

September 6, 2026

“Obligated to Love”

Romans 13:8-14

### **Intro:**

There are two certainties in life: Death and Taxes.

While there is an inevitability to the first one, most of us would, I am sure, like to get out of paying our taxes. If any of you have been secretly cooking up schemes to avoid paying taxes, I have bad news for you. Biblically speaking, we are supposed to pay them. Not only did Jesus instruct his followers to “give to Ceasar what is his”, but the Apostle Paul very clearly re-states that instruction in Romans 13:6-7: “Pay your taxes, too, for the same reasons... Pay your taxes and government fees to those who collect them”

So there you have it. We have no excuse to be delinquent on our taxes. I’m sorry.

This line of thought isn’t just limited to paying taxes. At the beginning of verse 7, Paul says to “give to everyone what you owe them.” This has a much broader implication for the whole discussion around debt, borrowing and lending.

Some argue here that Paul is saying Christians should not carry any debt at all. Others argue that Paul wasn’t making a statement about not holding debt, but rather, that he was advocating making good on the promises of payment that you made in that transaction. If you promised the car company you would pay \$800 a month for that car loan, then you had better be able to pay it. Whichever side you land on, the common denominator is that debt should have an end, and we should work hard towards getting ourselves out of our debts.

### **Obligation of Love:**

There is an exception to that rule, however, and in verse 8 Paul gives it to us. Yes, he tells his readers that they are not to owe anything to anyone, but the exception is our obligation to love one another.

This is an interesting thought. Paul's words here turn the concept of loving others into a debt that we owe them, and an obligation we are bound to. More than that, it is a debt that can never be fully repaid – meaning that while we can make the final payment on a mortgage and be done with it, our obligation to show love to one another never gets to that final payment. None of us will wake up one day, show some love to one neighbour, and then be able to wash our hands of ever having to do that again to anyone else. In fact, if we read these words correctly, loving one another is a debt-load that we should be willing and eager to take on.

What does it mean to love one another and who are the “one anothers” that Paul is talking about?

In Matthew 22, Jesus is asked which is the most important commandment. Jesus' reply was, “to love the Lord your God with all your soul, strength, and mind,” and the second was, “to love your neighbour as yourself.” In this, he was making reference to Leviticus 19:18. That passage is part of a much longer discourse on how the Israelites were to treat and deal with one another in their own national context. They were instructions for those “on the inside”.

After Jesus is tested by that question, in Luke's account he is asked a follow-up question of who is one's neighbour. Jesus responds to that question by telling the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:30ff), clearly pushing the national boundaries to say that loving others is for all humanity, not just country-men.

Paul dials that back a bit and in this case, differentiates between those who are Christians and those who are not. Paul is not saying that Christians don't have an obligation to love non-Christians, but he asks how people who are outside of the family of God can recognize Christian love, if we can't even manage it within the family of believers. So, Paul is making a distinction between loving our neighbours and doing good to our neighbours. While we work at getting our heads on straight about how to love one another, we should be continuing in the practice of doing good to everyone, no matter where they stand with God.

## **Conclusion:**

Back to the original point: we are obligated to love one another. Within the Christian family, we owe it to one another to show genuine and full love to each other. This is the term of the debt that we made with each other when we covenanted together as children of God. Our communion as believers reminds us of this obligation, but it is also a part of the terms of the debt that we have with God.

This second point in all this is what the law given to Moses at Sinai was all about. It taught the Israelites how to understand the great mercy and grace that God gave them by setting them apart as His people, and Himself as their God. But the strict following of the letter of the law didn't succeed in fulfilling the intention of the law. **The intention of the law is fulfilled when we approach every aspect of relationship through the actions of love.**

So, Paul invites his readers to consider the law – the second half of the 10 commandments, as a way to demonstrate how we are to love one another well. His conclusion is found in verse 10: Love does no wrong to others. If the commandments Paul mentions: don't commit adultery, murder, steal, covet, and the other unnamed ones (which include no bearing false witness against others) are ignored and broken, the result is that "wrong". In other words, "harm" is done to others. So, if we want to know how to pay our debt of loving others, it is simply (or maybe not so simply) the intentional act of not causing anyone harm.

This is significant for us Christians to wrap our heads around. This is a challenge to us because we are often so very bad at following this within the church. Within Christian circles, we are constantly doing and saying things that cause harm to others. Sometimes they are unintentional – and we need to own up to those and make sure there is genuine remorse and apology as soon as possible. But all too often, those harmful things are done intentionally. Sitting here this morning, you might think some things like adultery or murder are pretty far fetched, but harmful words spoken out of jealousy are not so far away from us. Harmful words and actions based on a desire for power over others persist in the church. Refusal

to own our mistakes and to seek forgiveness, to begin with, drives wedges between believers and creates division and rifts within the family of God. And while all of that is going on inside the church, Christians try to do good deeds in the non-Christian world and wonder why it isn't making an impact. How can people accept the good we do, when they see the harmful ways we treat fellow Christians?

This morning I encourage and challenge all of us to very carefully consider our words and actions among and towards fellow Christians. Is there a risk of harm in anything we do or say? If there is, even if you are not sure, don't wait for "the right moment" to go and make it right. Do it right away. If you think that you might be the kind of person who struggles to recognize when what you say or do is hurtful, then ask a trusted Christian to help you to see and recognize those moments.

In all of this, keep close to mind the words of Paul in verse 14, to "clothe yourself with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Let's pray.