



[Romans 13:8-10](#)

(8) Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. (9) The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (10) Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

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Paul presents us with an interesting paradox. On the one hand, he says that we should owe no man anything that he can rightfully claim from us. But on the other hand, we must owe everyone more than we can [hope](#) to pay, that is, perfect love.

He extends and intensifies the concept of obligation. We must be more scrupulous within the limits of the common idea of indebtedness, and also infinitely widen the range within which it operates. Did not our failure to meet our obligations to [God](#) and man accrue for us an unpayable debt? Now that the debt has been paid, we are obliged not only to strive to avoid further indebtedness, but also to expand and perfect the giving of love.

This paradox is more apparent than real, because love is not an added duty but the inclusive framework within which all duties should be done. Love is the motivating power that frees and enables us to serve and sacrifice with largeness of heart and generosity of spirit.

If we view love as just the keeping of God's laws, we are stuck on a low-level, letter-of-the-law approach to righteousness. Do not misunderstand,

keeping God's law is a necessary aspect of love, but love is far more complex. Commandment keeping is compulsory and can be done in an "only because" attitude, one that concludes, "I must love the person, but I don't have to like him." Drawing upon Christ's teaching, Paul gives an entirely new significance to the idea of obligation.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

[Passover, Obligation, and Love](#)

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