

Romans (84) **The Christian under God's Law**

Last Lord's Day we considered the teaching of the Holy Scriptures on how Christians are to understand their relationship to the civil nation in which they live. We Christians are to be the best of citizens, obeying the laws that our secular government has established for us. We therefore acknowledge that we are subject to governing authorities of this earthly kingdom in which we live. As Christians we seek the well-being of our society and this nation. In this matter we recognize that Christians are somewhat unique and privileged who are citizens of these United States (and nations like the US), in that we live in a society in which we have a role and responsibility in selecting the leaders that will govern us according to the constitution under which we live. This brings us privilege and also responsibility.

And yet in all of our life under the authority of our civil government, we confess our chief loyalty is to a different and higher kingdom and its laws, even the kingdom of God. We are citizens of heaven, who are temporarily dwelling in the kingdoms of this world. In one sense we have dual citizenship, in that we are citizens of the United States and we are citizens of our homeland in heaven where our King sits enthroned. But our identity is chiefly that with the Kingdom of God, which takes precedence in our thinking and the governing of our behavior. We purpose by God's grace to obey man's laws, but only in the way and to the degree that we are able to obey the laws of the Kingdom of God, for the laws of the kingdom of God take precedence over us. If a government of this world commands us to keep a law that is contrary to God's law, our conscience and commitment will be to obey God's law rather than man's law. We say as Peter did when he and other Christians were commanded to live contrary to God's law,

²⁹“We must obey God rather than men. ³⁰The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹God exalted him at his right hand *as Leader and Savior*, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³²And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those *who obey Him*.” (Acts 5:29-32)

And so, as Christians, our identity is that of citizens of heaven. “Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. (Phi. 3:20f).

We see that our citizenship in these United States is only temporary, and it is certainly secondary to the loyalty and responsibility that we have to our King Jesus and the Kingdom of God over which He rules. We are only here temporarily. We are as exiles from our homeland, sojourning here for a time, even while we are in a spiritual pilgrimage to our “homeland” the New Jerusalem. If we are thinking rightly we regard ourselves as people in exile, sojourning in a foreign land, even while we dwell as Christians here in America. This is not our true home. But while we are dwelling here we desire and attempt to do good and bring benefit to others living about us, but in doing so we always recognize our heavenly citizenship and our principle loyalty to the Kingdom of God. We apply to ourselves the principles of the instructions that God gave to the remnant of Israel after they had been taken from their land to far off Babylon. We read in **Jeremiah 9:4-7**:

“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. ⁶Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. ⁷But *seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile*, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

We Christians are exiles living in “Babylon”, but even while we sojourn here for a while, we purpose by God's grace not to become wholly a part of “Babylon.” We refuse to take “the mark of the beast”, selling our souls to the “world”, which would identify this world as owning our souls. Rather, we have the mark of God's

ownership upon our foreheads, even His name (cf. Rev. 22:4). We belong to Him. And one day, perhaps before long, we will be with Him in the Kingdom of which we are true citizens that He has promised we will one day inherit.

Today we arrive to the next paragraph, which is **Romans 13:8-10**, which reads:

⁸Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹For 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.” ¹⁰Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. (Rom. 13:8-10)

We need first to say a word about the text itself. If you are reading this passage in a translation other than the English Standard Version (ESV), the New International Version (NIV), or the New American Standard Version (NASV) (or perhaps another modern translation), in other words, if you are reading this passage in the King James Version (KJV) or the New King James Version (NKJV), you may notice that your reading of verse 9 is longer than the one that I just read in our hearing. The KJV and the NKJV add the phrase, “You shall not bear false witness.” The newer translations do not include this clause because the translators did not believe that it was originally written by Paul. (We do not have the time to explain the reasoning for their decision, although I did include a “simplified” explanation in a footnote.¹)

In **verse 8** we have the command given to us, ***“Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.”*** This is not a prohibition against all borrowing. It is a prohibition against failing to fulfil your obligations, to pay your debts on time. Some have taken this to mean that the Christian should never borrow and should always remain debt free. Some have taken this to say that a church should never borrow money for any reason at all, for the Scripture declares, ***“Owe no one anything.”*** Now certainly an argument from principles of stewardship would suggest that this is the best and preferred course. But the Bible does not forbid borrowing. There are times in which borrowing is needful but is to be regulated by the Word of God. Few of us would own houses if we never borrowed to do so.

Now it is true that God had promised ancient Israel that if they stayed true to their covenantal promises to God that they would not need to borrow from the other nations; rather, they would lend to other nations. We read in Deuteronomy 15:6, “For the LORD your God will bless you, as He promised you, and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow, and you shall rule over many nations, but they shall not rule over you.” And God also declared that if Israel failed to keep their covenant commitments to Him that they would be forced

¹ For the curious ‘sickos’ among us who would like further explanation, consider the following: The editors of the Greek text that lies behind the newer translations [*The Nestles Text* (19th ed.) and the *United Bible Society Greek Text* (3rd ed.) which are both commonly identified in the margin as NU] surmised that a scribe who lived later than Paul, while making a copy of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, added this commandment in order to conform Paul’s statement to include the one commandment left out between the commandment, “You shall not commit adultery” and “You shall not covet” in the Ten Commandments. Perhaps the editors of the Greek text(s) applied the principle commonly used, “the shorter reading is to be preferred”, assuming that a scribe would tend to add a phrase for clarification or in order to conform to the scribe’s assumption of what the text should have read. But interestingly, the textual scholars who made this decision in the Greek text that lies behind the modern translations, rated the shorter reading as a “B” on the scale of A to D. A rating of “A” would indicate they are absolutely certain that the reading they chose was original to Paul. The rating of “B” would indicate they think reasonably that the reading they chose was original to Paul. The “C” rating would indicate less certainty. The “D” rating would indicate that there was weak evidence for the reading they chose and perhaps there were a minority of scholars on the editing committee who differed in their opinion of legitimacy of the reading chosen. Perhaps this less than full confidence rating, “B”, was due to the early attestation of the additional reading in the Codex Sinaiticus (4th c.). Or perhaps the omission might be explained as the scribal error of homoeoteleuton (the word for the day), which would mean that the reading was indeed original with Paul, but a scribe erred in his reading by passing over the clause because of the similar appearance of the ending of the word in the following clause. In other words, the scribe’s eye fell upon the word in the following clause, inadvertently not seeing the clause he omitted because the words had the same ending.

to borrow from other nations and thereby become their servants. We read in Deuteronomy 28:43f. “The sojourner who is among you shall rise higher and higher above you, and you shall come down lower and lower. He shall lend to you, and you shall not lend to him. He shall be the head, and you shall be the tail.” But borrowing itself is not prohibited in the Bible, although debt is certainly not desirable. We read in the New Testament our Lord’s instruction, “Give to the one who begs from you, and **do not refuse the one who would borrow from you**” (Matt. 5:42). Sometimes borrowing may be necessary and if that time comes, the Christian should not resist lending to the one who would borrow from him. And there may be times when the Christian needs to be the object of another’s mercy in borrowing from him. We read our Lord’s instruction to His disciples in **Luke 6:32-36**:

“If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. ³⁵But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. ³⁶Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.”

Lending to others is being merciful as God the Father is merciful. And there are times when the Christian may find himself in a position to be the recipient of another’s “mercy.” And so, lending to those who would borrow from us is good. On the other hand borrowing from another may not be “good”, but it is not evil to do so.

But again, what verse 8 prohibits is the failure to fulfill your commitments. If you enter into an agreement with a person or an institution to borrow and in doing so you committed yourself to make certain minimum payments at certain times, then if you failed in your commitment you would be violating this commandment of Romans 13:8, “Owe no man anything.” It would be important as a Christian to acknowledge this as sin and seek to correct your behavior. Christians are to pay their debts.

However, although we may be fortunate not to have financial debt, there is a continual debt each of us owes to others, a debt of which we can never escape or pay in full. Again, in **verse 8** we read, “Owe no one anything, **except to love each other.**” We are indebted to love others.

Now when we speak of the responsibility “to love” each other, we may immediately think in terms of possessing emotional affection for others. But the love that is spoken of in the Scriptures has to do with how we treat others rather than how we feel toward them. This is not to say that we need to disregard feelings of affections for others. We read in 2 Peter 1 of instruction on our sanctification:

⁵For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, ⁶and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, ⁷and godliness with **brotherly affection**, and brotherly affection with **love**. (2 Pet. 1:5-7)

But here you can see that “brotherly affection” is not the same as “love.” Rather, here and elsewhere it is common to understand “love” as loving action, not loving affection. Brotherly affection should be shown in acts of love.

We have also read earlier in Romans of the need to have affection for the brethren. Romans 12:10 reads, “Love one another with brotherly affection.” Here we see that our loving actions should be accompanied with brotherly affection. Here again we can see that love is not identical with brotherly affection. In other words, one can perhaps have brotherly affection for another but fail to “love” that one biblically.

And so, if we are indebted to love one another but that is not to be understood as having brotherly affection for another in and of itself, what is it to owe this debt “**to love each other**”? Our Lord taught us quite clearly what it is to love others, particularly how we are to love our enemies. This is recorded in **Luke 6:27-36**.

“But I say to you who hear, **love your enemies**, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. ³⁰Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. ³¹And as you wish that others

would do to you, do so to them. ³²If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. ³⁵**But love your enemies**, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. ³⁶Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

This passage is imbedded in what has been termed, **The Sermon on the Plain** (Luke 6:17-49). In this sermon, the Lord Jesus teaches how to live as a citizen of the Kingdom of God, a disciple of Jesus Christ. The disciple of Jesus Christ is to view things differently than he once did and to live differently than he did formerly. There is an over-arching principle that pervades all of these principles, and this is *the principle of love*, stated in 6:27a, **“But I say unto you, love your enemies.”** Love is the principle ethic of the Kingdom of God; it is the main teaching of our Lord. It is the principle of love that is to govern how we are to live and relate to the world around us. This is what Paul declared in Romans 13:8, **“Owe no one anything, *except to love each other.*”**

Here in Luke 6:27 the Lord commands His people, “love your enemies.” Implied in this statement is the responsibility to love everyone. You do not need to be commanded to love them who love you, you do that naturally. So if you love your enemies, you will be loving everyone. Jesus is making it clear that no one is exempt from your love. If he is an enemy, he qualifies.

Now again, we tend to view love in terms of *feelings of affection*. We speaking of “falling in love” and “being loved” in terms of romantic infatuation. This view of “love” this drives our world. And people are driven in relationships often consumed by the need for this feeling they are the recipients of someone else’s attention and affection. And often times God’s love is perceived *only* in these terms. Even people who are in rebellion to God and His laws believe that God loves them in that He gets these “fuzzy feelings” whenever He thinks of them. This in turn gives them a sense of well-being and a wrong belief that they are immune from God’s wrath upon them for their sin. Wrong views of God’s love commonly results in giving people a false sense of well-being and security. But “love” in the Scriptures is most frequently (though not always) to be seen *not* as a *feeling of affection* which is experienced, but rather love is a *description of action* which is performed. To “love your enemy” is not to generate some feelings of affection for him who has wronged you (although that may occur), but to love your enemy describes **how you are to behave toward him, regardless of your feelings.**

Biblical love is *active*, not *passive*. Love is doing *something* more than it is *feeling something*. That is why if you say “I love God” yet do not the things He says, you show yourself to be deceiving yourself, for **“this is love, that we walk according to His commandments”** (2 John 6). And so, I would say, that you can have feelings of deep revulsion toward an enemy, and yet still “love” that enemy, in the same way that God has great indignation and wrath toward those who refuse to believe and submit to His Son, yet He still performs loving acts on their behalf.

You might ask, **“How, then do I love my enemies?”** I believe the instruction is found for us in this Luke 6 passage. In verse 27 Jesus said, “Love your enemies.” And then down in verse 35 He says the same thing, “love your enemies.” I believe that these two commands serve as two theological “bookends” between which are the practical instructions of how to love your enemies. And so, after the Lord first commanded His disciples to love their enemies, He set forth in clear detail how this is to be performed.

What do we read here? We read that to love your enemies...

I. There are three things you are to do (6:27b-28).

First, “Do good to those who hate you” (6:27b). This is the first way in which you may love your enemies. Now this runs counter to our natural inclinations. When we sense that people hate us we do not naturally respond to them in this fashion. We may not return evil for good, but on the other hand, we do not return good for evil. Actually, there are three possible responses to one who is our enemy: (a) the natural response is **to do evil in return**. I once heard a Satanist say on TV: “When someone does something to me, I see to it he can’t do it again.” That is the way of the unsaved world. (b) The ordinary “Christian” response is **to do nothing** (and we think we are spiritual in letting it pass by!) But (c) the response of a true disciple of Jesus Christ who is thinking rightly and doing rightly is **to do good to that enemy**.

We don't generally go all the way. We only go halfway; consequently, we might not do what unbelievers do, but we do not do what disciples of Jesus Christ ought to be doing. We are right in the middle. I think this is why many professing Christians do not see God working powerfully in their lives and why others about us do see God working through them. There should be something unique about us. What distinguishes us from the unbelievers in the world about us is how act and react to events that take place in our lives. Now it is true that Christians are known by their actions, but they are better known by their reactions. When things happen to them, they do not respond as others do, and the world sits up and takes notice when they see this.

A **second** way we are to love our enemies is to “**bless those who curse you (6:28a)**.” Again, there are **three possible responses**. (a) The natural response is to **curse back**. (b) The ordinary “Christian” response is to **remain silent**. But (c) the response of a true disciple is to **bless him, speak kindly to him**.

The **third** way in which we love our enemies is to “**pray for those who mistreat you (6:28b)**.” Here again, (a) the natural response is to **get even**. (b) The ordinary “Christian” response is to **ignore him**. But (b) the Christian response of a true disciple is to **pray for him; make him an object of your petitions before God**.

God often draws people to Himself through engaging them in conflict with His people. God “bids” one in His providence to abuse us. Our response to that abuse should be a vivid demonstration of the reality of God in our lives. Maybe God has bidden someone to abuse you so that He might win to Himself through your godly response to him.

In order for us to love our enemies, not only are there three things we are to do, but...

II. There are also three things you are *not* to do (Luke 6:29, 30).

First, we are told, “Do not retaliate, but rather be willing to suffer” (6:29a). That is what is being said in the words, “To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also.” (a) The natural response when someone turns your cheek is to turn his cheek. (b) The ordinary “Christian” response is to defend yourself so that he cannot do it again. (c) But the response of a true disciple is to turn the other cheek, i.e. be willing to take more; you do not retaliate.

Second, you are not to be bitter or angry when someone takes something from you. We read in Luke 6:29b, “from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either.” (a) The natural response is to become bitter and angry. (b) The ordinary “Christian” response is to try to forget it, struggle to deal with the bitterness of having something unjustly taken from you. (c) But the response of a true disciple is to **give more**. This, by the way, is one way in which bitterness toward another person can be overcome. We read in Proverbs 21:14, “A gift in secret averts anger, and a concealed bribe, strong wrath.” If you are having trouble dealing with bitterness in your soul to someone, you may try sending him a gift anonymously. It will puzzle him, but you will find that it dissipates your anger toward him.

And the **third** reaction that we are not to do is in Luke 6:30: “Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back.” Do not limit your generosity when someone takes something from you. (a) The natural response is to either resent or demand back what you have given in the past. (b) The ordinary “Christian” response is to stop giving. (c) The response of a true disciple is do not stop giving. And then to sum up this instruction, the Lord gives in **6:31** the overarching principle for everything He has said thus far--the Golden Rule: “**Just as you want people to treat you, treat them in the same way.**”

Our Lord next posed...

III. Three questions designed to move us toward this action of loving our enemies (6:32-34)

First, if you only *love* them who love you, you are doing no better than the unbeliever (6:32). Unbelievers generally only show acts of love to those who love them or will render appreciation for their actions. We are called to higher ideals. Our loving action is not to be manifested only to those who agree with us, behave like us, and walk with us. We are to love because it is the right thing to do. Second, if you only do *good* to them who do good to you, you are doing no better than an unbeliever (6:33). And third, if you only *lend* to them from whom you know you will get a return, you are no better than an unbeliever (6:34).

We then read...

IV. Two further reasons designed to move us toward this course of action (6:35, 36)

First, your reward will be great (6:35a, b). In so doing you can be assured that you will be “the sons of the Most High.” Although as believers we are now the children of God, here we see it as a future realization. There will be a day when we will yet receive “our adoption as sons” when the glory which comes with our sonship will be revealed (cf. Rom. 8). But in the meantime, we can rejoice in our assurance of this future prospect for we are like our Heavenly Father in our behavior.

This suggests the *second* reason: *your Father Himself deals with His enemies in this fashion* (6:35c, 36).

In conclusion to the instructions given here in Luke 6, we are taught to love others in the same way that our Lord demonstrates love for His enemies.

Their love was to be like His own towards sinners--unselfish, disinterested, and uninfluenced by any hope of return. “What was to be the manner of this love?” the disciples might ask. It was to be self-sacrificing and self-denying. “Unto him that smiteth thee you on the one cheek offer also the other.” “Him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also.” They were to give up much, and endure much, for the sake of showing kindness and avoiding strife. They were to forego even their rights, and submit to wrong, rather than awaken angry passions and create quarrels. In this they were to be like their Master, long-suffering, meek, and lowly in heart.²

² J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, p. 183.