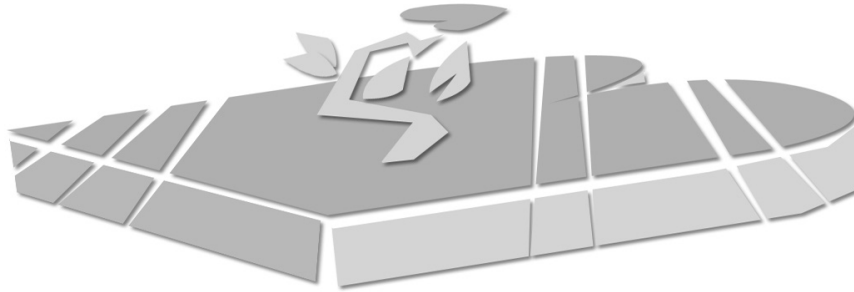


Love and Law



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 11

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Romans 12; Romans 13.

MEMORY VERSE: “Don’t [do not] live any longer the way this world lives. Let your way of thinking be completely changed. Then you will be able to test what God wants for you. And you will agree that what he [God] wants is right. His plan is good and pleasing and perfect” (Romans 12:2, Nlrv).

PAUL ENCOURAGED THE ROMANS to drop their false ideas of the law. But he also calls all Christians to a high standard (level) of obedience. This obedience comes from a change that takes place inside our hearts and minds. It is the change that happens in a person who has surrendered¹ to God and now has the power of God working through him or her.

This obedience does not happen without work. The Christian needs to learn what the standards of obedience are. He or she must then have the desire to obey and live by those standards. Finally, he or she should take hold of God’s power. Without this power, obedience is not possible.

Works are a large part of the Christian faith. Paul never meant to say that works are not necessary. In chapters 13, 14, and 15, he shows how important works are to faith. This does not mean that he denies what he said earlier about righteousness by faith.² Instead, works are the best way of showing what it means to live by faith. New Testament believers have been given a perfect example of how to live. This example is Christ. He is the only Pattern we should follow. “You should think in the same way Christ Jesus [not Moses, not Daniel, not David, not Solomon, not Enoch, not Deborah, not Elijah] does” (Philippians 2:5, Nlrv).

The standard does not—and cannot—get higher than that.

1. surrendered—to give one’s whole life to Jesus.

2. righteousness by faith—the truth that we are saved through faith in Jesus.

SUNDAY—SEPTEMBER 12**LIVING SACRIFICES³
(Romans 12:1)**

The closing chapters of Romans are very important. This is because they show how a person should live the life of faith.

Faith is *not* meant to take the place of obedience. Faith does not remove our need to obey the Lord. The Ten Commandments still must be kept. They are explained even more clearly in the New Testament. The Bible tells us that, at times, it could be difficult to live up to the law. This is because the battle with self and with sin is always hard (1 Peter 4:1). God promises to give the Christian His power to win this battle. And God encourages the believer that victory is possible. But we are still in the world of the enemy and will have to fight many difficult battles against temptation.⁴ The good news is that if we fall, we are not turned away but have a High Priest who works for us (Hebrews 7:25).



As long as we are in this world, we will have to fight many battles against temptation.

3. sacrifices—gifts or offerings given to God.

4. temptation—anything that can turn us away from God and that tries to get us to do, think, feel, or say what is wrong.

How does the example in Romans 12:1 show how we as Christians are to live? How does Romans 12:2 fit in with this?

In Romans 12:1, Paul is talking about Old Testament sacrifices. In Old Testament times animals were sacrificed to God. But now Christians should surrender their bodies to God. They are to serve God as living sacrifices.

In the days of Israel in Bible times, every animal that was to be used as a sacrifice was examined carefully. If the animal was not perfect, it was refused. This is because God commanded that the offering be perfect and without fault. So, God asks Christians to present their bodies as “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.” In order for them to do this, all their powers must be kept in the very best condition. It is true that none of us is perfect. But we should try to live as spotlessly and as faithfully as we can.

It is always easy to come up with excuses for our sins and faults. What is your common excuse for falling into the same trap over and over? Is it not time to start putting away the excuses and claim the promises? After all, the power of God is greater than your excuses.

MONDAY—SEPTEMBER 13**THINKING OF ONESELF
(Romans 12:3–21)**

We have talked a lot this quarter

about how God’s law stands forever. We have pointed out again and again that Paul’s message in the book of Romans does not remove (take away; get rid of) the Ten Commandments.

But it is easy to get so focused on the words of the law that we forget the spirit behind them. We also may forget that the spirit behind the law is love—love for God and love for one another. Anyone can claim love. But showing that love in everyday life is the true test.

According to Romans 12:3–21, how are we to show love for others?

After dealing with the gifts of the Spirit, Paul gives honor to love. Love (Greek *agape*) is the better way. “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Love describes the character of God.⁵ To love is to act toward others as God acts and to treat others as God treats them.

Paul here shows how that love can and should be shown in a useful way. One important principle (rule) comes up and that is personal humility (not proud). It means that you should not “think of yourself more highly than you should” (Romans 12:3, Nlrv). This also means that you should “love each other deeply. Honor others more than yourselves” (verse 10, Nlrv). And you should not “think that you are better than others” (verse 16, Nlrv). We need to take to heart the words Christ said about Himself, “Become my servants and learn from me. I am gentle and free

of pride” (Matthew 11:29, Nlrv).

Of all people, Christians should be the most humble. After all, we cannot save ourselves. We are sinful. We are dependent (needing another). We need righteousness (holiness) outside of ourselves to be saved. And we depend on a power that works in us to change us in ways we never could change ourselves. What do we have to brag about? What do we have to be proud about? Nothing at all! We should live as Paul advises us to in these verses, and we should start by being humble to God and to others.

Read Romans 12:18. How well are you using Paul’s advice in Romans 12:18 in your own life right now? Do you need to make some changes in your attitude (thoughts and feelings) so that you can do what the Bible tells us to do?



Love is the better way.

TUESDAY—SEPTEMBER 14

**WORKING WITH OUR LEADERS
(Romans 13:1–7)**

5. character of God—who God is; having and understanding the character of God is the same as being kind, loving, honest, and so on. God’s law (Ten Commandments) shows us His character.

What basic principles can we learn from Romans 13:1–7 about how we are to work with the government?⁶

What makes Paul’s words so interesting is that he wrote them during a time when a pagan⁷ empire (Rome) ruled the world. Rome could be very cruel and corrupt (dishonest). Rome knew nothing about the true God. A few years later, Rome would start a great war against Christians who wanted to worship that God. In fact, Paul was put to death by this government! Would Paul encourage Christians to be good citizens (members of a nation), even under a government like that?

Yes. And that is because the idea of government itself is found throughout the Bible. The principle of government is blessed by God. Humans (men, women, and children) need to live in a community⁸ with rules and laws. To have a country without government is not something the Bible encourages.

But this does not mean that God approves of all kinds of government or how these governments are run. In history and in the world today, there have been many cruel governments. But even in situations like these, Christians should, as much as they are able, obey the laws of the land. Christians should give loyal support to government if it is not opposed to God’s will (plan). One should think

very prayerfully and carefully before opposing (going against) the government. Prophecy⁹ tells us that all of God’s faithful followers one day will need to stand for God’s law against the ruling powers in control of the world (Revelation 13). Until then, we should do all that we can to be good citizens in whatever country we live in.

“God has blessed the government and its leaders. It is our sacred [holy] duty to obey our leaders and respect their power. But when obeying our leaders or laws means breaking God’s law, we must obey God rather than men. God’s Word [the Bible] must be recognized above all human governments. . . .

“We are not required to rebel [fight] against those in power. We should consider carefully what we say or write to our government. If not we put ourselves on record as seeming to oppose law and order. We are not to say or do anything that would unnecessarily close up our way.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*,¹⁰ page 69.

WEDNESDAY—SEPTEMBER 15

HOW WE SHOULD TREAT OTHERS (Romans 13:8)

How do we understand Romans 13:8? Does it mean that if we love, we do not need to obey the law of God?

6. government—the group of people who control and make decisions (laws; choices) for a country or state.

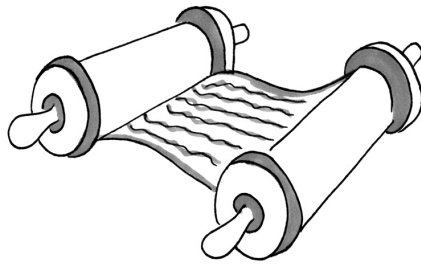
7. pagan—having to do with the worship of many gods or goddesses or the worship of the earth or nature.

8. community—a group of people living, working, or worshipping together.

9. prophecy—a special message from God, often an explanation of what will happen in the future.

10. apostles—the disciples (followers) of Jesus who preached and taught the gospel (the good news about Jesus) after Jesus rose from the dead and returned to heaven.

As Jesus did in the Sermon on the Mount, Paul is trying to make the law easier for people to understand. He shows that love must be the main reason for all that we do. The law reflects (shows) the character of God, and God is love. For this reason, to love is to fulfill (keep) the law. God's law still stands strong, because it points out sin. And who is going to say that sin is not real? But the law truly can be kept only on the basis of love. Remember, some of those who brought Christ to the cross then ran home to keep the law!



To love is to fulfill the law.

Which commandments did Paul use as examples in Romans 13:9, 10 to show the principle of love in law keeping? Why are these important?

Interestingly, love was not a new principle. Paul quotes Leviticus 19:18, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself" (NIRV). Paul shows that the principle of love is an important part of the Old Testament system. Again Paul uses the Old Testament to sup-

port his gospel (good news) preaching. Some use these verses to argue that Paul is saying that the few commandments he lists are the only ones we need to obey. If that were true, it would mean that Christians can dishonor their parents, worship idols (false gods), and have other gods before the Lord. That does not make sense.

Study the main message. Paul is dealing with how we relate to one another. He is dealing with personal relationships.¹¹ This is why he listed the commandments that centered on these relationships. His argument should not be used to say that the rest of the law does not stand. (Read Acts 15:20; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 1 John 5:21.) The New Testament writers also point out that by showing love to others, we show our love to God (Matthew 25:40; 1 John 4:20, 21).

Think about your relationship to God and how it shows up in your relationships with others. How important is love in those relationships? How can you learn to love others the way God loves us? What stops you from doing that?

THURSDAY—SEPTEMBER 16

NEARER THAN WE BELIEVED (Romans 13:11)

Paul had a very special reason for writing this letter to the Romans. It was to make the relationship between

¹¹ relationships—the way in which two or more people, groups, or countries talk to, behave toward, and deal with one another.

faith and works in the New Covenant¹² clearer to the church in Rome. The issue that Paul gave the greatest attention to was salvation and how a sinner is judged to be righteous (pure) and holy before the Lord. To help members who were legalists,¹³ Paul put the law in its right framework. Judaism, even in Old Testament times, was a religion of grace.¹⁴ But legalism¹⁵ arose and caused a lot of problems. We as a church need to be careful that we do not make the same mistake.

What event is Paul describing in Romans 13:11–14? How should we be acting as we wait for that event?

How interesting that Paul was talking to the believers. He was telling them to wake up and get ready because Jesus was coming back. That was written almost two thousand years ago. But we must always expect that the coming of Christ is near. Whether next week or in 40 years, we close our eyes in death. Whether we sleep for a few days or for 400 years, we will not know the difference when we are dead. The next thing we will know when we wake is that Jesus is coming. With death just around the corner for any of us, time is short. And our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.

Paul does not write much about

the Second Coming in the book of Romans. But in the Thessalonian and the Corinthian letters, Paul explains it with many details. After all, the Second Coming is a very important theme (idea; topic) in the Bible, especially the New Testament. Without it and the hope it offers, our faith really means nothing. What meaning does “justification by faith”¹⁶ have if the Second Coming does not happen?



Paul helped put the law in its right framework.

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

FRIDAY—SEPTEMBER 17

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “An Explanation [Making Clear

12. New Covenant—the promise or agreement between God and His people. It was made when Jesus died on the cross and rose from the grave.

13. legalists—people who believe that their obedience to the law saves them.

14. grace—God’s gift of forgiveness and mercy (kindness that is not deserved) that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

15. legalism—the belief that one can be saved by obeying the law.

16. justification by faith—the belief that being saved and forgiven depend only on the death of Jesus on the cross for our sins.

or Plain] of Early Statements,” pages 66–69, in *Selected Messages*, book 1; “Practical [Useful] Godliness,” pages 540, 541, in *Testimonies*¹⁷ for the Church, volume 5; “Our Attitude Toward the Civil Authorities [Teachers],” pages 394, 395, in *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 6; “The Tabernacle [House of God] and Its Services,” pages 352, 353, in *Patriarchs [Leaders] and Prophets [Special Messengers]*; “The Spirituality¹⁸ of the Law,” pages 49–51, in *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*.

“In the Bible, God’s will [plan] is shown. The truths of the Bible are God’s words. He who makes these truths a part of his life becomes a new person. He is not given new mental powers. Darkness caused by ignorance and sin has clouded the understanding. But it 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 followed by a firm decision [choice] to do Christian duty and by an understanding of truth. He or she who gives the Bible close and prayerful attention will gain clear understanding and good judgment. It is almost the same as reaching a higher level of thought when turning to God.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, page 24.

“The Lord . . . is coming soon, and we must be ready and waiting for His appearing. Oh, how glorious [wonderful] it will be to see Him and be welcomed as His saved ones! Long have

we waited! But our hope is not to grow weaker. If we can 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 those saved by His blood to their eternal [forever; without end] home.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 8, page 253.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① In class, go over the question at the end of Thursday’s lesson. What were the answers people gave?
- ② The question of how we should be good citizens and good Christians can be very difficult at times. Suppose someone asked you for advice about standing up for what he or she believed was God’s will. But what if taking this stand would get him or her in trouble with the government? What would you say? What advice would you give? What principles should you follow? Why is this something that we should treat very carefully? (After all, not everyone thrown into the lions’ den comes out unharmed.)
- ③ What do you think is harder to do: to follow the law strictly or to love God and to love others without limits or conditions? Or could you argue that this question shows a comparison¹⁹ of ideas that cannot be compared? If so, why?

17. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.

18. spirituality—new life given to us by God to lead Christ-centered lives; being born again.

19. comparison—the act of showing how two or more things are the same or different.