



We have come a long way in our journey through 12 chapters of Romans. Through chapter 5 we learned that salvation comes through the death of Christ and is received by grace alone, through faith alone, and in Christ alone, and that we are justified by God's grace and given a new identity as a child of God because we are now joined with Christ who brings new life.

In chapters 6-8 we learned about God's faithfulness and what it means to walk in the Spirit, and what it means to know that our eternal destiny is secure. Then in chapters 9-11 we learned about God's sovereignty and his mysterious and unsearchable ways he builds his kingdom.

Then in chapter 12 we turned a corner. We learned that because of the incredible mercy to us explained in the first 11 chapters we are compelled to present ourselves as a living and holy sacrifice to God as an act of holy worship. That God's incredible outpouring of love to us because the gospel that flows into us is now to flow out of us and to those around us. And God's love is to flow from us to those closest to us, those we work with and go to school with and do business with, and even those who don't like us or who have hurt us or someone we love.

We learned that this love that flows into us should flow out of us and affect our views and actions toward the earthly institution of government, that we are to be compelled to respect the government God put in place.

It is really important that we understand the logic and flow of Paul's writings in Romans. We have been filled with the greatest explanations of the greatest doctrines of our faith. I think Paul wanted to make sure that we didn't become fat and sassy in all that we have learned and hold it all inside. He is saying let this knowledge not only fill you, but transform you into my servants, serving in love.

Remember back in chapter 12 verse 11, Paul said, *"Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor serving the Lord."* To love those in our church, our own communities, and across and up and down this peninsula and then out into even the remotest places we need zeal and spiritual fervor. We need to be enthusiastic to take love on the road.

Benjamin Zander was the conductor of the Boston Philharmonic and a professor at New England Conservatory of Music. He wrote about a particular student who played Chopin perfectly, but without an essential quality that makes a performance great: "A young pianist in my master's class understood the piece intellectually. He could have explained it to someone else, but he was unable to convey the emotional energy that is the true language of music. Then I noticed something that proved to be the key:

His body was firmly centered in the upright position. I blurted out, 'The trouble is you're a two-buttock player!' I encouraged him to allow his whole body to flow sideways, urging him to catch the wave of the music with the shape of his own body, and suddenly the music took flight. Several in the audience gasped, feeling the emotional dart hit home, as a new distinction was born: a one-buttock player."

What a great goal for believers to become one-buttock Christians! People would come from everywhere to know the God we serve if we lived the truth we carry in our hearts with a vibrant and enthusiastic passion. I think that is the picture Paul is painting as he transitions us from chapters 1-11 to chapter 12 and into chapter 13.

Paul is saying get off your haunches. Don't be left earthbound in your study of Romans. Let the music of the grand theology of chapters 1-11 touch your emotions, your passions, your creative intellect and your ethics. Move on what you now know in your calling to be a Living Sacrifice. Enthusiastically love. Paul's call to Christians who study Romans is to become one-buttock Christians. And a one-buttock Christian loves their neighbor.

Romans 13:8-14 really drills down on this. In fact, Paul labels loving one another as a debt. This debt is the only debt that will always be outstanding as long as we remain on this earth.

Love is Our Unpaid Debt

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, (v. 8a)

The command to "owe nothing to anyone" was surprising to me. It seems like a contradiction because in verse 7 when he was talking about taxes and other debts when he said, "Give to everyone what you owe him" and here it appears to be a prohibition against borrowing or carrying debt. Some might use this verse to discourage credit cards, auto loans, mortgages and even church building loans. Wouldn't it be great if we could all live debt free? But in the world we live, most of us couldn't have a roof over our head, or get to work, or have a place to worship out of the rain without some kind of monthly debt to others. It's possible that a home mortgage, a car loan, or even a church building loan can be the best form of stewardship for one's family or the mission of the church. The point is we must be disciplined and wise with debt. The tense of the verb is present tense, suggesting that we are to avoid habitual repeated and ongoing debt. In other words, don't get into debts you can't or don't intend to pay off. Don't add debt upon debt. And by no means default on a loan.

With that let's look at the broader context here. It's broader than money. The command is to be responsible and avoid owing

anything. The only exception is love. Completely separate from financial obligations, all believers have the constant obligation to love one another. It is the debt we are constantly to pay but can never pay off. The early church priest Father Origen said, "The debt of love remains with us permanently and never leaves us. This is a debt which we pay every day and forever owe." We can never stop loving somebody and say, "I have loved enough."

But be encouraged in those times when you are struggling to love your neighbor, because God doesn't tell us that we must assume this ongoing love debt without the ongoing resources to pay it.

The "one another" here applies to our fellow believers. The idea is right from Jesus' teaching in John 13: *"A new commandment I give you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another."* Paul goes on to tell us that showing love by doing good to others is so important you need to understand that when you love this way you are fulfilling the law.

Love is the Fulfillment of the Law

for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law (v. 8b).

Paul's choice of a different wording in the last part of verse 8 is interesting. The Greek word translated "others" is literally "one of a different kind." The first "love one another" in the first part of verse 8 is to love those like you. The second "loves others" is to love someone very different than you.... different in beliefs, theology, different in personality, different in politics, different in tastes, race, values and history. In other words, with love, difference should make no difference. This is a perpetual debt that can never be zeroed out until we leave this earth and go to be with Jesus.

This love is so important that Paul says he who "loves others" or loves his "neighbor" has fulfilled the law. I think some of us think that living by the law is bad. We might be thinking, "Hasn't the message of grace abolished the law in our lives?" "Isn't the law irrelevant to the New Testament Christian?"

We tend to think of law only in terms of the negative—Thou shall not do this or thou shall not do that. And then we think of love in the positive. But love needs the law. Love needs an objective moral standard, moral guide, moral boundary so our acts of love are grounded in truth and not just emotionally driven actions that may or may not outcomes that point people to Christ. And just as much on the other side, the law needs love. 1st Corinthians 13 tells us that the greatest loving actions are as meaningless as a clanging symbol if the heart behind the action is not full of love.

Jesus said, *"Do not think that I came to abolish the law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill."* Later in the Sermon on the Mount, in what is commonly called the Golden Rule, he said, *"Therefore, however you want people to treat you, so treat them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."* James says in James 2:8, *"if you keep the royal law found in scripture, 'love your neighbor as yourself', you are doing right."* So love fulfills the golden rule and the royal law. Love completes the law.

I heard a beautiful analogy from the field of music that helps us understand the greatness and completeness of love. The musical scale has only seven basic notes which many children can learn in an hour or less. Yet great composers, such as Chopin and Beethoven, could not play out their variations in an entire lifetime. Godly love is like that. It uses the basic and sometimes insignificant things in life to play out God's variations of love in our lifetime. Love controls the temper and guides reason. Love seeks to overcome the worst qualities and develop the best. Love transforms us who are simple redeemed people more and more into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

Love Blesses Our Neighbor

Now Paul explains how it is that blessing our neighbor with love fulfills the law.

The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law (verses 9-10).

Paul quotes the 6th, 8th, 9th, and 10th commands of the 10 Commandments. And to these he adds, "and whatever other commandments there are they can be summed up in one rule, love your neighbor as yourself."

Why does love sum up all the commandments? Because love does not harm its neighbor. Instead love does good. Adultery robs a marriage and family. Murder robs a person of life. Stealing robs a person of his property. Covetousness robs a person of contentment and peace. Violating these commandments does evil to our neighbors. Instead the essence of love is to seek and to serve our neighbor's highest good.

Paul refuses to pit love and law against each other. There is another principle that surfaces in any discussion about love. The principle is obedience. Being a loving Christian is being an obedient Christian. God's love to us compels us to be obedient to him. And then our obedience to God compels us to love our neighbor with enthusiasm.

The obedient thing for the Christian is to do the loving thing. And the loving thing for the Christian is to do the obedient thing. We do not love our city by compromising on obeying God's standards; rather we love it by obeying God's commands.

I am pleased to have a relationship with a community group leader here at North Campus who knows he is loved by God and desires to be obedient to him. He commutes to the city every day. Each day he carries in with his regular stuff onto the train, literally bags of love—a little cash, some hygiene items, some good news of the gospel, and some energy bars. Each weekend he packs up enough for the week, and each day he drops one off when he exits the train at his work stop downtown. This doesn't take extreme intelligence, extreme money, extreme creativity, extreme free time; it takes an understanding that the greatest commandment is to love God and love your neighbor, (those different from you) as yourself. It's the desire to be an enthusiastic

one-buttock loving Christian. And for us to love like this, Paul tells us we need to know some things. First we need to understand the times in which we live.

Knowing Our Times Motivates Us to Love

And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here (verses 11-12a).

And do what? No longer live according to the pattern of this world you submit to the state, you pay your taxes, you love those like you and those different from you. Remember what the present time is and live appropriately. Paul could have used either of two words for time. The first is *chronos*, where we get our word chronology or days on a calendar. The other is *Kairos*, which means a fixed season. It also refers to the quality of a particular season. Charles Dickens would have opened up his novel *A Tale of Two Cities*: "It was the best of kairos. It was the worst of kairos". Paul is writing, "Know the kind of season in which we live." And do what? Love.

Paul describes our time as one in which "salvation" is closer to arriving than ever before. He doesn't mean our personal salvation. That has already been accomplished when we believed and accepted Christ. Paul is referring to the return of Jesus Christ and the restoration of God's righteousness, the master plan of salvation. Paul is saying our future inheritance is soon here. Christ's return is closer now than when we first became Christians. We look back and see Christ's first coming, we see his death and burial and resurrection, we see the Holy Spirit establishing and expanding his church. Many of us here today look back and see our salvation, our baptism in the rear view mirror as well. Then we turn and look forward and we try to see God's future calendar and we see that his calendar is pretty clear of big events until the final events that lead to the second coming of Christ. That will be the next great event on God's calendar.

Paul is saying because it is closer than before and could occur at any moment, we cannot afford to be sleeping right now. We need to wake up and get up. It's time for us to wake up because salvation is near and night has nearly given over to day. Be excited that our final salvation is coming soon, but at the same time be alert and live with eager expectation of that day.

As I keyed in Paul's words "wake up" I thought of my friend who had really messed up and was in jail for an 8-month sentence. I would often go and visit him. And as I tried to encourage him in his faith I asked him how he passed the time. He said most of us sleep 18 hours a day, that most spend long hours in their beds trying to sleep away their sentences. He mentioned something called the prison shuffle where they moved at the slowest possible speed to kill time. It's sad but understandable because they didn't have any reason to wake up or speed up.

But Paul is saying here "wake up," you are not to kill time; you are to redeem the time and use it to love your neighbor, use it to share Christ with others. The only commandment that God gives

us on earth that we won't do in heaven is "Share our faith and life with unbelievers, our neighbors."

Consider that we are accountable for our time. Time is a talent not to be buried as much as any other natural attribute or spiritual gift shouldn't be buried but be invested. I wonder if we were really convinced that we will give God an accounting for what we do with our time, would we use our time differently? How would we use our time differently?

Consider how much time you have lost already. If you are old or my age you need to pay attention to this. If we have not been active in Christian service we have wasted precious moments. We can't make up lost time, but we can make every effort to use the time in our futures well. I remember hearing someone compare life to a roll of toilet paper. It didn't make sense until I turned 50. Life starts out turning slowly, and it seems to have unlimited time ahead. But then as more of life that gets used up, the older we get, the faster and faster life goes and more and more of us are used up and life is just zooming by and we turn around one day and we are spent, discarded and replaced by a new roll, a fresher, softer, younger version of ourselves with a future full of usefulness.

So Paul says, understand the times, let his second coming thrill you, but use this time wisely to love because the time is coming when "time shall be no more." This takes imagination and reflection. We are to imagine that the day has dawned and Jesus is right before us and then we ask: "Now, how would I behave? What is really important? What will last forever? Knowing our times and Christ's return as imminent will motivate us to love.

Knowing Appropriate Behaviors Motivates Us to Love

So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh (verses 12b-14).

While some of us sleep and need to be woken up, others of us are engaging in dark sins and need to stop. The idea is to renounce or repent of sins because our sins grieve God. We have every resource to fight the sins of darkness. This idea of armor aligns with the armor of God in Ephesians chapter 6—the belt of truth, the protective shield of God's righteousness in us, feet in shoes that plant us firm in the gospel that saves and empowers us, a shield of a faith in God's goodness and power that defends us against attacks that come our way, the helmet of salvation that assures us that he will never leave us or forget about us, and the sword of the spirit which is the word of God. These words refer specifically to wild late night festivals in honor of Bacchus the Greek god of wine that really is a drunken parade. The festival would end in literally "beds" or sexual sin, sin outside of marriage, and perverse unnatural sexual immorality, literally infighting and jealousy that tears a community apart. In the original language, *alla*, the strongest word for drawing a contrast: the exact opposite of darkness.

To put on the right clothes is to believe a certain way and then act accordingly. What we put on reminds us of who we are. Police put on bulletproof vests to remind them to be careful and in their uniform they act a certain way. The Warriors put on uniforms to remind them who they are as a team and to play a certain way. Julie and I dressed way up for our daughter's wedding and it had an affect on our behavior. We looked in the mirror and saw ourselves dressed for an occasion of dignity and formality before God giving our daughter in marriage. If we work this out for Christian living we are supposed to remember not what we are wearing but who we are wearing. Notice he doesn't say the desires of the flesh have gone away. He is saying we are truly new creatures, but our full transformation is not complete. The old self can rear up and drag us back into sin if we listen to it. The idea here is do not think about a way to sin, do not make a plan to sin. Be proactive to think about a plan for righteousness. Here is a good plan to think about: Read the word, plug in with other Christians that you can be honest and transparent with. Come to church regularly, confess, repent, stay alert, stay active in things that matter to God like loving your neighbor, and get to know God better and you will love and appreciate him more.

One-buttock Christians wake up with enthusiasm, they get up and they get dressed with Christ and they love their neighbor.

Opal Whetset is a Christian writer. One night she was on a Greyhound bus between Flagstaff, Arizona and Albuquerque, New Mexico. It was a cold February night and the bus stopped in a small Indian community. A young American Indian teenager boarded the bus and sat down behind her.

Maybe it was the warmth of the bus or the rocking motion but she could tell by his breathing he was soon asleep. Sometime later he woke and ran down the aisle to ask about a certain stop where he was supposed to get off. The driver snapped back and said, "We passed that stop a long time ago. Why didn't you get off then?"

The young man went back to his seat. She could tell he was anxious and upset. He got back up, walked back to the driver, and said, "Will you stop the bus and let me get off and walk back to where I was supposed to get off?" The bus driver said, "No, it's too cold and it's too far. You'd freeze. You've got to ride the bus all the way into Albuquerque then catch another bus back to your stop."

The young man sat down in his seat behind Opal. She could tell he was upset. She turned around to this young man she never met before, and said, "Are you afraid? Is there anything I can do to help?"

He said, "I don't know what to do. I've never been to Albuquerque, and besides, I don't have any money. They're going to make me pay again. I don't know what to do."

She said, "Well listen, don't worry, you just stick with me. When we get to Albuquerque, I'll make sure you get on the right bus. And if they want to charge you, which they shouldn't do, I'll buy your ticket."

Then Opal went up and talked to the bus driver and explained the situation. She said, "Can you make sure the next bus he gets on, they don't charge him to take him back to where he needs to go?" The bus driver finally agreed. Opal went back and sat down and turned to the young man behind her and said, "It's all taken care of. Don't you worry. Everything's going to be okay."

After riding for about ten minutes in total silence, Opal felt a tap on her shoulder. She turned around and the young man leaned forward, and asked her this question. He said, "Ma'am, are you a Christian?"

Has anybody ever asked you, "Are you a Christian?"

The Big Idea of our Scripture this morning is this: Loving our neighbor fulfills the law of God, so we are to put Christ on display and love our neighbor.

A couple of nights ago my wife and daughter and I had gone out to dinner in a city on the peninsula. After dinner we proceeded to walk around the downtown and as we were walking we saw several people sitting on the sidewalk asking for money. My eyes met a younger man who was very crippled. He had no legs. He politely asked me for money and I looked and smiled and just kept walking. About a half a block down the road, I could sense God was speaking to me. I had to turn back. I wasn't to have ignored my neighbor. So I told my family I would catch up to them and I turned and went back. When I got back to him, I don't know if he even remembered me from the crowd, but I said to him, "I passed you before and I was wrong. God wants me to tell you that God loves me and he loves you. I'm supposed to tell you that and I'm supposed to give you this." I handed him some money. He smiled and thanked me. I wanted to stay, but it felt awkward so I slowly turned and walked away, not sure what I was feeling. As I walked away, I could sense God telling me that I did the right thing loving my neighbor. But then as I kept walking I sensed him saying this to me, "Next time tell him about my kingdom. Tell him that I have a beautiful kingdom waiting for both you and him in heaven where he will be made whole and happy if he believes in my son Jesus Christ as his Savior from his sins."

I won't forget what God is doing in my heart. I want someone to ask me, "Are you a Christian?" Not because I am a preacher but because I put on Christ and I loved my neighbor.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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