

November 12, 2023

“Freedom to Love”
Lesson 2

Romans 13:8-10
I Corinthians 13:8-13

Intro

In Scripture, two types of verses predominate: doctrinal verses (what we are to believe) and practical verses (what we are to do). The section in Romans that we look at today is in the middle of a section describing how we are to act toward civil authorities. Paul moves his focus from how we are obligated to act toward those authorities (13:1-7) to how we are to relate to other believers (13:8-10)

The section from 1 Corinthians is well known, but again, context is important. It's in the middle of a section going from chapter 12 to chapter 14, which deals with spiritual gifts. The Corinthian church had issues with an excessive focus on gifts, to the exclusion of practical Christian living.

Read Romans 13:8-10

1. vs. 8: The word “debt” in this verse carries the idea of “owing”
 - Paul has talked previously of what we owe to the government in terms of our actions
 - The debt here moves to what we owe in our actions to “one another”
 - Most of our debts we rightly view as needing to be paid off, to be acquitted
 - Paul says, “Let no debt remain outstanding”
 - But our debt of loving actions toward others is never one that gets paid off
 - “...the continuing debt to love one another”
 - Loving one another is fulfilling the law

2. vs. 9: The command to “love your neighbor” is phrased positively, a “do this” command
 - All of the 10 commandments Paul notes here are negatively phrased, “don't do this”
 - Christian love seeks first to do no harm to another
 - Then it seeks to actively work for the good of others
 - This seeking of good is not limited by Paul to the 10 commandments alone
 - He says, “and whatever other command there may be”...
 - Whatever is for the good of others is to be sought.

3. vs. 10: Paul finishes this section with a summary of his main points
 - Love does no harm
 - Love fulfills the law

Read I Corinthians 13:8-13

4. vs. 8: Paul places love above prophecy, tongues, and knowledge
 - It has the greatest “staying power”
 - The other gifts will cease, he says, but “love never fails”
 - Paul uses the word translated “never” only in this one place in all his letters
 - The three gifts mentioned can draw attention to themselves, trying to or not
 - None of them are as valuable as they are not being used out of love

5. vs. 9-10: These two verses help to explain why love is greater than any spiritual gift
Paul says that knowledge and prophecy and “in part”—they aren’t everything
But he says “when completeness (the perfect) comes, what is in part disappears”
The word for completeness can also be translated as “mature”
This is the same word comparing immature children to mature adults
The gifts are “in part”—they are not the mark of completeness or maturity
This idea is where Paul is heading in the next two verses
6. vs. 11: Paul refers here to a comparison between acting as a child and acting as an adult
The idea here is to compare immaturity to maturity
As childish (imperfect) things are put aside in growth, so imperfect spiritual things fade
We take on new spiritual responsibilities and interests; we put aside childish things
7. vs. 12: Paul uses one last analogy to show how the gifts are temporary, but something permanent is coming
The mirror reference is not to mirrors we know now; those were invented in 1835
The mirror Paul has in mind was polished metal
It does reflect an image, but one that is dim and distorted
So is our understanding now—dim and distorted compared to completeness/maturity
One day we shall “know fully” and be “fully known”
This could refer to Jesus’ coming
This could also be referring to the completion of the NT, God’s written revelation
As we mature in Christ, we shall certainly understand more
A big goal is for us to continually know Christ more, so we can be “fully known” by Him
8. vs. 13: This famous verse concludes Paul’s thoughts on Christian love in this chapter
All three (faith, hope, and love) are important: “these three remain”
But in terms of value or importance, love ranks highest
“But the greatest of these is love”
We will not need faith when we walk by sight in God’s presence in eternity
We will not need hope of salvation or of seeing Him when we are there with Him
But love is eternal—“love never fails” says Paul in vs. 8
Love is an attribute of God (I John 4:8, 16)
Love is the starting point and the goal for Christlikeness

Application: This section calls on us to put into practice what we say we believe: to love as Christ loved us—graciously, sacrificially, completely. As we “see” more clearly how to do this, we practice it by seeing more opportunities for showing God’s love to everyone in our world. As we do this, our spiritual vision keeps getting sharper. As we minister to others, we see that loving others is serving God. Because of Christ’s love, we are not to see people as the world does. They are people for whom Jesus gave His life, to reconcile them to God. We are to love them as God does, to do good for them like the is shown to the hurt man in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:33).

Prayer: Father God, soften our hearts where they have gotten calloused; help us see the needs of others around us. Help us follow Jesus’ example, and grow in Christlikeness in love toward others. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

