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Romans 13:7-10

The Love Debt

INTRO: How many people here are debt free? "I owe. I owe. It's off to work I go!" Anyone debt free? Tricked you! None of us are. But you may be surprised to hear what kind of debt we owe, why we owe it, and those to whom we pay it. Lets read…

Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed. **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.**—Rom 13:7–10**

SLIDE: Outline. 3 pts. We owe a relational debt. We possess an abiding love. We fulfill a righteous law. Let's jump in together…

Now after 11 chapters of mainly focusing on God's saving work for us in Christ, Romans 12 moves to God's saving work in us as he transforms us to do his will.

I hope you are not surprised to see the theme of love in these sections. LOVE is the *dominant* theme in Romans 12-14.

God's people are to be marked by love. Why? Because we're full of it. God's love not only changes us. It fills us and leaks out all over the place onto our neighbors.

This is important because I am sensing a change in the American air we breath right now. There is an agitation at play. A disgust. A rising sense of outrage at how secular, godless, and "in-your-face" our Western world has grown. It's easy for hate and resentment to rise in your heart in ways you don't even realize. And before you know it, HATE fills your heart. This is a timely reminder, friends.

Like Jeremiah and the Israelites in Babylon…We have to maintain our identity as followers of Jesus. And at the same time, we're called to mission in this godless world. That mission is simple. LOVE. Let's jump into our outline…

Pt. #1 We Owe a Relational Debt: The key word here is "OWE."

A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to every one. **—Martin Luther**

The context here is: Submit to the higher governing authorities. Give them what is "owed" them. But not when they forbid what God commands or command what God forbids.

Then we resist. Then we engage in peaceful, honorable civil disobedience. We avoid two extremes of FIGHT and FLIGHT.

Instead, we follow a way of wisdom and humility that honors King Jesus and honors the authorities.

How and when might Christians do that today?

When the government **requires** a Christian doctor to perform an abortion or forces a healthcare provider to pay for it.

If the government ***requires*** a policeman to punish someone without due cause or ***pressures*** a judge to enforce justice in biased ways that serve the powerful. Or through a bribe.

If a boss ***demands*** you to lie for financial gain/increase profits.

If the government ***forces*** me to perform a same-sex wedding.

If government ever ***forced us to be silent about the gospel*** or refrain from teaching our convictions regarding God's Word.

In all those situations, by God's grace, we obey God rather than men. We RESIST. We have a higher loyalty and authority.

But LOVE is still the motivation. Love for God. Love for the unborn and the mother. Love for unbelievers. Love for truth. justice.

Now…many see verse 8 as a mandate against incurring any debt or borrowing money to build churches or homes or businesses, or to buy a car. But there are provisions for taking on debt as well as guidelines to protect people who are in debt in the Bible.

Of course, believers should not enter into debt hastily and should honor the terms of any contract they sign, pay their bills, and settle their debts. That's basic integrity.

Paul is not forbidding borrowing. Jesus permitted that (Matt. 5:42).

Paul is talking about paying what we owe. But he moves from money to something more valuable and expensive: LOVE.
Love your neighbor (others of a different kind in GK).

Owe no one anything. Pay your debts! When Paul told the Christians in Rome to pay what they owe, he wasn't just talking about money (mortgages, school loans, and rent). He had something much deeper in mind, and more valuable. *Love*. Love is the debt we owe to every image bearer we encounter.

SLIDE: (3X) **Bradford Sandoval** was born and raised in Sacramento CA near the American River. He loves his community and invested in it by owning and operating a small business: the Thai Restaurant House.

On June 25, he went to what's known as Clay Banks, a popular swimming spot on the river—and an area he's familiar with. He's been visiting there, swimming and floating around since he was 10

He saw a panic and heard that two swimmers went under water and never resurfaced. He immediately went into action…

Armed with only a mask, snorkel and fins, Sandoval dove down 25 and 30 feet before coming in contact with one of the swimmers.

"I felt like maybe I was supposed to be there," he said. "I think when it comes down to it, people want to help. You do what you can do….I said a little prayer... 'Guide me and give me strength'

His decision to intervene was a manifestation of his lifelong commitment to his community, a sentiment that resonates deeply with his personal beliefs.

He located the struggling swimmer on the bottom by his white tank top and pulled him to safety.

First responders took over, performing crucial life-saving measures before the victim was rushed to the hospital.

"I try to help, when I can, people in need," There's an old saying: "Do unto others as you would have done unto you."

"His community is always in his heart." That was the line the reporter used to describe this life-long member of a Sacramento community who spent his life serving others. The Sheriff said:

"Bradford is a rare individual, that in a moment of crisis, ignored all personal risk and sought to help a fellow human in distress."

"It was my responsibility to at least try…" That sounds like debtor language to me. Does it to you?

Now contrast that with another story from Chicago…

The story of Mary Hannigan is sad and alarming. Years ago in Chicago, she was assaulted on Chicago's Kennedy Expressway when a man rammed her car, then attacked her with a knife when she stopped to check the damage. She said:

'He had a knife at my throat and he said he was going to kill me. I begged him; I said I had two little girls at home, but he wouldn't listen, He started cutting me with his knife. I screamed and screamed; and there were a lot of cars going by but nobody stopped. It was horrible.'

Police said they were baffled by the incident and no witnesses have come forward.

Officer John Fanning. 'It doesn't surprise me at all in this city. No one helps.'

Fortunately her assailant fell from the car when she was able to push on the accelerator again, and she escaped.

After a plastic surgeon had worked six hours on her face, leaving some 100 stitches, her husband said, "That's what I can't believe.… It's as if people went out of the way not to help her."

How irresistible Christianity would be if Christians truly loved their "neighbors" If we were to consistently see ourselves as love-debtors, just think how the gospel would spread!

Why am I in debt to people who have given me nothing? Or going even further, what about the people who have taken from me. How can I be indebted to them? In what sense do I "owe" them?

They have not given me anything but a hard time. So what am I paying back? Not something they gave me. But something God has given me. I want to remind you of Paul's opening introduction to this letter back in verse 14. He calls himself a debtor.

He "received" grace and apostleship from God (verse 5). So he has the money. His pockets are deep with gospel and grace.

SLIDE: I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

SLIDE: It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbor. The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbor's glory should be laid daily on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken. **—C.S. Lewis**

Pt. #2 We Possess an Abiding Love: How can we do this. Only if

you are a Christian. Only if you've been changed. Rescued.

We need to be justified and changed and given a new nature. Old things must go. All things must become new. 2 Cor 5. He died for all so that those who live may not longer live for themselves.

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. **—Titus**

Bring in Christ, we have a new outlook. We see God differently. We see ourselves differently. We see others differently. No longer as enemies. No longer as worse than use. But our kinsmen.

Are we our brother's keeper? Yes! We no longer see them as Gentiles or Jews or black or white, or British or American. Or poor or rich or bad or good. Religious or non-religious. The cross levels all those labels and destroys them. They are souls!

We have been given a way of thinking that transcends and abolishes all human distinctions. No longer proud. No longer having anything to boast in. Souls. Sinners. Just like us. Needing what we needed and received purely by the grace of Jesus.

Years later in Rome, the Cyprian plague broke out and spared no-one. Wealthy and poor, pagan and Christian. It spread all throughout the city wreaking havoc. The pagans fled the city and left their sick and dying family and friends behind. The Christians flooded the city, knowing it was a death sentence. Why? Love.

Love is the fruit of the Spirit. Is the Spirit of God producing love in you? Are you full of it? We're all full of something aren't we? What comes out of us when the going gets tough? Revenge? Hate? Finger-wagging? Judgment? Or….love. Genuine love?

The people to whom we are paying a debt deserve it no more than we deserved God's grace that was freely given to us.

Our debt to the world is not because we have received anything from them. They've done nothing for us. But Jesus has done EVERYTHING for us.

SLIDE: Here is the way the apostle John put it: Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. **—1 John 4:11**

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. **—1 John 3:16**

Here's a searching, probing way of putting it that I read:

"Do you know yourself loved like this? Is there in you a rising sense of indebtedness to unbelieving, sin-soaked, hell-bent people to whom you owe everything Christ has given you so freely?"

Yes, I know myself loved like that. I WANT there to be a rising sense of indebtedness in my heart to the world. I need help!

SLIDE: May I make a quick application from our congregation? What have we been given? Help. Rescue. Assistance. Resources.

True Identity Recovery Program. Todd and Jessie Isaackson

We are debtors. Joyful. Happy. Glad. Humbled debtors. Our currency is love. Our payment goes to our neighbors. Pt. #3.

Pt. #3 We Fulfill a Righteous Law: Love your neighbor. That's anyone in need. The whole world is our neighbor. No matter what creed or color or code. They are image bearing creatures to serve.

Love your neighbor ***as yourself***. What does this mean?

We're never told in the Bible to love ourselves. The Bible assumes you do. Does it have us pegged or not? Self love is a basic instinct. You care for your basic necessities.

Paul does not say ignore your desires for personal happiness and instead, focus on making others happy.

He used that as a measure. Love your neighbor AS you love yourself. How do you love yourself…? Consider it. You feed yourself. You rest yourself. You entertain yourself. You treat yourself well. Don't you? I'm pretty committed to loving myself. So love your neighbor in that way. Be doggedly devoted to it.

Now the relationship between law and love. The world often pits them against one another. Paul does not. Jesus does not.

SLIDE: A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. **—John 13:34-35**

Love is not sentimentalism. It has objective content.
Love is measured and assessed by commandments

In our culture, what is love measured by? Feelings! Emotions! The heart wants what it wants! Someone else's spouse. Or house. Life.

Adultery is often justified by "I just fell for that person" or "I just don't feel in love with them any more."

You may have felt something but it wasn't love according to the bible. Maybe lust or excitement.

Love is measured and accessed by God's law. Adultery can't be love because it violates one of God's commandments.

Love is not wildly subjective the way the world teaches.

There was a rock-n-roll song from the 80's I remember. "Is this love that I'm feeling. Is this the love that I've been searching for. Is this love or am I dreaming. This must be love. 'Cause it's really got a hold on me. A hold on me." So does idolatry and sin!

Love needs a law to define it. So Love and law go together. Satan pitted God's love against God's law in Eden when he tempted Eve. He caused her to doubt God's good, loving rule.

People say, "Love is good enough! We don't need the particulars. We don't need instruction. No commands please. No law!"

But consider it. We don't just say to our kids. "Be good!" Law is a manifestation of love. Never divorce these!

Three-fold use of the law. Mirror. Curb. Guidance. To show us God's perfection and our failures. To restrain evil (police car, speed

limit, camera on door), to guide us into good works. **God's law is God's guideline on how to love others**. Paul is saying: The laws are more than simply guidelines; they are "love-lines."

The obedient thing is the loving thing; the loving thing is the obedient thing! If we want to love others, God shows us how.

The Pharisees were all law. Experts on the particulars. But had no love. The love of God was not in them. They were concerned with the actions of a person, but not the person himself or herself.

The law was not to make people moral. The pharisees and scribes were virtuous, they thought. But cold, hard, intellectual only. You'd never go to them if you were in trouble. You'd steer clear. They were moralists and legalists. Look at the adulteress in John 8.

Jesus, on the other hand was the most law-abiding, holy person who ever lived. And yet the tax collectors and harlots drew near him. And he near them. They felt drawn to him. As if he could help him. Why? Because he had something to give them. Love!

Love and law are not enemies or opposites. They're in-laws.

Without Christ the law is powerless; without the law love is directionless.

The law shows us HOW to love. By the Spirit we have the enabling POWER to do it. The law is like the train tracks, and the Spirit like the engine.

Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

Why was 1 Corinthians 13 written? Why didn't Paul just say how beautiful love was and leave it at that. To the Greeks. Agape love was a brand new thing. Even in all their culture, philosophies and ideas, the Greeks new noting about it.

If I have not love, I gain nothing. 4 Love is patient and kind; love
does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not
insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not
rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all
things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love your neighbor as yourself. Boy do I need summaries and get helped by them. So here it is. Love God. Love your neighbor. One leads to the other. That's why Augustine famously said, "Love God and do as you please."

Very active. Very practical. We'll be doing this the rest of our lives. The rest of eternity really. Much easier in heaven.

Love is not just avoiding the violation of a commandment. I could do that by just staying in my room. I can't hurt you if I'm not around you. True. But neither can I love you.

Do you see? Caring for others. Love includes caring for others, both their spiritual and physical needs.

So, those hermits who moved out into the desert. St. Jerome literally did that. But his vices followed him. His lust follow him. His adulterous, covetous eyes followed him. He needed to be rescued.

Not committing adultery on spouse. Great starting point. Bless

Not murdering anyone at GLC. Great. Thank you. Please keep it up. But….BLESS. LOVE. SERVE.

Haven't stolen anything yet. Wonderful. What have you given? Are you practicing generosity? Haven't lied? Fist bump. Are you a truth teller? Listening to one another. Hearing one another. Giving to one another. Bearing one another's burdens. Those one-another you'll find are great assessments of LOVE. Contributing. Rejoicing.

The NT confirms these timeless moral norms. In Galatians Paul calls them the law of Christ. James the royal law of liberty.

SLIDE: For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." **—Gal 5:14**.

Let's look for ways to love people like that. To surprise them. To bless them. To show them how patient God is. Forgiving God is. Generous God is. Caring God is.

Let's pray…and prepare for communion.