

Love and  
**Law**

---

*“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2, NKJV).*



Introduction  
*The Coexistence  
of Law and Love*

Romans 12; 13

“No, please, don’t take me! Please leave me alone,” the woman cried. A new and promising day had arrived, but for her it was dark and dismal. She never had anticipated actually getting caught in the act of adultery. Now the Pharisees and teachers of the law were bringing her before Jesus. Her heart pounded as she awaited her punishment, which in those days was death by stoning. She heard one of the teachers ask Jesus this question: “Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?” (John 8:4, 5, NKJV).

---

**The woman knew what she did could have cost her her life, yet she did it anyway.**

---

The moment of silence before Jesus responded must have seemed like an eternity to the woman. She was too ashamed to look up, and unbeknownst to her, He had begun to write something in the dirt. He was writing the sins of those condemning her for all to see.\* The Pharisees and teachers were becoming agitated and continued questioning Jesus, trying to get a response. Then He said, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first” (John 8:7, NKJV).

As the words Jesus was writing in the dirt became clear, the Pharisees and teachers began to depart, each one knowing that he was not free from sin. After another eternity, the woman heard these soft words spoken, “Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you? . . . Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more” (John 8:10, 11, NKJV).

What a marvelous example of unconditional love! The woman knew what she did could have cost her her life, yet she did it anyway. She was spared death only through the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ and His unflinching love for humanity. Without condoning her sin, He relieved her from her punishment according to the law. One would hope that she walked in the light of Jesus’ love the rest of her life.

In our own lives we need to be slow to condemn just as Jesus was. This week, we’ll learn how we too can learn to coexist with both law and love.

---

\* *The Desire of Ages*, p. 461.

Rom. 12:9–13

## Evidence *Glued to Goodness*

As humans in a fallen world, our natural tendency is to do evil. Without Christ working through us, even our love is self-serving and false. So to help us out, God has given some instructions on how to live and love. Christians are to “hate what is evil; cling to what is good,” and keep their “spiritual fervor, serving the Lord” (Rom. 12:9, 11, NIV). But what exactly does this mean?

### Have you ever accidentally superglued two things together?

The word *abhor*, translated from *apostugeo*, is a verb that is only found here. It means “to hate violently.”<sup>1</sup> That is a strong command. It isn’t enough just to ignore evil, or shy away from it. We are to actively and violently hate it! This order contrasts directly with the next sentence: “Cling to what is good.” “Cling” is the translation of the word *kollao*, “a term that means ‘to glue, weld or cement’ ourselves to something.”<sup>2</sup> Again, this is vivid imagery. Have you ever accidentally superglued two things together and then tried to separate them without the proper solvent? Or have you tried to smash apart two bits of metal that were welded together? It’s very difficult, if not totally impossible! Likewise, Christians should be so closely bound to what is good that it is all but impossible to be separated from it.

The chapter continues, by rephrasing the golden rule, telling how to go about being cemented to goodness: put others first, be kind, treat everyone with the love of God, and serve the Lord. *Zeo*, the word translated “fervent,” “literally meant to boil or to seethe.”<sup>3</sup> We should be so on fire for Christ, so ready to serve and obey, that we are boiling over. Jesus’ love should fill our hearts so that we diligently do all He asks, growing closer to Him every day.

As Romans 12:9 says, “Let love be without hypocrisy” (NASB). Christians are to be different from the rest of the world. We are to love with a love that is pure rather than self-serving. When Christ lives in our hearts, we will find evil so awful that it will be hateful to us, and we will try to make goodness an inseparable part of our lives. Our hearts and minds will be full of God’s love, and we will be so excited to serve Him that His laws will be a joy to us.

1. Brad Price, *Living by Faith: A Commentary on the Book of Romans*, pp. 261, 263.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

This week's lesson looks at a smaller part (Romans 12, 13) of a greater part (Rom. 12:1–15:13). It should be understood that in the greater part, Paul was writing about the attitude and conduct expected of Christians in the city of Rome. All of this is in relationship to the law and love. With that in mind, let's dive into the Word and see what Paul has to share with us.

---

**You've just lost your "store" to a thief. How is one to pray at a time like this?**

---

***Consecrating the Body and Mind (Rom. 12:1, 2)***

Since sin entered the world, human nature tends to gravitate to that which *appears* to feel or look good, and which *appears* to provide "fun." In these opening verses, Paul is calling for a complete presentation of oneself to God. He makes a distinction between the worldly and the heavenly, the profane and the holy.

"Here we have a most significant thing. True worship is the offering to God of one's body, and all that one does every day with it. Real worship is not the offering to God of a liturgy, however, noble, and a ritual, however magnificent. *Real worship is the offering of everyday life to him*, not something transacted in a church, but something which sees the whole world as the temple of the living God."<sup>1</sup>

***Using God's Gifts With Humility (Rom. 12:3–8)***

In verses 3–8, we see that all members are part of one body, and that there are many parts to that body. God gives each member different gifts, such as prophecy (verse 6); ministry and teaching (verse 7); exhorting, generosity, administration, and mercy (verse 8).

***Exemplifying Christian Character Traits (Rom. 12:9–21)***

For a Christian living in Rome during Paul's day, this unit of verses would provide quite a challenge. Especially for the new Christian, some of these traits would be a "cause for pause." Try this one on for size: "Love one another with mutual affection" (verse 10, NRSV). Yeah! That's right! Someone just stole your favorite stall down at the market. You've had that same spot for the past 14 months! How dare he! But verse 12 says, "Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer" (NRSV). Well, you surely don't feel like praying right now. You've just lost your "store" to a thief. How is one to pray at a time like this?

Paul goes on to say in verse 14 to “bless those who persecute you” (NRSV). The last thing you plan to do is “bless” this man! (Maybe tell him where to go, but surely not bless him!) Paul, however, doesn’t let up. “Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all” (verse 17, NRSV). And then he has the nerve to say in verse 18 that “if it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (NRSV). Don’t miss the picture; right beside the spot, the one you’ve had for the past 14 months, is another open spot.

If . . . if you can jump down to verse 21 and abide by it, maybe, just maybe you can try the new spot for one day. “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (NRSV). Oh, yes, don’t miss that thing about vengeance being up to God and feeding this person who has stolen your property (verses 19, 20). If this Christian thing really works, maybe your “market day” will turn out all right.

### **Honoring Authority (Rom. 13:1–7)**

Let’s twist the above story just a little further and say that the authorities get involved. Now you’re dealing with more than the crazy man who just took your market stall of 14 months. Your Christian interaction one on one has just been challenged, but now the “public” is going to see how a Christian relates to authority. Paul admonishes us in verse 7, “Pay to all what is due them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due” (NRSV).

### **Walking in Love (Rom. 13:8–14)**

This set of verses would have helped the victim in our story. If he had approached the market that morning realizing that no one owed him anything, but that he owed everyone love, maybe his morning would not have been so bumpy. I like how verse 14 closes out this section: “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (NRSV). Here “Paul exhorts believers to display outwardly what has already taken place inwardly—including practicing all the virtues associated with Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

### **REACT**

1. Why is it so hard to yield completely to Christ?
2. How does one discover the “good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God”?
3. What would our story in this lesson look like today? The marketplace could be a mall, or something similar could take place if someone slips into a parking space you wanted. Use your imagination and make the story relevant to where you live and what you do.

---

1. William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letter to the Romans*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia, Penn.: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 157.

2. Kenneth Barker, ed., *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1985), p. 1727.

## Testimony *Loving the Law*

Rom. 13:10

“The law of God, from its very nature, is unchangeable. It is a revelation of the will and the character of its Author. God is love, and His law is love. Its two great principles are love to God and love to man. ‘Love is the fulfilling of the law’” (Romans 13:10).<sup>1</sup>

### “Christ dwelling in the soul is a spring that never runs dry.”

“Righteousness is holiness, likeness to God, and ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:16). It is conformity to the law of God, for ‘all Thy commandments are righteousness’ (Psalm 119:172), and ‘love is the fulfilling of the law’ (Romans 13:10). Righteousness is love, and love is the light and the life of God. The righteousness of God is embodied in Christ. We receive righteousness by receiving Him.”<sup>2</sup>

“God is Himself the source of all mercy. His name is ‘merciful and gracious’ (Exodus 34:6). He does not treat us according to our desert [what we deserve]. He does not ask if we are worthy of His love, but He pours upon us the riches of His love, to make us worthy. He is not vindictive. He seeks not to punish, but to redeem. Even the severity which He manifests through His providences is manifested for the salvation of the wayward. He yearns with intense desire to relieve the woes of men and to apply His balsam to their wounds. It is true that God ‘will by no means clear the guilty’ (Exodus 34:7), but He would take away the guilt.

“The merciful are ‘partakers of the divine nature,’ and in them the compassionate love of God finds expression. All whose hearts are in sympathy with the heart of Infinite Love will seek to reclaim and not to condemn. Christ dwelling in the soul is a spring that never runs dry. Where He abides, there will be an overflowing of beneficence.

“To the appeal of the erring, the tempted, the wretched victims of want and sin, the Christian does not ask, Are they worthy? but, How can I benefit them? In the most wretched, the most debased, he sees souls whom Christ died to save and for whom God has given to His children the ministry of reconciliation.”<sup>3</sup>

### **REACT**

Is it possible to be totally conformed to the law of God? Describe a person who would be in conformity with God’s law.

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 467.

2. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 18.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Romans 12; 13

## How-to *Serving, Sharing, and Submitting*

In Romans 12, Paul reaches the pinnacle of his message about love, law, and grace. He makes an appeal in light of all that he has just said, in view of God's mercies, to present ourselves to God as living sacrifices. As a result of offering ourselves to God, we will then be able to carry out His perfect, good, and pleasing will. Let's look at Paul's practical applications of his message to implement in our lives:

---

### **There is a certain vulnerability or risk in being a part of a community.**

---

*Serve the community of believers.* Paul was writing to a group of believers who worshiped together and who most likely lived near each other. He instructed them to serve the body by using their spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:6–8). In the same way, as believers, we are to serve the community of Christ by offering our spiritual gifts, as well as our time and energy. If you are unsure of where your spiritual gifts lie, take a spiritual gifts inventory or think about the things you naturally excel at and enjoy. Offer those things to God and to serving the community of believers.

*Share your life with others.* Paul encouraged fellow believers to share their lives with each other. In Romans 12:9–16, we are told to rejoice and grieve with each other, practice hospitality, and to live in peace with one another. These are just some of the ways we share our lives with other believers. There is a certain vulnerability or risk in being a part of a community, but this is one of the ways we can remind ourselves of God's redemptive work in our lives and in the lives of others.

*Submit to authorities.* While we are to submit and defer to each other in the body of Christ, Paul also writes in Romans 13 that we are to submit to those in authority over us. There are many who serve in positions of authority, whether it is in our local church or in our nation's government. We should respect government officials, pray for them, and as far as our conscience allows, cooperate with them. We also show our submission to authorities when we are fiscally responsible in paying our taxes, respect local laws and governance, and of service to the town and country in which we live.

### **REACT**

1. Are you currently engaged in a community of believers? If not, how do you think you could become involved?
  2. How could you better serve the community of believers?
-

Opinion  
*The Law in Action*

Rom. 13:9

You've seen them. Vacant eyes from billboards stare down upon your car as you pass by. Haunting eyes from the gaunt forms of children on television look your way. Do you look back? Do you try to help these starving, underprivileged children get the help they need? Or do you merely turn your eyes elsewhere as you are about to do from this page right now because I'm getting personal?

---

**Somehow she always finds a way to help just one more child.**

---

The movie *Slumdog Millionaire* awakened many people to the grim conditions of the youth in Mumbai, India. After that movie came out, many of the actors in that film went back to the same life of poverty that they had known before.

In 1999, a Scottish nurse named Gillie Davidson came eye to eye with India's youth and their poverty. And she chose never to turn back. Gillie was inspired to take children who had been forced into prostitution, begging, and life on the streets and help them to live a better life. She didn't want them to repeat the lives of their parents who had died of AIDS, been murdered, or committed suicide. She reaches down to those in the lowest social castes and protects them from abuse and prejudice.

To help change their lives, she provides food, clothing, shelter, and education. She calls the organization she has started Scottish Love in Action. Youth show up at her center from various nightmares. One day, a boy arrived after walking for miles with his younger brother and sister. Their mother had died of heart disease, and their father, who was a policeman, had been murdered.

Another child came to the center at the age of 14. She had been abandoned by her father after he had a nervous breakdown. This happened to him because his own family had murdered his wife, the child's mother, because she was of a lower caste.

Unlike many of us, Gillie cannot just turn away. The pleading, beckoning eyes of India's future penetrate her soul, and somehow she always finds a way to help just one more child. Truly she fulfills the law Paul speaks of in Romans 13: "The one who loves another has fulfilled the law" (Rom. 13:8, NRSV).

**REACT**

1. How is the law of love in action a part of your life? How would you teach it to a child?
2. In what ways could you reach out and show the law in action?

---

Ron Reese, Canton, North Carolina, U.S.A.

Romans 12; 13

## Exploration *Inside-Out Living*

### CONCLUDE

The gospel has the power of rescuing us from sin's control, thus putting us in a right relationship with God. It also has the power to transform the way we live our lives. The work of the Holy Spirit is first done in our minds; and from there it is carried on through our wills, affections, and conversations, until our entire lives reflect Christ's character. This is what Paul calls true worship. It is the daily giving of ourselves as an offering to God. It is the submitting and committing ourselves to the Holy Spirit so He can continually perform that work of grace in us that reflects God's love to a world in need of the hope that we have (Rom. 12:1–3).

### CONSIDER

- Journaling for a week how you spend each day from the time you wake up until you go to bed. Live without giving deliberate thought to the exercise of journaling. Just go about the day as you always do—but record your plans, thoughts, activities, and interactions. After your first three days, notice what you've recorded about your life. Did you find any patterns that surprised you? What importance did you give to yourself? To others? To God? For the rest of the week, deliberately ask yourself as you journal your days, "Is worshipping God through my life a reality that I live out daily?"
- Praying, asking God to open your heart and mind to His word and to draw you into His transforming presence.
- Reading Romans 12 and 13 and listing the characteristics of a transformed Christian community.
- Making a collage that represents your Christian community as the body of Christ living out His love to each other and to your community. To compile your collage, check with the church secretary or an elder to see what photos they have of your church in different scenarios. Put it all together, and share it with your church. If you don't have photos, begin your own project of photo-journalism to make a visual record of your church living out Christ's love.
- Brainstorming with a group of friends about how you can reach out in your church and community to offer help and hope in places of need. Then spearhead the charge and do it!

### CONNECT

*Steps to Christ*, chapter 7, "The Test of Discipleship," pp. 57–65.

Fritz Ridenour, *How to Be a Christian Without Being Religious*, rev. ed. (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 2002).