**Loving Our Neighbors**

**Romans 13:8-10 (ESV)**

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We’re going to be in Romans chapter 13 together today. We’ve been making our way through this great letter and we’re in this practical section. Chapters 12-16 are all applications. But they flow out of the first two verses of Romans 12:1-2 which urge us in view of God’s mercy that God has applied to our life, to present our bodies to God as a living sacrifice. And this is only reasonable that people who have been so affected by God’s grace, that this would be a response that we would have and say, “God, all I have is yours.” And so then from there, Paul traces out this life of radical worship. When we present our lives to God, it leads us to specific commitments in our life. And today, we’re going to see one of those commitments. It’s the commitment to love our neighbor. It’s a theme that Paul developed first earlier in chapter 12, of loving one another as brothers and sisters. But then he even broadens that and says not only one another, but also people in the world. And so that’s where we are in our study of Romans, and we’re going to be looking at verses 8-10.

***8*** *Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.* ***9*** *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.”* ***10*** *Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*

May God encourage us today as we meditate upon that and apply it in our lives!

God is constant in His emphasis upon calling His people to love. So constant is His call for us to love, that we would be insulted if we didn’t presume that we are rather dull of hearing. So it’s important for us to realize that we are dull of hearing. When I open up my Bible, God so often says to me, “Ritch, love your brothers and sisters. Ritch, love your neighbors as yourself.” And I’m right to say, “God, thank you. I’ve heard You say that many times before, but thank you for prompting me once again. My ears are dull to hear. My heart is slow to believe. And were it not for Your gracious promptings, my focus would be on self, self, self. And Lord, You are right that my joy is tied to a focus being on love, love, love.” So God returns to this theme in Romans 13:8-10. Our Bibles are open. It’s a theme that the Apostle Paul had just actually expressed. So in Romans 12:9 you read

**Romans 12:9** Let love be genuine.

And yet, less than a chapter away, we find this theme once again emerging. God is sending another appeal for us to have greater love in our hearts.

I think God repeatedly urges us toward love for a couple reasons. First of all, we are so very unaware of our lack of love. We think we are loving when really, we’re not. We need constant reminders to stir up love so that we don’t become complacent in our present condition. Secondly, we’re prone to paint ourselves with an artificial love; to allow love not to be genuine, but rather for it to be a form of love, but not the real genuine article. And so, we’re content with surface change when what God calls us to is not just to act like we love others, but to genuinely have a transformed heart that truly loves one another, loves our neighbor. So God repeatedly urges us to love.

In order to follow this command, we first need the Gospel to alert us to the problem. If we weren’t alerted to the problem that our heart is very selfish, it’s very self-centered and self-seeking, then we wouldn’t be interested in listening to a command like this. And then we need the Gospel to help us so that we don’t deal with the problem superficially, so that we don’t put a band-aid on a severe wound. This sin of self-centeredness is a severe wound, and we need the transforming work of God’s Spirit to bring healing and then to bring strength so that we become new creatures in Christ, so that we become like Jesus. Let me illustrate our spiritual condition with a physical analogy.

For the past three weeks, I have used some chemotherapy on my face to treat a chronic problem I have with basal cell skin cancer. And so, occasionally I put this chemical on two times a day, for two weeks. And that chemical doesn’t react to healthy cells. So if all my cells are healthy, there would be no reaction. If the cells are unhealthy and beginning to turn, then that cream reacts to it and burns them. It burns them right off before they become a real problem. So these pre-cancer cells that are on my face are invisible for the most part to the naked eye. If I look in the mirror before I put the cream on, I think, “This looks great! I’m doing fine.” After the end of two weeks however, I find that there are patches. And this time particularly, there are just blazing red swollen patches. It’s a red mess.

In fact, about a week ago, sort of at the height of the redness, a friend of mine saw me. They hadn’t seen me for a couple weeks. And at first when they saw me they exclaimed, “What happened to your face?!” I realized that this is really what everyone’s reaction is. It’s just that others are trying to hide their startled shock. So for the last two weeks, I asked my wife, Kimberly, for help. And she took out this tube of makeup. (Congregation Laughs!) Makeup is an amazing thing! What was red and swollen and really ugly just disappeared. Now, people that came close to me and talked to me close up, I think some of them, in fact I know some of them looked and said, “I think Ritch is wearing makeup.” (Congregational Laughter!) But even then, they couldn’t see the red blotches. They saw the makeup. They still saw something a lot more appealing than what the true condition was. How does this relate to Romans 13?

First of all, it’s important for us to know that all of us are afflicted with the cancer of selfishness. Every one of us! We look in the mirror, and we don’t see it. Those cells in our soul are invisible. We look and say, “I’m great! I’m a pretty loving person. I’m a pretty selfless person.” But what God tells us in His Word is that all of us are lovers of self rather than lovers of God, rather than lovers of other people. And so the diagnosis is 100% in this malady. And no one is excepted. If you ask each of us the question, “Are you a loving person?” most of us would say, “Yeah! I think I’m a pretty loving person.” After all, we love our children. We love our spouses. We love our friends. So we must be loving persons after all if we love those specific people who are really loving to us.

Well, God in His Word is the Great Physician. And like many great Physician’s, He has to first give the bad news. The bad news is that we have a cancer, a cancer that will rob us of life. We do not love as we ought. We do not love God as we ought. We do not love one another. But it’s good news. And it’s good news because God doesn’t leave us in the bad news. He leaves us with a remedy. He applies this remedy. It is His Son, Jesus, and the working of His Holy Spirit. So our condition is first of all safeguarded and secured so that this malady will not kill us. But then even its effects, its ongoing effects are removed gradually by the Holy Spirit as we submit our life to Him. God says, “My Son is able to heal you. He will restore you completely. In the present time you’re going to have to fight this disease, however, but know for that I have given you My Spirit to apply my Word to your life in such a way that you will become more and more whole. Apply this morning and noon and evening.”

And as we apply God’s Word to our soul, it first burns. It takes the bad cells and makes us aware of them because of the reaction. If we’re listening to God’s Spirit, all of the sudden we realize, “You know, I may not be as loving as I thought I was when I realize what that means. When I recognize the standard, and I recognize the great infinite holiness of God and I recognize the standard that God applies for that.” And it begins to burn. But it always burns not to damage us, not to harm us, but to heal us. And as it burns however, we’re a little bit embarrassed. And now we have some choices to make because we’re a bit disturbed. Before, when we looked in the mirror, we thought, “I’m fine! I look great!” But now we look in the mirror and say, “Man! I’m a mess.” Now we have a choice to make. And that choice then is to cover it up.

This is where the analogy breaks down because there really isn’t anything wrong with using physical makeup to cover up blemishes. But there is something tragic when God’s Word begins to burn the cells, make them known to us, the sin, the selfishness, and we say, “Instead of allowing for the full treatment to bring healing, it’s going to be a lot easier for me to put a coating over it.”

And so that’s why God says in Romans 12, “Let your love be genuine. Don’t put a mask on. That’s not My intention for revealing these areas of your soul that are selfish. It’s not My intention for when we begin to feel the sting of the first burn...”And with this cream, your whole face kind of hurts every time you smile or every time you open your mouth to take a bite. Your whole face kind of hurts. It’s uncomfortable! And yet, I do that because it’s healthy. It’s healing. And so we take the Word and we allow it to have its full work as difficult as that is, as distressing as it is to realize our real condition and then to go through the pain of this transformation by God’s Spirit. This is the hope. It’s the hope of transformation. It’s not just the hope of reformation, to put on a new look, but the hope that our actual heart would be filled with the love of God. And it’s from this standpoint, from this Gospel, that Paul speaks now in Romans chapter 13. As we open up our Bibles, we do so with a humble heart of readiness. We long for God to deal with whatever is real, to show us what’s real, and then to burn whatever needs to be burned. And then to bring us to that soft, new, supple, wonderful skin of a healthy soul where we are truly exhibiting the life of Christ and the love of Christ in us.

The main idea behind this passage is that our radical worship of God leads us to commit ourselves to love our neighbor as ourselves.And it does so actively. This is not a passive pursuit. When we say, “God, I’m presenting my body to You as a living sacrifice,” what that will lead to, what will follow is a genuine, active commitment and pursuit to love my neighbor as myself. That’s Paul’s message. Paul gives us three really strong motivations and encouragements in order for us to be motivated to move in this direction. There are three joys that love brings into our worship of God.

**Joy #1:  Love pays the debt that we owe.**

There is a joy to making a payment on a debt we owe, rather than letting that deadline pass by and feeling like, “Oh no! I have nothing in which to pay this debt and now I just have to let it go by. And I know the one I owe is not going to be happy about it.” There is a joy to paying off a mortgage month by month; to paying off a car payment month by month. What love does is it’s a continual payment of a debt that we owe.

***8*** *Owe no one anything, except to love each other…*

God says, owe that! Continue to pay off that, but owe that. In the Bible, God does not absolutely condemn lending and borrowing of money. In fact, God gives some very specific instructions to people who lend money to others, about not using their position of wealth to take advantage of people who need to borrow money. So just for instance, in Exodus 22, God says

**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.

So He’s commending lending, but a certain kind of lending. It’s a lending in which you’re not taking advantage. In fact, if you’re lending to another Israelite as an Israelite, he says don’t charge interest. It’s not about you gaining advantage over a poor person. It’s about you helping them. So if God does commend lending in this way, then of course He acknowledges the wisdom in certain circumstances, of borrowing. Lending and borrowing money is a legitimate part of any economy.

Here God does condemn however, the kind of borrowing in which what is owed is not paid back. So it’s fundamentally the opposite of worship financially to purchase something with a credit card and then default on that loan or not pay it back. It’s fundamentally anti-worship to receive a service from someone then refuse to pay for that service. So, “owe no one anything” means that our worship of God demands that we meet our financial obligations to others.

But then Paul says that it’s more than that. It’s more than simply paying our bills. It’s not less than paying our bills, but it’s more than that. Paul is really not interested in teaching in depth about money here, so much as he is interested in using money as an illustration for the pursuit of love in the church as well as outside the church with our neighbors. He’s using this language of borrowing and lending to talk about love. He says

***8*** *Owe no one anything, except to love each other…*

Paul is presenting a principle about love that love is a continuing debt. We can never pay it in full so as to be free of its obligation upon us. When a person pays off a mortgage of a house, there’s often a great celebration. There’s a burning of loan documents because now they never again have to pay any more obligations. There’s no more monthly obligation that has to be set down according to the demands of the loan. Paul is saying love is never like a paid off mortgage. We can’t pay it down to a zero balance. As Christians, we can never love someone to the point of saying, “I have loved them enough. I have met my obligation to them. Now I can walk away knowing that I’ve done what I was obligated to do and I don’t have to continue to love.” Love is always an outstanding debt that God would have us pay and pay and pay.

Our flesh wants to view relationships through a debit/credit lens. We sometimes sense that we are on the borrowing side of the love ledger. So if you come over and help me put a new roof on my house, then love would require me to, at some point in the future when you have a need, help you put a new roof on your house. Or if you ask me to lunch, then sometime in the future if you paid for lunch, I should pay for yours. Or if I miss a meeting with you, I know that you have in your wallet now a “Miss A Meeting with Ritch” card and that you can miss a meeting with me and I should not feel bad at all about that because I’m in debt. So we look at relationships through this love ledger. Who is ahead? We keep score of our debts.

On the other hand, we sometimes feel like we’re on the lending side.We give and give and give and give in a relationship and the other person just doesn’t give back. We ask a couple over to dinner over and over again and they never return the favor. We send a Christmas card out every year and we never receive one back. We finally think, “Well, I don’t think I owe them any more expressions of love. I think I have fulfilled what love demands.” And here’s what Paul says.

***8*** *Owe no one anything, except to love each other…*

Because of the lavishness of God’s love upon us, it is a debt that we never come to completion in regard to our neighbor. Never! God is saying that His people who have received the lavish, infinite love of God, that now we are to be His conduits constantly for His glory, giving and giving and giving. No matter how much we give, no matter how little the other person gives back, we are to love, love, love. This is how John describes that.

**1 John 4:19-21** We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

We love God because He first loved us, but we also love our neighbor because God first loved us. There’s a debt of love we owe. God would have us to rejoice when we are constantly on the credit side of the love ledger. Our flesh kind of gets frustrated. “It seems like I’m the one who is really giving in this relationship and I’m frustrated by that.” But God says that’s the time to really rejoice because that’s when God Himself is being glorified through your love. This is what Jesus says:

**Matthew 5:46-48** For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

If you view relationships as a debit/credit, making sure that there’s never anything very far out of balance, how does your love differ from any unsaved person? That’s the way unsaved people think of relationships. You must be perfect. You must be whole, complete. And we can even add that word, “loving.” You must be perfect, whole complete, loving, even as your Father is loving.

When we love in order to be loved in return, that love becomes unsatisfying because it flows from a selfish heart. In fact, that kind of love only deepens distress in a person’s life. Because the truth is, once we are on track with a love ledger and we start keeping a record of this, we rarely will believe that anyone is paying us back what they owe us. And that’s why God says, “I’ve loved you in such a lavish way. Just throw that love ledger out and know that everyone you meet, you’re called to love them. And you never run out of the debt. It’s not because of what they’ve done, but because of what I have done for you.” If we love out of the overflow of God’s satisfying love for us, then we will rejoice to give love regardless of what we receive back in return. The principle God teaches us regarding giving money I believe is also true in regards to giving love. This is what Paul says about giving money.

**2 Corinthians 9:6-8** The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

The way to reap bountifully from God and from His storehouse of His love and the enjoyment of it and the experience of it, is to sow it. Paul and God are saying, “Sow love, sow love, sow love and it’s going to come back in good measure.” God sees to that. It might not come back from that specific individual, but that’s not where we’re looking to be satisfied. It’ll always come back in good measure, bountifully from God. However, if we sow only a little love, it’s going to come back to you in a little way. As we pray over Scripture say, “How would you have me to love others?” And then before the Lord, have a spiritual decision of how we’re investing our life energy. Decide in our hearts let’s give that love, not reluctantly or under compulsion. It’s not because, “Well, I guess I have to love now even though I really don’t want to.” God loves a cheerful lover. He loves a cheerful giver. He loves somebody who is just happy to give love regardless of what they’re receiving back from that person.

“Well, Boy! If I live that way, won’t I be depleted? Won’t I be the one in the poorhouse of love?” And here’s what God says. God is able to make all grace abound to us. If we follow God in His gracious gift to us, we’ll never have to worry about loving unto depletion. Because the more we follow God in loving others, the more God fills our love tank. There is no passage in Scripture that tells us we’re to get our love tank filled from other people. That’s contrary to the Gospel. There are passages that say expect your love tank to be made full by Christ. And then, all His grace will abound to you. Praise God for that! Here’s the principle. When we fulfill God’s call to love, we never need to worry that our own needs will not be supplied. Never! As followers of Jesus, we can never love, love, love, love someone and then finally say, “Whew! I am glad that is over! I am paid up for a long time now. I’m exhausted!”

Now there is a caveat. We have to avoid being moved, pushed, coerced, manipulated by human expectations that others have placed upon us. In our love, we should not allow others to manipulate us by guilt or fear to express acts of love in specific ways.Some people are really skilled at this. They use guilt and they use fear as a sharp stick to control and prod and manipulate and move. If we allow that to take place in our lives, love—genuine, spiritual love, the love of Christ—will be destroyed in every relationship.

So what do we do as Christians when someone attempts to control us through guilt and fear to love in a specific way that meets their expectations, even though those expectations might not be the same as God’s? Our natural, fleshly response to being manipulated through guilt or through fear is twofold. We do one of two things. First, sometimes our natural response is to submit to it. “Okay. I’m going to do this even though I don’t think God is leading me to do it. I’m going to do it because if I don’t, you’re going to be really unhappy with me and then there’s going to be a big price to pay and I don’t want to pay that. So I’ll do it.” So we submit to it. Other times, when a person seeks to manipulate us through guilt or fear, instead of submitting to it, we stand up against it and we separate ourselves from the person.

Now, if someone is throwing a spear at us, it’s right to get out of the way. David did that. But a commitment to love as God loves is a commitment to maintain an open heart, looking for a path to peace, looking for a path to health, looking for a path to express love as God is leading us to express love. We fix our eyes upon Jesus. We present our bodies to worship the God who loves us in infinite measure. And then we respond to Him. That’s the answer!

When others manipulate us, we don’t have to submit to whatever they expect or demand. We also don’t have to say, “Okay, I’m going to shake these strong boundaries and you stay out and don’t ever come in because you’re off limits to me.” Instead, we say, “Lord, you know this situation. Would you lead me? I want to love this person. I want to keep a heart of love. I’m not going to shut love off from them. But their behavior is defining what is going to be loving toward them. So help me. I want to maintain a heart of love.” And I believe God will lead us as we keep a heart with the Spirit controlling us, with asking Him to lead us, and with looking for opportunities to show biblical, God-lead love to our neighbor.

When are we free to stop loving our neighbor? Answer: When Jesus stops loving us. That’s the answer. Until that happens, we’re not free. That’s the whole point that Paul is making. There’s this debt.

One of my favorite pastors is James Boice. He’s in heaven now, and has been for a number of years. But he lists four specific applications of what it means to pay this debt of love in his commentary.

1. Listen to one another. We live in an age in which few people really listen to one another. We talk to or at one another, of course. But we do not listen, and as a result ours is a lonely age in which community has largely disappeared. And so we’re looking for ways to say, “I want to love you by just listening to you, hearing your story, taking an interest in your life.”

2. Share with one another.The second thing we need to do is share ourselves with each other. The problem is that sharing ourselves makes us vulnerable, especially if we are trying to share with a person we care deeply about. We are afraid to be vulnerable. Sharing is the reverse side of listening. So it’s not enough just to listen. It’s also important for us if we love others to say, “I want to give some of my life to you. I want to share with you what’s happening in my life if you’re interested, if you want that kind of relationship.”

3. Forgive one another.None of us is without sin in community. Not in the community of the church, not community externally in the neighborhood. And so, as we listen and we share, we also offer forgiveness and we also ask for forgiveness.

4. Serve one another.Let’s find practical expressions. And he uses Jesus as an illustration. When He washed the disciples’ feet there was a need. They had dirty feet. There was a dinner. And so He took a towel and He said, “Let me show love to you.” So let’s find ways to serve one another.

I thought those were great applications of how we pay this debt.

**Joy #2:  Love obeys the Law that we revere.**

***8*** *…for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.* **9** *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.”*

Now all through this great letter, the Apostle Paul has taught us that not one person is righteous. Not one person can fulfill the law through their own efforts to live a righteous life. Not one person! And our only hope then is in the perfect righteousness of Christ. God sent His Son, Jesus, who completely fulfilled the law for us, who died upon the cross to remove sins from us, to pay that penalty, to be punished as though He had committed the sins that were ours, so that we could say, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those of us who are in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1) So all through this letter, the Apostle Paul has been pressing this point that none of us fulfill the Law in ourselves.

And yet now he’s saying however, that if we love, we fulfill the law. Is he reversing course? No! He’s talking to people who have kept track of the first 11 chapters of doctrine. He’s saying, now that you know that your righteousness is not your own righteousness, but is the righteousness of Christ that is imputed to you through faith, now that you have been adopted into God’s family so that you’re now God’s children, now that you have the Spirit of God placed upon you, now it’s possible for you to live a transformed life. And now you have a desire to please God. You have a desire in view of God’s mercy to present your whole body to God as a living sacrifice. This is what that worship leads to. It leads to practical outcomes.

Simply because we are not justified on the basis of our good works, doesn’t mean that good works are not important to God. God justifies us on the basis of Jesus’ good work, Jesus’ righteousness. And then God sets His Spirit in us so that we can be transformed. And that transformation is gradual. We learned that from Romans 7. We ever have to fight in the Spirit that now is inside of us. And the Spirit is able to overcome our natural flesh. And so now he gives this command that when we love, we’re actually fulfilling the law. We’re entering in to the completion of Jesus’ work on our behalf.

Love obeys the Law that we revere. This is not a call to simply try harder to live up to God’s standards. It’s a call for us to live our life according to the Spirit, empowered by the Spirit. Radical worship to God leads to radical transformation. The salvation that Jesus offers us provides us with two key blessings. First, Jesus fulfills the righteous requirements of the Law for us so our standing before God is absolutely secure. It’s all about Christ’s sufficiency. It’s not any about our own sufficiency. But secondly, God’s Spirit empowers us to obey God’s law in our daily lives. It’s in this context that Paul says

***8*** *…for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.*

I believe he is thinking about Jesus’ words in Matthew 22 when the Pharisee came up to Him and asked, “What is the greatest commandment?” And Jesus said, “The greatest commandment is this. That you would love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your spirit. And the second greatest commandment is like it. It’s to love your neighbor as yourself.” And this is what Jesus says. “On these two commandments depend” or rest “all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:35-40) Paul picks up Jesus’ words and sends them to the church at Rome. He says, “Remember what Jesus taught us.”

Love is the beginning and the middle and the end of our obedience. Love is not one of the layers of obedience to God. It’s not like there’s purity, and there’s honesty, and there’s integrity and there’s love, and then there is humility and a heart of service. No, that’s not the way it is. All the ethical standards that God presents, at the beginning of those ethical standards is love. At the middle of those ethical standards, is saturated with love. At the end of those ethical standards, it’s all about love. And this is really important for God’s people to embrace. If we truly loved God and loved one another, we wouldn’t need any other command. None other! That’s all we need.

So then some of you are asking: Well, why does God give us so many other commands then? If it’s true that we don’t need any other command if we simply obeyed the one command to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves, why does God give so many commands to us? And here’s the answer I believe is what is taught. It’s because our flesh deceives us into thinking that we act in love when in truth we do not. So what is the standard toward which love strives? When we measure our love for people on the basis of internal feelings or of emotional perceptions, then we veer off course away from what love truly is and what love demands. The only way that we can measure whether our love is moving us in the right direction with other people is by looking at God’s Law.

So Paul is not teaching us that the Law no longer informs us of what is right and wrong. He’s not saying, “Hey, whatever feels loving to you, just do whatever feels loving and just forget all the rest.”No! Our internal sense of love is a flawed guide. We need God’s Word to instruct our love so that it always flows upward into God’s righteousness and holiness. The Law needs love to keep it, the Law, from producing self-righteousness. Love needs the Law to keep it, love, from justifying unrighteousness.

The Law in itself will always produce self-righteousness. “I’m really good people, especially when you look at all these losers out here. I mean, I’m really up at the top of the hill of the moral mountain.” The Law without love will always lead to proud, arrogant self-righteousness. However, love without the Law will always lead to justifying unrighteousness. “I don’t think that’s bad. After all, it was done in love. And if it’s done in love, who can say it’s wrong?” One commentator says this. “For love and law need each other. Love needs law for its direction, while law needs love for its inspiration.”

Paul mentions four laws as an illustration.

***9*** *For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,”*

Paul says if you really loved your neighbor you will fulfill all of these commands and every other command. We often think of God’s Law as sort of purity standards or a list of moral rules. But God’s laws are always connected to relationships. The reason why sin is so wicked is because first, it’s an offense to the Person of God. But secondly, it’s an offense and a hurt and a cause of suffering to other people. And he says if you could see sin for how it affects God, how it grieves Him, how His right response against it is one of outrage, if you could see how it affects other people, the pain that it brings, you’d never do those things if you loved them. So he says love is the fulfillment of the law. The biggest problem with our sin is not the trouble it brings into our lives. But the biggest problem with our sin is the pain it brings into other people’s lives.

**Joy #3:  Love protects the people that we know.**

***10*** *Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*

There is a Physician’s maxim that says first, to “do no harm.” So, when a patient comes in, the very first thing before anything else is done, I am not going to treat that patient in a way that when they leave, they’re worse off because of my treatment, than when they came in. So I will not harm them. That’s the absolute first maxim that I’m going to follow in my desire to help them. Yet, in our selfishness in relationships, we end up doing just that. Our pride justifies the hurt that we bring upon other people. The opposite of love is careless selfishness. It’s saying, “I don’t really care how my attitudes and my actions hurt other people. I didn’t mean it. So if I didn’t mean it, I’m not responsible for it. But after all, I have to live my own life.” Paul says put to death the desires of the flesh. These desires of the flesh poison our own hearts, but they poison and bring such pain and misery to others. There are many, many applications, but Paul parks on these four.

First, adultery. Think about that! Think about how it hurts the person you’re in relationship with. It’s destroying their eternal soul. You say, “Well, but I love them.” No you don’t! If you loved them, you’d care about their eternal soul. Think also about their family and their children. Think about the church they’re involved in. Think about this for a moment and how it’s so unloving to do this.

Think about murder. And of course this is not just physical murder. Jesus would say that if you get angry with somebody and start having a resentful spirit and call them names, that’s murder. (Matthew 5:21-22) What are you doing to them? What are you doing to people around them? When you gossip, don’t you know what you’re doing to a whole bunch of people who otherwise would be at peace and loving each other and worshiping God together? Don’t you see what you’re doing? You’re hurting people when this happens. Love is the fulfillment of the Law. And the first thing love does is, it doesn’t hurt people. How is it that people are just simply minding their own business and then you act in a way that now they feel pain in their heart? Isn’t this world broken enough without we as Christians being participants in bringing pain and suffering in other people’s lives? That’s the issue. “But I didn’t mean it. That was not my intention.” We do not need to intend to hurt people in order to hurt them. Our lack of intention does not relieve us of our culpability. Let me use an illustration.

Imagine you’re a parent, say you’re a dad, and you’re working with a sharp knife. You’re cutting up meat and doing all that manly stuff. And there’s a sink full of water and you throw that really sharp knife in the sink. And you have a nine year old son who is learning how to help around the house. Later in the day you say, “Son, there’s a whole bunch of dishes in the sink. Go and wash them up for me.” And he gets all excited. And he just plunges his hands down in there and that sharp knife just cuts it wide open. And it may cut it to a point where he might not ever be the same. You take him to the hospital. They say, “Whose fault is this?” You say, “It’s not my fault. I didn’t mean to cut it. I didn’t take the knife and slash it.” But shouldn’t you have been more careful with where you put the sharp instrument and with what you told your son to do? Shouldn’t you take the culpability for that action and say, “Son, I was wrong. Would you please forgive me? I was just careless. I didn’t mean to. You know I didn’t mean to, but I did. Please forgive me.”

What God says about our heart is it’s covered with sharp edges. It’s covered with them! We don’t even know it. And when people get in a relationship with us and get too close, if we don’t consciously put some guards over those sharp edges, we’re going to cut people. And when we do, whether we meant to or not, we’re culpable. We’re held responsible before the Lord. And that’s why the Lord says here in verse 10:

***10*** *Love does no wrong to a neighbor…*

What a sweet encouragement God gives to us as He calls us to love our neighbors. To love our brothers and sisters in the church, but also to love those outside of the church so that Jesus Christ would be exalted in our lives and in our community. This all flows out of our commitment to worship God in a radical way, a way that is seldom expressed. It flows out of our attention to and obedience to this appeal.

**Romans 12:1** I appeal to you therefore brothers by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

And then when we do that, God begins this transformation. And then we prove actually, through a transformed life, that God’s will actually is good and acceptable and pleasing. When we first look at God’s will to love an enemy or to live a life that’s vulnerable and giving, we say, “I don’t know if that makes any sense. I don’t know if that’s safe. I don’t know if it’s going to bring blessing.” But God says as you present your body to God and say, “God, I’m just going to trust You and I’m going to obey You,” then God begins to work in you that kind of love and you see what it does in you as well as in your church and in the world around you. Then you say, “I was wrong all along. God’s will is good. God’s will is acceptable. And God’s will is pleasing. Thank you God for helping me to discover that.”