

Romans
“Love Fulfills the Law”
Romans 18:8-14

It is my privilege to bring God's word to you. If you're a visitor today, you've come in the later stages of a study in the book of Romans. If you're a highly attentive person, you're going to say, oh...love. Didn't we just talk about love four weeks ago. We did. And that's because Paul talked about it four weeks ago. So, Romans chapter 12 - love. Romans chapter 13 - love. And so, we need to hear about it a lot. That's what we're hearing in God's Word today. This is God's word.

Owe no one anything except to love each other for the love for the one 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 Covid. And any other commandment are summed up in this word. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. Besides this, you know the time that the hours come for you to wake from sleep, for salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone. The day is at hand. Let us walk properly as in the day time. Not in orgies or drunkenness or sexual immorality or sensuality. Not in quarreling or jealousy, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision, or make no plan for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Let's pray for a moment.

Lord, we thank you for this message. the call to love that is grounded in your love. First for us. We pray that you will give us the ability to hear your word for us, and by your spirit, to live by it and to turn to you. When we fall short, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. You may be seated.

I heard about a woman named Sydney Towels. I'm not sure how it's pronounced. Let's. Just a couple days ago. she's a TikTok influencer with a few million followers. I don't spend a lot of time on TikTok. but this one got my attention because, she's a smiley, lovely young woman who announced a little while ago that she has stage four cancer, and she kept on showing videos of herself.

And in those videos, she looks pretty good. She doesn't look like she has cancer. And you know what happens in the world today? The haters said she doesn't have cancer. She's just saying that so should get more viewers and seems like she has cancer. And you can have cancer. Even stage four cancer without quote unquote looking like it.

And so it seems that these people took this woman who has become their neighbor because they follow her on TikTok. They know her. And instead of loving her in her time of grief, they

have hated her. The Bible has a word for us in that kind of situation. Now, you may think the word is judge not, lest you be judged.

That's true, but there's another word, and the other word is don't judge according to appearances. That's exactly what they're doing. They're saying doesn't look like she has cancer. I'm an expert. I know all about it. Doesn't look like it. Therefore she doesn't. Therefore, I'm going to tear her to shreds. The Lord Jesus said, do not judge according to appearances, but judge with righteous judgment, not according to appearances.

Now that's a law, and that's a law we need in a situation like that. And the Bible has lots of laws. It's not fundamentally a book of laws. It's fundamentally the account of God's salvation throughout human history, making promises and covenants to his people, starting with Adam and Eve saying, I will not forsake you to sin and death.

And then he accomplishes that. But when we enter a relationship with him, he also tells us how to live as children of God. And the main thing he says is, if you love someone, you will keep the law, because the law will tell you how to love. Now, a lot of people have the idea that love is a feeling, and there's certainly an element of feeling in love.

But love is also law governed behavior. We behave certain ways when we love someone. Paul already described that in chapter 12 of Romans, verses 9 to 21, and he's coming back to it because it's so very important to love. The word love appears five times in our passage. Three times is a verb commanding us to love each other twice is a noun.

Saying things like love fulfills the law. And he has a little sandwich structure in the passage, which is one way to emphasize things. You see, it says in verse eight, the one who loves another has fulfilled the law that it names the laws adultery, murder, theft, coveting. And then it says, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

He says it twice in a very short compass. So we understand that this is his vital thing. Now, when he picks up on this, when he says this, he's actually quoting the Old Testament. Leviticus tells us to love our neighbor as ourselves. Leviticus 19 and various other laws in the Old Testament command love. And now he says at the end of the passage, put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

But if you wonder, how do I put on Christ? One of the best answers is by obeying God's law with the people around me, because the law teaches me how to love. Now you may say, oh, you're commanding today. This is a day full of commands. But let's remember the context of the book of Romans. First of all, it says we love because God has poured his love into our hearts.

That's Romans five. And a little bit later in Romans five, we understand that we can love our neighbor as yourself, because even if our neighbors unloving or unlovely, God loved us when we

were still sinners, when we were still his enemies. That's also Romans five. And if we fall short, God still loves us because nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.

That's Romans eight. And so the love of God prepares us to answer his love by loving the people around us. Now, this is also important because there's a statement Paul makes in Romans chapter six. The statement is to the redeemed, to believers who died and rose with Christ. As he says, in that place you are no longer under the law, but under grace.

And some people think, oh, well, I'm no longer under the law. That means I don't have to follow the law. But no, Romans is one letter. And we're supposed to understand that you're not under the law does not mean you don't keep the law. It means you're not under the curse or the burden of keeping the law in order to please God.

We're still under or in or with the law as God's guide for our life. Because, you know, Jesus said, if you love me, you will keep my commandments. And he said, as I have loved you, so you should love one another. Now what that means, among other things, is that Jesus people sometimes say Jesus is a walking law.

So you want to know how to love people. You want to know how to tell the truth. Look at Jesus. He is. Other people say, a normative narrative. That is to say, if you just look at the story of the life of Christ, it will teach you the norms of God. He shows us how to do things like not kill people, take care of them.

He shows us how to turn away wrath with a gentle answer. Jesus shows us the way. Of course, not in every way. We can't, you know, die for people sins and heal people at a word or forgive people because we see in the hearts. There are unique ways in which Christ loves, but he teaches us how to love, and the law does too.

The first commandment Paul mentions is adultery. Now what that means is we keep promises we make, keep vows we make to her husband or wife, and we extend that to all the other vows and relationships we have. We're faithful to our promises. We don't kill, which means we respect people's lives. We protect people's lives. We don't steal. We protect people's property.

We don't covet. When someone near us is enjoying all kinds of favor and success, we give thanks for it. We're not envious of it. We say, praise God for his kindness to this other person. Now, some people say, well, the law, you know, interferes with my my free expression of love and law can be restrictive. And I accept that in a way, because there are ways in which we live that aren't law governed in the narrow sense, for example.

So we have a marriage retreat going on right now, and I was there for the first part, but obviously I'm here now. And so we talked about marriage. And in marriage, you know, we're

supposed to love each other. And there was a newlywed couple there. And so let's imagine a newlywed couple and they both love coffee. They're gourmets of coffee.

And they love coffee in the morning. But they get up at different times. And so they're not going to sip coffee together. He tends to get up at six. In fact, he gets up at six every day and his wife gets up at seven. And in an act of love, his wife thinks I'm going to get a really good overnight coffee maker that has perfect timing, and he's going to get up at six and the timer is going to go off and the coffee's going to be ready for him at 6:03 and a half because that's how long it takes them to get there.

That's my gift of love. And she thinks this is loving. And he says, great. what I want to do is wake her up with coffee at 6:59 before the alarm goes off. And I'm going to bring her a cup of coffee, and I'm going to wave it under her nose so that she is gently roused by the aroma.

If that doesn't work, I'll have some bacon with me, and I'm going to gently wake her up every day. Now, that's an act of love. And if you made it into a law, it would kind of defeat the purpose, wouldn't it? Because then you'd have to say, well, the day you didn't, you know, set the timer or you were breaking the laws.

No, no, no, there's room for freedom. But we also need laws because we sin. Again, back to this, marriage and family conference. I spent some time. One talk was on disciplining children, and I got a lot of questions like, what do you do when this happens? But even that happens because children do bad things, like they hit each other on the head and push their siblings into walls, and they need to be told, don't do that.

No, the law says no. The law is full of negatives. It doesn't say be nice to each other. Says don't murder, don't kill, don't steal, don't bear false witness. We need to hear the word no because we are sinful. Now, there's also concrete advice in this passage, and I find myself a little bit astonished to be giving it to you, because I don't usually talk about particular financial counsel.

But there's actually a financial counsel in this passage, and it has to do with love. It says in 13:07 the verse before the one I read to you, pay what you owe to everyone. And in that context, if you're here last week, you remember it means specifically pay your taxes, pay your financial debts, pay your debts. And then verse 18, sorry.

Verse eight says, oh, nothing to anyone except to love one another. Now there's a little bit of a play on words, and you could say it this way pay your debts, finish paying them off. Except for one debt you can never finish paying off, which is the debt of loving each other, right? But when it says debt and it says pay your debts in the previous first, it actually means pay your debts, which means Christians don't voluntarily enter into debt.

I'm not saying you should never borrow money to advance your business. I'm not saying you should never borrow money to finance your house. Debt is not when you owe money to somebody. It's when you owe money to someone that you can't pay. When you don't know how you're going to pay your debts, then you are in debt. And the Bible says, don't fall in debt.

And if you do fall into debt, repay your debts. A righteous man repays his debts. That's actually a particular statement in the Bible. And the wicked borrow and do not pay back. That's Psalm 37, verse 21. And if you have a friend who's in need, loan the money without interest. Now you may think to yourself, well, what if they got into debt because of careless overspending?

The Bible here is assuming that in the ancient world, crops can fail. No fault of your own. Floods of water like we've had around here lately, or a disease that goes through your flock and you can find yourself in a hard spot. Furthermore, today, through automation or AI or wars, droughts and so forth, people can innocently have no ability to pay their way.

And the Bible says we should lend to such people freely. In fact, the Bible says a righteous man freely lends to the poor. But if you're in desperate debt, you can't do that, can you? You can hardly take care of yourself. So stay out of debt so you can be generous to the people around you. That's concrete counsel the Bible gives and that Paul is speaking right now.

Now it's good counsel and you can get out of debt certain ways. Financial counselors will tell you how to get out of debt, stop spending money on your credit cards and pay off small debts and start to go down the road of success and feeling good, and then go for bigger debts. And it's all very good. Unless you're spending money too much because somehow or other money's an idol to you, it's harder.

There's a simple plan. You can just follow laws. Unless your heart is given over to displays of success, or if you're feeling kind of depressed, you think the way out of depression is what do they call it? Retail therapy. And I'm not going to I'm not going to follow the ordinary and healthy paths to get out of depression.

I'm just going to go buy stuff or to I want the world to know who I really am by spending big on things. If money is your god or appearances or your God, then you have to repent and turn to the Lord. But still, let's pay our debts. So your Apostle Paul says to us. In other words, it goes back to the heart one more time.

Now, when we say heart in our culture, it's, you know, listen to your heart. And I'm always, you know, apprehensive to use the word heart. Although the Bible uses word heart lots of times. And so I'll use the phrase from Jonathan Edwards, that great great American theologian who spoke instead about affections. By affections, he didn't mean a transient feeling.

He meant our deep and settled loves, the ones we act upon because all of life proceeds from those affections. And if you love God and you love neighbor, then, then you'll know what to do. But if you're not quite sure, the Lord will tell you what to do, let me say it differently. If you really want something, your mind will come up with a rationale.

If you really want something, you'll find a way to get there. Because your affections, your heart drives everything. That's why the Bible says above all else, guard your heart, for it is the spring of life. Let me illustrate it personally. People ask me from time to time, they feel you don't feel like you can get more and more personal longer.

I'm here and you ask me personal questions like, do you have a pet? Did you ever have a pet? Because I don't talk about pets. Do you hate animals or something? And, the answer is we have had a pet dog and the dog's name was taxi, which means no taxation without representation. That's the dog's full name. And we have never had a cat as a pet because it's not really clear that cats can be pets.

It's more like they're wild animals that deign to live in the same space as you from time to time. But we had a dog, and when we got this dog, it was a rescue dog. And you know, we loved it. And our kids loved the dog, of course. And, this is the strange side of me. I said, you know, it costs \$700 a year to support a child in the third World or in a needy place.

And we do that with support. We support as many children as we have. We we have three children and we support three children overseas. And that costs 700 per. And so I said, if our dog when we got the dog, I said, if our dog has a vet bill that's more than \$700, we're going to put her to sleep, because I just can't heal a dog at the same price it would cost to take care of a child overseas for a whole year.

I know you all think I'm crazy, but at least you can at least accept my reasoning that there's something to it, right? Okay, so year nine our dog got very sick. We took our dog to the vet. The vet says this can be fixed. It's going to cost \$800. And so our dog you know that was the end of that.

No. No. We rationalized we rationalize because we loved our dog and we said it's only 100 extra dollars. We just won't get, you know, pizza, or go out for coffee or something. We, we found a way to do what we wanted to do, right? That's what we that's what we're like. If we love God and we love our neighbor, we'll find a way to do the right thing.

But we don't always know the right thing. And so God gives us his law. If you're not sure how to go about loving people, here are some things you shouldn't do. And you turn around and there are things that you should do. The first one he mentions is adultery. Don't be unfaithful. Don't do what adulterers do. Tell themselves a story about how bad and deficient and inferior their spouses and come up with a rationale for breaking vows.

Don't do that. Treasure your spouse. Give thanks for your spouse, and don't kill and don't harm people for no reason. Now that that's not a word against armed forces. If an army resists an invading army, that's good because you're keeping them from killing other people. You're keeping them from doing terrible things to other people. So prevent violence. To steal is to take away somebody's property, protect people's property.

If you're walking around outside and you see your neighbor's doors open, the front doors open and you know they're away, walk over there, lock the door and pull it shut. Take care of your neighbor's property. Don't covet when something good happens to the person who works next to you, or the person who graduated from high school or college with you.

Don't resent them. Give thanks. If they're rising higher than you. Give thanks for God's goodness and kindness to that person. Don't covet tells us how to marvel. It tells us what to do when somebody has more ability, more success, more something than you or I do. It says give thanks because coveting makes everybody miserable. It makes the person who covets miserable.

They see how miserable I am. Instead of saying how thankful I am for what God gave me. And it makes the person they covet miserable because they can tell something's wrong in the relationship and it's actually rebelling against God. You're saying, you know, Lord, what you gave me is all wrong. You should have given me what? But that person has give thanks.

Praise God if somebody plays the saxophone better than you do, don't be envious. Learn to play the saxophone. Or the guitar. Or the piano or something. Instead of being resentful, this can enter into the church. You know there's a place in Israel. If you've been to Israel, you probably have been there. It's called The Church of the Holy Sepulcher. And it's a big building, not a very pretty building with thousands and thousands of people in it.

And it's most likely the great majority of all archeologists, biblical archeologists believe it's very, very likely this is the place in that building where Jesus was buried, which means it's also the place where Jesus rose from the dead. And you would think it would be a place of magnificent celebration. And to some degree it is. But the sad truth is that over the years, somehow six different denominations once you might not have heard of, you know, the Greek and Armenian Orthodox Church and the Syriac Church and the Coptic Church and so forth, all have made claims to the church property.

And so they've divided it up with lines here and there, and they kind of stare at each other. If anybody puts a foot over the line, it's so sad.

That's how we need the law to tell us don't and to turn it around. Martin Luther summarized the law this way in one place. He said, besides our own body, don't murder, right? Besides your own body or husband or wife, don't commit adultery or property, don't steal. We have one more treasure which is indispensable to live well, namely, the honor of our good name.

That's. Don't bear false witness. It's a good summary of what the law teaches us now. It teaches us to love our neighbor as ourselves. And some people say, ooh, that sounds kind of selfish, making your own affection for yourself the standard. But actually it's just describing the way we behave. And somebody also says always. Well, I mean, what about people don't like themselves?

There are people who don't like their looks or their career or even their own personality, which is very sad. But even those people pay attention to themselves. As Paul says over in Ephesians, we love, we nourish, we cherish our own bodies. Even if you don't like your body, you take care of your body. He's saying, look, you know how you pay attention to yourself.

You know how you pay attention to your hair and your skin and your clothes. Do that with other people. Love other people, specifically love your neighbor. So the next question people ask all the time is, so who's my neighbor? You know, what about this panhandler? That's, you know, at an intersection I pass every day is that person my neighbor?

And Jesus told a parable about that. It's called the parable of the Good Samaritan. And there was a man beaten up and left for dead. And a priest came by and said, not my neighbor. And a Levite came by and said, not my neighbor. And they both left, and a Samaritan came by and said, obviously I'm walking right by.

The guy must be my neighbor. If God puts somebody in your life, they're your neighbor. Don't overthink it. It's pretty simple. Love your neighbor as yourself. And by the way, when you do that, remember Jesus is a walking law and informative narrative. Jesus became a neighbor to us in the incarnation and didn't ask, are these my neighbors or not?

He said, neighbor and he came. Now some people, some people are going to be a little bit nervous about all this. Talk about the law and fulfilling the law. So what I want to do is answer the person who may say this talk sounds kind of legalistic. I'm going to help you by giving you three definitions of legalism that are all incorrect ideas.

Number one, legalism at its worst is what's called auto. So tourism auto meaning self, so terror savior saving yourself by doing good works. That is a rank heresy. We do not please God or earn our favor or keep our favor by doing well enough. That's true hardcore legalism and that's not what we're advocating. Of course. Number two, the second form of legalism is adding manmade laws to the Bible and saying you must keep those to please God or obey God.

Those are laws that Jesus had to endure, laws that said, you can't cook food, you can't walk more than half a mile. Those are not God's law. And to make up laws and to foist them on other people is legalism. And that's not what we're advocating. The third way to be legalistic is to have a monomaniacal focus on lists of things that have to do so that you forget what Jesus calls the weightier matters, which are love and justice and mercy and faithfulness.

We're not in favor of any of those things. It's not legalism, however, to say God's law is good, and it teaches us how to love him and how to love our neighbor. Now, this is very important, Paul says later in the passage, because the hours come for you to wake up from your sleep. Wake up everybody. Do you know what time it is?

We are closer to the day of Christ's return than we were yesterday. Now the Bible says we don't know when Jesus will come. Jesus said four times in one chapter, you don't know the day. You don't know the hour. Be ready, be ready, be ready, be ready. And so one day Jesus is going to come and it'll be a surprise to us unless you're ready.

But every day that goes by, we're one day closer. We're getting closer and closer to the day when Christ returns. Salvation is nearer than it was at first. Paul says he can come any time, any moment. The night is far gone. The day is at hand. Verse 12 says, therefore let us cast off works of darkness, and put on the armor of light.

Cast off works of darkness is cast off. The sins of Paul's just mention the armor of light is described in great detail over in Ephesians chapter six, but here he just mentions it. And the armor of light is twofold. The first is the gospel. The Bible calls the gospel the light of the gospel. The gospel is the light for life.

We will see. Celebrate that in the Lord's Supper in a few minutes. And God's law is a light. It is a, as you perhaps know, a light to our feet. That's the light that we have, the light by which we live and we walk properly. Verses 13 and 14 say in the day time. And then he lists some sins, like orgies and drunkenness and sexual immorality and sensuality and quarreling and jealousy, which we don't need to describe.

He does tell us one thing. He says, make no provision for the flesh and its desires. The word provision means plan. I don't plan sin, don't plan sin. In our culture today, a lot of people, we live in an age of anger. A lot of people like to sort of heap up offenses against themselves, stirring up their anger.

That's making a provision for the flesh. Don't store up anger, dissipate anger, forgive people. Don't prepare to be angry at people. Give thanks for people. Let me see all this through an analogy. And I'm going to ask you to picture three people for a minute. We're going to imagine three people up here one, two, three. There's three runners.

And we asked them they've been running for five years. They run, you know, 30 miles a week. Why do you run? The first person says, I run because my father died of a heart attack at the age of 53. My grandfather at 50. And I want to live to see my children get married and have grandchildren. So I run for my heart.

Okay, great. It's a good answer. Second man, why do you run? He says, well, I run because when I run, I burn off all the energy from and the stress of the day, and I just feel so relaxed after I run and then and then, you know, I run before supper a lot of times we eat around 7:00 and if I run five miles, I got to tell you, I can eat whatever I want, and I really like it.

That's why I run. And we ask the third person, why do you run? And he says, I run because when I run, the wind blows through my hair and my feet soar over the ground and my heart beats like slow, heavy thunder in my chest. That's why I run. Now I have a question for you. Who's going to keep running, man number one maybe, maybe wants to see his grandchildren, but he might get tired of it because he doesn't really love it.

How about man number two? Is he going to keep running? Maybe. Probably not running to eat the pay off is just not enough. Is this guy going to keep running? Oh yeah. You do what you love. And there are laws about running, about training so you can run well, not get hurt, not wear yourself out. And he will follow those laws because of what he loves.

But the law teaches us how to love, how to love God, how to love our neighbor. And it gives us the no, don't do that. That we often need as sinners. Now we're coming to the Lord's table, and I want to make sure that as we do so. Do you know something about the Lord's table? And I've printed these words I'm going to read to you as a sort of preparation for the Lord's table.

It's about the law. And what happens when we don't keep it, because any exposition of law is going to end up with the idea that I can't keep this law right, no matter how much I love it, no matter how much I would like to, I'm going to fall short. I'm going to covet. I'm going to bear false witness and so Paul says in Romans eight, God has done what the law could not do by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin as a sacrifice for sin.

He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us as we walk according to the spirit. So if you listen to the law of God and you say to yourself, I have not kept this law, where am I with God? The answer is, you're in trouble. Except that God sent his son as a propitiate to sacrifice, giving his flesh, his body and blood, his death for ours, his righteousness for us.

That all the righteous requirements of the law would be met in us through Christ, by faith. We're going to take these elements in a moment. I want to make sure you know who they're for. They're for the children that were just baptized and joined the church. Therefore, the grown up has been walking with the Lord for 20, 30, 40, 50 years.

And honestly, it's not going that well right now. You've kind of strayed from the Lord and you know it. Let this bring you back like communion with Christ and tasting of the sacrifice of Christ bring you back to health. And if you're full of joy and you say, by God's grace, I'm, I'm just at the top of my Christian life, it's so beautiful, then this is definitely for you.

And I say one more group. There are people here. Almost certainly. I was one of them at one point in my life who professed faith in church and was baptized and sat in church saying, I'm a member of the church and I profess faith and I am not a Christian. Even this moment can be a moment when you say, I want to take these elements sincerely, I've said it, but today I mean it.

Today I call on Christ.

Let's pray for a moment.

Heavenly father, we thank you for your Word, your work, Lord Jesus, for your sacrifice. Oh for even when we love your law, we know we don't keep it. Teach us to repent. Teach us to rejoice in all the good work you've done, all the beauty of your law, keeping and your ways strengthen us. Holy spirit, we pray to live by faith in you and we pray it all in Jesus name. Amen.