

Our Reasonable Service Part 3
Romans 13:8-10

Hebrews 3

Hebrews 4

Responsive 1 Corinthians 13

This morning we will be picking up where we left off last week in chapter 13 of Romans, remembering again that the principles that are guiding our understanding to what Paul is writing here is first and foremost, we who have died with Christ, that is, who have had our sins washed away but his death on the cross, are not bound under the old Mosaic law, for Christ is the fulfillment, the end of the law for all who believe. For our righteousness is found in him, it is his righteousness which has been laid to our account, so that when God looks upon us...he sees what Christ has done, and we being his adopted children through blood, have a righteousness through Christ, that we could never earn on our own through good works and law keeping. So again, when we see such instruction by Paul, and other's who have written these books of the bible, these are not some new set of rules and laws to be followed to gain merit or righteousness, but rather is a picture, and explanation of what a life in Christ looks like. There are those who would argue that the sermon on the mount was Christ setting forth a new standard of law, but to believe that is to miss the entire point of Christ's teaching there, as he points out that righteousness through the law is unattainable, unreachable for mankind and its purpose was to convict, and condemn to expose the truth that we need a righteousness outside of ourselves, we need a Messiah, one to come and wipe away the intrinsic sin and rebellion that grows and thrives in our core inner parts of ourselves.

And that was the point of Jesus' teaching on the law, not that he replaced it, but that it condemns and we need something outside of ourselves, and our own ability to be able to stand righteous before God. Matthew 5:27, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, "You shall not commit adultery." So we see Jesus lists one of the laws of old, but then he goes on to show that adherence was never just an outward action but is judged by the internal wants and desires of the heart verse 28. "But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Again in verse 43 of the same chapter he says, "You have heard that it was said, "you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But say unto you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. So that you may be sons of your father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust." Jesus is not laying forth a new law to abide by, but is rather showing the dire state of mankind in its ability to be righteous before God on its own, therefore Jesus came, to fulfill the law, and has imputed, laid to our account his righteousness, and he has by the new birth has taken away our heart of stone, and have given us a heart of flesh...and as the Prophet Jeremiah wrote, "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the lord. I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

That day has come, we who have been born again through the blood of Christ, have Christ written on our hearts, we have been given a new heart, with new desires, a heart filled by the spirit with faith and love, so that we do the things that are pleasing to God. Which is why Paul wrote to the Galatians, listing the fruits of the spirit and he says, against such there is no law. In other words, the fruits of the spirit, which naturally flow out of God's children are not contrary to the law, but rather in line with its principles, when we show forth these qualities which are born out of a believing heart, we are acting in accordance to God's law which is written upon our hearts.

Again I used google to search up where this verse is found in scripture because I couldn't remember exactly what chapter in Galatians it was, the google search AI gave me this conclusion. "This concept "against such there is no law" is significant because it highlights the importance of living according to the Spirit rather than the flesh. When we are lead by the spirit, we are not under the law, and we are free to live in harmony with God's will." So Paul expounds upon that in Roman's instructing them to love without hypocrisy, to be kindly affectionate to one another, seek after the things which are good and do not seek to repay evil for evil but rather love your enemies as Jesus taught in the sermon on the mount and all of these things should be the natural out flowing of a heart who loves God.

Paul speaks rather highly of this love, in-fact he sees it as the key and centerpiece for all Christian conduct. Our conduct is either bound in duty, or in desire, by that I mean how we live our lives is either driven by a sense of duty to follow the law, or we are driven by a profound love for our Lord and Savior. Paul presents the argument that it is by desire that we pursue righteousness, our love for God, and our love for each other is what is the driving force behind our behavior and conduct. And this even extends outside of our families, outside of the church, and goes to the very conduct we have toward everyone...and Paul implores his readers, even our enemies. For the love of God reflecting in our hearts toward one another, and toward those who seek us harm is a part of the ministry of hope and a reflection of the love that God has given us when he sent his Son to die for sinners who hated him. The reality is here, we can not overstate this love, it is even bigger then we are able to comprehend, for in our yet sinful flesh we only get a glimpse of the divine love that God has for us, and we can only imperfectly reflect it to one another.

Last week there was a bit of a discussion after the sermon on some of the statements I had made about the church's acceptance of the ruling authorities, for there have been instances of the church standing against corrupt governments, so I wanted to also just take a few moments this morning to clarify some of what I was saying, for I may not have explained it well enough. I also qualify this as my view and understanding, but I believe it is in line with what Paul is teaching here. I believe, as a corporate body, the concerns of the secular government and world should in many ways be of little concern. By that I mean, the role and purpose of the local expression of the church is to worship, to exhort and encourage one another, and to equip the saints in the gospel, preparing them for ministering to those around them. I find no where in scripture where the church is going out and organizing protests, or rallies against Rome, or against the Jewish leaders who sought to persecute them either. Of course there may come a time when we are confronted, or persecuted for our beliefs by the governing officials or authorities, and it is at these points that we are unbending for we serve God not man, and if the moment arrives between following what man demands, or what God demands, we follow God. For instance, the principle is set forth in scripture that the saints should gather, and we do so for the aforementioned reasons, to worship, to pray, to encourage and help one another, but if the government steps in and bans all such gatherings..who do we follow, man? Or God?

So, I think the key, and the point I was trying to get across last week and maybe fell a bit short on is that the key to understanding this section of chapter 13 I believe is found in verse 18 of chapter 12 As much as we can, live peaceably with all men. For we are to be about the ministry of God, and if we seek vengeance, and resort to aggressive behaviors, we are only inviting wrath of those who are against us. We are to be focused upon the larger picture, the spiritual war that is raging as we share the gospel with those around us. There is a sense when I believe a quiet rebellion is justified, we see examples of it all through scripture, when a corrupt government bans the gathering of the saints, or the preaching of the world, the church goes underground.

She doesn't take up arms to cause a rebellion and overthrow the government that is oppressing her, but in silent rebellion continues the work of God through the ministry of the word. This is what I meant last week, we as believers who belong to a local expression of the body should seek to not cause undo judgment upon ourselves for we do not want to hinder the effectiveness of our ministry. We have plenty examples of corrupt, even tyrannical governments in scripture, and in no circumstance was the answer to rise up and rebel. The Hebrews in Egypt were slaves, God did to instruct them to take up arms against Pharaoh, but rather he lead them out of Egypt. When Rome and Israel were persecuting Christians, none of the Apostles argued for taking up arms against those authorities. The idea of liberation from tyranny, and oppression is exactly the reason Israel rejected Christ. They expected the Messiah to come to lead them against Rome and establish them once again as a powerful nation in the world. But, he did not, he operated within the confines of the ruling authorities being focused upon the message he was sent to give, and what he was sent to do, for in doing, he rose up spiritual Israel, and gathered them into his kingdom to wage a spiritual war against all unrighteousness, as he rules and reigns from the throne of heaven.

Another thing I think I should mention before we get into our section this morning is our societies misunderstanding of love. If we are to talk about love in a biblical sense, in the way that Paul means here in this book we need to first define what that means for our understanding in the world today of what love is, has been corrupted and turned on it's head. We have boiled love down to a simple act of acceptance. To love, is to accept, to love is to agree, to love, is to enable. That is not true love, it is a mere shadow and a weak appearance love. It is a deception that parades itself as love. An example of this, of what is considered to be love by today's understanding would be, say your 10 year old child, or any young child for that matter, really, really, wants to smoke a cigarette. Society today says, if you love that child you will provide them with what they desire. But that is not love, an enabling acceptance of something detrimental and wrong is not love. Love would look at that child, recognize the outcome of a decision made in ignorance, a life of addiction, disease, and likely an early death...and instead in the better interest of that child, because you care for and love him or her, you would not buy those cigarettes. This principle can be used all across the board, far too often in our world today we are not willing to be tough when we need to be tough, or stand our ground on what we know is right...maybe because we don't truly love.

The picture we get of love in scripture is entirely different than the expression we see paraded around today. Hebrews 12:5 "And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as sons. MY son, do not despise the chastening of the lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by him. For whom the lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives." A loving parent, guides, protects, and yes even scolds the child they love knowing that such instruction will help guide them to be the person they are to be. This means, sometimes withholding what they want, what they desire for we out of love seek their best interest. So, to understand the love of God, and a love that we are to have for one another, we must first define and understand what love actually is for the world around us today has a different idea and has applied a different meaning...and in fact has twisted and perverted the concept so much so, that if out of love you deny or restrict, or even disagree with a person it is now understood to be the opposite, you are called a bigot, or your love is taken as hatred.

So with all that in mind, let us read our passage this morning, and you know what to get a full orbbed sense of the context, and as a quick refresher .. let us start back at verse 9 of chapter 12. (Read 12:9-13:10.

Paul makes a profound statement here in verse 8, one that should rock the world of many conservative Christians today. The NIV translates this verse in this way. "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law." This passage is not saying, do not go into debt as many want to understand it to mean, instead it is instructing that if you are in debt, to pay it as you ought, but the debt of love we owe to God, and one another should be understood as a constant, unpayable debt, that we continue to owe one another. True love never reaches a point where it ends, you never say... you know, I have loved you enough, paid what I owe and now I don't owe you any love anymore. This debt of love that we are to have for one another is a constant, never ending desire for the betterment of one another. But that is not the point I want to focus on this morning, it is the last half of this verse that if some would only dig into they might come away with a different understanding of our "reasonable service" toward God. Paul says, For he who loves one another, fulfills the law. Wait a second....aren't we as Christians to strive to follow the law for righteousness? Isn't the law our guide showing us how we are to be as Christians? Well, not according to Paul. According to Paul, our love for one another, our love for our neighbors, that naturally flows out of a heart changed by God, is fulfilling the law.

He goes on and expounds on this in verse 9. "For the commandments, You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, you shall not covet, and if there is any other such commandment, are all summed up in this saying namely, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no harm to a neighbor, therefore love is the fulfillment of the law." You want to live righteously? Love, you seek to please God, Love, you want to know how to live as a Christian? Follow Christ's examples, and love those around you. And in doing so, you will be keeping the law, for one who loves, truly, is one who does not envy, Christ said, the law states, do not murder, but I say, be angry with your brother without cause shall be in danger of the judgment, yet one who loves truly will not be angry without a cause. If you love you shall not steal, if you love, you shall not covet, and it is our love for God which drives us away from sin. We who are in Christ, are bound to him in this love, and he, by love gave of himself to fulfill the righteous requirements needed to be reconciled to God, nailing our sin with him upon the cross, paying the punishment and penalty of it so that we may be found righteous before God.

This truly is the secret to Christianity, our righteousness is found in one who gave it, there is nothing that we can do to earn it, but it was a gift given because God first loved us, that he sent his only begotten son, so that who ever believes upon him shall not perish but have everlasting life. And that new life, in him, is a life that will reflect that love he has toward us as we interact with the world around us. For it is the spirit which works in us to will and to do that which is pleasing to God. For the fruits of the spirit, the actions and attitudes that flow out of the believer, is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such, there is no law. For we no longer stand condemned by God, but have been made righteous through the blood of Christ. The requirements of the law have been fulfilled on our behalf in Christ, therefore we who rest in him, by him have been made righteous. The temple sacrifices have also been fulfilled in Christ, for they were all examples and pictures pointing to the spotless lamb of God who would be sent to pay the price of sin once for all, no longer are such sacrifices necessary, for they have been fulfilled in Christ. So, that leaves one more aspect spoken of in the law, the Sabbath, the day of rest. Each piece of the law points to something greater than itself, Christ expounded upon that on his sermon on the mount, showing that the requirements of the law went beyond the physical, because God looks at the heart of mankind, therefore all of mankind stands condemned, there is none righteous, and none who can keep it.

So, the law points to our need of Christ, the perfect lamb, to fulfill it on our behalf. The law therefore was tutor, to teach us this truth and reality so now that Christ has come, and that aspect of the law has been fulfilled, it is no longer binding to us, as Paul say, that which has been made obsolete is fading away. The sacrificial aspects of the law, has been fulfilled in Christ, the lambs, and bulls were a picture pointing to the need of the Messiah, showing the vile wickedness of sin brings death, and that there is no remission of sin without the shedding of blood, it is either paid on our heads, our by another. And Christ has fulfilled this aspect of the law as well, being that sacrifice once and for all so that we may have remission of sins, and be reconciled to God, being found holy and just by the blood of Christ. The Sabbath, a day of rest...we toil, we work, we strive...but on the sabbath there is rest. If all of the law was pointing to something, then surely the set aside Sabbath day was as well. We who are in Christ, rest in him, for he has become our Sabbath...we no longer toil and work to try to earn righteousness, we rest in the one who has provided. This concept of Christ himself being this sabbath rest is found in Hebrews chapter 3 and 4 where the author points out that there is a rest to be had, and it is a rest for those who believe. Verse 4, of Hebrews 4, "For he has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way; And God rested on the seventh day from all his works. Again again in this place; They shall not enter my rest. Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, he designates a certain day, saying in David, TODAY, after such along time it has been said, Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts. For if Joshua had given them rest, that is the 7 day Sabbath, then he would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered his rest has himself ceased from his works as God did from his.

As you can see, the author is not imploring his readers to keep a special or certain day, but rather that our rest as believers is in Christ, in his works on the cross, and we are to rest in the salvation given to us by him...that is our rest, that is our Sabbath. Again, we see all of the law is fulfilled in Christ, and we fulfill it through him. The Sabbath, the sacrifices, the righteous requirements have all been fulfilled by Christ, and we who are in him rest in that reality. And the reflection of that rest, is the love of Christ which first was given to us, that through the spirit we love those around us. And that is how all of the law is summed up in this, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." For we who are in Christ have been made righteous by his blood, and we have been given the spirit of God so that we may know him, and believe, and who works in us conviction beyond that of any external law, and drives us toward repentance when we fail, proving our faith. Let us find our rest in him, the one who has reconciled us to himself, by his grace and mercy died, so that we may be free from sin. Let us put aside these silly notions that we must perform or be a certain way, that we must keep a specific day, for each day is the Lords, and each day we rest in him..in Christ, everyday is the sabbath. And through Christ and his spirit, we live, and we love, and by doing so, we reflect his righteousness in the law that he has fulfilled for us. Let us, owe no one anything, except to love one another, and let that love be without hypocrisy, may it be a true love, born our of the love that God has shown toward us, as we strive to be kindly affectionate toward one another in brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another, not lagging in diligence, being fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, and steadfast in prayer. And this, as the children of God, is our reasonable service. To love God, and to Love others, so that they may, by his grace and mercy, likewise come to know and believe.