

Love Is a Fulfilling of the Law, Part Three

by John Piper

John Piper emphasizes that love is the essence of fulfilling the law, highlighting the need for a Redeemer in the Christian faith.

Duration: 47:34

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 7:4, Romans 13:8-10, Romans 13:14, Galatians 5:22

Topics: "Law And Grace", "Fruit Of Love"

Description

In this sermon, Pastor John Piper aims to explain why the apostle Paul doesn't directly address the topic of law in his letters to the Galatians and Romans. He takes a comprehensive look at the teachings on law in these books and highlights the absence of Christ as a redeemer or substitute in the law. The law, according to Piper, only multiplies transgression without providing a solution for sin. He emphasizes that all human efforts to keep the law are futile and sinful. Instead, Piper argues that the purpose of the law is to bring accountability to all people and to shut the mouths of every tribe on earth. He then focuses on Romans 13:8-14, where Paul emphasizes the importance of love as the fulfillment of the law. Piper encourages believers to give hourly attention and focus to Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate curse bearer, righteousness provider, and treasure of their souls. By cultivating this relationship with Christ, believers will bear the fruit of the Spirit, with love being the first and all-encompassing fruit.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God is available at www.desiringgod.org. The sermon text for tonight's message is found in Romans, chapter 13, verses 8 through 14. That's page 948 in your pew Bible.

Romans 13, starting at verse 8. O no one anything except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet, and any other commandment are summed up in this word, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbor, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Besides this, you know the time that the hour has come for you to wake up from sleep, for salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone, the day is at hand, so then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires.

Let's pray together. Father, we do not take for granted the pleasures of worshiping your Son around His table. It has been very sweet.

And I pray that I would not undermine anything that you've been doing powerfully as we have sung together and eaten at the Lord's table. But rather let this word continue in the Spirit to save sinners, to strengthen saints, to humble the proud, to lift up the downcast, to reconcile the alienated, to guide the perplexed, to refresh the weary, to befriend the lonely, to provide the needs of the destitute and to have an effect beyond this hour ten thousand times greater than we could imagine in producing love. This is my heart's desire in these weeks on these texts that love would be done.

It says in 1 Thessalonians that they were God taught to love one another. Paul tried to teach them, but he knew that in and through his words and around his words and in spite of his words, if people were going to love authentically, they would be God taught to love each other. So I ask that you would do that now in Jesus' name.

Amen. Three times in these verses 8 through 10, Paul says, more or less, that loving your neighbor is what fulfills the law. Let's look at them.

Verse 8, second half of the verse, For the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. Verse 9, at the end of the verse, And any other commandment are summed up in this word, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Verse 10, Love does no wrong to a neighbor.

Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. So before we ask some really urgent questions, let me just clarify three words. Number one, what does he mean by law? Law has different meanings in the New Testament and old.

Here it appears to mean the Ten Commandments. Pretty simple. Verse nine, the commandments.

You shall not commit adultery. You shall not murder. You shall not steal.

You shall not covet. Those are all quotations from Exodus 20, the Ten Commandments. And any other commandment are summed up in this word.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. So the focus in Paul's meaning of the word law is commandments. Very specifically, ten of them, he quotes from that list.

Second clarification, what does fulfill mean? You see the word in verse eight has fulfilled. You see sum up in verse nine and you see fulfilling in verse ten. What does that refer to? It refers to attitudes and actions of love that correspond to what the law required.

That's the way I would put it. This love fulfills, that is, it corresponds, it is a behavior and an attitude which corresponds to what the law was aiming at and meant to bring about. Law can mean all kinds of things and fulfill can mean fulfill prophecy.

It doesn't mean that here. It means that when you do a certain kind of thing, feel a certain kind of way, you are doing and feeling something that corresponds to what the law requires and thus fulfill the law. Third clarification, what about the word wrong in verse ten? Love does no wrong to a neighbor.

I'm puzzled by that. I was anyway. Why, Paul, do you focus on the negative? I mean, love is a very positive thing.

You do nice things for people when you love them. Why are you focusing on love does no wrong? Love does no wrong for the neighbor. Therefore, it's fulfilling the law.

And I think the answer is that he has in front of him ten commandments and the ones he quotes are all negative. Don't do this. Don't do this.

Don't do this. Don't murder. Don't commit adultery.

Don't steal. Don't covet. Because love doesn't do that.

Love doesn't do that. So the commandments that he's chosen to highlight are prohibitions. They're not things that you're supposed to do.

You're supposed to not do. And so what he's saying is simply when you love, you fulfill all those negative commandments. Love doesn't do that sort of thing.

It doesn't hurt people. He's not saying it's not positive. He's just saying I'm talking about the negative and it doesn't do that.

So it fulfills. And if he had chosen to list off a bunch of things positively, he would have said, I think, love does that too. But I think that's the reason he focuses on the does no wrong to the neighbor is because he's just listed commandments that describe how not to do wrong to a neighbor.

So with those three clarifications, here's my first big question. I only have two, and this one yields the bigger one. My question is, why in chapter 13 at verse 8 does Paul even bring up the issue of law? He's already dealt a lot with the law.

Good night he's worked that over. Chapter 3, chapter 4, chapter 5, chapter 7, chapter 8, again in chapter 10. I mean, we understand, or do we? Why does he even bring it up? Now, my guess is this.

He brings it up because he has just made a statement that sounds so unbelievably sweeping. He knows Jewish Christians and Jewish listeners are going to stumble over this statement. Because they're lovers of the law and rightly so.

So was David. Oh, how I love thy law. It is my meditation all the day.

And that included the Ten Commandments. Paul himself had said the law is good and just and holy. Chapter 7, verse 12.

And yet here he has just said something that might make a law lover think he is neglectful of the law. Because what he said was, owe no one anything except love. And it just kind of takes your breath away.

One thing you owe all people. What about the law? I mean, I think that's what he has in his mind. There are going to be people in the congregation, these Jewish believers, who are going to say, that is a breathtaking, sweeping statement.

I mean, what about the Ten Commandments? What about the law? You just think love. Just love. And so I think Paul, to settle that issue, to bring those people off the rafters, he says, and oh yes, when you love, you fulfill the whole law.

I think that's why he went there. The one who loves, end of verse 8, the one who loves has fulfilled the law. So no, he says, I'm not neglecting the law.

I'm not acting as though the fulfillment of the law doesn't matter. I'm not talking as though God made a mistake in giving the law or gave it in vain. On the contrary, I think he would say, I am saying, and this is going to lead now to my second big question, I think Paul would say, I am saying the one thing that needs to be said if the law is to have its fulfillment.

What I'm saying in verse 8 is the one thing that needs to be said if the law is to have its day in the Christian church. What if he took a shortcut? What if he took a shortcut and not through love to law, love and then love fulfills, but rather just went around like that and said, only owe commandments. Only owe law fulfilling.

Owe no one anything except to keep the commandments. Only owe, don't owe one anything except to fulfill the law. What if he said it that way? Shortcut in round, just not through love, but just immediate.

Let's go there immediately. If the goal is to get the law fulfilled, let's just say it. And that's my second question.

Why didn't he do that? That's the only other question I have. I am really, really, really eager because to me, this gets so close to how I live my life and how you live your life. So I'm pleading with you at this point to listen, because I think the next 15 minutes or so are so central to the heart of Christianity.

And the heart of how you live your Christianity, how you relate to law, how you relate to love, how you relate to Christ, how you relate to cross, how you relate to faith, all these things. They come together in a particular way that makes you a Christian. And if they come together in the wrong order, you're not a Christian.

This is really big, and I'm eager to get it clear and to get it right. So my big main question is, if Paul cares so much about law fulfillment in my life, he's not just talking about Christ fulfilling law here. He's talking about me, by the Spirit, doing love and thus doing what the law ultimately was aiming at.

If he cares so much about law fulfillment, then why doesn't he call for it directly instead of calling for love? Only love. Only love. Why does he say it that way? So here we go.

This is review, but it's review from four and a half years ago, so I'm assuming you won't remember. We're going to step back. We're going to take Galatians and Romans in one big armful and let Paul teach us about law in such a way that it explains why he doesn't go there directly, but goes through love.

That's my goal, is to get all the relevant teachings on law from Galatians and Romans in my arms in such a way that this text makes sense. And I'm going to look at too many of these for you to look at, so don't go there unless you just want to. If you want to go there, that's fine, but I'll be breezing along probably.

You can jot them down and look at them later or listen to the tape. I'm going to start in Galatians three and in verse 17 says the law came four hundred and thirty years after the promise to Abraham. So the promise to Abraham that in you, all the nations will be blessed.

Abraham believes God has counted him for righteousness because he believed in righteousness is imputed to him for his faith. And four hundred and thirty years later, Paul says law arrives. So we know

what he means by law.

Moses, Moses, Exodus, Sinai, Ten Commandments. That's what happened four hundred and thirty years later. Law sometimes refers to the whole of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

But here, clearly, four hundred and thirty years later is when it showed up. So Genesis is not part of the law in that verse 17 of Galatians three. Then he says, why then the law? And he answers, it was added because of transgressions until the offspring is Jesus now should come to whom the promise has been made.

And then he asks, verse 21 of Galatians three, is the law then contrary to the promises of God? And he answers, certainly not. And then he says something that is so central to my understanding of the Christian life. Listen carefully.

He says, certainly not. For if a law had been given that could give life, righteousness would be by the law. Implication, it can't be.

And he didn't give a law that could give life. That's huge. When he gave the law, it could not give life.

Eternal life could not be had through the law. God gave the law, and Paul says, if he had given the law which could give life, life would be through the law. It can't, he didn't.

Why not? I mean, why can't the law give life? It is not because the commands are bad. It's not because God gave bad commands. Chapter 7, verse 12.

The commandment is holy and righteous and good. And, add this one. It is not because faithful, faith-based law-keeping was not a legitimate way to have life.

A couple of negatives in that sentence. And I better say it again so you hear me right. The reason the law cannot give life is not because keeping the law by faith is an illegitimate way to have life.

It is a legitimate way to have life. And we know that because it's the way that Adam was told to have life. I'll read it to you.

Listen for the word commanded in this text from Genesis 2, 16 and 17. And the Lord God commanded, commanded. It's the same word for command in the law.

The Lord God commanded the man saying, You may surely eat of every tree in the garden, but the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat. For the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die. So it's very simple and straightforward.

Obey this. Trust me. Trust me.

And obey this and you won't die. You will have life. So there's nothing wrong with having life through trustful obedience.

If there's no sin. And when Adam fell, we fell. And everybody in this room is fallen.

Your nature is corrupt. You are a rebel against God by nature. You love the wrong things and you don't delight in God by nature as you ought.

And therefore, that way to life is closed. The way of trust filled law keeping is closed. Because you now need something way more than new motives and a leaf turnover.

You need a redeemer. You need a substitute to bear all the curse of the law that is being poured out on sinners like us. You need someone who could obey laws in a way that you could never obey them.

So that all the laws demands could be satisfied and then reckoned to your account. That's the need ever since Adam. And therefore, when the law was given, Galatians 3.21, a law was not given that could give life.

It cannot give life weak as it was through the flesh. Therefore, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh did what the law could not do. So why did He give the law? I mean, what's the deal? You know we can't be saved by the law.

So why did you give the law? Paul is really eager to answer that question. He answered it in so many ways you lose track. I'll read three or four of them to you.

Number one, Romans 3.20. Through the law comes the knowledge of sin. Romans 3.20. Meaning, I think, that the law both intellectually and experientially makes us acquainted with sin. It not only objectively out there in stone says, don't do this, now we know it.

It also goes in here, don't covet, and stirs up in us all kinds of rebellion or legalism. There are many ways that the law makes us know sin. Know it, because we read it on a page, and know it because here it is rising up in our hearts in rebellion against the law.

That's the first function that Paul says it has. The second one is Romans 5.20. 3.20 and 5.20. Now the law came in to increase the trespass. God knows exactly what he's doing here.

The law, 430 years later, comes in to increase trespasses. How? How does it increase trespasses? I think I've got four ways written down here. One, it provokes outright rebellion.

I don't like to be told what to do, thank you. You get in my face with a list, I'm going to kick. So it provokes rebellion.

Number two, it turns vague selfishness into concrete transgressions. Like if you're a rebel, if you're a really rebellious person against your king, and you don't know any of his laws, and suddenly you read all kinds of speed limit laws, and stop sign laws, and tax laws, and keep your yard laws, and suddenly your selfishness just starts crossing all kinds of lines. And the line crossing becomes a particular definition of what was already there.

That's what it means by multiplying transgressions. It doesn't make you more of a sinner. You're a sinner, and that's that.

But you become a rebellious sinner and a line crossing sinner when the law shows up in your face. Here's another one. It provokes religious people to make two mistakes.

One of two mistakes, maybe both. One, to try to keep the law in your own strength. Law shows up, you're a religious sinner.

Not a pagan sinner, a religious sinner. You turn it into a ladder, start climbing to God. Say, see, I can show my moral prowess here by the performance of this law.

That's deadly, and that's sin. Sin is multiplied. The very effort to obey the commands becomes sin when it's done in your own strength to prove yourself to God.

Or, this one's a little more delicate, it also stirs some people up to try to keep the law in God's power without a Redeemer. I know I need your help. I know that I'm a sinner.

And I know that I cannot do this in my own strength. And so now I pray that in this new relationship to you that I have, I'm not talking about Christ here, He's not even in the picture. There's no Christ here.

No Redeemer, no substitute. Now, help me, oh God, keep this law. And I say that all of those four or five ways, the law simply multiplies transgression.

Without a Redeemer, without a Savior, without a substitute to bear the curse of the law for us, we are under His curse and all our efforts are sinful. Here's the way He sums up the function of the law. Romans 3.19 Now, we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law so that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world, not just Jews, not just those under the law, the whole world be accountable to God.

The law arrived in the history of Israel 430 years after the promise in order to shut the mouth of every tribe on planet earth. And if you wonder about the dynamics of how that happens, then you're going to have to go back because I can't re-preach Romans every time we come to a text like this. But there it is, the function of the law to stop our mouths, to make us accountable.

And therefore, I say the simple truth of Galatians 3.21 again. If God had given a law that could give life, righteousness would be by the law. He didn't and it can't.

Conclusion, we must have a Redeemer. This is why Christianity does not fit in among the world religions. All the world religions think in terms of a law, a God with some standards, people who don't measure up and then they create all kinds of ways to connect, all kinds of ways to get connected.

Sacrifices and do nice things and let your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds, and all kinds of ways. Only one religion says we've got to have a substitute to bear the curse. We've got to have one who lives a perfect life to perform the righteousness that required so that by faith it could be counted to my account and I could stand before a holy God as a sinner, safe because of Him, not me.

Christianity is absolutely unique. And I hope if you're here trying to make Christianity fit into the pantheon of the gods so you can just add Jesus alongside Buddha or Mohammed or 700,000 Hindu gods or Moses, you will see that's futile. Christianity is a universal religion because it deals with the universal problem of falling short of God through sin and only one way can that law's curse be satisfied and demands be met and that is Jesus Christ crucified and risen.

That's the only way, which is why we preach to everybody the gospel. So here are the three ways that Paul says this, namely, that the law not being able to give life was pointing to Jesus. Go to Jesus! Go to Jesus! That's what the Old Testament is all about.

Here are the three texts. Galatians 3.24 The law was our guardian until Christ came in order that we might be justified by faith. That's Galatians 3.24 Here's Romans 10.4 Christ is the goal of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

And here's Romans 8.2, which we saw at the Lord's table. The law of the spirit of life in Christ has set me free from the law of sin and death for God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do. It couldn't do it.

It couldn't give me life. It couldn't bear my curse. It couldn't provide my righteousness.

It could only pronounce curse and demand righteousness. That's all the law could do for me. And therefore what the law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin.

He condemned my sin, your sin, in the cross, in the flesh of His Son. Something had to be done that the law could not do if I am to have eternal life. Namely, I have to have a Redeemer.

I have to have a Savior. I have to have a substitute. The law could not bear its own curse.

The law could not satisfy its own demands. Christ did. And by faith alone we have Christ.

And that's all we need. Ever since Adam fell and we became sinners, the only way to eternal life was a Redeemer. It was true for Cain, Lamech, Noah, Abraham, David, Isaiah, John the Baptist, Paul, John Mielke who quoted the text, me, you.

There is one way into life, a Redeemer, a substitute, a curse bearer and a righteousness provider. That's the only way. We must preach Christ everywhere to every tribe and every people on planet earth, including all the lost people of Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Galatians 3.13, lest you not hear it from the word itself. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. Don't you love clear biblical language? Oh man, you talk about clear substitutionary language.

Let me read it again. This is Galatians 3.13. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law which we were under because none of us keeps it by becoming a curse for us. As it is written, curse it is everyone who hangs on a tree.

Christ did all of this on our behalf and therefore, and this is a real central part of the good news, there's only one way to have it, to have escape from the curse and to have an alien righteousness reckoned to our account. There's only one way. Faith alone, apart from works of the law.

Romans 3.28. We hold that one is justified, that is declared right, righteous. One is justified by faith apart from works of the law. So, here's the great question that Paul was wrestling with in chapter 13 and 12 and 14 and 15.

If this is true, if everything I've said for the last 15 or 20 minutes is true, the law cannot give you life. You try to go that route, you perish. You must turn from that, let it take you like a guardian over to the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, the law fulfiller and the curse bearer.

If that's true, if that's the way we all get to heaven, by faith alone, then how do you write verses, chapters 12 through 16? That is, how do you do the Christian life? What do you do when you get up in the morning? That's where we are for the next couple of years. Chapters 12 through 16 is, what do you do now if doing is not the way to life? Do you say, I'm going to give you two possibilities, the first one is wrong. Do you say, I'm forgiven by faith alone.

I have an imputed righteousness from Christ by faith alone. I have the Holy Spirit within me by faith alone. That's true.

That's true. Those three statements are true. If you're a believer now, I will go back to the law.

I will go back to the Ten Commandments. And I will focus my new God given Holy Spirit, given ability on the commandments, and I will fulfill them so close. And yet so far, I think Paul didn't do it that way.

I'm telling you what I'm learning from verse 8 through 10. Paul didn't do it that way. He didn't say that.

If he had said that, he didn't say that. He said, oh, no man anything except to love him. So, let me try out another way of the justified person talking.

It goes like this, I hope you talk this way. I hope you talk this way to the Lord, to yourself, to people. Now, I am forgiven by faith alone because of Christ.

I have an imputed righteousness that is not my own. It belongs to God in Christ and I'm in Him by faith alone. I have the Holy Spirit dwelling in me which I received by faith alone.

Now, I will continue to make my focus Jesus Christ every day. And I will look to Him for everything my soul craves. And from my union with Christ and my being nurtured by this relationship day in and day out as I contemplate Him as a great Savior and a mighty Lord and an infinite treasure, I will love people.

Period. And oh yes, it will fulfill the law. I think that's the way to talk.

Now, why do I think that? Is that based only on verse 8 through 10? It isn't based only on verse 8 through 10. I'll give you a very personal testimony. Early 2001, I was preaching right through the first six verses of Romans 7. In fact, I would like you to take your Bible and open it to Romans 7. I do want you to follow me to this one because it had such a tremendous impact on my life in those days.

It clarified some things for me. It gave me an orientation towards the law and towards Christ and towards faith and towards love that has been one of those rare seasons of life that you only have maybe half a dozen of them in your life as you clarify something and head in a certain direction. So I'm going to read with you verse 4 of chapter 7 and see whether or not you think I have been faithful to this verse.

Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ. I'm going to pause there. I'll tell you what I think that means.

I think that means that when Christ died in the fulfillment of His Father's command, He obeyed perfectly to the end and thus wrought out for us a complete and perfect righteousness and law fulfillment. And as we are in Him by faith, we died with Him and His fulfillment becomes our fulfillment. And it means that when He died, He bore all the weight of the curse of the law and as we are in Him, our curse fell on Him.

And so with His righteousness as ours and with His curse as ours, we are now dead to the law. We don't focus on the law. We don't go to the law for life.

The law is not our focus. What is? Wrong question. Who is? Let's keep reading.

You have died to the law through the body of Christ so that you may belong and that word belong was used three times in the preceding verses for marriage. You might belong to another, to Him who was raised from the dead. Now, look at what He is doing.

Oh, this was huge to me. I hope it becomes huge to you. You are dead to the law so that you might belong to a person.

You switch from the law, not to a new law, but to a person. A living person. He is alive.

Jesus, You are alive! Seated at the right hand of God in this room in power by His Spirit. Turned from law to Christ. Then, what happens? When that magnificent soul transaction of law craving, I've got to get right with God, I've got to do this, I've got to get right with God, I've got to do this, becomes, You are my all.

You are my curse bearer. You are my righteousness. You are my treasure.

You meet every soul craving. When that transaction happens, what happens? How do you write chapters 12-16 out of that in the last third of the verse? Jesus gives you the answer. So that you may belong to another, to Him who is raised from the dead, in order that we may, He could have said so easily, keep the law.

And He said, in order that we may bear fruit. What's the first and all-encompassing fruit of the Spirit? Tell me. Love.

So, here we are at verse 8, chapter 13. Oh, no one, anything, except to love each other, I think means, it's shorthand for, give hourly attention to your beloved Jesus Christ. Give hourly focus.

You are my curse bearer. You are my righteousness provider. You are my treasure.

And all the cravings of my soul, I find satisfied in You. You are my all in all. Do that hour by hour.

Cultivate that. And Paul says when you do, fruit is going to happen. Don't you just love that picture? Fruit.

How hard does a tree work to make apples? It just stays rooted in Christ. And oh yes, it does fulfill the law. It's what the law was all about.

It won't hurt people. It'll bless people. You'll give to your enemy something to drink.

You'll witness to your neighbor as you have occasion. You'll give to the poor and you'll go on mission trips. He'll begin to stir a triumph over the selfishness of your life.

And believe me, I wish I had another sermon. I'm not going to take another sermon on these verses. I really think we should move on.

But if we had another sermon, I would talk about how the law gets fulfilled. How love fulfills the commandments. But I'm going to leave it as fruit.

Fruit comes. Love is the fruit. And it does satisfy the law's demands as you begin to live it out.

And you can't live it out perfectly. When this text says love fulfills the law, I think it means love that's perfect fulfills the law perfectly. And love that's pretty good fulfills the law pretty good.

And the only children God has is pretty good children. I mean, that's the best. That's the best He has.

You will fulfill the law perfectly someday. You know that, don't you? You will in heaven sin no more. That text will come true perfectly there.

Here we're stumbling along thanking God morning, noon, and night that Christ is our righteousness. So that's the long answer to the question why does Paul call for love instead of going straight to say do law, do law instead of directing us to the law. So, here's the short answer with which I close.

The short answer for why he's doing this is because he wants Christ to be glorified as our sin bearer, our righteousness provider, our love enabler through faith alone. And so I say, I say, owe no one anything except to love. And to that end, be dead to the law and belong, belong to Jesus.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, I'm walking around the center of glory here longing that those who hear me will be given divinely opened eyes to see. And so I plead with You, Father, that I not be the only teacher here, but that Christ make plain spiritually how He becomes the replacement for the law that leads to love that fulfills the law.

That's a miracle, Lord, and I ask that You would make it happen. In Jesus' name, Amen. Our website is www.DesiringGod.org or call us toll free at 1-888-346-4700.

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