

Romans 13:8-14 Answers The Law of Love

Context: The last section of Romans is generally about Service (Ro 12-16). In Romans 12-13, Paul detailed our service in relation to God (12:1-2), other believers (12:3-16), our enemies (12:17-21) and the government (13:1-14). Romans 1-11 is the “what”. Romans 12-16 is the “so what”. If you really believe Romans 1 – 11, then *this* (Ro 12-16) will be true in your life. Romans 1-11 is the foundation and Romans 12-16 the superstructure.

Key Text: The driving text for this whole section is **Romans 12:1-2**. In the rest of Romans we are studying what it looks like to present our bodies as living sacrifices that are transformed through renewed minds. Romans 12:9-21 list the marks of a true Christian.

Introduction: Romans 13 contains the “therefore” of our relationship to the Law of Moses.

******What key ingredient leads to fulfilling God’s law (13:8-10)?** Love is the key ingredient.

According to 13:8, what legitimate debt do we owe each other? We owe each other love (*agapao*). The idea is that the debt of love is an unlimited debt that can never be fully paid back.

Origen: “. . . we should both pay all this debt daily and always owe it” (Coleman & Peace, p.114).

ESV **John 13:35** By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

1. Does “owe no one anything” mean we are not to have a house note or credit card debt (13:8)? *See back to 13:7.* Some have taken this to mean it is unbiblical to have any type of monetary debt. It would be unwise to build an entire financial policy based on one half of one verse in a paragraph about love. Based on 13:7, it means simply that you should not be behind on your obligations (no late payments); if you are in debt you should not be in arrears, you are to pay what is owed, fulfilling any repayment agreements you have made (*ESV Study Bible*, p. 2180).

Application: Do not be late paying your utility bills. If you buy a store’s merchandise on credit and agree to pay for over time, be faithful to pay for it (otherwise it is close to stealing). If you borrow money from a friend, pay it back in a timely manner.

For the record, it was not a sin under Mosaic Law to borrow money:

ESV **Deuteronomy 15:7-8** If among you, one of your brothers should become poor . . . you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be . . . For there will never cease to be poor in the land.

However, any loans made to the poor had to be without interest:

ESV **Exodus 22:25** If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be like a moneylender to him, and you shall not exact interest from him.

ESV **Leviticus 25:35-37** If your brother becomes poor . . . You shall not lend him your money at interest . . .

Furthermore, every seventh year all debts were cancelled (sort of a pre-planned bankruptcy):

ESV **Deuteronomy 15:1-2** At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release. And this is the manner of the release: every creditor shall release what he has lent to his neighbor. He shall not exact it of his neighbor, his brother, because the LORD'S release has been proclaimed.

Unlike ancient societies, ours is a debt based society. Easy credit is the norm. Businesses borrow money because they stand to make more profit than they pay in interest. It often makes sense to get a mortgage on a house, especially if your payment is close to the cost of renting. The problem with debt, especially for consumers, is that it often condemns you to a lower standard of living in the future, in no small part due to the devastating effect of compounding interest.

Even if we are out of debt financially, we always owe a debt of love to each other.

2. What law (13:8) was Paul talking about (common law, Roman law, Mosaic law, principle of law, etc.)? From the context it is clear he had in mind the Law of Moses.

How many of the Ten Commandments did Paul quote in 13:9? He quoted four of the ten. Notice that Paul here only quotes ethical (moral) laws, not any of the Mosaic ceremonial or civil laws.

Is the command to love your neighbor as yourself one of the Ten Commandments (13:9, Lev 19:18)? It is not, but it is the basis for all the other commands.

3. What is true about love for ourselves (13:9) that is often lacking in our dealings with other people? Martin Luther pointed out that by the phrase “as yourself”, “every kind of simulated love is ruled out and all the love of others merely for what we can get out of them” (Cranfield, p. 678).

4. How is it that all the commandments can be summed up in the one command to love your neighbor as yourself (13:9-10, Lev 19:18)? That one command is the bedrock from which all the others flow. If you love your neighbor as yourself, you will treat him in such a way that you naturally fulfill God's law.

Augustine: “Love God — and do what you like” (Coleman & Peace, p. 114).

ESV **John 13:34** A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

ESV **James 2:8** If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well.

ESV **Galatians 5:14** . . . the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

5. How does Romans 13:8-10 help us understand our relationship to the Law of Moses? Paul clearly assumed Christians would live out the moral parts of the Law of Moses. Basic morality never changes, no matter if under the Law of Moses or the Law of Christ.

Law of Moses vs. Law of Christ: We must let the New Testament interpret the Old Testament. The New Testament is clear that believers are not obligated to keep the Law of Moses. Neither, however, are we lawless. Lawlessness in the Bible is always a bad thing. Instead we are under the Law of Christ. For example:

ESV **1 Corinthians 9:20** To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law . . . that I might win those under the law. [Here Paul described unbelieving Jews as those who are under the Law of Moses, *hupo nomos*.]

ESV **1 Corinthians 9:20** . . . To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) . . . [Paul made it clear that he himself was no longer under the Law of Moses.]

ESV **1 Corinthians 9:21** To those outside the law I became as one outside the law . . . that I might win those outside the law. [Here Paul described unbelieving Gentiles as those outside the law, *anomos*].

ESV **1 Corinthians 9:21** To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) . . . [Here Paul described himself as being under the law of Christ, *ennomos Christos*, or in-lawed to Christ].

Everything that was moral in the Law of Moses is repeated in the Law of Christ. What was ethical then is ethical now. Using Paul's wording from 1 Corinthians 9, one might say the eternal, never changing moral Law of God was first manifested in the Law of Moses and then later manifested in the Law of Christ. Though Paul was not under the Law of Moses, he was never outside the Law of God because he was in-lawed to Christ.

Nine out of Ten: All of the Ten Commandments are renewed under the new covenant except one: the Sabbath. Exodus 31:16-17 indicates the sign of the old (Mosaic, Sinai) covenant was observing the Saturday Sabbath. People who suffer a divorce no longer wear a wedding ring (the sign of the marriage covenant). Similarly the new covenant cancelled the old covenant; you don't keep the sign of an obsolete covenant.

*****What time is it (13:11-14)?** It is time to wake up! The night is far gone; day-break is at hand.

Paul started this paragraph with “besides this” (13:11); besides what? The wording here in the Greek was a common idiom used to introduce additional circumstances heightening the force of something that had just been said (Cranfield, p. 680). Thus, Paul is saying you should really been keen on loving one another in light of our coming salvation when Jesus returns. The Second Coming is an incentive to moral earnestness.

ESV 1 John 3:2-3 . . . we know that when he appears we will be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

6. What does sleep and night symbolize (13:11-14)? They are metaphors for drunkenness, sexual immorality, bickering and jealousy.

ESV 1 John 1:5-6 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

ESV 1 Thessalonians 5:5-9 . . . you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

7. In what sense is salvation nearer now than when we first believed (13:11)? The Bible speaks of salvation in three tenses: we have been saved, we are being saved and we shall be saved. Paul here wrote of salvation as a future event, referring to our ultimate salvation when we are freed from these bodies of sin and given resurrection bodies. Certainly every day we live is one day closer to home. Our salvation will be finally completed when Christ returns and we are given glorified bodies.

ESV 2 Timothy 4:6 . . . the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

Prophecy Application: A study of prophecy is too often a Christian substitute for reading a horoscope. Any study of biblical prophecy that does not lead to life change is unhealthy. Paul here uses the approaching return of Jesus as a motivation to obedience.

8. What does the night being far gone and the day being at hand have to do with the timing of the Second Coming (13:12)? The early church obviously believed there was very little prophecy left to be fulfilled before the Second Coming might occur. Other New Testament writings predicted the destruction of Jerusalem, which of course was fulfilled in A.D. 70, not long after Paul wrote Romans around A.D. 57. If our own understanding of prophecy is such that Jesus could not possibly return before such and such happens, then probably we have the wrong understanding of prophecy.

9. In 13:11 we are told to wake up. What are we told to do in 13:12-13? Like clothing, we are to cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light, behaving properly.

ESV **John 3:19-20** . . . light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil . . . everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

Structure: There are three pairing of sins in 13:13. The first set is orgies and drunkenness. One can see how the two might go together.

Orgy & Drunkenness (13:13): In English, an orgy is a sex party where guests freely engage in open and unrestrained sexual activity or group sex, such as that engaged in by French finance minister Dominique Strauss-Kahn. It is pure, unadulterated debauchery. The Greek here is *komos* (not *kosmos*), originally the name of a village festival characterized by drinking and revelry. The NAS renders this as carousing, the KJV as rioting and the NKJV as revelry (revelry is lively and noisy enjoyment, especially with drinking and dancing). If you still do this, wake up! Cast it off.

Drunkenness clearly is a sin. There are no ifs ands or buts about it. You must put on the armor of light.

ESV **Ephesians 5:18** And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit . . .

Sexual immorality and Sensuality (13:13): If something is immoral it is a sin! The Greek word here for sexual immorality is the Greek word for bed (Coleman & Peace, p. 115). Instead of sensuality, the NAS has debauchery and the NKJV has lust. If you are sexually immoral, you must put on the Lord Jesus Christ and cease being immoral.

Quarreling & Jealousy (13:13): We are not to quarrel. Other translations have strive or dissention. It is to be contentious.

10. How do quarreling and jealousy go hand in hand (13:13)?

11. What kinds of things might Christians be jealous about (13:13)?

What positive command are we given in 13:14? We are to put on Jesus Christ.

12. In this context, what would it mean to put on Jesus (13:14)? It means to follow Jesus in the way of discipleship and follow Him in holiness, living a life pleasing to Him (Cranfield, p. 688).

13. What did Paul mean by flesh (13:14)? It signifies the whole of human nature in all of its fallenness and in disobedience to God (Cranfield, p. 689).

14. What would it look like to make provision to gratify the desires of the flesh (13:14)? A man who buys pornographic magazines is making provision for the lusts of the flesh. A man with a drinking problem who stocks up on liquor is making provision for the flesh. A woman who buys immodest clothing is making provision for the flesh. A fat person who stocks up on ice cream and cookies is making provision for the flesh.

So What?

Amazing Grace: In the summer of A.D. 386 Aurelius Augustine, Professor of Rhetoric at Milan University, sat weeping in a friend's garden, wishing to start a new life by not knowing how, when he heard a child chanting, "Take up and read! Take up and read!" He then picked up his friend's copy of Romans and these last two verses we have studied today (13:13-14). In *Confessions*, he wrote, "No further could I read, nor I had I any need; instantly, at the end of the sentence, a clear light flooded my heart and all the darkness of doubt vanished away" (Coleman and Peace, p. 114).

Is this the day you start a new life? To be clothed with Christ? To cast off the deeds of darkness?

15. What do you need to do as a result of reading this passage of Scripture?

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

- These lessons are designed for a 45 minute session and are based on the text of the ESV.
- You can hear this lesson being taught at www.SermonAudio.Com/NTRF.

Stephen E. Atkerson

www.NTRF.org

02/22/15