

THE FULFILLMENT OF THE LAW

Romans 13:8-10

Up to this point this year, we have been focusing on Jesus' central place in God's plan for our lives ("We need to follow Jesus because..."). Now, beginning this month, we will shift our focus to exploring some of the major characteristics that one must cultivate within their life when they commit to following Jesus ("Following Jesus involves..."). We will consequently devote ourselves to considering love's place in following Jesus, how it relates to his life and teachings and the place that it ought to consequently have in our lives.

The love-driven Bible

- Paul's comments about love's place in God's law exist as part of a group of passages in the New Testament that emphasize the important place God gives to loving other people.

Consider:

- **Matthew 7:12** - Jesus, in his Sermon on the Mount, stated that treating people the way that we want to be treated "is the law and the commandments"¹.
 - **Matthew 22:39-40** - Jesus taught that, along with the greatest command of loving God, loving "your neighbor as yourself" is the commandment upon which all of God's other commandments "depend".
 - **Matthew 5:43-48** - the command to love others, Jesus taught, offers a nonnegotiable expectation that extends even to our enemies.
 - **Galatians 5:13-14** - Paul wrote that God has "called us to freedom" so that we can lovingly serve one another, which prompted him to write that "the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself".
 - **John 13:34-45** - Jesus' life and teachings provide an important filter to understanding how to love others - our love for one another must mirror the love that characterized him.
 - **1 John 4:7-11** - God's unsolicited and generous love for us provides the motivation and template for our love for one another.
- The New Testament's many passages stating God's expectation that we love one another base themselves upon the love God commanded the Israelites to show to one another in the Old Testament (*Leviticus 19:17-18*).
 - Despite the common perception that the Old Testament does not focus on love like the New Testament, it does focus on love but in a different way than the New Testament.
- Consider:
- The Old Testament contains God's revelation of Himself and His character to Israel and through Israel (*Exodus 6:2-8; 19:1-20; Deuteronomy 4:5-8*).

¹ All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.

- God focused His self-revelation on the covenant He made with Israel that detailed the thinking and behaviors He expected of the nation, expectations that He intended to help the nation learn to be like Him (*Leviticus 19:2; Exodus 34:5-7*). Consider, for example:
 - ***Leviticus 19:33-34*** - God commanded the Jews to love the foreigners living among them, reminding them of their own time as foreigners in Egypt.
 - ***Deuteronomy 10:17-19*** - God commanded the Israelites to show care and compassion towards the marginalized and powerless in their world in a way that mirrored His own treatment of the Jewish people.
 - ***Deuteronomy 15:1-18*** - God's command to love one's neighbor expressed itself in challenging standards like the surprising generosity He legislated in the Israelites' relationships, a standard He expected them to meet without complaint or bitterness.
- God's insistence upon loving people, the surprising expectations of that love, and its connection to His character reveals a few insights that help us begin to see why Paul wrote that "love is the fulfillment of the Law":

The differences between God's teachings about loving others and the daily reality of relationships in our world reveals the difficulty we have loving one another (cf. James 2:1-13; Matthew 5:43-48).

The struggles we experience in our relationships with one another exist because we tend to love self more than we love one another (James 3:16; 1:13-15; Romans 3:9-18, 23).

Love's connection to Jesus and God reveals that loving one another has specific, non-negotiable standards (John 13:34-35; 1 John 4:8).

God's declaration that He "is love" offers an important truth - His actions and instructions outline the look and character of love (1 John 4:8); love that does not match the example of His love is not real love.