and look up all the places where the word peace occurs in the New Testament. It's really an eye-opener.

This is one of those places. Be diligent to be found by Him in peace without spot and blameless. That's the other primary portion of our calling, isn't it? Holiness.

Be found by Him in peace. Be found by Him holy. And consider that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation, it's deliverance.

Just as our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in his epistles, speaking in them of these things. Peter recognized that this was the theme in Paul's writings, one of which we're studying, that we've been called to peace, we've been called to holiness. Peter says, Paul has been writing about this in his letters, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the scriptures.

And this is one of the primary passages we go to when we address the issue of inspiration in the New Testament. Peter declares the writings of Paul to be on a par with the inspired Old Testament scriptures. He says, they take the writings of Paul and twist them just like they do the rest of the scriptures.

they're the scriptures of the scriptures. So, by implication, what Paul is writing is considered by Peter to be scripture. Look at verse 17, you therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked.

What's the opposite of falling from your steadfastness? Grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. So, in Galatians chapter five, when Paul says, if you get involved in trying to cut to the chase and go straight to works without that intermediate step of faith, you are a debtor to keep the whole law. You've become estranged from Christ.

You who attempt to be justified by law, i.e., by works, by what you do. You have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.

Hope is the motivation. We're eager. We look forward to that declaration of righteousness, both now and at the time when Christ returns.

In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything. Now, circumcision is a part of the law, isn't it? And aren't we talking about fulfilling the law? And yet, here's Paul saying, here's a requirement of the law, circumcision, that doesn't avail anything. Because when he talks about the law, he's talking about God's purpose for the law, which is to declare righteousness, the righteousness of God.

In the Old Testament, the emphasis was on the contrast, the sinfulness of man. In the New Testament, the emphasis is on the righteousness of God. And we can partake of that righteousness through faith.

In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love. What a great phrase, faith working through love. That's what Paul's talking about in Romans chapter 13.

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. How do we love? It's not by an act of will, it's an act of faith. It's the application of the Word of God.

It is recognizing that the loveliness or unloveliness of the person isn't the issue. It's the principles of the Word of God. It's the aspects of the character of God and the plan of God that apply in that particular situation.

We act in faith. Sometimes we refrain from acting in a situation that humans might say, well, here's a chance to love. Here's a chance to make a loan or to shore up or to comfort.

You get the chance, even in the secular world, people have recognized that sometimes tough love is proper, that it's not always the best thing to coddle someone, to insulate them from the consequences of their poor decisions or their bad actions. Even the secular world recognizes that, and we should certainly be aware of that in the Christian realm as well. This is not a call to unthinking benevolence.

This is a call to faith, and faith has as its object the Word of God, and the Word of God educates us and tells us when it's appropriate to act, how it's appropriate to act, and there are times when it's not appropriate to go in and be a benefit to someone because they are a Romans chapter one case. God has turned them over to the consequences. Be not deceived, God is not mocked.

Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that sows to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption. He that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap what? Life everlasting.

Is this salvation by works? You've got to sow to the Spirit, and you'll reap salvation from the lake of fire? Eternal life, life in the sense of quality. We see that time and time again. If we as believers

invest in our life, our opportunity, having God the Holy Spirit and the Word of God in our soul, we're going to reap eternal life.

We're going to reap the benefits, the quality of divine life. So Paul says, we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. It's faith that works through love.

Notice what he says in Galatians 5 as you move on down through that chapter. Verse 13, you brethren have been called to liberty. Only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another. I say then, walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

Now this is not an awkward juxtaposition of ideas. One of these flows directly out of the other. How is it that you love your neighbor as yourself in verse 14? Walk in the Spirit and you won't fulfill the desires of the flesh.

Our flesh has self at the center. We live in that pre-Copernican universe where everything revolves around us. And it is walking in the Spirit that reorients us so that our universe revolves around God and the things of God.

And that's what enables us to love. That's how we fulfill our calling to peace. That's how we fulfill our calling to holiness.

Back in Romans chapter 13, he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, you shall not covet, and any other commandment are all summed up in this saying. Namely, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law. Now this seems like something of a strange thing to say.

We like to think about agape love. It's active, God so loved the world He didn't just fail to do us harm, He did us some good. And here Paul says, love does no harm to a neighbor.

Now this is not the sum total description of love. We can't just come to Romans 13.10 and say, well, I'm loving you because I'm doing you no harm. I'm living and letting live and that's love.

This is not Paul's full-blown excursus on love, is it? If we want a good idea of the full-orbed description of love, we have a chapter we can go to, don't we? First Corinthians chapter 13. Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels and so forth. He spends an entire chapter developing this idea.

But here he emphasizes the fact that love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law. The law was designed among other things.

Paul is answering a question here. He has reoriented, hopefully, people's thinking in this letter to the Romans about the law and the role of the law in life. People had assigned it a place as being the means of righteousness.

If I do the law, God will be pleased, men will be pleased, everyone will be happy if I do what's in the law. Paul has successfully, we assume, argued us out of that and we say, okay, I'm not righteous by what I do. Well, what role does the law have? Well, it is the definition of what a person who does have inner transformation, who is walking in faith, who does have love and hope, that's how they're going to behave by instinct, by nature.

They're going to do the things in the law. And one of the aspects of that, if you want to think about what role does the law serve, it keeps us from hurting each other. The civil code, the requirements of the law of Moses for Israel as a people, as a nation in the Old Testament, protected them from each other.

When is it that rules are a good thing to have? Paul has been arguing that we should live by principle and not by rules, that we should be operating on the higher law, the law of love. Well then, what is the place for rules? Rules keep us from hurting each other. We don't just set up the United States legal system and say, well, you know, we're not going to have any laws, we're not going to have any rules.

We're just going to encourage you to love each other and you won't, you know, everything will be fine. We won't have a problem with crime. But we have to have laws and we have to have rules and penalties to prevent us from hurting each other, from wronging each other.

And in a church, when a constitution is set up and there are laws and things that are set up in the constitution that make provision for certain things, what is that for? It's to keep us from wronging one another, to give us an idea of what to do when something bad does happen. And that's the role of the law. By the law is the knowledge of sin and it has a penalty and it has a procedure to follow.

And Paul is also telling us here in the same way that there's nothing wrong with ministry, there's nothing wrong with rules. There's a place for rules. And their primary place is to keep us from harming one another.

Love does no harm to a neighbor, to someone in the vicinity. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law. So do this, knowing the time that now it is high time to awake out of sleep.

For now our salvation, our deliverance is nearer than when we first believed. Another classic salvation passage. There is a quite large aspect of our salvation that is ongoing.

Deliverance out of this present evil age. And we're making progress, we're learning. And our deliverance, both in time and our ultimate deliverance in the form of the return of Jesus Christ, is nearer than when we first believed.

We need to awake out of sleep. We don't want to be lethargic. We have an obligation.

We have a debt that we owe. We satisfy our debts in all of our other areas, but there's one that we always owe. And that's in the area of love.

If we operate in love, we're fulfilling the law, we're fulfilling God's calling. Why? Because in order to love, we have to have been acted on by God's word and God's spirit. We have to have learned humility through suffering, learned obedience through suffering.

We've learned our place in the scheme of things, and we don't have ourselves on the top line. We've learned to be selfless. We have learned to be Christ-like in the sense that we put the interests of others ahead of ourselves.

We're not hesitant to put ourselves out on behalf of someone else, like the Samaritan did. Paul says, the night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore, let us cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armor of light.

Walking in the spirit, walking in the light, that's the means of fulfilling this exhortation. We can't love by an act of will, but we can make the decisions to be enabled, to have divine power operational in our lives. How does the power of God come into our lives? The word of God, the spirit of God.

Let us walk properly as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. Those six things, those three pairs of things, every single one of them reflects self at the center, self on the top line, un-love. You know, 7-Up had a big commercial campaign back in the late 70s.

They were calling themselves the Un-Cola. And one of my classmates printed up some t-shirts and distributed them at the Naval Academy, and they said, Navy, the Un-College. Everything that college is, we are not.

And love is un-selfishness. It's un-self-centeredness. It's un-me first.

And so, it's a part of the proper walk. It's a part of fulfilling our calling. It's not revelry.

It's not drunkenness. I'm going to enjoy the moment. I'm going to satisfy my desire.

Not in lewdness and fleshly desire. Not in strife and envy. And notice, strife is motivated by selfishness.

Why is there division? Why is there strife? It's self at the center. We can differ with someone without having strife. We can disagree.

We can hold a different position. We can maintain a different view without creating strife. When it turns to strife, self has entered the picture somewhere, and it's the opposite of love.

It's un-love. Envy, thinking that somebody has something that we ought to have, or that we should have, or that we need to have. Looking over the fence.

Jealousy of someone else's situation. Why do I have this problem and someone else does not? Why do they have that thing, or that situation, or that circumstance, and I do not? Why do they have that attribute that they were born with and I do not? There's a lot of the first person pronoun in that thinking. Verse 14, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its desires.

That's what we'll pick up in our study next time. How do we put on Jesus Christ? That's what we'll see. Let's close here in prayer.

Father, we thank you for the truth of your word. We thank you for its nourishing and sustaining power. We thank you for the transformation that it can accomplish in our souls.

We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will be able to have free reign in our hearts and in our souls with these truths. We pray that he will recall them to our minds at pertinent points, that as we meditate on this truth, it will shift our perspective, it will change our priorities, it will give us a new view of what our options are in any given situation. We thank you for the comfort that it offers us.

We thank you for the assurance we have from your promises and from the nature of your character that you vindicate, that you justify, that you see and reward on a perfect and just basis. We thank you that we have no need to seek our own justice or our own righteousness or our own solutions, that we can rest in your perfect provision in that area. We pray that these things will become a part of the landscape in our soul, that we will view our life in these terms, and that as a result, we can be those who truly do have your love shed abroad in our hearts, and that we will have the means and the motive to love, and that as you provide us opportunity in our daily lives, we will see and seize upon those things in an aggressive way and in a cheerful way, knowing that this is something that you have equipped us for and have given us the opportunity to exercise.

And we know that this fulfills our calling and accomplishes your purpose. And we thank you for that opportunity. We pray for that opportunity.

We ask all these things in the name of our Savior. Amen.