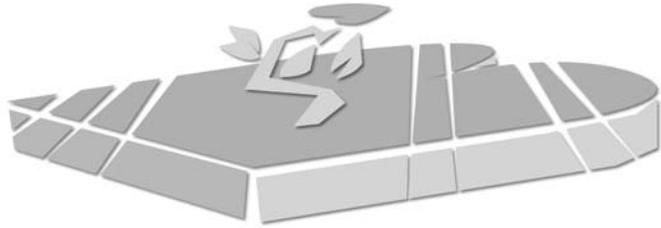


Love *and* Law



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Romans 12, 13.*

Memory Text: “Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (*Romans 12:2*).

However much Paul was seeking to disabuse the Romans of their false notions of the law, he also calls all Christians to a high standard of obedience. This obedience comes from an inward change in our heart and mind, a change that comes only through the power of God working in a person surrendered to Him.

Romans contains no hint that this obedience comes automatically. The Christian needs to be enlightened as to what the requirements are; he or she must desire to obey those requirements; and, finally, the Christian should seek the power without which that obedience is impossible.

What this means is that works are part of the Christian faith. Paul never meant to depreciate works; in chapters 13 to 15 he gives them strong emphasis. This is no denial of what he has said earlier about righteousness by faith. On the contrary, works are the true expression of what it means to live by faith. One could even argue that because of the added revelation after Jesus came, the New Testament requirements are more difficult than what was required in the Old. New Testament believers have been given an example of proper moral behavior in Jesus Christ. He and no one else is the pattern we are to follow. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (*Phil. 2:5*).

The standard doesn’t—*can’t!*—get higher than that.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 18.*

Living Sacrifices

With chapter 11, the doctrinal part of the book of Romans ends. Chapters 12 through 16 present practical instruction and personal notes. Nevertheless, these concluding chapters are extremely important, because they show how the life of faith is to be lived.

For starters, faith is not a substitute for obedience, as if faith somehow nullifies our obligation to obey the Lord. The moral precepts are still in force; they are explained, even amplified in the New Testament. And no indication is given, either, that it will be easy for the Christian to regulate his or her life by these moral precepts. On the contrary, we're told that at times it could be difficult, for the battle with self and with sin is always hard (*1 Pet. 4:1*). Christians are promised divine power and given assurance that victory is possible, but we are still in the world of the enemy and will have to fight many battles against temptation. The good news is that if we fall, if we stumble, we are not cast away but have a High Priest who intercedes on our behalf (*Heb. 7:25*).

Read Romans 12:1. How does the analogy presented here reveal how we as Christians are to live? How does Romans 12:2 fit in with this?

In Romans 12:1, Paul is alluding to Old Testament sacrifices. As, anciently, animals were sacrificed to God, so now Christians ought to yield their bodies to God, not to be killed but as living sacrifices dedicated to His service.

In the time of ancient Israel, every offering brought as a sacrifice was examined carefully. If any defect was discovered in the animal, it was refused, for God had commanded that the offering be without blemish. So, Christians are bidden to present their bodies “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.” In order to do this, all their powers must be preserved in the best possible condition. Though none of us are without blemish, the point is that we are to seek to live as spotlessly and as faithfully as we can.

It's always so easy to come up with excuses for our sins and faults, isn't it? What's your common excuse for falling into the same thing again and again? Isn't it about time to start putting away the excuses and claim the promises, for isn't God's power greater than your excuses?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Romans 13:10*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Describe the results of faith in the life, reflected in how we treat others.

Feel: Nurture respect and brotherly love for one another.

Do: Use our gifts wisely in the service of the body of Christ.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Gifted for Service

A Why must our lives be a daily offering of worship and obedience to the One who gave His life for us?

B In what ways is this offering of worshipful obedience to God to be expressed in our daily behavior?

C Why is it so important for us to care for the body of believers in Christ?

D How is the way we relate to one another an outgrowth of our faith in what God has done for us?

II. Feel: Love Completes the Law

A How is feeling loving toward others related to acting lovingly?

B How does treating others lovingly fulfill the law?

C In this context, how is love related to faith?

III. Do: Serving Christ's Body

A In what ways has each of us been given a gift to serve and build up the body of Christ?

B What are the gifts that we need most in our church?

C How can you use your gifts in a loving way, while valuing the contributions of others?

► **Summary:** The way we value, nurture, and serve others is a spiritual act of worship. As in faith, we accept the gift of God's mercy; we extend God's love and mercy to others and so fulfill the requirements of the law to love one another.

Thinking of Oneself

We have talked a great deal this quarter about the perpetuity of God’s moral law and have stressed again and again that Paul’s message in the book of Romans is not one that teaches the Ten Commandments are done away with or somehow made void by faith.

Yet, it’s easy to get so caught up in the letter of the law that we forget the spirit behind it, and that spirit is love—love for God and love for one another. While anyone can profess love, revealing that love in everyday life can be a different matter entirely.

Read Romans 12:3–21. How are we to reveal love for others?

As in 1 Corinthians 12 and 13, after dealing with the gifts of the Spirit, Paul exalts love. Love (Greek *agape*) is the more excellent way. “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Therefore, love describes the character of God. To love is to act toward others as God acts and to treat them as God treats them.

Paul here shows how that love is to be expressed in a practical manner. One important principle comes through, and that is personal humility, a willingness of a person “not to think of himself more highly than he ought” (Rom. 12:3), a willingness to “give preference to one another in honor” (vs. 10, NASB), and a willingness not to “be wise in your own opinion” (vs. 16, NKJV). Christ’s words about Himself, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:29), catch the essence of it.

Of all people, Christians should be the most humble. After all, look at how helpless we are, look at how fallen we are; look at how dependent we are, not only upon a righteousness outside of ourselves for salvation but on a power working in us in order to change us in ways we never can change ourselves. What have we to brag of, what have we to boast of, what have we in and of ourselves to be proud about? Nothing at all. Working from the starting point of this personal humility, not only before God but before others, we are to live as Paul admonishes us to in these verses.

Read Romans 12:18. How well are you applying this admonition in your own life right now? Might you need some attitude adjustments in order to do what the Word tells us here?

Learning Cycle

► STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: *The outgrowth of a proper relationship with God is a satisfactory and satisfying relationship with God's creation.*

In addressing the root causes for the divisions within the Roman church, Paul has written his most thorough exposition regarding the nature of redemption. There is no basis for superiority within the church, because everyone, Jew or Gentile, receives salvation in the same way—trusting the finished work of Christ on Calvary for the expiation (forgiveness) of sins. There is no alternative route to heaven, and no amount of earthly goodness can purchase salvation. This understanding of redemption forms the foundation for the latter portion of the book in which Paul sketches the practical outworking of God's grace in our lives. He discusses the nature of our relationships with other believers, our enemies, and earthly government. Love, the defining factor, is the sieve through which all choices regarding relationships must be strained. Love is the standard by which those choices will be judged. Law can define the surface behaviors that readily are visible, but only love defines the heart.

Opening Activity: Bring two toy cars to class. The first one should have functional wheels but no motor. The second one should be a remote-controlled car. It is best if the cars are approximately the same size. First, discuss the similarities in their appearance. (For example, they both have wheels, a chassis, a windshield, bumpers.) From the outside they look very much the same. Second, discuss their differences. (For example, one has a motor, one does not; one has a power source, one does not; one is remotely controlled.) Now ask your class to compare the good citizen with the Spirit-controlled Christian. First, discuss the similarities of their appearance and actions. Next, discuss their differences.

Consider This: While we appreciate the good deeds of the unconverted, what does the Christian have that they are missing? When the road is easy (downhill), the nonmotorized car can move forward just as the remote-controlled car can; but only one has power to move on a flat or uphill surface. What advantage does the Spirit-powered Christian have over the good citizen when the road gets tough?

► STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: *Unlike much of the mythological teaching existing*

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Relationship to Government

Read Romans 13:1–7. What basic principles can we take from these verses about how we are to relate to the civil power of government?

What makes Paul’s words so interesting is that he wrote during a time when a pagan empire ruled the world, one that could be incredibly brutal, one that was at its core corrupt, and one that knew nothing about the true God and would, within a few years, start a massive persecution of those who wanted to worship that God. In fact, Paul was put to death by this government! Yet, despite all this, Paul was advocating that Christians be good citizens, even under a government like that?

Yes. And that’s because the idea of government itself is found throughout the Bible. The concept, the principle of government, is God-ordained. Human beings need to live in a community with rules and regulations and standards. Anarchy is not a biblical concept.

That being said, it doesn’t mean that God approves of all forms of government or how these governments are run. On the contrary. One doesn’t have to look too far, either in history or in the world today, to see some brutal regimes. Yet, even in situations like these, Christians should, as much as possible, obey the laws of the land. Christians are to give loyal support to government so long as its claims do not conflict with the claims of God. One should consider very prayerfully and carefully, and with the counsel of others, before embarking on a path that puts him or her in conflict with the powers that be. We know from prophecy that one day all of God’s faithful followers will be pitted against the political powers in control of the world (*Revelation 13*). Until then, we should do all that we can, before God, to be good citizens of whatever country in which we live.

“We are to recognize human government as an ordinance of divine appointment, and teach obedience to it as a sacred duty, within its legitimate sphere. But when its claims conflict with the claims of God, we must obey God rather than men. God’s word must be recognized as above all human legislation. . . .

“We are not required to defy authorities. Our words, whether spoken or written, should be carefully considered, lest we place ourselves on record as uttering that which would make us appear antagonistic to law and order. We are not to say or do anything that would unnecessarily close up our way.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 69.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

in the ancient world, scriptural teaching always bears practical purposes. It exists for transformation rather than entertainment. Redemption is the catalyst for changed lives. Relationships merely are not improved—they are reinvented. Paul proceeds to establish the standards that define the goals toward which every Christian strives. Impossible attainments without God’s promised empowerment and spiritual control now become expected achievements for every sincere believer. How would the world be different if Christians everywhere accepted these admonitions? How attractive would Christianity become if our lives reflected these values?

Bible Commentary

I. Living Sacrifices (*Review Romans 12:1, 2 with the class.*)

Some have read Greek dualism into the writings of Paul, supposing that his castigation of the flesh and elevation of the Spirit indicated contempt for the physical aspects of being. Nothing could be further from the truth. These verses underscore the importance of our bodies. Certainly this passage reflects the temple’s sacrificial rituals whereby an unblemished animal was slaughtered and offered to the Lord. Paul now admonishes his readers to offer their bodies as “living sacrifices.” Clearly Paul’s specialized treatment of the word *flesh*, metaphorically representing the totality of human existence without God, was not intended to belittle the spiritual importance of the body. The body, housing our mental, social, physical, emotional, and spiritual faculties, was submitted completely to God—“sacrificed.” However, living sacrifices, not dead offerings, were required of Christians.

Consider This: What are the spiritual implications of becoming “living sacrifices”? In what way is this offering of self to God our logical, rational, or reasonable service? What characteristics of the biblical living sacrifices—Christ and Isaac—might we emulate?

II. Thinking of Oneself (*Review Romans 12:3–21 with the class.*)

Having previously addressed the foundation for the church’s divisions, Paul turns to the solution, which includes humility in service. Comparing the Corinthian correspondence, we discover similar emphases: the unity and importance of various *body parts* and the divine

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Relationships to Others

“Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law” (Rom. 13:8). How are we to understand this text? Does it mean that if we love, we have no obligation, then, to obey the law of God?

As Jesus did in the Sermon on the Mount, Paul here amplifies the precepts of the law, showing that love must be the motivating power behind all that we do. Because the law is a transcript of the character of God, and God is love, to love, therefore, is to fulfill the law. Yet, Paul is not substituting some vague standard of love for the precisely detailed precepts of the law, as some Christians claim. The moral law is still binding, because, again, it is what points out sin—and who is going to deny the reality of sin? However, the law truly can be kept only in the context of love. Remember, some of those who brought Christ to the cross then ran home to keep the law!

Which commandments did Paul cite as samples to illustrate the principle of love in law-keeping? Why these in particular? Rom. 13:9, 10.

Interestingly, the factor of love was not a newly introduced principle. By quoting Leviticus 19:18, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,” Paul showed that the principle was an integral part of the Old Testament system. Again Paul appealed to the Old Testament to support his gospel preaching. Some argue from these texts that Paul is teaching that only the few commandments mentioned here are in effect. If so, does this mean, then, that Christians can dishonor their parents, worship idols, and have other gods before the Lord? Of course not.

Look at the context here. Paul was dealing with how we relate to one another. He was dealing with personal relationships, which is why he specified the commandments that centered on these relationships. His argument certainly shouldn’t be construed as nullifying the rest of the law. (See Acts 15:20, 1 Thess. 1:9, 1 John 5:21.) Besides, as the New Testament writers point out, by showing love to others, we show our love to God (Matt. 25:40; 1 John 4:20, 21).

Think about your relationship to God and how it is reflected in your relationships with others. How big a factor is love in those relationships? How can you learn to love others the way God loves us? What stands in your way of doing just that?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

distribution of spiritual abilities (*charismata*) bestowed on believers to enable loving service (*1 Cor. 12:12–31*). Service extended beyond hospitality to the faithful includes sacrificial kindness directed toward persecutors of Christians. Undoubtedly, Paul remembered his persecution of believers and their kindness toward him. These abilities were given not for personal self-glorification but for building and enlarging God’s kingdom.

Consider This: What effect does an attitude of humility and loving service have on divided congregations? Where should that attitude originate? How might God perceive believers who fail to utilize their spiritual abilities?

III. Relationship to Government *(Review Romans 13:1–7 with the class.)*

Christian responsibility extends to governmental relationships. Remember “render therefore unto Caesar” (*Matt. 22:21*)? Legend says that one Texas lawmaker exclaimed, “Get the government out of our business!” One can only hope his preacher delivered a sermon about this passage and corrected his rebellious attitude. Governments divinely are ordained. Even ineffectual governments are preferable to anarchy.

Cooperating with governmental authorities (including honest payment of taxes) is included in the Christian’s ethical mandate. Obviously, this does not include compromising spiritual values or violating divine commandments.

Consider This: How do we determine which conditions make serving both divine counsel and national interests incompatible? What is our proper course of action under such circumstances?

IV. Nearer Than We Believed *(Review Romans 13:11–14 with the class.)*

How interesting that proximity to the lawgiver encourages compliant behavior! Every wallet-protecting motorist reduces excessive speed when surprised by police officers. Certainly proximity to our “love-givers” elicits compliant behavior also (at least during the dating phase!). Paul summons “proximity,” Christ’s impending return, as a motivation for righteous living. Therefore, “don’t participate in the darkness of wild parties and drunkenness, or in sexual promiscuity and immoral living, or in quarreling and jealousy” (*vs. 13, NLT*).

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Nearer Than We Believed

“And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed” (Rom. 13:11).

As we have stated all quarter, Paul had a very specific focus in this letter to the Romans, and that was to clarify for the church at Rome, especially the Jewish believers there, the role of faith and works in the New Covenant context. The issue was salvation and how a sinner is deemed righteous and holy before the Lord. To help those whose whole emphasis had been on law, Paul put the law in its proper role and context. Though, ideally, Judaism, even in Old Testament times, was a religion of grace, legalism arose and did a lot of damage. How careful we as a church need to be that we don't make the same mistake.

Read Romans 13:11–14. What event is Paul talking about here, and how should we be acting in anticipation of that event?

How fascinating that Paul here was talking to the believers, telling them to wake up and get it together because Jesus was coming back. The fact that this was written almost two thousand years ago doesn't matter. We must always live in anticipation of the nearness of Christ's coming. As far as we all are concerned, as far as our own personal *experiences* go, the Second Coming is as near as the potential for our own death. Whether next week or in 40 years, we close our eyes in death, and whether we sleep only 4 days or for 400 years—it makes no difference to us. The next thing we know is the second coming of Jesus. With death always potentially just around the corner for any of us, time is indeed short, and our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.

Though Paul doesn't deal much in the book of Romans with the Second Coming, in the Thessalonian and the Corinthian letters he covers it in much more detail. After all, it's a crucial theme in the Bible, especially the New Testament. Without it, and the hope it offers, our faith is, really, meaningless. After all, what does “justification by faith” mean without the Second Coming to bring that wonderful truth to complete fruition?

If you knew for certain that Jesus was coming next month, what would you change in your life, and why? Now, if you believe you need to change these things a month before Jesus comes, why shouldn't you change them now? What is the difference?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED► **STEP 3—Apply**

Just for Teachers: The human commission of glorifying God and living harmoniously with God’s creatures is captured by one word: *love*. Human behavior, being influenced by multiple factors, fails to reveal completely the contents of the heart (see *Matt. 7:22, 23*). Splendid performances frequently are motivated by selfish, egotistical purposes. Behavior and appearances must be superseded by genuine heart religion. Unless our devotion exceeds the pretense of the Pharisees, we never will enter the kingdom of heaven. Anything falling below the standard of genuine love is neither satisfactory to God nor satisfying for us.

Thought Questions:

❶ What is meant by genuine heart religion, and how does the Christian achieve this goal?

❷ What are the standards of genuine love that God has set for us? How can we allow our hearts to become transformed by these standards? In what ways can we become more susceptible and responsive to God’s guidance and direction in our devotion to Him and to others?

❸ What experience replaces hollow, appearance-conscious religion?

► **STEP 4—Create**

Just for Teachers: How does love fulfill God’s law in our experience so that our lives are satisfactory to God and satisfying to us? Discuss spiritual gifts in the context of the above question to introduce the final activity. How is God pleased when we utilize those gifts for His glory? How does utilizing our abilities bring personal satisfaction?

Activity: Reread Romans 12:6–8; list the various gifts mentioned. Invite members to take pictures of activities during the coming week that they feel illustrate the gifts list and bring them to the next class.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “An Explanation of Early Statements,” pp. 66–69, in *Selected Messages*, book 1; “Practical Godliness,” pp. 540, 541, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5; “Our Attitude Toward the Civil Authorities,” pp. 394, 395, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6; “The Tabernacle and Its Services,” pp. 352, 353, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “The Spirituality of the Law,” pp. 49–51, in *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*.

“In the Bible the will of God is revealed. The truths of the Word of God are the utterances of the Most High. He who makes these truths a part of his life becomes in every sense a new creature. He is not given new mental powers, but the darkness that through ignorance and sin has clouded the understanding is removed. The words, ‘A new heart also will I give you,’ mean, ‘A new mind will I give you.’ A change of heart is always attended by a clear conviction of Christian duty, an understanding of truth. He who gives the Scriptures close, prayerful attention will gain clear comprehension and sound judgment, as if in turning to God he had reached a higher plane of intelligence.”—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, p. 24.

“The Lord . . . is soon coming, and we must be ready and waiting for His appearing. Oh, how glorious it will be to see Him and be welcomed as His redeemed ones! Long have we waited, but our hope is not to grow dim. If we can but see the King in His beauty we shall be forever blessed. I feel as if I must cry aloud: ‘Homeward bound!’ We are nearing the time when Christ will come in power and great glory to take His ransomed ones to their eternal home.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 253.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ In class, go over the question at the end of Thursday’s lesson. What were the answers folk gave, and how did they justify them?
- ❷ The question of how we are to be good citizens and good Christians can at times be very complicated. If someone were to come to you seeking advice about standing for what he or she believed was God’s will, even though it would put him or her in conflict with the government, what would you say? What counsel would you give? What principles should you follow? Why is this something that we should proceed on only with the utmost seriousness and prayerful consideration? (After all, not everyone thrown into the lions’ den comes out unscathed.)
- ❸ What do you think is harder to do: to keep strict adherence to the letter of the law or to love God and love others unconditionally? Or, could you argue that this question presents a false dichotomy? If so, why?