

Romans (13:8-10)

An Outstanding Debt

Part 77 - July 23, 2006

ALL YOU NEED

Let me begin by reading from the words of Paul:

There's nothing you can know that isn't known;
Nothing you can see that isn't shown;
Nowhere you can be that isn't where you're meant to be.
It's easy. All you need is love; all you need is love;
All you need is love, love, love is all you need.

Different Paul, same theme: All we need is love. The Beatles, unbelievers, and believers alike agree that we *need* to love one another. And that we *should* ask ourselves (in every situation) what the most loving way to behave would be.

Where the two Pauls would differ, is on defining what love actually is; what it looks like; and how it is properly applied.

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. - *Romans 13:8-10 NIV*

The KJV translates that first line as: "Owe no man any thing ..." I wouldn't even mention it, except some believers have taken it as a *mandate* to not borrow money ... any money ... ever ... period!

But when Jesus told His parable about the "talents," he said that the servant should have at least deposited his master's money and made interest on it. (*Mat 25:27*) How is it okay to *make* interest if it's wrong to *pay* interest?

The Greek says: "Stop continuing to owe". I like the NIV's translation: "Let no debt remain outstanding". Verse seven holds the key to understanding what Paul means:

Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. [And then verse eight says] Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another ... - *Romans 13:7-8 NIV*

So, verse eight doesn't mean we should never incur debts. It means that when we do, we should pay them ... promptly ... lovingly.

How do you pay your taxes lovingly? Let me remind you of Paul's definition of love:

Love is patient, love is kind. It is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. It rejoices with the truth. - 1 Corinthians 13:4-6 NIV condensed

Q: Does this describe your attitude when you pay your taxes?

A guy from Holland is telling an American how the colors of his flag symbolize taxes: "We get red when we talk about 'em; white when we look at 'em; and blue when we pay 'em." The American says, "Same with us ... only we see stars, too."

And this is about more than money: "Let 'no debt' remain outstanding". We should regard every pledge and promise as sacred. Love for others should touch our conscience and make us eager to live beyond reproach especially in the matter of money.

Remember the height-challenged tax collector named Zacchaeus? He climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus. And when Jesus saw him, He told Zacchaeus to come down, and Jesus stayed at his house.

Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house ..." - Luke 19:8-9 NIV

Salvation didn't come to Zacchaeus because he wanted to put his finances in order. That was the *proof* that salvation had already invaded his heart.

OWING LOVE

Q: What does Paul mean that we have a: "continuing debt to love"?

Thinking of love as a "debt" (that we *owe*) seems wrong. If you love something set it free; if it comes back, blah, blah, blah. How can love be a *debt*? And why would we *owe* it?

Q: Have you ever heard that imitation is the fondest form of flattery?



We tend to imitate the traits we treasure. If a young boy appreciates (values, and esteems) the kindness and generosity of his grandfather, he'll consciously and unconsciously emulate these traits.

We imitate that which we appreciate.

Therefore, a lack of imitation is a kind of denunciation. If the kid thinks grandpa's a sap, he may desire the benefits of grandpa's compassion, but he won't follow in his footsteps.



The advertising world *banks* on this principle of imitation. I'm watching TV and I think: "I admire how attractive and athletic that advertising model is ... I think I'll go buy that nicotine-based lard pie she's eating!"

Imitation reveals admiration.

Q: Remember Jesus' parable about the Kingdom of Heaven, where he told about a servant who owed his master a million dollars?

The servant fell on his knees. "Be patient with me," he begged. The servant's master took pity on him and canceled the debt. - *Matthew 18:26-27 NIV condensed*

But then the servant grabbed a man who owed him a day's wages. He choked him, yelled at him, and refused to cancel his debt. Everyone in the story is greatly distressed. Especially the master! He calls the wicked servant before him and says:

"Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. - *Matthew 18:33-34 NIV condensed*

When we truly internalize and appreciate what Christ has done for us we *will* feel a "debt of gratitude" and an "obligation to share" the benefits of love that we have richly received. Every believer should sense a debt of gratitude.

Our "continuing debt to love" is utterly unique:

- A. It's a debt others don't deserve, but one that we must pay.
- B. It's a debt created by a gift we receive, but paid not to the one who gave it to us.
- C. It's a debt that we'll never finish paying off.
- D. It's a debt that blesses the one who owes it.

And then Paul says: "He who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law"

Love cannot contradict the commandments. Love will not: "commit adultery". Love will not: "murder". Love will not: "Steal". And love will not: "Covet". And true love will watch for opportunities to lovingly confront others with truth about violating God's laws.



The world is quite confused about what love really is: Love songs are often just lust songs. Romance novels are often adultery and fornication novels. Mature movies are often horrendously immature about love.

- We must not let the world define love for us.

We must allow God's Word to define what true love is; and we must share this truth with concern and kindness. Love needs the law for its direction. The law needs love for its compassion.

And all the commandments, properly understood are ...

"Summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" (13:9b)

Q: What does it mean to love others: "as yourself"?

It certainly means to care for others the way you care for yourself ... but it must mean something more than that. He obviously doesn't mean that masochists should inflict pain on their neighbors; or that addicts and alcoholics should offer their neighbors an escape through substance abuse. Because he goes on to say:

Love does no harm to its neighbor (13:10a)

So, before you can love others as you love yourself, you have to learn to love *yourself* appropriately. And as important as self-respect, self-worth, and self-esteem are, that's not what we're talking about. Jesus said to:

Love each other **as I have loved you.** - *John 15:12 NIV*

As I personally comprehend and appreciate God's love, acceptance, and forgiveness through Christ, I am empowered to love others out of the overflow of *his* love.

- It's not about self-esteem, it's about God-esteem.

Knowing that I'm created in His image, my sins are forgiven, all condemnation has been removed, and the righteousness of Christ has become *my* righteousness!

- A. You must first love *yourself* as God loves you.
- B. Then you can love your neighbor "as yourself".

Each supports and further enables the other.

Love is no longer a law-bound duty; it's an expression and an imitation of the One who fulfilled the law for us.

Therefore *love* is the fulfillment of the law (13:10)

And the amazing thing is that when loving others becomes our goal, we gain the very thing we offer.

- What we owe is an outstanding debt!