



Today is a very special day for me. One year ago I was standing in the delivery room at Kaiser RWC. My wife Charity had gone into labor and we were eagerly awaiting the arrival of our son. Later that night Isaiah was born. When our son came into this world everything changed for our family. We went from man-to-man defense to zone coverage. We went back to diapers and no sleep. We added a boy. We also bought a minivan and it's awesome!

The last year has been a big change for our family and we are so thankful for Isaiah Justus Benson. Thinking about how much my family has changed in the last year made me wonder how much the lives of the people in Rome must have changed after receiving this letter from Paul. Have you experienced something in your life in the last year that drastically altered the way you lived? When was the last time love impacted you so much it made you rethink how you're living your life? Maybe it was the opposite and it was a near death experience that made you think about eternity.

If this is your first morning with us I'm so glad you're here. For almost seven months we've been studying Paul's letter to the church in Rome. In this Paul has written about the Gospel, justification, being married to Christ, life in the Spirit, and loving others, just to name a few. This morning we come to the second half of Romans 13. Here Paul is going to highlight two relationships for the church in Rome to focus on. The first is their relationship to the law and the second is their relationship to the day of Christ's return.

Before I open the Bible let me help to make a connection from our text to the larger content in the book of Romans. At first glance it appears that these verses we will look at are misplaced. The section of Scripture before this talked about our response to government. While in the section before that Paul commanded the church to love their enemy. It could seem that Paul is just randomly writing about different topics or is there a greater connection going on?

In the latter part of Romans 12 Paul instructs believers to *"overcome evil with good"* (Romans 12:21b). Then in chapter 13 he proceeds to talk about the Christians' involvement in society and response to government. He is essentially saying that Christians are supposed to overcome the evil in our society by doing good deeds and living good lives in full view of everyone. More specifically, in Romans 13:7 Paul says, *"Give to everyone what you owe them."* He is talking about taxes. The connection of the need to

pay our debt transitions us in Romans 13:8 to a call to love everyone. The section on the government is wedged between the two commandments to love our enemies and love our neighbors. The build-up throughout these passages leads us to a comprehensive connection that Christ-followers are called to love every citizen around us by being active participants in our society.

Our Relationship to the Law

Let's begin by looking at our relationship to the law in Romans 13:8-10.

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled 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.

It is easy to interpret verses 8-10 very individualistic, as teaching us to simply love our fellow man and not harm others. If we leave it at that we miss out on the greater application of these verses. Earlier in this letter Paul has already referred several times to the importance of paying our debts. We are in debt to the unsaved world to share the truth of Christ. We are in debt to the Holy Spirit to live a holy life. We are also in debt to the state to pay our taxes.

This is the main connection in this section. Christ-followers are called to paid their debts on time. Christ-followers should count the cost before becoming obligated in contractual agreements that require financial commitments. We probably can all agree that is a wise thing to do. You want to be able to pay your mortgage, rent or phone bill on time. There are debts we are to pay. There is also a debt we can never fully pay: the duty of continuing love. The only outstanding debt a Christian should have is the command to love others.

In verse 8 we are commanded to love others. In the original Greek Paul states this as a command to love; not an option. A more literal reading from the Greek would read, "Let no debt remain outstanding except to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law." This is not a command to only love believers either, it's a command to love everyone. There are times Paul makes a distinction between those in the church and

those outside the church. This instance is a plain command to love everyone. Do you remember what Jesus said to His disciples in His last hours on earth? He said, *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have love you, so you must love one another"* (John 13:34). This is similar to that command from Christ to love everyone.

There are many great examples of people who have loved their fellow man in the name of Jesus. Let me tell you one story of a group of people who loved others. A couple of months ago our Young Adults ministry went to City Impact to serve in the Adopt-A-Building program. If you've ever served at City Impact you may have participated in Adopt-A-Building. Let me explain the ministry. In each building, our teams would knock on doors and deliver hot meals to people in their room. Many residents in the Tenderloin are suffering from mental illness, drug addiction, abuse, or depression. There are thousands of people living in the Tenderloin in horrible conditions. It has been great for our young adults to travel 40 minutes up the freeway into one of the most unpleasant neighborhoods in the city and love others. The people in the Tenderloin can never pay our young adults back. But by bringing them a hot meal and human interaction they have fulfilled the law. The truth is, love fulfills the law.

Many people think the law and love are incompatible. We probably all can agree there is a significant difference between them. When we think of a law we think, "don't do this." When thinking of love it's in the positive sense. The truth is love can't manage on its own. Love needs an objective moral standard to help us fully understand it. This is why Paul wrote "love is the fulfillment of the law" and not "love is the end of the law." Love fulfills the law!

To help explain this further Paul uses the Old Testament Commandments.

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" (Rom. 13:9).

Have you noticed how it can be helpful when someone communicates what something isn't to help you understand what something is? This is what Paul does. Paul uses the 6th, 7th, 8th and 10th commandments to explain what loving others is. We all know you don't show your love for others by stealing from them. Murder robs people of their life and hurts families. Sleeping with another person's spouse is a horrible example of loving others. Coveting robs you of the simplicity and contentment you are to have in Christ Jesus. Certainly the last five sins in the Ten Commandments hurt others.

These examples deal with the human relationship, or the horizontal commands, in the Ten Commandments. All of these commands can be summed up in the words Christ spoke in the Temple courts. *"Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with*

all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matt. 22:37-39). This is what we're talking about. We are to love our neighbors as much as we love ourselves. The Greek word Jesus used here is *agape* (ἀγαπάω), which is a selfless love. Christ never called us to love ourselves but to love others and be selfless. When we love our neighbors with this selfless love it provides an opportunity to seek their good. This is what Paul reiterates in verse 10. Love doesn't harm others but love fulfills the law.

There is a story about a man who spent a summer in the slums of Calcutta with Mother Teresa. He wrote about one of his experiences there by saying this. "People often ask me what Mother Teresa was like. Sometimes it's like they wonder if she glowed in the dark or had a halo. She was short, wrinkled, and precious, maybe even a little ornery—like a beautiful, wise old granny. But there is one thing I will never forget—her feet. Her feet were deformed. Each morning in Mass, I would stare at them. I wondered if she had contracted leprosy. But I wasn't going to ask, of course. 'Hey Mother, what's wrong with your feet?'

"One day a sister said to us, 'Have you noticed her feet?' We nodded, curious. She said: 'Her feet are deformed because we get just enough donated shoes for everyone, and Mother does not want anyone to get stuck with the worst pair, so she digs through and finds them. And years of doing that have deformed her feet.' Years of loving her neighbor as herself deformed her feet."

It makes perfect sense for Paul to instruct the church in love. Over time Christ-followers can grow inward and forget about loving their neighbor. Just think about that. When was the last time you actively loved your neighbor? We all know neighbors can be difficult. We can also be difficult neighbors. Some of you have neighbors in your apartment building who play the music too loud. Instead of loving them you curse them. You may have a neighbor who allows her dog to do its business in your front yard. What about that neighbor who always parks in front of your house when it is clearly your space? These are just a few examples.

Loving your neighbors can be a tricky thing. You see this in Scripture but don't always apply it. Let me share a few ways you can actively love your neighbor this week. First, smile at them. Smiles break down walls. Next, introduce yourself to them. Start out by learning their name. This helps to make them a real person who is known and loved. Finally, engage them in a conversation when you see them in the hallway, outside, or walking on the sidewalk. It's amazing where God can lead unplanned conversations with your neighbor. Finally, think of ways to serve them.

We have a neighbor who is a widow. Over the last three years my family has formed a great relationship with our neighbor. We started by learning her name. Then we engaged in small conversations on the sidewalk. After a while she began inviting us into her

home. We tried inviting her to our home but she is physically unable to come over. I immediately started bringing my kids to teach them about loving their neighbor and she lights up when she sees them. Then the greatest thing happened on Easter. My oldest daughter made a whole Easter bag for her complete with candy, cupcakes and a handwritten card. I wish you could have seen the joy on both of their faces. There is joy in loving our neighbors.

You have to start somewhere in loving your neighbor, so why not start today? If you are a Christ-follower you are not given an option on loving others. I resonate with what C.S. Lewis says on this topic, "Do not waste time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor; act as if you did." You may not want to love your neighbor. You may have valid reasons not to love your neighbor. If you are a Christian, you are commanded to love your neighbor, so start acting like you do.

Our Relationship to the Day

Our relationship to the law and our call to love others is what I think leads Paul to write the last paragraph in chapter 13:11-12a.

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.

Although the exact point of continuity between the command to love our neighbor and this section of Scripture isn't completely clear, it does seem clear that Paul's purpose is to lay an eschatological foundation on Christian conduct. Paul wants the church in Rome to wake up and engage the culture. This is the same for us who are Christ-followers. We are to wake up because the day of Christ's return is imminent.

Our need to love others is important in view of the critical age in which we live. In our technological world we are all slaves to time. We wear watches, check our phones and keep a constant watch on time. You probably feel the pressure of time each day of your life. You may have rushed here or have plans to head somewhere after service is over. The Bible divides history into "this age" and "the age to come." The New Testament writers were clear that the Kingdom of God was inaugurated by Jesus. We are living in what some scholars call the "already" and the "not yet." We live eagerly awaiting the Kingdom of Heaven but not yet being able to enjoy the benefits of Heaven. In verses 11 and 12, Paul provides three reasons a believer needs to understand the time we live in.

First he writes, "the hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber," essentially saying that the time for sleep has passed. It is time to wake up and engage in our culture. There is no time left to just live in a Christian bubble. People in the world live as though Christ doesn't exist. For them the things of this

world will be the best they ever get. Christians need to help show how love fulfills the law and be prepared for the return of Christ.

Second, our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. Salvation is a comprehensive term embracing our past, present and future. Paul is writing about our future salvation and the glorification we will receive when we meet Christ face-to-face. We've studied this some already in the book of Romans. It's the reminder that we are awaiting our final adoption as children of God. Every day brings it closer. If you have not yet placed your trust in Christ, this salvation is available to you also. It's a free gift to you!

Third, we read that the night is nearly over and the day is almost here. Night can represent the age of darkness; the sinful deeds of this world that whisper for our attention and distract us from Christ. But the return of Christ is almost here. A believer needs to live in a constant state of waiting for Christ's return. We don't know the exact day. The day is coming and we must be ready.

In preparation for the return of Christ Paul explains how a Christian should live their life in verses 12b-14:

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.

These verses deal with our behavior. It's not enough to only understand the time; we need to behave accordingly while we wait for the return of Christ. The first two comparisons are inclusive, meaning Paul includes himself in them, and the last is directed at the reader. The things we are called to put off are never suggested to be put on again. These commands are similar to what Paul wrote to the church in Colossae. It's easier to understand putting aside the deeds of darkness. To put on the armor or light takes creative imagination.

The comment about behaving decently as in the daytime is a good reminder of how much immoral behavior occurs in the nighttime. Paul goes on to list those behaviors: carousing, drunkenness, sexual immorality, and debauchery. Let's start with the three words relating to sexual desires. The word carousing really means practicing orgies. This was a problem in the Roman world and Paul wanted to make sure when a person gave their life to Christ they stopped this immoral behavior. Sexual immorality is partaking in sex outside of the marriage relationship. This could have been directed at couples who were practicing cohabitation before marriage. Debauchery is a complete lack of moral restraint, mainly in sexual purity. It exposes those who practice excess sex or lustfulness.

The sins the church in Rome were fleeing from are sins we still see in our culture. Cohabitation was once rare and is now on the rise. The porn industry is estimated to bring in \$10-\$13 billion

dollars a year. The sins we see today aren't new sins. If you are struggling with these I want you to know there is freedom in Christ. I want you to know you can find help here at CPC and people to walk alongside you to maturity in Christ.

Sexual immorality wasn't the only problem Paul addressed. The subject of drunkenness seemed to also be a problem. You may be aware that I had a drinking problem when I was younger. This last week I celebrated 16 years of sobriety. It wasn't easy. If you are struggling with alcoholism behind closed doors, please reach out to someone and find help. This is a painful disease and it's hurting families, marriages and individuals. We have a great recovery ministry here at CPC. If you have a drinking problem, reach out and battle this struggle.

The last two sins Paul lists seem to be more acceptable in the church. We don't condemn people as much for dissension and jealousy but need to work just as diligently at ridding them from our lives. We are a grace-based church, but let's not take advantage of grace. Christ-followers are called to live differently. We need to be the ones who are setting a different standard so others know we are Christ-followers. We need to be the ones who are living moral lives in preparation for the day of Christ's return. My first mentor would say to me, "How would you act if Jesus was right next to you?" It was a convicting statement.

In all of this we are told to clothe ourselves in Christ. This is the practical application of no longer behaving indecently. This is the application of living for Christ on a daily basis and not practicing any sinful behaviors. If you find yourself in a place where you are struggling with some of these things please know this is a place where you are accepted for who you are, but a place where

you will be invited to become who Christ wants you to be. The encouragement is to prepare for the return of Christ. This is another example of how love fulfills the law.

We've looked at some fantastic Scriptures that deal with Christian living. Thinking about all of this reminds me of the novel *Les Misérables*. In the book there is a scene where Jean Valjean is welcomed in by the Bishop. Instead of sleeping through the night he wakes up and robs the Bishop of all the silver. The next day he is caught and brought back bleeding and in shackles. The Bishop has a choice before the police: he could turn him in or extend grace. The Bishop tells Jean Valjean that he left so quickly and forgot the candle holders. He tells him, "You must use this precious silver to become an honest man. By the witness of the martyrs. By the passion and the blood. God has raised you out of darkness." The Bishop models how we are to love our neighbor. This act of love changed the entire life of Jean Valjean.

We are commanded to love others. We may have to show love to people who we feel are unloveable. We may need to show love to those whom we don't want to love. But in doing so we show the love of Christ. We can love others with such extraordinary, incomprehensible love that it changes the entire course of their life. We can impact the lives of others and help more people find and follow Christ here on the Peninsula. I urge us to love others, not just because the day is approaching but because love fulfills the law.

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