

# Romans 13:8-9

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## Our Responsibilities Under Grace - Part 11

by Dr. Wayne A. Barber

How many times are we tempted to take verses out of their context? The rule of study is observation, interpretation and application. When you take something out of context you misuse what God has put before us. Some people actually do that with Scripture. You grab a verse here and you grab a verse there and you build a doctrine off of it that has nothing to do with the context from which that statement came.

We use the statement all the time, "When two or three are gathered together, I am always in the midst." The context of that is when you are dealing with an unruly brother, a brother who has sinned, and two of you have gone to him. When two or three are gathered together, it is in the context of relationships. It is in the context of those kinds of situations. But we use it for everything. Staying in context is very, very important.

I am talking about that because we are coming to a verse that I believe people have taken out of its context and made to mean one thing when, if you will follow the flow of what Paul is saying, doesn't mean that at all.

What is the context? The first 11 chapters of Romans is the greatest teaching on grace you can find anywhere in the New Testament. It is what we don't deserve but what God has done for us through the Lord Jesus Christ.

You come to 12:1-2 and what does it talk about? It talks about presenting your body. Why do you present your body? Out of appreciation for what God has done for us. Eleven chapters of it. You are overwhelmed. Paul says, "Man, all things are of Him and

through Him and to Him, the marvelous wonder of it all." Then he says, "Therefore, present your bodies a living sacrifice."

Over in Ephesians he talks about being filled with the Spirit. This is the same thing. Do you want to know how to be filled with the Spirit? Present your body a living sacrifice. That is what he is talking about. Why? Because these bodies are bodies of sin. Romans 6:6, 12 tells us that. These bodies are deceitful bodies. These bodies will lead us on a path of destruction. We used to be helpless and could not do anything about the power of sin in these bodies. Now that we are saved, the power of God is within us and therefore now we can choose not to follow after our flesh but we can choose to follow after the Spirit. How do you do that? By presenting your body. How do you present your body? By renewing your mind. Verse 2 talks about that. Make sure you rip out the way you used to think and put in the way God wants you to think. What happens? You are transformed in your character. You get to test for yourself what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. That is the context.

Now, I know we are in chapter 13. But if you lose sight of 12:1-2, then it is no wonder you are struggling in your Christian walk. You have got to stay right here, surrendered, broken and yielded. Everything flows out of that well. Everything happens differently. All your relationships take on a brand new perspective. In Romans 12:3-8, you begin to realize that the church is not an organization, it is an organism and it is the body of Christ. We are all gifted members of the body of Christ. You begin to realize that we have gifts to serve one another. And the way we serve is out of these gifts which God has given. I have certain gifts, and you have certain gifts. Those gifts are utilized, when we are surrendered, to serve the body of Christ. You are not in the body of Christ to be served. You are in the body of Christ to serve.

Romans 12:9-21 show us that if the love produced by the Holy Spirit of God, which is a love without hypocrisy, is not there, then all of our serving makes absolute nonsense to the world. It means nothing to God. It means nothing to people. It is nothing more than just pure flesh.

You see, he talks about the gifts first. But remember something: you can fake any gift, but you can't fake the fruit. That is what the Holy Spirit of God produces within us. It produces a love without hypocrisy and from verse 9 all the way to verse 21 he explains how that love operates.

In verses 17 through 21 he even moves it outside the church walls to people who treat you terribly, to when you are persecuted by the government or enemies or whatever. They were in Rome, which was the capital city of the Roman Empire.

But then you come into chapter 13. For seven verses Paul doesn't do anything but insert something that is incorporated into love, this love that God's Spirit produces within us. It gives us a respect for authority. It gives us an appreciation for authority. We begin to understand God appointed authority. And out of the love that we have for Him, now we are enabled and empowered to be submissive to that authority.

Then he adds something none of us like. He adds the proof of it all in verses 6 and 7, which is the fact that we are willing to pay taxes. We think we are overtaxed. I tried to show you when we touched those verses that they were more taxed than we have ever thought about being taxed. Yet in the context of Nero, the Emperor of Rome at that time, the Apostle Paul says, "Pay your taxes."

It is out of that context we come to verses 8-9, as he brings us full circle. Paul inserted seven verses to show you how to deal with those authorities in your life and then he comes right back to his topic of this love without hypocrisy. Romans 13:8 says, "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law."

Now there are several things I want to share with you. First of all, I want you to see that you and I owe a debt that we must pay. There is a song we used to sing years ago. It depicted a person without Christ: "We owed a debt we could not pay. He paid a debt He did not owe. I needed someone to take my sins away." That is exactly the way it was.

But folks, that is before we were saved. Now that we are saved, the Holy Spirit of God has come to live within us and now we have a debt we must pay. We are going to be obligated to God to pay it. That verb is in the present imperative. Present tense means this should be going on every day in our life, every moment of our life, in every relationship that God puts in our life. The imperative mood means it is a command. This is not an option, not a suggestion. The Apostle Paul says we have a debt and we are commanded by a Holy God to pay it. It is present tense. It is not going to be paid until Christ comes back again. It is being paid every day in every relationship that we have.

So what is that debt? That we love one another. "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law." Relationships started back in 12:3. We are still in relationships in 13:8.

Now, this is not saying that I cannot go out and borrow money. That is not what Paul is talking about. If you will look in verse 7, there is your context. Verse 7 says, "Render to all [government authority] what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor."

Then verse 8 carries the thought on by saying, "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another." If it even implies personal debt, then it would mean don't ever be late on your payment, don't overextend yourself, don't borrow to the point you can't pay and mar your testimony. But to me that is not what he is talking about here. He is saying, when it comes to our submission to civil government, when it comes to the organization of government that God has put around us, never be found lacking in money paying your taxes or in respect that is due to all these people. As a matter of fact, owe nothing except to love them. Let that be the supreme debt that you are constantly paying, not only to one another in the church, not only to governmental officials around you, but to everybody, every relationship that you have. This is what you owe that you will always be paying. That is what I believe he is talking about here.

It is amazing to me how you can take one little verse out and put it over here and build a doctrine off of it. That is not what he is talking about at all. He is saying, "Don't ever be found lacking when it comes to the proper respect and the proper taxes that are due to those that are around you."

"Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another." The "anyone" there would be those that he just mentioned in verse 7. Then he says, "for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law." He is going to quote that phrase again in verse 10. We are commanded. God has always demanded a character out of His creation, the character of love. The first five commandments deals with loving Him first, and the second five commandments focus on loving others. That is what the law is. That is what we couldn't do back when we were lost. That is what we are enabled to do now that we are saved. This character is this love. It's the love that the Holy Spirit produces, back in Romans 12:9, without hypocrisy. That is what fulfills the law.

How do you know somebody is spiritual? Listen, it is not how high you jump. It is not how many tongues you think you can speak in. It is not how exciting your ministry is supposed to be. It is not all of that shouting and stuff. It is how straight you walk in the matter of your relationships.

Now you think about it. In every relationship that God has given to you, is there a love without hypocrisy being produced in your life that measures to the qualifications of chapter 12, that measures to the fact that daily you sense the need and the debt that you owe to somebody to show Christ's love to them? I wish we could see this. If I have received His love in me and the person of the Holy Spirit is the one who manifests it, then as I am presented, Romans 12:1-2, then that love can be released through me and touch every single relationship that is in my life whether it is a one time thing or whether it is a long term situation. That love is supposed to be constantly being released in our lives.

Not only do we owe a debt that we must pay, but we owe a debt that we cannot pay unless the Spirit of God is in control of our lives. I want to show you what Paul does here in verse 9. I know you can go to a commentary and find all kinds of things, but what I see he is doing in this text is very valid to the context that we have been looking at. He is going to show them again the frustration of flesh trying to live up to the law. You have got to keep it in context. If I am not surrendered, then I am not paying a debt. Not only am I not paying a debt, I couldn't pay that debt if I wanted to. I have to be surrendered in order to be able to pay that debt of loving one another.

Watch what he does in verse 9. He quotes out of the Mosaic Law. This is what was there before you got saved. This is what condemns you. The flesh responded to it. The flesh couldn't do it and was condemned because of it. Verse 9 reads, "For this, 'You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet,' and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

The New American Standard lists four commandments. The King James adds one to make it five commandments. We will look at that. Paul takes five commandments right out of the Mosaic law. Why would Paul do that? I think it is to show us that if we are not surrendered, if we are not back in Romans 12:1-2, all this becomes is some legalistic way we measure ourselves and judge others because they are not doing what we are doing.

Alright, watch. "You shall not commit adultery." The word for "adultery" there is moicheuo. You are probably sitting there saying, "I am not committing adultery. Why is he getting on my case?" Paul taunted the Jewish people in Romans 2:22. Look over there and let me show you what he did. These were the religious crowd and they were just as lost as the rebellious crowd. Sometimes we forget this. It is not so much what you do or don't do on the outside. It has more to do with what is on the inside. He says in verse

22, "You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?" Boy, you can just see what is going on in their minds. "What? Are you accusing me of committing adultery? What do you mean? We are living up to the law. We are measuring up to the law."

Paul is going somewhere with this. You may be sitting there thinking all these commandments are how you treat relationships, how you treat one another. You do not commit adultery because the love of God within you will not allow you to do something like that. But are we guilty sometimes of doing it without actually committing the act?

Look over in Matthew 5 and see what Jesus had to say. As a matter of fact, the Apostle Paul is doing exactly the same thing Jesus did over here in the Beatitudes. He is going deeper than what you do or don't do. He is going deeper inside. You see, we owe a debt we must pay. But we owe a debt we can't pay unless the Holy Spirit of God is in control of our lives. Our flesh will automatically disqualify itself. Watch.

Matthew 5:27 says, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart." What he is saying is, it is not just the action, it is the attitude of sin and the flesh part of us. The flesh part of every person is that which will lust after someone. It is wicked. That is where it all comes from. That is where the lust of the flesh resides. What he is saying is, "You may not have committed the act, but there have been times when lust has been in your heart; and when that lust was there, you just qualified yourself in that commandment." Is there any man who wants to stand up and say they can absolutely, totally obey that commandment without the Holy Spirit of God living in them? No man would be foolish enough to stand up and say they could.

You see, he is reminding them of something here. Paul said, "According to the law I was found blameless." Yes, but he was lost. God had to stop him on the Damascus Road and save him. But he did all the things or didn't do the things he was told not to do. But it was deeper than that. There was something on the inside and no man according to his own flesh can obey this law.

So this kind of love that we are talking about, this kind of debt that we owe has got to be something that God has to enable us to do. It is the Holy Spirit of God producing this. Man in his flesh cannot do that.

Well, look at the next one. I know you are going to say, "I am clear on this one." "You shall not murder." The word for "murder" there means murder. You say, "Well, I have never killed anybody." Now be real careful. You see, some people will be proud enough to say, "I have obeyed every one of those. What else is there?" It is kind of like the rich young man one time who said, "What must I do to be saved?" And Jesus said, "Obey the commandments" and then he began to list them. He said, "Oh, I have done all of those." He couldn't recognize the fact that he hadn't done any of them because his flesh is not capable of doing any of them. It must be by God's Spirit working within your heart.

You say, "I have never murdered anybody. Why, I wouldn't hurt a flea." Oh, is that right? Look at what Jesus said about that in Matthew 5:21. He said, "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'" Now watch what Jesus says. "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell."

You mean to tell me that anger with my brother is actually the same heartbeat as murder? Folks, when are we going to wake up? You can murder somebody's character by what you say about them. Listen, the whole idea of misrepresentation of somebody is the idea here of murdering that individual.

The Apostle Paul said in 2 Timothy, writing from his last imprisonment, "Timothy, watch out for this man. Watch out for this man." Then he names Alexander the coppersmith. If you want to find out who Alexander the coppersmith was, you go back in scripture to the book of Acts. You will find Paul in Ephesus when the riot happened. Alexander was the one who got up to give a proclamation of the gospel. He was a Jewish man but evidently was a believer. Then in another epistle he says that Alexander rejected his teaching. What teaching? The Apostle Paul taught the pure message of grace and here was a man who couldn't handle the message of grace. He wanted that legalism. He wanted the law added to it. Therefore, he said he blasphemed me. That word "blasphemed" means to tear a person's reputation down behind his back with what you say.

"Oh, I have never murdered anybody." Friend, every time you open your mouth in a negative way about somebody, you have just done the same thing as if you took his life away from him. You took the reputation away. You sucked their character away by what you said. You know, James 3 says that we all offend in many ways. What is the whole theme of James 3? No man can control the tongue.

I am one who believes adamantly that the devil cannot get inside a Christian. I believe that and will believe that until I see the Lord Jesus one day. I believe that the devil cannot get inside a Christian; however, he can put a saddle right on your tongue of a believer and murder somebody's reputation and somebody's character. You want to try this after the flesh? I want to tell you something; your flesh will react to relationships. It will not respond properly to God and His Holy Spirit. Have I been guilty of it? Absolutely I have been guilty of it. Not a one of us could point a finger at anybody. I warned you back in chapter 12. If you are listening to these verses like, "I sure hope somebody hears that," then you need to go back to 12:1-2 and get your heart right with God.

Now hear me straight. It's not my brother, not my sister, it is me standing in the need of the grace of God. If you see it any other way, folks, you evidently think you have arrived and that is the height of pride right there. It is where am I in this situation. Oh, I wouldn't take a hammer and hit anybody or I wouldn't take a gun and shoot anybody, but what I say about them hurts them a lot worse.

When I was growing up we used to say, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." That is a lie from the pit of hell. Words will do a whole lot more damage because what is broken with sticks and stones will heal; what has been said about a person will go on forever. I remember a man in our church years ago. Somebody came up with a rumor about him and it literally almost ruined that man's life. It hit the news in town. Somebody picked up a rumor and ruined a man's character just because of that.

We must be very, very careful to listen to what Paul is saying here. You cannot pay this debt unless the Holy Spirit of God is absolutely in control of your life. You can't live up to this. Your flesh won't do it. It will fall short. "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." He is talking about men who live after their flesh.

Thirdly he says, "You shall not steal." "Now, I haven't stolen anything. Come on, I have integrity. When I get too much change back at the store, I give the change back. I wouldn't steal anything." Careful. Careful. The word for "steal" is klepto. Guess what word we get out of that. Kleptomaniac. Now that is not a person who steals one time, is it? That is a person who has an addiction to stealing, all the time taking.

We found that word over in Ephesians 4. Turn over there with me. It is in the context of putting on and taking off the garment of Christ. He says, "Take off the old man," as far as the behavior goes and put on the new man, which is Christ in you. The new person is what you have become in Him. "Stop living as if you are not saved," is what he is saying in Ephesians. He is talking about what the old garment looked like and what the new garment looks like. It is very, very interesting. Verse 22 says to take off, and verse 24 says to put on. Look at verse 28: "Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need."

In the context of putting on the new garment, we discover that if what you are taking off used to steal, then the characteristic of the old lifestyle, the characteristic of the old garment of the flesh is that it is a thief. It will rob you. Now, it is one thing to walk into a store and pick up something that is not yours and walk out of it. That is one thing. But there are others ways of stealing, folks, just like there are other ways of murdering. There are other ways of committing adultery except in the actual act. It can be done other ways. How can I steal other ways? I can rob you of your time, your energy or your emotions.

Do you realize a person who is not living in Romans 12:1-2, surrendered and obedient to God, is a person who is a taker? He is a depleter. The person who is living in the newness of life of Romans 12:1-2 is a replenisher. He is a giver. That is exactly what this verse is talking about. You go to work with your hands so that you can give. Quit taking and start learning to work so you will have something so that you can give to other people. The whole root thought of that is the flesh takes but the Spirit gives.

Which would you rather be around, somebody living after the flesh, a taker, or somebody living in Romans 12:1-2 who is a giver? I tell you, when you have been around people who serve after the flesh, they will suck everything out of your life. They will take your time. They could care less about you or anything else about you. But when you are walking in the Spirit, it constantly wants to give, to give, to give. That is where it all comes from. So when you try to live this just by simply overtly saying that I have never stolen anything, be real careful. Stealing goes a lot beyond just taking something that is not yours. You are a thief when you live after the flesh, a free-loader if you please, riding on other people, trying to get out of them what is really not yours to take.

There is not a one of us who hasn't done that. Our flesh manipulates. Our flesh wants only for itself. You say, "You sound like you know a lot about the flesh." Yes, I do. I have to deal with it every day of my life. I wish I could say, "Live like me." No, don't live like me, but help me live like we all ought to live. You see, that is where we are accountable to one another. The scripture says that you

cannot do this except as Romans 12:1-2 tells us.

The third thing Paul mentions I think is just as important. The King James puts it in, but the New American Standard leaves it out: "Thou shalt not bear false witness." The word is pseudomartureo. Martureo means to witness something. In a courtroom sense, it would be to bear false witness against somebody, either to lie about something or to refuse to say what you know to be true to help that person. In other words, just by your refusal to say it sometimes you can bear a false witness against someone.

But in a broader sense, in the Christian life it has more to do with being deceitful by the way you live. It goes right on down to the very fact of lying itself. It is a person who lives and by what he does bears a false witness, a deception against another person by what he says or however he insinuates in his life. Now, over in Matthew 19:18, Jesus said to the man who asked what commandments he should obey, "You shall not commit murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness."

The same idea is in Ephesians 4:25. The old garment is deceptive. It will bear false witness. It will lie in a minute. Now remember, the broader sense of bearing false witness is simply to be deceitful and to lie. As you narrow it down, it has even more to do with relationships. In Ephesians 4:25 look at what Paul says. "Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another."

Now again, we are talking about laying aside this old garment and putting on this new one. What was the old? The old garment deceives. The old garment will lie in a minute. The old garment will bear false witness. That is the flesh. But when you put on the new, you can only tell the truth. The truth is something the Holy Spirit of God leads you to do.

It is incredible how quickly we will lie, how quickly we will deceive, how quickly we will bear false witness when we are walking after the flesh and not after the Spirit of God. The Apostle Paul, led by the Spirit of God, is so wise here. He is saying, "Listen, this is not some group of legalistic rules here. You can't do this unless you go back to Romans 12:1-2 and surrender yourself fully to Him. And when you let His Word get into your mind it will transform your character and there will be a new garment you have on and that garment will not let you lie."

We owe a debt we must pay, but we owe a debt we can't pay unless the Holy Spirit of God enables us to do it. If you are not walking in light of Romans 12:2, it is no wonder your relationships are shattered relationships. When your relationship to God is what it ought to be, your relationships towards others is going to be incredibly different. It is going to be the reflection of what God the Holy Spirit is doing in your heart.

Well, the last one he mentions there is "You shall not covet." Now the word "covet" is the word also translated lust, epithumeo. It is the word that we also discovered in Romans 7:7. Look there, because I want to show you something. In verse 7 you see the law, this command, these things that he is quoting out of here. The character that God demands automatically condemns all flesh because no flesh can live up to it. This is the character of God. He demonstrated His righteousness by the way He sent Jesus to die for us. He demands this of all His creation, but we can't do it. Verse 7 reads, "What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, 'You shall not covet.'"

In other words, Paul said, "I was just going around trying to do my best for God as a Jew. I didn't realize about coveting until the law came and said, 'You shall not covet.'" Verse 8 continues, "But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the law sin is dead." Let me show you what he is saying. He is saying, "Listen, when the law came out, my flesh just came alive. My flesh loves to try to obey. My flesh has always deceived me." Yours has, too, by the way. If you think you can live any of this in the energy of your flesh, you are already deceived, folks.

So the Apostle Paul said, "'Do not covet.' Okay, I won't covet today." He got up that morning and what did he do all day long? Covet, covet, covet. Everywhere he looked he was coveting. Suddenly it dawned on him, "Oh, there is something in me that is causing this to happen. I can will it not to happen, but there is something about me that wants to covet." That is why it has got to be surrendered at all times to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. These bodies are bodies of sin and they will not cooperate with the Holy Spirit. They cannot co-exist. One has to live through the other. One dominates the other. That is what it is all about. Covet, covet, covet.

You may say, "Well, I have never coveted. I am just very grateful for what I have." Is that right? Go back to chapter 12 where it says to rejoice when others rejoice and weep when they weep. "Oh, I can rejoice when others rejoice." Can you? I guarantee you that you can't. Let somebody have a million dollars dropped on them. Out loud you may say, "I am so glad for you," but inside your flesh is saying, "God, why didn't you give that to me? I deserve it." That is the way we are. You can't live any of these, folks. They are

relationship words. Do you recognize in this that if you are not walking in Romans 12:1-2 every relationship that you touch is poisoned because of the wickedness of your flesh. Do we see this?

I may back off and say, "I don't do any of those five things." God is going to say, "You are not looking close enough. Now let's open the door and go inside. I guarantee you that you are guilty of all five of them." The flesh is totally inadequate to do what the Spirit of God commands. The only thing that can enable us is when we are filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit of God. For 15 years now I have been trying to preach the truth of the Christ-life, a vessel through which Christ manifests His power and His life and His character. I am not sure if it has ever caught on. Sometimes I wonder if it is caught and not taught. I wonder if the light has just got to turn on inside of somebody.

The Apostle Paul is bringing us right back into context. He is saying that this love without hypocrisy that can only be produced by the Holy Spirit of God is something you owe as a debt to every single relationship God allows in your life until Jesus comes back. And folks, the longer you live the more important you are going to see relationships because when we get to heaven one day, there are not going to be buildings. There are not going to be programs. There is only going to be people and that is who God sent His Son to die for. So therefore, if we do what we do at the expense of relationships, we have denied the very principle of what God has taught us about what the Christ-life is all about. I must be under the control of the Spirit of God for any relationship around me to be what God wants it to be, whether it is my family, my children, you, or people out in the world. The reflection of a spiritual walk is not how loud you can shout, it is not how high you can jump. It is how straight you walk when you come down as it comes to relationships. That is the bottom line.

Jesus said in John 13:35, "By this shall all men know that you are My disciples by the fact that you love one another." Go over to Galatians 5. I want you to see this from another angle. Paul wrote both books and they are commentaries on each other. Paul says the same thing in Galatians 5:14 that he just said in Romans 13:8-9. Galatians 5:14 says, "For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" Now, jump back to Romans 13:9 and look at the last part of the verse. He quotes the very same thing. He is trying to show us something. The Holy Spirit of God lives in me to fulfill the law that He requires out of me. I have got to be surrendered or it won't happen. Romans 13:9 says, "and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" That is exactly what Galatians 5:14 is referring to.

Paul is saying this love is to be shown selflessly to the relationships around you, first of all within the church and then without the church. Do you know why I think he concentrates so much on the church? If we don't learn to love people inside the church, we will never love people outside the church. We are the perfect ones to love somebody. We have received God's love. We ought to love one another. If we are not doing it in the church, we are not going to be doing it out there. The love that the Spirit of God produces is what fulfills the character requirement that God has had on all of His creation even since the very beginning.

Look at Galatians 5:22: "But the fruit of the Spirit [that which is produced by the Spirit] is love,..." Then he qualifies it. With this love comes other things. Are you looking for joy in your life? Look here: "...joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." Now when is the Holy Spirit of God going to produce that love in me? Romans 12:1-2 tells us. I sound like a broken record, don't I? Context, context, context. Stay in it. You cannot do these things unless you are filled with the Spirit of God. It is God enabling you.

This is the beautiful truth that I want to show you. Not only am I commanded to pay a debt, under grace I am enabled to pay that debt. I make the choice. God takes it from there and produces within me the very ability to do what under the law I could never do according to my flesh. Now in the power of His Spirit and under His grace, I am able to do what I couldn't do before.

Romans 13:10 says, "Love does no wrong to a neighbor." The Paul quotes it one more time, "love therefore is the fulfillment of the law."

Folks, you owe a debt. You are riding down the road, breaking the speed limit and a cop stops you. You owe him a debt. You owe. I owe. I want to tell you something. When we get off this kick of thinking that everybody owes us and get back in Romans 12:1-2 where we belong, we are debtors, folks, we are debtors until the day Jesus comes for His church. And we owe every single person we come in contact with the debt of loving them. Now sometimes the love God manifests in our life is not what they are looking for. That is the kind of love John talked about that says the world hasn't got a clue what you are talking about. Sometimes it is tough and it hurts but it does what we believe to be the best for that individual. But we owe that debt to everyone.

I want to tell you something, the longer you live the more this truth is going to start grabbing hold of you and you are going to realize the debt, the huge debt you have incurred over the years and you haven't paid. Relationships, folks, are where it all is.

The Apostle Paul had a situation with John Mark. On his first missionary journey they got to Pamphylia and John Mark bailed out on him. He would not go on with him. It so affected the Apostle Paul that later on they were going on another missionary journey and Barnabas came up to him and said, "Listen, let's take John Mark." The Word says there was a sharp disagreement between the two of them and Paul said, "No way is John Mark going with me." Barnabas said, "Okay, I will take him." He said, "Okay, you go your way and I will take Silas and we will go our way." They departed company over John Mark.

Later in 2 Timothy 4 we find Paul in prison. He writes Timothy and says, "Timothy, I am cold. I am bored. And I am so lonely." These were the last days of his life, folks. What do you expect in your Christian walk? Do you know what he wanted? He wanted relationships. That is what he wanted. He said, "By the way, will you bring John Mark to me? He is useful to me."

Do you know why I think John Mark bailed out on him? Because he couldn't take grace. All of these guys came out of Jerusalem and they couldn't stand the message of grace. They had to add something to it. Plus he was scared to death of the persecution Paul was getting because of preaching it. John Mark bailed out, but in the last days, Paul said, bring him to me. He is important to me.

I look down over the years of ministry that God has allowed me to have and I see the scars of when debts were not paid in loving people in relationships. Don't you point a finger at them. God says it is our debt. We are commanded to pay every one He allows us to be related to while we are here on this earth. That is the key. Owe no man anything except to love him. Let that be a constant outstanding debt that you are paying until Jesus comes back.