**Sermon: “Love Your Neighbor”**

Text: Romans 13:8-14

WELCOME AND TEXT

*Welcome everyone, tell them where to turn, and read.*

Here’s Romans 13:8-14:

**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.

**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.

This is… the Word…of the Lord.

INTRODUCTION

If you were here last week, you know J.D. had to deal with a difficult passage—again, not because we don’t know what it means but because even though we know it, we don’t want to do it. We’re to submit to the government, even those we disagree with. But here, another difficult word is given.

***Christians are to be a people of love.***

At face value, I know you might be thinking, “That’s easy.” Well, the call here isn’t a love of ease. Matthew 5:43-48 shows why the Christian’s love is difficult.

**43**“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ **44**But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, **45**so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. **46**For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? **47**And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? **48**You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

***Love your neighbor.***

***Love your enemy.***

***Pray for your persecutors.***

That is not our natural response.

Recent events, in our own community and around the nation, have shown us that “love” is not the natural response we want to show to those we disagree with—those we would consider our enemies… our opponents. Animosity, strife, enmity, ridicule, embarrassment, mocking, scoffing, cursing, making fun of—these are our natural dispositions toward many of our neighbors. *Not love*.

You don’t have to be taught to hate, yell, scream, bicker… I’ve got three kids 4 and under who prove that. I promise you, there’s things they do that we have not taught them. And there’s things we’re trying to teach them that they still don’t do—and one of the foremost things… is to love one another.

We’re not predisposed to it, as much as some might want you to think. We need first, a new heart; and second, we need a regular reminder… to love.

I think that’s why Paul walks into this after talking about government officials—a group that most of us would want to do anything but love.

And what does Paul say… not only that you must submit to them… but you have to love them.

Our Lord is a Lord who ate with tax collectors and sinners. He conversed with the wicked. He engaged adulterers. He encouraged submission to government. He consoled convicted sinners. He sought out wayward sheep. He prayed for his persecutors. He wept for those who didn’t trust him. He fed those who would betray him. He washed the feet of those who would doubt him. He sweat drops of blood for those that would deny him. He pleaded to the Father to forgive those who killed him.

While we were still God’s enemies, Romans 5:8 says, he loved us too—“while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”—and he made his neighbors his brothers.

THE CENTRAL IDEA OF THE TEXT AND SERMON

Paul’s call, then, is this—to mirror Jesus’ love. His point in these verses is this.

**CIT: The Romans are to be good citizens by loving their neighbors.**

And for us, these words are still important…

**ESS: Our role as good citizens, and a debt we’ll never pay, is loving our neighbors.**

THE MEAT

As Romans 13:1-7 is about our responsibility to submit to the governing authorities, verses 8-14 carry on that theme. However, we’re not looking up the hierarchical chain of government and how we live in response to the powers that be. Instead, Paul calls us to look horizontally, at one another… at our neighbors.

How do we live as good citizens toward our brothers and sisters and neighbors—what some translations call our “fellow man?”

Paul says, multiple times and in multiple ways, that it’s simple: your horizontal duty… to one another… as citizens of earth… is this: “love your neighbors.”

Our duty to the government is the focus of verses 1-7. Our duty to fellow citizens is the focus of verses 8-14. These verses show us how we live as faithful citizens of earthly governments and kingdoms.

***We do it with love.***

So, I’ve just got two points today, and in both, I’m going to work out how it is that we love our neighbors. The first point is very simple…

**(1) Love your neighbor by loving your neighbor.**

**(vv. 8-10)**

It took me all week to come up with that.

Love your neighbor by loving your neighbor.

You can see that Paul starts off this passage with a word to “Not owe anything…” I’ll come back to that in just a bit. Right now, I want you to see this.

Four times in these first three verses, Paul calls us to love of neighbor. He doesn’t want you to miss this.

“…love each other…” (v. 8)

“…love [one] another…” (v. 8)

“…love your neighbor…” (v. 9)

“…Love does no wrong to a neighbor…” (v. 10)

So, how do I love my neighbor?

Well first, love for neighbor is manifested in how you *don’t* treat them. Paul works through a list here. I’m sure you noticed. Verse 9 mentions, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet…”

It’s like Paul is saying, “You want to show your neighbor that you love them?” I’ve got **four tips** for you—don’t cheat on them, don’t kill them, don’t take their stuff, and don’t desire what’s theirs.

But then he goes and says “and any other commandment.”

If you look back at our Old Testament reading for today, Leviticus 19, you’ll see many more of those other commandments:

* We don’t lie to neighbors or about our neighbors.
* We don’t curse them.
* We don’t cause them to stumble.
* We don’t show partiality toward them.
* We don’t slander them or gossip about them.
* We don’t avenge ourselves if they’ve done us wrong.
* We don’t bear grudges against them.

In fact, what Paul is inferring here is that it would be hateful to treat them in such a way. Have you thought about these things like that before?

***As hate?***

Adultery… sexual immorality… is a way of expressing hate to the one you commit it with and the one you commit it against.

Spouses, when you commit adultery—in minor or major ways—you’re hating your spouse in that moment. How do we know this? Because it’s certainly not an act of love.

Christians, when we look upon others with lustful intentions in our hearts, treating them like animals for our own pleasures, we’re hating them by forsaking the fact that they’re made in the image of God.

When you covet what others have, that’s a way of expressing hate that they’ve been blessed in some material way. Your covetousness is a frustration with God that he hasn’t given you the same things.

Lying to others, and depriving them of the truth, even when you think it’s for good… is a means of hating them.

Cursing others… wishing, hoping, even praying that something bad would befall them… is hating them.

Causing weaker consciences to stumble, so that you can exercise certain liberties, is a way of hating weaker brothers and sisters… more on that as we continue in the book of Romans this summer.

Giving preference to the rich over the poor is a means of showing hatred for the least of these. And Jesus says we’ll one day be judged for it.

Slandering or gossiping about a brother, sister, or neighbor is a means of hating them… and it often entails saying hateful things about them.

Taking vengeance, which is God’s, into your own hands, is a means of expressing your hatred with action.

Holding grudges against others is just a way to prolong hate’s bitter presence in your own heart.

Paul says: you want to love your neighbor? Then maybe… don’t do these things.

But even more, love for neighbor is manifested by how you *do* treat them.

In fact, I think it’s probably best to not focus on all that you’re not to do. Maybe you’re thinking, “C.J., just tell me all the little things I’m not supposed to do, and I’ll be okay.” No, we’d both drive ourselves crazy.

Think about it like this: when you drive… hopefully… you’re not laser focused on all the roads and exits you’re not supposed to take or looking at the ditches and barriers and guardrails and the cones that your car isn’t meant to hit.

You look at the road ahead, and trust that if you stay on it, you’ll get where you’re supposed to be going. The road ahead, for Christians, is stated with Paul’s positive command in verse 9: “love your neighbor as yourself.”

So much of our sin against other brothers and sisters could be resolved if we would simply stop and ask the question: “Is this loving?”

And if it’s not loving, I’ll give you the famous therapist, Bob Newhart’s, counsel: “Stop it!”

Or for another generation, consider the words of Dwight Schrute: “Before I do anything, I ask myself ‘Would an idiot do that?’ and if the answer is yes, I do not do that thing.”

At the bottom of every one of these negative commands… at the bottom of every one of these “shall nots”… is one positive command. Paul is telling us to *keep it simple, stupid*. “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

If you love well, you’ll do “no wrong to a neighbor,” and in successfully living out this command, you’ll be “fulfilling the law.” Both verses 8 and 10 tell us this.

So many want to put the law and love against one another. Paul doesn’t do that. He tells us that to love well is to do the law… and that to do the law is to love well.

It’s the same thing Jesus told us when he said in Matthew 22 that, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

Here's a caveat: what I don’t mean is a “rule of love” where we reduce all of the Christian life to one commandment to love and interpret that however we want. Love does not mean affirmation of others’ opinions. Love is not sentimentalism. Love doesn’t mean doing other sins in the name of that love. Love isn’t measured by our feelings.

Love for God and others will express itself in doing God’s good Law—though not ***for*** our salvation… but ***because of*** and ***out of*** our salvation.

Our love is manifested in our commitment to keeping God’s ways… to keeping God’s law.

Sinclair Ferguson puts it this way: “Without Christ, the law is powerless. Without law, our love is directionless.”

And yet, still… Paul can tell us that so many commandments are summed up in a phrase: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” If you’ll simply find it in your heart to have love for your neighbor, the “don’t” matters will start to take care of themselves. Love will manifest itself in a commitment to live God’s way.

You’ll pursue sexual gratification only within the holy confines of marriage—whether that means now or having to wait.

You’ll be grateful for how God has blessed your neighbors materially. You’ll pray that God provides even more for their every need.

You’ll speak the truth to your neighbors, in kindness and in grace.

You’ll spare your personal liberties for the sake of weaker consciences.

You’ll love the rich and the poor equally—you’ll give where you know there’s no return on investment.

You’ll speak well of your brothers, sisters, and neighbors—even those with whom you disagree.

You’ll pray for your enemies.

Your natural dispositions will start to slowly fade away. The old sin nature will continue to disappear.

This is what is meant in Romans 8:29 when Paul says that we are “conformed to the image of his Son.” It’s what Paul means in 2 Corinthians 3 when he says that we are “beholding the glory of the Lord [and] are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.”

Now… I also have to answer this question: who is my neighbor?

The question, “Who is my neighbor?” is inferred multiple times in Scripture. Jesus gave us the Parable of the Good Samaritan to show us that our neighbor is… essentially… anyone in our sphere of life with whom we can share God’s love.

We’re not talking about the houses next to you and across the street. We’re not talking about your officemates. We’re not just talking here about fellow Christians.

We’re talking about your “fellow man” and your “fellow woman.”

Leon Morris explains it well if you’ll look at that quote on the front of your bulletin:

“The obligation to love has no limit. We are to love not only those of the family of God but our ‘fellowman’ as well. As God’s love extended to all, so must our concern reach out to believer and nonbeliever alike. Obviously love will take different forms depending on the recipient, but the decision to ‘place the welfare of others over that of our own’ may not be limited to those of like faith.”

Scripture is abundantly clear on the question of who your neighbor is… of who we’re to love.

***Everyone.***

That’s:

* Christians and non-Christians.
* Friends and enemies.
* Rebels, bulldogs, and golden eagles.
* Commodores, Chargers, and Lions.
* Republicans, democrats, libertarians, independents.
* The ones who fill your cup and the ones who empty it.
* The people, even this Sunday, that you naturally gravitate to and the people you try to steer clear of.

It’s:

* People with political differences
* Government officials
  + Not just submitting, but loving them. Phew.
* Telemarketers
* Road ragers
* Lazy co-workers
* False prophets
* Wayward sheep
* Even some of your closest friends
  + You know, ones you rib with, pulling no punches.
    - Are those relationships characterized by love?
* If someone else got ahold of our group chats, would it prove to be loving?

I’m not sure if you can tell yet of all the convictions I felt as I wrote this sermon.

All in all, you try to love the ones it’s easy to love… and the one’s it’s hard to love. You don’t get to pick and choose. They’re all your neighbors.

They will know us by our love, John 13:35 says.

This love is the Christian’s public witness in your family, in your church, at your workplace, in your community, at the ball game, at the dance recital, walking your neighborhood, working out at your gym…

Christians don’t shut themselves off from society, nor do they conform to it.

Rather, living in it, we love the community by obeying God’s commands toward others—his rules for love.

How long will we have to do this?

Well, that’s where we come back to verse 8: “Owe no one anything.” This is Paul continuing his train of thought from the first half of Romans 13. He just got done telling us to pay our taxes to whom taxes are due and revenue to whom revenue is due. Owe them nothing, if you can help it.

But then he tells us that there’s a debt we’ll never pay off in this life: “to love each other.”

We can pay our debt to the bank, the store, schools, governments, and credit card companies, but our debt to love our neighbor is never discharged until we cross into heaven. R.C. Sproul says that, “Love is a perpetual obligation, an indebtedness given to us by Jesus.”

We’ll never be able to say, “I’ve done all the loving I need to do.” We pay it off daily, as best as we can… yet we’ll owe it again the next day.

Christian, every person you come across, you owe them something: **love**. Every time we meet someone, our thought should be: I need to show him or her the love of Christ.

If you’ve ever owed someone money, that’s probably what you think of when you see them... or why you avoid trying to see them until you know you can pay them back.

In the same way, when we see people… we should think of what we owe them: **love**.

***Love your neighbor by loving your neighbor.***

The second and last point is this…

**(2) Love your neighbor by loving your God.**

**(vv. 11-14)**

*Repeat above.*

Augustine is arguably the most important theologian in church history. Before becoming a Christian, in the 4th century at age 32, he was already a highly intellectual person; however, he found it completely impossible to break away from his sexual sins.

But one day, he heard a child calling out, “*Tolle lege*… *Tolle lege*… Take up and read… Take up and read.” And he took up a copy of Romans, and his eye fell upon our sermon text for today. God used this passage to bring home to him the reality of his sin and the reality of salvation in Christ.

***God’s Word can still do this.***

In fact, if you’re here and a professed unbeliever, first of all, we welcome you; we’re glad you’re here. And my hope is that you feel loved by the people here.

It’s also my hope that, like Augustine, you might read this passage and give yourself to God… that you might be saved. I’d love nothing more than to talk with you today about that.

Augustine, converted upon the reading of this text, would go on to write that the Christian ethic can be summed up like this, “Love God and do what you want.”

If you love God, you can do as you please, because you will be doing what pleases God. It’s as Psalm 37:4 says, “Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”

Though love is not a word mentioned in verses 11-14, what we see here is an outworking of our love for him. And our love for God is an outworking of his love for us, shown to us in the seventh verse of this book. Paul says this letter is “to all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints.”

And if we love God well… it will be a loving act to our neighbors.

So, how do I love my God? Or, in other words, how is my love to God made manifest?

It’s simple.

***We put off sin, and we put on Christ.***

*Repeat.*

We put off sin. Paul tells us to “wake from sleep.” We need to get up and love God while we still have time to. For some of you, if you’re like me, that means you need six alarms on your phone every day, telling you to wake up from your sleep and get in the light.

And then he tells us to “cast off the works of darkness.” What are the “works of darkness?” He mentions six: orgies, drunkenness, sexual immorality, sensuality (or immoral living), quarreling, and jealousy. Paul’s describing for us the idolatrous parties of that Roman world. Yet, we know that nothing new is under the sun. All too many of us know how much our own town was probably frequented by these very things just hours ago.

And if we know Paul, these six are just a sampling.

Yet, all six of these vices stem from self-will; they are all the outreach of a selfishness that seeks one’s pleasure instead of God’s. It’s loving self more than loving God. It’s no good for our neighbors.

***And Paul is saying, “Get rid of them.”***

And once rid of them, he later tells us, “Make no provision for the flesh.” A more literal translation might be, “Give no forethought to sin.” Don’t plan for sin. Don’t make sin easy. Do whatever you can to continually rid yourself of these works of darkness.

In accountability terms, these are a type of what we call “guardrails.”

* Alcoholics need to get the liquor out of their house.
* Porn users need to get software that will make access too difficult.
* Those who struggle with envy should probably get rid of social media.
* Those who are greedy, should have more transparency with how they manage their budgets.

Guardrails aren’t sufficient, but they are necessary. Martin Luther once said, “I can’t keep sparrows from flying about my head, but I can keep them from making a nest in my hair.”

Put in simpler terms, we’re being told here that temptation lies close at hand for all of us: so don’t make it harder by planning to sin; give it no welcome; offer it no opportunity; kick the sin off your doorstep; remove it from your house.

How’s this good for our neighbor?

God’s commandments are rules of love, not just rules of conduct.

For probably believers and unbelievers alike, if you don’t think our world would be a better place without orgies, drunkenness, sexual immorality, sensuality, quarrelling, and jealousy, I’m not quite sure what to say, except that I’ve never heard a sane person claim that any of these things would make our world a better place.

These are the kinds of things news media feed off of—and it’s not because it encourages us; it’s because it’s like watching a train wreck.

These things won’t be a part of the new heaven and new earth… and the more we distance ourselves from these works of darkness, the more we distinguish ourselves from the world, and give our neighbors a compelling witness to join the body of Christ.

How irresistible would Christianity be if we truly loved God and neighbor by putting off this sin?

But we don’t just put off sin. We also put on Christ.

Paul tells us to “Put on the armor of light.” He says, “Walk in the daytime.” Take off your jammies, put on your armor, and get in the sun. This is what it means to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ,” as Paul says in verse 14.

In fact, Christian, you’ve already done this. Galatians 3:27 says that, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ ***have put on Christ***.” Christ is your ceremonial robe.

* When we get married, we put on tuxes and dresses.
* When we graduate, we put on robes and fancy hats.
* When we’re commissioned, we put on uniforms.
* When we have children, we put on hospital gowns, garbs, and gloves.

***And when we are justified, we put on Christ.***

In this context, then, the call must be to live like your clothed. Look in the mirror—see Christ—and be changed!

I’m not that fascinated with celebrity culture, but I keep up with it. And I’m always dumbfounded at red carpet events by a question we pretty much never ask each other: “Who’re you wearing tonight?” If any of you ever asks me this, I’ll have three answers: Levi, Stafford, and Hanes.

In a much more spiritual sense, though, how can I answer this? “Who’re you wearing?” Well, I’m wearing the Lord Jesus Christ today. And tomorrow, I think I’ll put him on again. And the next day… yep, I’m putting on Jesus again.

Jesus Christ is like the letterman jacket that it’s never awkward to wear, even though you graduated twenty years ago.

Paul says, every day, “Put on Christ.” He is our righteousness. Remember who you’re wearing.

How’s this good for neighbor?

To follow God’s law really is God for us and our society.

There’s not a command that we follow that makes our lives or others’ lives more miserable.

Psalm 1:1-3 tells us, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water

that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither.”

That’s the vision of what life would look like if we loved God and delighted in his law.

How long will we need to love God? To put off sin and put on Christ?

Paul says while you are “awake from sleep,” a day is approaching. It’s a day of “salvation,” and it’s “nearer to us now than when we first believed.”

Salvation here is not your justification, believer. That’s already happened. You were already saved, in a sense.

And yet, you will one day be saved—fully and finally. This is glorification. That day when sin will pester you no more. Right now, we still fight sin. Our bodies hurt because of this fallen world. Diseases and distress still befall us. Tears are our daily company, the psalmist says.

But a day is coming when those things will be no more. A day, again, that is “nearer to us now than when we first believed.”

That will always be true, Christian. Right this moment, you are closer to Christ’s return than you ever have been. And right this moment, you are closer to Christ’s return than you were the moment before.

We will love God until then; and upon Christ’s return, we will love him for all eternity—but without fail.

In this life, we live patiently, as if he might not come in our lifetimes. Christianity is as Eugene Peterson has said, a “long obedience in same direction.”

At the same time, we live urgently and diligently, with earnestness, as if he could come and find us tomorrow.

***We’ll want to be found loving him.***

If you’re doing it right, then I think the older you get, the more welcome you are to the idea of death. You’ve been faithful. You’ve done your best. But you’re tired. And you just want to enter your eternal rest, confident that your groom is coming to take his bride home. You’re ready for the marriage supper of the lamb.

I saw a video recently of a woman who just turned 90. Her family videoed her and asked, “Grammy, do you think you’ll live another year?”

Sixty years from now, I hope I can remember to reply like she did:

***“I hope not.”***

Like her, may we welcome the reality of our earthly deaths… and love God until His Son returns.

CONCLUSION

As we close, here’s the bad news and the good news for all of this… this loving your neighbor stuff—you can’t do it perfectly. You just can’t. In fact, I’m sure that more than half of us, not even to noon yet *on a Sunday*, have failed to adequately follow this command to “love your neighbor.”

And we certainly haven’t been perfect enough to always put on Christ and put off sin.

***But it’s okay… because someone else did.***

Jesus had a perfect love for neighbor. That love manifested itself when he willingly took on the death we deserved so we could have the life that we do not deserve.

Jesus had a perfect love for God. Not once did he break God’s commandments. Not once did he fail to love God. Not once did he not trust in God falter. To his death, he loved God perfectly.

So, Christians, we have hope… that even with our imperfections, Jesus is perfect.

And his perfect love for neighbor… and his perfect love for God… is why Paul can say that our coming salvation is so sure.

We don’t wait like those who have no hope; we have a certain hope.

So in light of that gospel and grace, we can be motivated to love our neighbors by loving them well and loving God well.

Let’s pray.

*Pray.*