

**The Bible (Unmuted) Transcript**  
**Episode 48**  
**Romans, Part 21 (Rom 13)**  
**January 9, 2024**

**Teacher: Matthew Halsted**

**Episode Summary:**

Questions about the relationship between earthly empires and the heavenly Kingdom is one that garners a lot of discussion and debate these days. But as we read through Romans 13 (and, at the same time, taking into account the witness of other relevant New Testament texts) the message is clear: Christians are to pass their days in exile by exhibiting the cruciform love of Christ. This type of ethic is powerful, for it testifies to the world that Christians have a different sort of politics than the world does. By imitating Christ, believers show themselves to be part of a Kingdom that is much different than the kingdoms of this world.

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Pre-order Matt's newest book, *The End of the World As You Know It*. You can purchase through (1) Amazon or (2) Lexham Press (as well as other outlets).

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**Transcript:**

0:00 Hey friends. Welcome back to another episode of the Bible unmute. I'm excited to be with you once again this week as we dive back into our series through the Book of Romans. Today we find ourselves in Romans chapter 13 which is an extraordinarily interesting text. We're going to be talking about all the things that they say you shouldn't talk about, namely politics and religion. So why not talk about them both in the same breath? Well, that's what we're going to do today. And I think it would be a lot of fun. We're going to talk about what Paul has to say about the government authorities and the Christian relationship to those, and all of that fun stuff. So I'm looking forward to diving into that text

today. I'm sure it won't be controversial at all. Anyway, I'm sure it'll be a lot of fun nonetheless. So I'm looking forward to that.

It's been great. I believe we had a two-week hiatus. I took a couple of weeks off for the holidays. We celebrated Christmas and of course, the New Year's celebrate. And that was lot of fun to be at home with a family to rest, relax, to get some R and R. It was a lot of fun. I hope that you had a great time with your family as well. I pray that the holiday season was an encouragement to you and was just relaxing. You know, in our fast-paced culture, it's always good to take a pause. And I think we should probably take more pauses and recognize the benefits of taking regular Sabbath. You know, we shouldn't have to wait, you know, once a year or twice a year for these big holidays. We should probably develop as a friend of mine once said, these rhythms of rest. And it's something I've been thinking a lot about. And every time we go through the holidays, I keep thinking, man, it's always good to slow down. And for me and our family, the Christmas season is a time of just slowing down and thinking of and contemplating what God has done for us. And so it's always good to have these as reminders. I just love the holiday season. I love Christmas such a wonderful time of year. They say it's the most wonderful time of year. And you know what I agree.

Well, it's great to be back with you once again. And after this two weeks off, we're going to come back today and resume in Romans, chapter 13. So it'll be a lot of fun to do that.

Before we get into our text today. I'd like to share with you some cool news. We're going to have a tremendous, amazing lineup of guests coming up this month and next. I think our first guests will come up at the end of January, if I remember correctly and then that'll go on into February. I've got most well, I guess I've got half of these guests scheduled already. I've got some solid dates. And anyway, we have four amazing guests. I think you'll really enjoy these conversations. Let me go ahead and share with you who those guests are, in no particular order. This is not necessarily the order in which these guests will appear on the show, but I'll go ahead and just run through my list here. Let me see. Here we go. Yeah, I've got it pulled up.

- 3:20 Our first guest that I wanted to share with you is a Jewish philosopher Berel Dov Lerner. He's written a new book called *Human Divine Interactions in the Hebrew Scriptures: Covenants and Cross Purposes*. That's the title. It's published by Rutledge. And if I remember right, don't hold me to this, but I'm pretty sure this might be part of a series that Drew Johnson is editing. I don't know. Maybe that's not a case anyway, but nonetheless, this looks to be a fantastic fortune. I can't wait to have Berel on the show. Berel, just reading from his biography here on the Rutledge website. "*Berel Dov Lerner, received his PhD. In philosophy from Tel Aviv University. He's an associate professor at Western Galilee College in Israel.*" This book looks really interesting. I haven't read it yet, but I've perused through it. I hope to dive into it real soon and get a chunk of it, at least out of the way before he appears on the show. But I'd like to read the description to you, because it looks really interesting. It says this,

*"This book addresses central theological issues in biblical narratives in terms of a bold thesis regarding relations between God and humans. That the actions of God and the actions of humans are informed by independently valid moral viewpoints which do not entirely overlap, the author suggests that God's plans and actions reflect the interest and*

*obligations appropriate to his goal of creating a worthy world, but not necessarily our world. In contrast, humans must attend to special obligations grounded in their dependence on their existing created world and in their particular places in the human family. However, in acts of grace, God voluntarily takes on special obligations toward the created world by entering covenants with its inhabitants. When the covenant involves reciprocal obligations, as in the case of God's covenant with Israel, it also recruits human beings to play conscious roles in God's larger plans. These covenants framed the moral parameters of human divine interaction and cooperation in which each party strains to negotiate conflicts between its original duties and the new obligations generated by covenants. The interpretive discussions in this book involve close readings of the Hebrew text and are also informed by rabbinic tradition and western philosophy. They address major issues that are of relevance to scholars of the Bible, theology of philosophy of religion, including the relationship between divine commands and morality, God's responsibility for human suffering, God's role in history, and the intersection between politics and religion."*

Yeah. It looks interesting. You know, I haven't read the book so I'm going to reserve judgment here, but it looks like there's just a ton of topics that this addresses. And of course, I'm very interested and have been in a long time in this concept of human suffering in God's world, or the problem of evil, we say. And I'm super interested, of course, in the covenant idea. So yeah, it's going to be really interesting. It's going to be a fun conversation. I bet I will have a lot of questions. But anyway, it's a privilege to have Berel on the show. I'm really looking forward to picking his brain and learning a lot from him.

6:20 We also have coming on the show. Steve Walton. He's a New Testament scholar and he's currently senior research fellow at Trinity College of Bristol. I'm really looking forward to this conversation. Steve has done a lot of work on Luke and Acts. And in fact, he's writing the Word Biblical Commentary on the Book of Acts. I think, if I'm not mistaken, I think it's a two-volume commentary that's going to be coming out. I really like Steve. I like his stuff. And he's he was...actually, I first met him gosh, years ago because he sat on one of the committees and I was doing MTH, PhD work. He was at London School Theology at one point. And so I had contact with him ever since. And I thought this would be really fun to have him on to come talk about Luke and Acts. So we're going to have a lot of fun conversations about that. His latest book is called *Reading Act's Theologically* is part of the Library of New Testament Studies. And I'm sure he'll have a lot to say about that. And I really want to pick his brain on what people can learn from the Book of Acts about Paul and Paul's theology. We're also going to get into early Christian church practice. You know, church planting; how did the early church conceive of church planting and Missiology, that kind of thing. So I'm really looking forward to Steve coming on the show. And he's going to have a lot of fun things to say. And we're going to learn a lot from Steve. So looking forward to that conversation.

7:50 We also have Robert Alter. Robert Alter is going to be coming on the show. He's over there at UC Berkeley, or I think he's retired now. But he is an amazing scholar. He's most recently Well, I guess a few years ago, he translated....he published a three-volume translation of the Hebrew Bible. And it's actually the text that we use in my Torah and Prophets class at Eternity College. And so I'm very familiar, of course, with his work there.

And I've just been super, super interested in these translations. And I have a ton of questions for him, but he is quite the treat to have on the show. I mean, I if I'm ever going to nerd out, I'm going to nerd out when Robert is on the show because he's such a highly respected scholar. I'm just going to read a little bit from the U. C. Berkeley website, his bio. It says, "*Robert Alter is Professor in the Graduate School and Emeritus Professor of Hebrew and Comparative Literature at the University of California at Berkeley, where he has taught since 1967. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Philosophical Society, the Council of Scholars of the Library of Congress, and is past president of the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics. He has twice been a Guggenheim Fellow, has been a Senior Fellow of the National Endowment for the Humanities, a fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Jerusalem, and Old Dominion Fellow at Princeton University.*" So, you can read up all about him. I think even the New York Times wrote a piece on him when he came out with his three-volume Hebrew Bible translation. So check that out. Just go to the New York Times and you can read up about that. So yeah, Robert is going to be amazing person to talk to. I want to focus some of our conversation on translation - his translation work. And maybe pick his brain about some Hebrew poetry questions that I have, and just maybe about the Hebrew Bible in general. So really, really looking forward to that, Again, it's a treat, a privilege to have him on the show. And Yeah, I think I think we're recording later in January. So I don't know if that'll come out end of January or first of February, but yeah, I'm looking forward to that.

10:00 And last but certainly not least, we're going to have New Testament scholar Dr. David deSilva on the show to chat about the Book of Revelation. David is a wonderful scholar. A committed scholar who is committed to excellence in scholarship. I've really benefited a lot from his work through the years, through his books. He's written quite a bit. And if you're familiar, if you've done your research on like revelation you'll be very familiar with David deSilva. Of course, he's also published a book called Introduction to the Apocrypha. That's one of the texts that we use in my Jewish and Greco-Roman Background of the New Testament class at Eternity College as well. So, it's going to be fun to have him on the show. Yeah, it's super cool too...David, actually wrote a blurb for my end times book that's coming out in February. And so I'm just truly indebted to him. As I said, I can't speak his praises more. I can't over-speak on his praises, I guess is what I'm trying to say because he's just been so kind to me to write that blurb, and it's going to be a privilege to have him on the show. He's a churchman. He serves in his church and of course, he's a well-known professor and scholar. So yeah, there's just a ton of things we could say about him. He's an accomplished musician too. And so I think he's published some of his musical works as well. So all to say, I am so enthused about these guests coming on the show: Steve Walton, David deSilva, Robert Alter and Berel Dov Lerner. An excellent lineup of two great New Testament scholars, two Hebrew Bible scholars, and we are blessed to have them on the show. So looking forward to that, be on the lookout. That is coming up.

11:43 There's a couple of things I want to say. So I've said a lot about this, and it sounds so I don't know...I just feel I feel so inept when it comes to marketing my own book. It just seems weird. But that's what they say that you got to do these days to get the book out, get the word out. I'm really passionate about my new book coming out February 7<sup>th</sup>, *The End of the World as You Know It: What the Bible Really Says about the End Times (And Why It's Good News)*. It's going to release February 7<sup>th</sup>. And if you haven't had a chance yet to pre-order it, feel free to do so. You can preorder it. And if you like the book, leave

a review on Amazon and share it with your friends. I'd really appreciate that. Thank you so much for doing that. A few have already read the book because it's gone out on like a launch team that Lexham was kind enough to organize. And so I've got some feedback already. And, the DiscipleDojo, YouTube channel, James is his name...He's going to interview me about the book. We're going to record that actually tomorrow. So that'll be a lot of fun. He read the book too. And I got some good feedback from him. Anyway, I'm really excited about this. You know, I'm not good at marketing stuff. I'd rather be writing a book than marketing a book. I just don't know how to do it. So, I just talk about it a bunch. I think that's what I'm supposed to be doing. Sharing on social media and so forth. But yeah, comes out February 7<sup>th</sup>. You can pre-order now on Amazon or at Lexham's website. Check that out.

Hey, also want to say if you like this podcast, please share it with your friends like and rated on your podcast platform. Whatever your using to listen to the show, I greatly appreciate it if you can share it and rate it. Whatever you do, I think you star it or something like that. Please feel free to do that as well And Yeah, okay. So I think that's everything. Gosh, you know, we've been gone for two weeks and coming back. I've got lots of fun announcements But I think that's it anyway. Well, if I forget, I will mention them at the end of the show. Okay. Well, without further ado, let's get into our text today. Romans chapter 13.

13:55 Let's begin by reading verses 1-7

**Romans 13:1–14 (NRSV)**

***1 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; 4 for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. 6 For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. 7 Pay to all what is due them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.***

14:57 So let me begin by pointing out all the wrong ways that this text has been interpreted. Okay, so at least one big way this text historically has been misinterpreted. Many people have used this passage in the most awful of ways. For example, they've used it to justify the authority of one's government and absolute obedience to the government. So, in order to advance the cause of the state, many people have quoted this text as a support for absolute obedience to their particular state's government. And in fact, I remember hearing

a story about this that is an example of such a bad way of interpreting this text. And I think the story if I recall comes from Preston Sprinkle's book called *Fight: A Christian Case for Nonviolence*, I think, is the subtitle. I think it came from that book. I just bring this up because I remember hearing a story from that book, I believe, which the story took place during the era when the totalitarian Nazi regime was taking hold of Germany. There was a Lutheran minister who was considering whether or not to join the war. As I recall, it was this very passage that convinced him that he should join the military. He reasoned that the government, after all, was God's servant. And as God's servant, it had a right to bear the sword. And citizens had the responsibility to support such sword-bearing. So, he joined the Nazi army.

Now, we know that this was obviously the wrong decision. The Nazis were evil, and nobody should have joined them or supported them. So the Lutheran minister's conclusions that he got from this text were wrong in that respect. But we should also consider something else in that same vein. We should also realize that the sort of exegesis that led the minister to join the Nazis was also wrong. In other words, it's not the case that just his conclusions were wrong, it's also the exegetical assumptions behind the conclusions that were also wrong. So what sort of assumptions was he making Well, he wasn't reading it too critically, right? I mean, he seemed to think that there should be absolute devotion to the state. That this text is sort of teaching that idea that seemed to be one of his assumptions at least.

Here's what I contend: What Paul is doing in Romans 13:1-7 is not giving a blank check to the empire of his day. He would never do that. His point is not to validate or justify the ways of empire, but rather to emphasize the way in which a Christian ought to live in empire—namely, live in such a way that they (1) live a quiet life and (2) live a blameless life. The emphasis is *not* on how one should support the empire's *empiring*, but rather how citizens of the Kingdom of heaven should conduct themselves. Let's dive further into this to see what I mean.

Before we do, though, let me say something very important. As many other confessional scholars have said, I too say that we cannot have Romans 13 without Revelation 13. Remember, in Revelation, we get a glimpse of what empire is all about: Domination, injustice, and *selfish* self-preservation. Any interpretation of Romans 13 that does not leave room for a critique of empire in Revelation 13 is a misinterpretation. So, our goal is to do justice to what Paul says here in Romans 13 in such a way that we don't mute the voice of Revelation 13 (and vice versa, of course).

17:00 Become a Patreon member! <https://www.patreon.com/TheBibleUnmuted>

Hey friends. I hope this episode is a blessing and encouragement to you. I hope that every episode of the Bible Unmuted gives you something fresh to consider and something deep to Ponder. My goal is to offer food for thought to give listeners the tools they need to be faithful interpreters of scripture. I cherish your continued prayers for this ministry and thanks so much to everyone who lifts me up in prayer each week.

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20:20 It is true that Paul does believe that governing authorities have *authority*. But why does he feel the need to mention this? We have to understand that the reason Paul says these sorts of things is to instruct Christians not to do wicked things (like murder, theft, etc). In other words, Paul is *not* bringing up the topic of government authority because he wants to Christians to be slavish followers of an empire but so that they are reminded not to commit crimes that are against God's own law (again, crimes such as theft, murder, etc). Notice once again how Paul's emphasis is on *not doing wrong*.

21:02 Let me read vv 1-5. It says,

***1 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; 4 for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience.***

So, notice here the context of what it means to "be subject" to the authorities. It means not doing wrong things. In other words, it's not a blanket statement that a Christian should do anything the State/Empire tells them to do.

Okay, let me read a verse 6 and 7 here,

***6 For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. 7 Pay to all what is due them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.***

Did you also notice how the State is depicted as a “servant” of God? This is not—and I repeat *not*—intended to be taken to mean that the State is a military department of the Kingdom of God such that, whatever they do, they do on behalf of God himself. Jesus has already said that his kingdom is different from the kingdom of the world. He has already said that his kingdom is not advanced or furthered by violence or war or by physical fighting. Notice what Jesus says in John 18:36: **“Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.’”**

Notice: Jesus differentiates his Kingdom from earthly kingdoms by pointing out the way his ways are much different than the ways of the earth. In other words, the way in which he advances his kingdom is through acts of love (the context here is dying on the cross). Jesus’ kingdom isn’t advanced by crucifying its enemies, but by being crucified for them. And I think Paul is on board with this idea, too. Notice what he says in Ephesians:

***“For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” (Eph 6:12 NRSV)***

So, when Paul mentions that the government is God’s servant in Romans 13, it’s not in the sense that he thinks the government can advance the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of our crucified Lord by wielding the sword. To say that it is a very dangerous thing to say, if I’m being honest. History has given us many examples of this danger when the state has taken upon themselves the false idea that they should wield the sword on behalf of the church. I mean, go read your history. That is a terrible, terrible, terrible thing for the state to do it. And sadly, many Christians have promoted that idea, that sort of politic. And unfortunately, it has led to many disastrous consequences.

And so we have to remember what Paul says in Ephesians 6 here is that our struggle, our fight, our warfare, the church’s battle is spiritual. And Jesus again in John 18 has told us that the Kingdom of Heaven is not advanced by fighting. If it were of the earth, then we would fight, because that’s what the Kingdoms of the Earth do. But because it’s of the Kingdom of Heaven, we go about warfare through prayer and through suffering and through dying for our enemies, not making our enemies die for us. So it’s just a completely upside-down view of warfare. Christians, we love everybody. We embody the cross. We embody the cruciform life because that’s what our Lord has done and so we are called to imitate him.

25:23 Now, I think that what Paul is doing in Romans 13 by describing the government as a servant, is to remind everyone that God is the ultimate authority. I don’t think the point there is to emphasize the government’s authority or, you know, whatever...it’s to emphasize their subjection to the one authority that is God. So he says, for example, in v. one, **“There is no authority except from God” (v. 1)**. And I think the assumption here is that Christians are to obey the government with respect only to those things that are not antithetical to the ways of the Kingdom. And you know, we can go into that some other



point, but just leave it there for now, that if they ever do that, you cannot do that because Jesus is Lord. He's your ultimate Lord. And so I think here what Paul's doing is that he's giving an implicit... no, I think maybe an explicit warning to the state, to the empire, even here, namely, to remind them that their authority it is not ultimate. The ultimate authority is God himself. They just occupy a servant's role. The minute the State thinks its authority is ultimate is the minute it has rendered itself invalid. It does not have the authority to take that which belongs to God and use it for its own selfish ends. Jesus, once again, gives us an example of the way it works.

So let's take a look at Matthew 22:15–22; (NRSV):

**15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. 16 So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. 17 Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" 18 But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? 19 Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. 20 Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" 21 They answered, "The emperor's." Then he said to them, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." 22 When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away."**

Caesar can have his coin, for it bears his image. And anything that bears God's image, belongs to God himself. And as it turns out, humans bear the image of God. I know a lot of teachers and folks that pointed this out that what Jesus is actually doing here is critiquing in a very ultimate way the claim that Caesar might have had on people, namely that he owned them, that they were all his subjects. Well, no, we belong to God. Now we can give him our taxes, right? We recognize that's a role that we have to play. However, we give him the coin because his image is on the coin and the implication here is that whatever bears the image of God belongs to God. So Caesar has no right to demand absolute loyalty from people because that people don't bear the image of Caesar. They bear the image of God. And his image bearers, our lives belong to God. And anything or anyone who would steal that which belongs to God is absolutely wrong. And anything or anyone who would demand us to do that which God has forbid us to do, is absolutely wrong. And we should not obey them.

29:18 Paul's point in this Romans 13 passage is to remind Christians to live lives that do not stain the Gospel and their testimony of the Gospel. If they, for example, engage in flagrant crime, then they have no defense before earthly authorities. I mean, what excuse could a Christian give to the Emperor for committing a crime such as murder or whatever? No excuse could be given. And, of course, anyone who harms their neighbor deserves to be held accountable. And God is committed to justice and equity. And, it goes without saying here, God has many ways of bringing about justice. He has many things he could use. He could, for example, use the government. It doesn't mean that he endorses all the

actions of the government. It doesn't even mean the government that he uses is holy, good, or righteous. This is where we need to remember our Old Testament. We read in Habakkuk, for example, how God used a wicked empire (the Babylonians) to judge his own people. And the Babylonians were absolutely evil. And, in fact, after God used the Babylonians as his servants of judgment, he punished them for being wicked themselves. How does he do that? Well, it goes back to some of our previous discussions about free will and divine sovereignty. God is powerful enough to remove his protective boundaries/grace, and he is smart enough to know what any particular person or empire will do once those boundaries are removed—and to what degree he should remove his graces. He knows the effects of that. In this way, he exercises sovereignty and people exercise their free will. The same idea, I suspect, can be applied to how God uses governments. But none of this suggests that God endorses what governments do in every situation. Even when in those situations, they are being used to carry out his judgment. It doesn't even mean in that moment he thinks they're doing right. No, he's just allowing them to do their evil thing. I mean, he doesn't think, for example, that the Babylonians in destroying Israel are doing a good thing, right? He just simply harnesses their wicked intents for his other purposes. So the same thing goes here in Romans 13. I don't think that passage is meant to endorse government at all. It's just simply to say that God can use government like he can use a donkey. He can use the government, he can use all kinds of sorts of things, right?

Here's the point: the government in Romans 13 is just that of a servant—a tool, that is—for God's use. You can't use Romans 13...hear me out on this... to advocate for the supremacy of your nation. Even though many people will try to do that, that's just absolutely wrong. It's, it's not sound exegesis. It leads to disastrous results. So let me repeat that again. You cannot use Romans 13 to advocate for the supremacy of your nation. You just can't do that. If I remember correctly, I remember Preston Sprinkle, who has done a lot of work on this topic, pointing out something very helpful in this regard. He points out that no particular government is in view here in Romans 13. Yes, the Roman Empire is technically in view but only with respect to making a larger point about all governments. In other words, this passage cannot be used to promote one's particular nation or *nationalism*. That was never the point of this passage.

33:10 Moving right along...let's get to verses 8-10. If Paul is concerned with what Christians ought *not* to do (namely, wickedness), in the next few verses, he mentions what they should do in order to live quiet lives as they pass their days in exile.

**8 Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 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, "Love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling [πλήρωμα] of the law.**

Here Paul quotes from Decalogue—the Ten Commandments. And he says that these commandments are "summed up" in the command to "**Love your neighbor as yourself.**" This is a quotation from Leviticus 19:18.

If you've been following along in the other episodes on Romans, you know how I've been emphasizing Paul's *christological* hermeneutics—that is, I've been emphasizing the way in which Paul read the OT in light of his belief that Jesus is the Messiah. So, how does that work here? Is Paul's hermeneutic still christological in this passage? I think it is.

So, let's capture Paul's logic. First, he says all the commandments are "summed up" in the command to simply "love your neighbor as yourself." And then he says that this loving-your-neighbor-as-yourself *fulfills* the law because love, obviously, does not harm its neighbor—it doesn't steal from them or murder them, etc.

In my Romans book, one thing I point out is how we might be tempted to think that what Paul is saying is that what Paul means by love fulfilling the law is that *love* renders all the other commandments as redundant and that *this* is all that Paul means by fulfilling the law. Right. And what I mean there is that if you love someone, then it's redundant to say don't steal from them, or don't murder them, because it would be redundant because you've already told them to love. So, is that what Paul means by fulfilling the law? Well, in my Romans book, I ask whether or not this is a sufficient account for all that Paul means by fulfilling the law. My answer in the book (and now) is that there's actually more going on if you take into account the larger context of Paul's letter to Romans. Specifically, I think Paul's idea of *love* is christologically defined and construed (see the argument I give in Halsted, *Paul and the Meaning of Scripture*, 220ff).

In my book, I point back to Romans 8 as part of the larger context here. And that's where Paul talks about fulfilling the law. So it makes sense if he's talking about fulfilling the law in these couple of places, maybe these two passages can inform each other. Let's take a look at Rom 8:1-5 for some context and help us understand perhaps what Paul is thinking when he talks about fulfilling the law in Romans 13.:

**1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. 3 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled [πληρώω] in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. (Romans 8:1–5; NRSV)**

The point here is that Paul envisions the Torah being fulfilled by the act of Christ's crucifixion, which is then something we participate in by virtue of the work of the Spirit in our lives. Galatians 5 and Romans 6 are other texts to bring in with respect to this discussion. Paul's overall way of thinking is that, because of our union with Christ—who have been baptized into Christ—participate in the love he displayed on the cross

such that, now, we too can show love to others. And it is *this* Christological love that fulfills the law. So, in Romans 13, we can't forget the christological element that serves to set the context for the concept of "love." Christians don't just *love* people in a way that is left undefined. To the contrary, we love people with the love that was shown to us by Christ. Christ's ministry shows us what love is like. It's a love that is a cruciform love.

And so, coming full circle, when Paul quotes Leviticus 19:18 about love fulfilling the Torah, he is quoting that text in such a way that it is christologically construed. His christological horizon of understanding sets the context for how to understand the love of which Leviticus speaks. And the levitical horizon of understanding sets the context for how to understand the work of Christ—namely, by reminding the readers that Jesus Christ is no mere random figure—he is one who brings the Old Testament's Torah story to completion. Christ fulfills the Torah, and so do we if we are in Christ.

39:06 Paul finishes up with vv. 11-14:

***11 Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; 12 the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; 13 let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. 14 Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.***

Paul doesn't think Christians have time to mess around. Because Christ marks a decisive turn of the ages, those who are in Christ participate in the future eschatological plans of God that come about in Christ and because of his ministry. In other words, the new Jerusalem is on its way; the new creation is right around the corner; the resurrection is nearby. And so, what sort of lives should Christians live? How should we conduct our lives in our exile? Paul tells us. We should live lives that put on display our new creation hearts. We should not look like the world that is engulfed in darkness. We should not give ourselves over to debauchery or jealousy. We should not seek revenge. We should not be those types of people. Instead, we are to "***put on the Lord Jesus Christ.***" We are to *clothe* ourselves in Christ. The clothing metaphor is helpful for Paul, I think, because it points again to our unity with Christ. It highlights the Christian calling. When people see Christians, they are to see Christ. If the church is the body of Christ, then, says Paul, let's get on with it—let's not mess around with the things from which we were saved and rescued. Let's live out the life—indeed, the love—that Christ has shown us. That is the calling that Christians have. And that is the calling that we must obey. So let's heed the words of Paul. Let's put on the Lord Jesus Christ as we pass our days in exile, as we wait for the coming New Jerusalem.

41:30 That's the end of today's episode. And thanks again for listening to The Bible Unmuted. If you like this podcast, consider rating it on your podcast platform, subscribing to it, and sharing with your friends. You can also support the podcast by becoming a Patreon

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