

Romans 13:8-10

Love is the fulfilment of the Law

Paul was concerned for the witness of the believing Jewish and Gentile community within the wider context of the non-believing Jewish community in Rome. He expressed his heart-felt desire that his fellow Jews be saved (Romans 9:1-3, 10:1).

Paul hoped that the believing community in Rome would share his burden. He exhorts them therefore to live as members of the body of Christ (Romans 12:3-8) according to the teaching of Christ (Romans 12:9-21,) summarised under the heading, *Love must be genuine*. In regard to the authorities (whom I think are the synagogue authorities, Romans 13:1-7,) they were to submit *for the sake of conscience* (Romans 13:5). Paul said they were to pay their taxes (the 2 drachma temple tax, Romans 13:7). Part of being living sacrifices means learning to give; and learning that God is the Giver of all we possess anyway. Martin Luther said: "I have tried to keep things in my hands and lost them all, but what I have given into God's hands I still possess."

The priority of love in chapter 12 reminds us that genuine love within the Christian community is the foundation for Christian witness: *By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*" (John 13:35). Paul picks up this theme again in Romans 13:8, *Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law*. And in Romans 13:10, *love is the fulfilling of the law*.

But how can love be the fulfilling of the law? To talk of love fulfilling the law sounds like an oxymoron, which is a combination of words which seem completely contradictory, for example, "Suddenly the room was filled with a deafening silence!" How can a set of supposedly harsh legalistic rules be summarised as love? For many they can't, and many read the phrase, *love is the fulfilling of the law*, to mean, *love has replaced the law*. However it is indeed a strange thing that pastors will teach from Romans 13 that Christians are obligated to obey the human laws of human governments; yet at the same time they will teach from Romans we are no longer obligated to the Divine law. We are free in the Spirit! But this makes no sense at all. A large part of Jewish law is about treating people with kindness. In the ancient world this was one of the things that set it apart from other systems of Near Eastern Law. Until recent decades our system of law in Britain was based on Biblical law. Paul himself lists some of the commandments in Romans 13:9 not in any way considering they have been abolished. His point is that if we really love our neighbour we won't do those things. The command to love is not something new, to replace the law, but it is a summary of all the rest. A book has a summary on the inside cover or at the back. The summary gives the gist of the book without having to read it. Jesus as Messiah has, if you like, written a new summary of the Law. It is not a new Law, or another Law, but it is a new revelation of the same Law summed up in this one word, *love your neighbour as yourself*. This is what the Apostles taught.

John Stott, "that Christ is the end of the law ... emphatically does not mean that there are now no moral absolutes except love, as the advocates of 'the new morality' taught in the 1960's, or that we have no obligation to obey God's law."¹ Unfortunately advocates of the new morality, which is lawlessness, in the 1960's became political activists so much of it has now been passed into legislation.

Love and divine Law are not enemies, they are friends. They are friends found embedded within the 10 commandments in Exodus 20:5-6, *You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments*. Likewise Jesus said, *If you love me, keep my commands* (John 14:15). Love and law are friends because the whole law is summed up in this one word, *You shall love your neighbour as yourself*, which comes from the Law in Leviticus 19:18. We find this verse sandwiched right in the middle of Leviticus, which is the middle book of the Law/Torah!

¹ Stott, J., *The Cross of Christ*, p241

On one occasion a teacher of the law came to Jesus to ask what he needed to do to inherit eternal life (Luke 10:25-37). Jesus asked him, *What is written in the Law? How do you read it?* This is the key: *How do you read it?* The teacher of the law answered, *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself.* Jesus said, *You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live (which means, you will have eternal life).* Yet the teacher of the law wanted to justify himself, so he asked, *Who is my neighbour?* (NB we can't justify ourselves!) Jesus answered his question with the well-known parable of the Good Samaritan. In it Jesus exposed the cultural hatred the Jews had for their closest neighbours, the Samaritans. In the parable it is the hated Samaritan who stops to help a Jew who had been beaten up by robbers. In doing so, the Samaritan was putting into practice the teaching of Christ as expressed by Paul in Romans, *Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse* (Romans 12:14); and, *if your enemy is hungry, feed him, if he is thirsty, give him something to drink* (Romans 12:20).

Not only are the Law and love are friends, the Law and the New Covenant are friends. We know that the Law was part of the Sinai covenant. But it is important to note that the Law is not the same as the covenant. A covenant is an agreement. Israel made an agreement with God to keep the words He had spoken, the Law (Exodus 24:3). God found fault, not with the Law, but with the covenant, i.e. the people (Hebrews 8:7-8). There was need for a new agreement (covenant), but the New Covenant includes the Law, i.e. God's revelation given to Moses. This is found in Jeremiah 31:31-33, and it is also quoted in Hebrews 8:8-12.

When it says, *Behold the days are coming*, this is prophet-speak for the Messianic age, which has not yet arrived. The New Covenant is different from the Sinai Covenant because under the New Covenant it says, *I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.* God will supernaturally write His law on the hearts of His people. When Messiah comes he will reveal the true or inner meaning of the Law, as it says in Psalm 40:7-8, *Then I said, 'Behold, I have come, in the scroll of the book it is written of me, I desire to do your will, O my God, your law is within my heart.'* When Jesus came he showed us what it really meant to live out the revelation of the Law, and it was a remarkable life. In that sense Jesus fulfilled the law.

In 1920 there was a little book written by a man called Paul Levertoff called, "Love and the Messianic Age."² He was converted to Christ from a Jewish Orthodox Chassidic family, and became an Anglican. He recognised that the Chassidics, who were (are) a mystical lot, were looking for something He had found in Christ. Even though they kept the law scrupulously, we would say legalistically, they would say things like: *Love for man is more to God than the outward keeping of the whole Law. Through love even our body becomes an organ of the Shekinah, and we become united with the spiritual world, and are able through our prayers to bring down grace out of the heart of God.* They looked forward to the coming of Messiah, whom they believe will *bring not merely a revelation of the hidden meaning of the old Law, but [will bring] a new revelation.*

Jesus brought this new revelation and the Apostles taught it. This is the law of Christ. It is for the Messianic Age to come, but, those who have believed have been *sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory* (Ephesians 1:13-14).

Law, rightly understood, and for those in Christ, goes hand in hand with love. The real enemies are lawlessness and love. Jesus said, in the last days, *because lawlessness will increase, the love of many will grow cold* (Matthew 24:12). Love, even God's love, on its own, is not enough. It needs the fuel of God's holy word, the whole counsel of God, in order to burn bright. Only then will we shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

² <http://www.afii.org/mjbooks/Love%20&%20Messianic%20Age.pdf>