

# Love And Fulfilling The Law

**Romans 13:8-10** [NIV] *“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow-man has fulfilled the law. 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 neighbour as yourself.’ Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.”*

When we consider Paul’s teaching about the relationship between love and the law, it is interesting how we seem naturally inclined to reverse it.

We seem to find ourselves more comfortable with the idea of the law fulfilling love than we are with the idea of love fulfilling the law.

## Love and law

**When it comes to relationships, most of us like to know where we stand.**

We don’t feel comfortable not knowing whether others like us or don’t like us.

**We feel better if we have some clear evidence, some way to measure where we stand with others.**

Maybe that is why we find ourselves more comfortable with the law being the fulfilment of love, than love being the fulfilment of the law.

**The statement, “love is the fulfilment of the law,” does not mean the same thing as the statement, “the law is the fulfilment of love.”**

**The first statement makes love the principal thing and the law the secondary thing.**

**The second statement makes the law the principal thing and love the secondary thing.**

But that is **not** what Paul is saying.

**A person can keep the law without loving.**

**But one cannot love without the law being fulfilled in them.**

**The law gives instruction in the ways that one who loves will live, [Romans 3:20; Romans 7:7].**

**But the difference between the law and love is that love works from the inside and the law works from the outside.**

## Different motivation

**A person motivated by love does not need to be told to behave in a loving way; a person motivated by law does.**

**Maybe that is why we tend to get uncomfortable with the idea that faith in Christ has superseded the law, as a means of salvation.**

**We fear that unless there is an outside agent, the law, compelling us to behave rightly, we probably won't.**

We know our love is weak, so we don't trust ourselves to behave with love without a threat of unpleasant consequences as motivation.

The problem with that is obvious: **Love cannot be compelled, forced, coerced or threatened into being.**

**Love is freely given and freely received, or it isn't love at all.**

Love is unconditional; anything short of unconditional is something other than love.

## **Conditional love**

**If we withhold our love from others, making it conditional upon whether they are at any given moment pleasing us or doing what we want them to do, then we are being manipulative, not loving.**

When we love others, we love them for who they are, **not** for what we want them to be.

More precisely, as Christians, we love others for who God has made them to be in Christ, **not** for who we want them to be for us.

It is only when we drop the selfish habit of withholding love from others until they adequately please us, that we can also free ourselves from the prison of striving to please others in order to win or retain their love.

## **Unconditional love**

*"Love is blind"* is an old saying that **illustrates how silly the common understanding of love is.**

It is usually taken to mean that love does not see the flaws, problems and warts of the object of love, and is therefore naïve.

**That is a good description of infatuation.**

**But it is a terrible description of love.**

**Love is honest.**

**It sees things as they really are, and loves what is real, not some image.**

**A good marriage, for example, is one in which each partner, in love, puts up with the various selfish, immature and obnoxious behaviours of the other.**

The partners do **not** waste their emotions and energies trying to manipulate and manage each other through the typical shame games, guilt-trips and favour withholdings that plague so many marriages.

**To love your neighbour [Matthew 19:19] is to know full well what you are dealing with, one flawed, imperfect and weak human being relating to another, and to love in spite of it all.**

**The point is:** Godly love is **not** based on whether the one being loved measures up; love travels in a different universe from that, and its chariot is forgiveness.

The Greek word for Godly love is “*agapé*” a spontaneous love irrespective of the “*rights*” or response of the recipient, [Romans 5:8] a sacrificial love, [John 3:16-17] that puts aside personal desires, [Philippians 2:5-8] to love the object of that love.

## **Forgiveness: root and fruit of love**

**Luke 7:36-38** [NIV] *“Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.”*

Naturally, the Pharisee thought this intrusion irregular, but said nothing.

He simply thought to himself: *“If this Jesus were really a prophet, he would know what kind of big-league sinner this woman is.”*

The implication being, righteous men don’t relate to sinners, especially women sinners.

Jesus knew his thoughts, though, and asked him this: *“Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he cancelled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?”*

*“Simon replied, ‘I suppose the one who had the bigger debt cancelled.’*

*“‘You have judged correctly,’ Jesus said.”* [Luke 7:41-43].

Then Jesus turned to the woman and said to Simon: *“Look, Simon. You didn’t show me any particular love when I got here, but this woman certainly did, and big time. And you know why? Because she is a big-time sinner who needs her sins forgiven, and she trusts me to do it, so she loves me big time. But you? Well, you know, Simon, you don’t think you need much in the way of forgiveness, at least not from me, so you don’t show me much love. It’s like that with people who think they are reasonably righteous, they don’t love much, but people who know they are sinners and want my forgiveness, well, my grace inspires them to great love.”* [Luke 7:44-48]

## **The more we understand how much we’ve been forgiven, the more we love God who forgives us**

**And the more we love God who forgives us, the more we forgive our neighbour who wrongs us.**

**Forgiveness generates love, and love generates forgiveness.**

Love comes from God, [1 John 4:8, 16].

**He loved us while we were still sinners.**

**Romans 5:6-8** [NIV] *“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

In Christ God demonstrated His love for us by forgiving us.

## Love defined

Paul describes love in **1 Corinthians 13** [NIV]. He begins like this: *“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.”* [verses 1-3].

**The only real value in anything at all is love.**

Doing good things, following the rules, keeping the law: these are **not** the same thing as love, and **they can be done without love.**

Paul continues: *“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”* [verses 4-7].

Meditating on these beautiful characteristics of love ought to make it plain that **love is on a vastly higher and deeper level than merely keeping the law.**

He goes on: *“Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.*

*“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”* [verses 8-13].

## Law rooted in love, not vice versa

The law, contrary to what many well-intentioned Christians believe, does **not** define love.

The law and love may intersect at many points, but they are definitely **not** the same thing.

**The law is rooted in love, to be sure, but love is not rooted in the law.**

**Just as the law does not define love, so love does not define law.**

**It transcends the law.**

**The law exists only because God loves. I doubt anyone would want to say that God loves only because He first had a law.**

Even though the law is a product of love, the law can be misused and turned into something that harms, rather than helps, when it is administered by cruel and pitiless people.

But love, from which law springs, cannot be misused.

In His love, God tempers justice with mercy.

Regarding the way God views the law and justice, James wrote: **James 2:12-13** [NIV] *“Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!”*

Now here is a curious thing!

Many religious people have the idea that God's "*spiritual blood*" is constantly at a furious boil at the sinning masses, and that He is first and foremost the God of justice who is itching to blast the evildoers.

So naturally, most people who believe this caricature of God go around either worried about or resigned to their obvious toboggan slide to hell.

But James, the Biblical writer who is a hands-down favourite of works-oriented Christians, says two remarkable things in the just-cited passage:

- 1) People are judged by the law that gives freedom, not the law that condemns.
- 2) The only kind of people who will get judgement without mercy are people who have **not** been merciful, because mercy triumphs over judgement!

This ought to be no surprise, because like Zechariah reported, **Zechariah 7:9** [NIV] "*This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another.'*"

In other words, in God's view, there is **no** other kind of judgement but the kind that is tempered with mercy and compassion.

**When God talks about judgement, He is talking about something quite different from what a lot of religious people are talking about.**

God loves.

And it is because He loves that He gave the law.

It is because He loves that He judges.

It is because He loves that He judges us all guilty, since we are.

It is because He loves that in judging us guilty, He has mercy on us.

It is because He loves that He sent Jesus.

It is because He loves that He sent the Holy Spirit.

It is because He loves that moves us to turn to Him [repent], to trust Him [have faith], and that He saves us from sin and death [salvation].

## **When we love, we are behaving like God**

Jesus said, **Matthew 7:12** [NIV] "*So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.*"

### **How do we receive this love?**

By allowing the Holy Spirit, Who is the Third Person of the Triune God, direct our lives.

**Galatians 5:22-25** [New King James] "*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.*"

Love is the greatest and foremost of the “fruits” of such an intimate relationship, [John 14:17].

## Released from the law

**Romans 7:6** [NIV] *“But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.”*

**Romans 8:1-4** [NIV] *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because **through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.** For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.”*

**The law, which justly brings all human beings under condemnation and death, has been replaced by the Spirit, which brings life through faith in Jesus Christ.**

Through faith in Christ we are no longer under the condemnation of the law.

The law has **no** claim on us, because we stand in Christ, **not** under the law.

## Our new life is in Christ, and is not under the law

**Romans 7:4** [NIV] *“So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.”*

**It is in this condition, the condition of belonging to Christ and released from the law, that we bear fruit to God, [Acts 20:28].**

Our sinful nature, which would use the law to destroy us if it could, can no longer do so, because we are no longer under the law.

Instead, we serve God in a new way, the way of the Spirit, not in the old way, the way of the law.

**What does this mean in practical terms?**

At least this: **There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ.**

To repeat, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

Warning: Your natural defences might not let you believe this at first.

It might help to repeat it a couple of more times.

If that doesn't help, you could try looking up **Romans 8:1** and reading it slowly.

It is hard for us to believe, but it is the true gospel message outcome.

Those who are in Christ take their stand against their sinful nature on the basis of faith in Christ and life in the Spirit (which are the same thing), **not** on the basis of the law.

**On the basis of the law, we lose.**

**On the basis of faith, however, we win.**

That is **not** because we ourselves win, but because Jesus is our victory.

We do **not** need to worry that God has rejected us, or that He will **not** listen to our prayers, or that He **won't** save us, or that He **won't** forgive us, or that He **doesn't** love us or even that He **doesn't** like us.

God's relationship with us is **not** based on the law; it is based on His Son.

If it were based on the law, we'd be sunk.

But, thank God, it is not.

**It is based on His Son, whom He sent to save the world because He loved it, you included.**

**John 3:16-17** [NIV] *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*

In the Son of God, who became human for us, all the barriers to love have been broken down, whether those between Jew and Gentile, between enemies, within families, between nations, or between anybody else.

**Ephesians 2:14-18** [NIV] *“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.”*

**Matthew 5:44** [NIV] *“But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”*

**Ephesians 5:25** [NIV] *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”*

**Isaiah 2:4** [NIV] *“He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more.”*

**Because we trust in Christ, who loves us and makes us into a new creation in His own perfect humanity, we are free to love others in spite of all the reasons humans have to hate others.**

## **Sin not our master**

The reason sin shall **not** be our master is because we are under grace and **not** under the law.

**Romans 6:14** [NIV] *“For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.”*

**If we were under law, sin would be our master.**

But since we are **not** under the law, but under grace, sin **cannot** be our master.

**Only grace frees us from sin; the law does not.**

The law only perpetuates the problem by keeping us enslaved to sin.

**The grace of God changes what we are inside so that we no longer want to sin.**

**Romans 7:18-25** [New King James] *“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!”*

We might still succumb to temptation, but we don't want to, we don't like it, and we fight against it.

**And if we do succumb, we don't pretend it is OK, and we don't make excuses for it.**

**We see our sins as sins, we confess them to God, we trust Him for the forgiveness He says we have in Christ,** we thank Him for His indescribable grace, and we get up and get back in the fight against our sinful nature and keep on striving to live godly in Christ.

**We can do that because we trust God to never stop loving us.**

**1 John 4:16** [NIV] *“We know and rely on the love God has for us.”*

**1 John 4:19** [NIV] *“We love because God first loved us.”*

Think about that.

**It is God at work in us, God who makes us into a new creation in the perfect humanity of His Son, who turns us into the kind of people who love.**

This is **not** something we will bring into being, or come to do through our own reason and effort.

**We love because God did something for us through Christ that we could never do for ourselves.**

He became human for us, and He was perfect, He both loved and kept the law for us, so that when we are attached to Him through faith [which is the only way we can be attached to Him], we become something new, a new creation in Him.

His atoning reconciliation on our behalf is what makes us into something different from what we are, **not** our actions, attitudes, emotions or willpower.

**Through faith, trusting Jesus Christ, we participate in His perfect love**

**Don't ever think that we actually love with perfect love ourselves, because we don't.**

Our salvation from sin and death and our new selves, our new lives in Christ, come **only** from Him and by Him and of Him, and He gives all this simply because He loves us.

**Christ, and Christ alone, is our righteousness.**

**Romans 3:22** [NIV] *“This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference.”*

**1 Corinthians 1:30** [NIV] *“It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God, that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.”*

**Philippians 3:9** [NIV] *“...and he found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.”*

**It is Christ's perfect humanity that God accepts as righteous on our behalf.**

All religious ideas of human "*measuring up*" are worthless, because such a thing is impossible.

Humanity is saved **only** because Christ became the perfect human for us, and we partake of that salvation and become a new creation only in Him and only through faith in Him.

There is no other way, [**Acts 4:12**].

**Philippians 2:13** [NIV] "*For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*"

**We cannot trust ourselves to do that, but we can trust Him to do it.**

## **Final thoughts**

When Christians say the law is superseded by faith in Christ, they are **not** saying something has been lost, for it shows us what sin is, [**Romans 3:20, 31; Romans 7:7**].

**2 John 4-6** [NIV] "*It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us. And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.*"

**John 13:34** [NIV] "*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*"

**Christ's command that we walk in love fulfils the Ten Commandments.**

**Those who walk in love fulfil the law, [Matthew 22:35-40; Romans 13:8-10].**

As John wrote in **John 1:17**, "*The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*"