

That We Might Bear Fruit For God

Lesson 15

**The Christian's mind renewed in attitude towards the world.
(Romans 13:8-14)**

By F. M. Perry

"(8) Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. (9) For this, 'You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet, and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' (10) Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law." (11) And this do, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. (12) The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. (13) Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. (14) But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts." (Romans 13:8-14).

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Questions for study.

- 1. Discuss the concept which says, "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another." (Romans 13:8).**
- 2. How is "love for neighbor" the "fulfillment of the law?" (Romans 13:7-10).**
- 3. Who is a Christian's neighbor? What is the Christian's responsibility to his neighbor? (Romans 13:8-10).**
- 4. Where are Christians today in God's schedule of purpose for mankind? What remains for God to do before the end of time and the judgement? What remains for Christians of today to do? (Romans 13:11-14).**

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Questions for study.

1. Discuss the concept which says, "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another." (Romans 13:8).

In Romans 13:7 Paul said, in a positive sense, "Render to all what is due them." Then in the Romans 13:8 he said in a somewhat different sense the same thing, "Owe nothing to anyone except ..." Certainly, if we render to all what is due them, we will owe nothing to anyone. Therefore, let us keep our earthly account book clean and clear. Let us have no outstanding debts unpaid in this fleshly world.

This means, primarily, debts owed because of our ties in our Christian lives to the fleshly world. The Holy Spirit said through Paul in Romans 8:8, "Those who are in the flesh cannot please God." Instead of having obligations to the fleshly world, the Spirit told us in Romans 8:12, "We are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh ..." But in Romans 8:14, we are to be "led by the Spirit of God." We cannot be led by the Spirit of God if we maintain ties to the fleshly world. We must not be entangled with the flesh. Therefore, render to those of the world their due and, thereby, be untangled from them.

God wants us as vessels of mercy completely untangled from the flesh. But we are vessels dwelling in an "outer court" of flesh. We are sojourners in the flesh. We have not yet received our spiritual bodies. We are presented with just and legal bills from the fleshly world. The Spirit said that the way to "walk" so as to maintain our freedom from fleshly entanglements is to pay all the bills that are due as they come due. Owe nothing to anyone. Thus we can be useful to God and we will be ready at any time to shed this flesh and be led into the joy of our Lord. In the last part of Romans 13:8 Paul made reference to the law. Obviously, he was saying also, that we must owe nothing to the law. It

has been fulfilled for the Christian.

2. How is “love for neighbor” the “fulfillment of the law?” (Romans 13:7-10).

Paul continued in Romans 13:8 after saying, “Owe nothing to anyone,” with an exception, “except to love one another, for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.”

Let us remember that Paul said in Romans 8: 4, the requirement of the law is fulfilled in us when we walk according to the Spirit. As Christians we are no longer indebted to the law because Christ fulfilled it for us. And Christ continues to fulfill the law's requirements in us daily and continuously when we "walk" according to His Spirit. Paul gave us that basic truth in chapter 8. Then in chapter 13, verse 8, we were informed how this is carried out in a practical way. When we "walk" according to the Spirit, we are led to love one another.

Owe nothing to anyone except, dear Christian friend, the one debt we can never fully pay – the debt of love to our neighbor. Christ freed us from the requirement to obey the old law of commandments, all except one. Paul quoted the old commandments in Romans 13:9, You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet. These laws aroused the sinful passions of the flesh. Remember that Paul said in Romans 7:5-6, “While we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. But now we have been released from the law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.” Then in a very practical sense, here is a commandment that does not arouse the sinful passions of the flesh –“Love one another.”

Our Lord Himself said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” (John 13:34). Why was this a "new commandment?" The Law of Moses always stressed love for God and one's fellow man. But, after the actual sacrifice of Christ for our sins, this was a new

commandment because we were released from all the old commandments of the law.

3. Who is a Christian's neighbor? What is the Christian's responsibility to his neighbor? (Romans 13:8-10).

Christ said that He released us from the commandment not to commit adultery, not to murder, not to steal, and not to covet, in order to place us under one grand obligation, a new commandment to replace all the old ones, the commandment that we love one another. The one new commandment accentuates the positive rather than the negative. And it really sums up the old commandments and takes them much further. So, if we love one another, we fulfill the law. Obviously, if we love all our neighbors as ourselves we will not commit adultery, we will not commit murder, we will not steal, and we will not covet. So then we have a new commandment that sums up the old ones. All our debts which we couldn't pay off individually have been consolidated into one grand debt. We are to render to all flesh what is due and owe nothing to anyone in the fleshly world except that we love one another.

But Paul, we have a problem! We thought you said we have been released from the law! But now you say that we have to struggle with this new law to love one another! Paul, we try to love our neighbors and we can't do it. Before we became Christians we struggled with the laws of God and we couldn't keep them. We condemned ourselves trying to keep God's laws. You told us that when we were baptized our old self was crucified with Christ and that we were raised with Christ into newness of life. You said that we were released from the law! We were so relieved because we had already learned that we couldn't keep the law. Now, you have said that we are obligated to keep the law anyway, ... That we have a new commandment which simply sums up all the old laws and we have to keep that! Alas, we do not love all our neighbors! We try but we have not been able to love all our neighbors. Are we not just as bad off as we were before becoming Christians?

The answer is no! The Christian who has the kind of problem as described above has missed the point of the Roman letter. What Paul

said in chapter 13 about love was not to put us back under law. He has showed us how the Spirit keeps us free from the guilt imposed on us by law. If we love one another, if we obey the commandment which sums up the law, the law is fulfilled. Yes. But Paul knew perfectly well, and he wanted us to know that, "walking' in the flesh, we cannot love one another perfectly as our Lord loved us!

The word "love" as used in Romans 13:9-10 is a translation of the Greek word AGAPE. Only God has this kind of love. Man, in the flesh, simply does not have this kind of love within him. It is the kind of love that does not have to have a reason for its exercise. It is the love that God demonstrated toward us, while we were His enemies, when He gave His only begotten Son that we might have eternal life. So we do not have this kind of love in our fleshly lives. That is why we fail when we try to exhibit this kind of love toward one another. Paul was not saying in the 13th chapter of Romans that we, while living in the flesh, must exhibit such AGAPE love to our fellow men. He knew that we cannot.

But much earlier in the Roman letter Paul prefaced his teaching with the statement, "The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." (Romans 5:5). Praise God! He has made provision for the carrying out of the new commandment within us even though we cannot accomplish it ourselves. We have but to "walk" according to the leadership of the Holy Spirit who was given to us. Through that Holy Spirit the AGAPE love, the love that originates only with God, is poured out within our hearts, free of charge, with no effort on our part except that of committing ourselves to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. We do not have to force the flesh to love our neighbor. We cannot. But we can abandon the flesh altogether. We can. We must stop trying to force the flesh to do anything. We must let it rest for it has died with Christ. Then we must know that it is dead, reckon that it is dead, and present our new life to God. After God has our new life, it will be easy to "walk" where the Spirit leads. Then we become the vessel of mercy through which God and His Son express their love to our neighbors.

The command of Romans 13:8 is to owe nothing to anyone except to remember in your new Spirit led life to allow God's love to be expressed to your neighbor through you. In this way the Spirit fulfills the law in us constantly. As Paul said in Romans 13:10, Love therefore is the fulfillment of the law. God's love, not our meager fleshly love, is the fulfillment of the law. Christ has done all for us. We have only to "walk" in His Spirit.

4. Where are Christians today in God's schedule of purpose for mankind? What remains for God to do before the end of time and the judgement? What remains for Christians of today to do? (Romans 13:11-14).

The Holy Spirit has spoken to us through Paul. The Roman letter was not addressed to the world. It was addressed to Christians, those who have believed, have repented, and have been baptized. The Spirit intimates that we who have become Christians and have the power of God available to work through us, are asleep! Paul asked in effect: You Christians who are asleep, don't you know the time?

When I read this admonition to "walk" knowing the time, I think of the time diagram that Romans places before us. On one side of the diagram is the eternity that existed before the creation of the world (Romans 1:20). And on the other side of the diagram is the eternity that exists after the day that God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus (Romans 2:16). And in the midst of this vast eternity we find our finite world with its short time scale. Time from the creation of Adam to the day of God's salvation is just a "speck" in eternity. The Roman letter places this "speck" of time under "the microscope," and we enlarge this tiny bit of eternity. And what do we see? We see that Adam and all mankind was created. He and all mankind were given laws for their own good, but which they broke. They sinned and died. When God created the nation of Israel, it was for a special purpose. For the good of Israel in the carrying out of His purpose, God gave them a special law, which they broke. Nevertheless, the Savior was brought forth. He was crucified, was buried, and God raised Him to glory. All law was potentially fulfilled in behalf of mankind who had a proclivity toward

breaking law. Salvation was placed within reach of all people.

Salvation was given to Christians and the Holy Spirit of God was placed within them. Now for almost 2,000 years Christ's body has been functioning on earth and God's children have been serving as vessels of mercy. God's purpose is being fulfilled! Time for this world is running down! God's master plan has but one thing more left to be fulfilled. What is that? It's my part, the part to be fulfilled by me and you! Awake from sleep, said Paul almost 2,000 years ago. Don't we know the time? Salvation is nearer to us than when we believed: The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand.

Peter said in 1 Peter 4:7, "The end of all things is at hand." John said in 1 John 2:18, "Children, it is the last hour." The Angel said to John in Revelation 22:10, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near."

These words were written almost 2,000 years ago. The coming of our Lord is certainly nearer to us now than when these words were first written. Why has God not already brought it all to a conclusion? He has not because He does not wish "for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9). He is just waiting in patience at this moment for us to let the new commandment be expressed through us. John said, "I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining." (1 John 2:8).

So Paul told us here in Romans 13:12, "Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. The time clock is ticking away. Only our part is yet to be done. The Spirit is ready to lead us. So wake up! Put on the armor! We will need it where we will be led.

Romans 13:13 indicated that the Spirit will lead us through the darkness of the carousing and drunkenness around us, the sexual promiscuity and sensuality, the strife and jealousy. As the Spirit leads, we will behave, not as those in that darkness, but as those who

through faith are already in the midst of the day which is at hand. The deeds of darkness will not encroach upon us because we have on the armor of light which the Spirit supplies.

We sojourners in the flesh were here told how to "walk" right through the rest of this fleshly life as though we are not made of flesh, as though the worldly night is already gone with no effect on us whatever, as though the day of light has already dawned and scattered night away. How can we live that way? Paul summed it up in Romans 13: 14, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts."

This was another, perhaps clearer way of saying, "know" and "reckon" that your old man of flesh is dead. "Present" yourself to God and "walk" according to the Spirit. It was summed up by Paul with the words, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ." In Galatians 3:27 Paul said, "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Christians, we went through the motions when we were baptized. But, maybe we haven't realized that we really are "in Christ." We were asleep in darkness before our baptism. God put us "in Christ" when we were baptized. We were raised from baptism into "the light." Has the light been too bright for us to open our eyes? Perhaps, we have not fully awakened from our sleep. But the hour for us to awaken is here. We must put on our armor of light.

We can overcome the flesh. It is dead. Christ is all sufficient. He supplies our every need. He performs His work in us. We need make no provision whatever for the flesh. It cannot possibly help Christ. It can only hinder Him. Therefore, we must allow Christ to work unhindered. Make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.