

ARE YOU PAYING WHAT YOU OWE?

Romans 13:8–14

Paul concluded his teaching on civil government affirming that we owe it to government servants to pay them taxes, revenues, respect and honor. In this next section Paul admonishes us to pay another debt we owe; a debt we will never payoff in this life.

TO WHOM DO I OWE LOVE?

Romans 13:8 ESV

Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

You owe it to others to love them.

Who are these “others” to whom I owe love?

On the one hand we owe it to our Christian brothers and sisters to love them. When Paul wrote, “Owe no one anything, except to love each other...”, the “each other” is the Greek term *allelous* which means “other of the same kind”. It refers to our Christian brothers and sisters in our church family, in our community and the world over. This is what Paul has already taught us in 12:9-13: we owe it to our Christian brothers and sisters to love them.

On the other hand, we owe it to everyone in our sphere of influence to love them. When Paul went on in verse 8 and wrote, “...for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.” he used a different Greek word for “another”. He used the Greek word, *heteron* which means “other of a different kind”. It refers to people who are not yet saved. It includes our neighbors, coworkers, fellow students, unsaved family and friends and anyone who comes into our sphere of influence who is not yet saved.

We owe love to Christians and non-Christians alike.

But this runs completely counter to what the world tells us. The world tells us the only people we are obligated to love are members of our family and even that is negotiable. The world also tells us to only love those who love us.

Our flesh, when we were in Adam, told us to love ourselves.

But God says we owe love to others.

Who are we going to believe? Who are we going to follow?

If we want to be a living sacrifice fully dedicated to God, we need to throw off the world’s ideas of love. We need to sit in passages like this and 1 John and ask the Holy Spirit to renew our minds to understand that we are called and empowered to love every person who comes into our sphere of influence whether a Christian brother or sister or someone not yet saved.

Once we’re clear as to whom we owe love we next need to understand what love is according to God’s Word. The world says love is a feeling of attraction or a feeling of desire. Is God telling us we need to generate a warm feeling of affection for everyone in our sphere of influence?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LOVE OTHERS?

Romans 13:8–10 ESV

Owe no one anything, except to love each other, 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 covet,” 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.

What does it mean to love others?

The love here is *agape*.

In verses 9-10 Paul gives us one aspect of loving others: love does no wrong to a neighbor. If we love someone we will do them no harm. The reason we will do no harm is because the essence of *agape* love is to do good to the other. If we consistently thought in terms of love many of our laws would not need to be stated. The four commandments Paul recites from the 10 Commandments are four examples of the way that love does not harm a neighbor. Paul is not saying these are the only four ways love does not harm a neighbor. There are examples, but not exhaustive. The point is that if we love our neighbor, we will identify what we should and should not do in our relationship with them. If I love my neighbor am I going to blare my music all through the night? If I love my neighbor am I going to blow my grass and leaves into their yard? If I love my neighbor am I going to return their pooch when it gets loose? Do I need laws to tell me to do these things? If I'm committed to love my neighbor I don't need laws to tell me how to do it. Love leads me to do what is right and good for others.

I have been really helped by Dallas Willard's definition of love:

And first, what exactly is love? It is will to good or "bene-volence." We love something or someone when we promote its good for its own sake.

This is a great working definition of love - **to do good to others**.

For me, I need this simple, concrete definition of love because I am so prone to live out of my feelings. There are times, usually at the end of a busy day, that I find myself standing at the kitchen sink with dirty dishes and cups and silverware that need to be washed or put in the dishwasher. An inner argument often erupts: "I'm tired and if I just leave it I know Cathy or Eileen will take of it. But what is the loving thing to do? How can I do good to Cathy knowing she likes a clean kitchen?" I still have to talk myself through things like this.

And here is the power of this concrete definition of love - **to do good to others**. I can ask this question about everyone in my sphere of influence: "How can I do good to them?" It is a very practical guide in loving those closest to us or loving the person who takes our order at Ramona Cafe.

The first thing this question leads us to do is to get to know the other person. I can't do others good unless I get to know them. The first step is to see the people around us at the store or the ball fields or the PTA meeting. They are not nuisances; they are people God calls us to love. Greet people with a smile. Learn their names. Listen to their stories. You'll be surprised how most people will respond to a little kindness and genuine interest from us.

I shared with you my experience on jury duty for three weeks. During the breaks I got to know most all of my fellow jurors just by asking them about their lives. All them were happy to tell me their stories. By week three some of them felt comfortable enough to ask me questions about the Bible.

Doing good to others simply begins by caring about others.

At this point you may be wondering why we are obligated to love others.

When we go into debt its usually our choice. If we owe something its because we chose to owe it.

But in this case God tells us we're obligated to love others and quite frankly, we may not buy it. In fact, if we look at the way many Christians treat others, it's clear many of us don't accept that we owe love to others.

So why do we owe love to others?

WHY DO I OWE LOVE TO OTHERS?

... for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

... therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Because It's The Right Thing To Do In God's Sight

The law articulates what God considers right and good. If you love God and want to be a living sacrifice then you want to do His will. The fulfillment of His law is love. If you want to do what is right in the sight of

God, it is to love Him and others. This is the first reason we are obligated to love others: because it's the right thing to do in God's sight.

The second reason we are obligated to love other is not found in Romans 13, but 1 John 4.

¹ John 4:7-8 NET

Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been fathered by God and knows God. The person who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

¹ John 4:19-5:1 NET

We love because he loved us first. If anyone says "I love God" and yet hates his fellow Christian, he is a liar, because the one who does not love his fellow Christian whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And the commandment we have from him is this: that the one who loves God should love his fellow Christian too. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been fathered by God, and everyone who loves the father loves the child fathered by him.

The second reason we are obligated to love others is because its our new nature as children of God.

Because It's Your New Nature As A Child Of God

We have new spiritual DNA if we're truly born again. We partake of the divine nature. At the heart of God's nature is love. The family resemblance in God's family is not the color of our hair or the shape of our noses or the color of our skin. The family resemblance in God's family is that we love. If you are not concerned about loving others you need to check yourself because you are not manifesting the most basic quality of a child of God.

John gives us a third reason we are obligated to love others. But before I point it out I want to illustrate it. Years ago, when our son was a little boy, he received a stuffed dog pillow as a gift. That became his pillow and, at least up until a few years ago, it was still his pillow. I may be mistaken, but I think he took it with him when he was deployed to Okinawa a few years ago with the U.S. Marines.

Needless to say, that pillow has long been a science project; I wouldn't even want to know how many gallons of drool that dog has absorbed. In the name of hygiene and world health it would probably be best if that pillow went away. But even if I could make that pillow go away, I wouldn't. Why? Because it's special to my son. I will do good to that pillow because my son loves that pillow.

Did you catch what John said in 5:1?

¹ John 5:1 ESV

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.

Why are we obligated to love one another in the church family? Because we love those whom the Father loves.

Because We Love Those Whom The Father Loves

By extension, this also applies to those not yet saved. According to Jesus in John 3:16, whom does the Father love?

John 3:16 ESV

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Because we love God, we love those whom God loves - Christians and non-Christians alike.

The fourth reason we are obligated to love others is found in Romans 13:11-14.

Romans 13:11–14 ESV

¹¹ Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

We owe it to love others because we will be held accountable at the Judgment Seat of Christ for the way we loved others.

Because We Will Be Held Accountable For How We Loved Others

What salvation is Paul speaking of in verse 11? It is future so it is not justification; we are delivered from the penalty of sin the moment we trust Jesus and are declared righteous by God. It is future so it is not sanctification; we are presently being delivered from the power and practice of sin. It is future so it must be our glorification when we are finally and forever delivered from these bodies of sin by receiving a resurrection body and being purified at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

If this salvation is simply going to heaven when we die then ultimately it doesn't matter if we do the works of darkness or put on the armor of light. But as Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 3 and 2 Corinthians 5, a significant aspect of our glorification is our purification and reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ. And based on what we are studying today, what will be a major issue for which we will be held to account?

How did we love?

Did we do good to our Christian brothers and sisters and did we do good to those not yet saved? Did we make the sacrifices necessary to do good to others?

So how do we grow in this lifestyle of loving others? I think verse 14 gives us the starting point.

Romans 13:14 ESV

¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

In all of us there is internal conflict between old-man self-centeredness and new-man love for God and others. To “put on the Lord Jesus Christ “ is to consciously and continually strive to live and love like Jesus lived and loved. It is conscious because our thoughts determine how we live. It is continual because of the constant pull of self-centeredness. Throughout our days we need to consciously and continually strive to live and love like Jesus.

It will also greatly help us to memorize the definition of love - **to do good to others**. And along with this to get in the habit of asking ourselves this question, “How can I do good to this person with whom I'm talking or about whom I'm thinking?”

It will also be of great help if we, in our homes and in our church family, celebrate and praise instances of love. If you see someone doing good to others, celebrate it. Speak words of encouragement to the one showing love. And certainly, if you are the recipient, respond in gratitude.

And dream with me about being a church family known by our love. Dream with me about the impact we could have for Christ all throughout our valley as each one of us loves those in our sphere of influence.

Thankfully, as we pursue love, the Holy Spirit is with us and working in us to do God's will. Through His power, we can and will be paying what we owe.