

# Romans

## #27: Love Is the Law

Romans 13:8-10

Dr. Kevin Maurice ---- March 29, 2026

Good morning, Grace! Happy Palm Sunday! Thank you to Michael and Cici and the band for leading us in worship this morning.

Well, it finally happens ... after years of resistance, years of saying, “You know, I’m different ... not for me,” I finally broke down. And the Maurice family purchased a minivan. At some point practicality wins. When you’ve got four daughters some things just make sense, like minivans ... or arranged marriage.

Now, I’ll admit ... it’s pretty great. The sliding doors—did you know they had those? They’re pretty cool. The cargo room ... The craziest thing, though, is this feature. It’s the parking camera. On my screen I’ve got this top-down 360-degree view of my vehicle. I can see everything around me. This minivan has given me expanded vision. No more blind spots ... at least when I’m driving.

Because I’ve got a lot of other blind spots in other areas of my life. It’s one thing to see cars and curbs. It’s another thing to see people—to actually see them—not just when I’m driving, but throughout my life. Because if I’m honest, most of the time I’m just thinking about me. I’m not thinking about other people. I’m thinking about what is next for me. What do I need to do next? What kid needs to go where? What is going on in my day? I’m looking through the windshield of my life.

And yet all around me are people ... neighbors and coworkers, people that I see every day, but I don’t always see them. A lot of the time they are in my blind spot. Anybody else feel that way?

This morning the Bible is going to expand our vision for other people. If you’re able, would you please stand with me for the reading of God’s Word? We’ve been in the Book of Romans since the fall, and today we’re in Romans 13, starting in verse 8. The Bible says:

**“Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For 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 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."**

This is the Word of God. Please be seated.

This passage teaches us that loving our neighbors is a debt that we owe. Loving our neighbors fulfills the law of God. And loving our neighbor seeks their ultimate good.

### Loving Our Neighbors Is a Debt We Owe

Romans 13:8-10 is three verses; it's one calling. Love your neighbors. Paul says, **"Owe no one anything, except love ..."** **"Owe no one anything"** ... Paul describes love as something that we owe people. Last week we talked about taxes. That's something we owe.

Now just a few verses later, Paul is saying love is what we owe people. When you owe something, it affects your priorities, it shapes your decisions.

And Paul says we owe love. And the kind of love that he's talking about here is not sentimental. It's not emotional or attraction-based love. It's that Greek word *agape*, the same word we studied two weeks ago. Jeremiah taught us that *agape* is self-giving. It's sacrificial. It's others-focused love. Even when it costs us something, it's love that moves towards people.

In Romans 12 Paul uses this word *agape* in the context of loving other Christians. In Romans 13 the circle of love is widened. And the implication of this is that it widens to include people who do not know Jesus.

This *agape* love is meant to move outward, beyond the church, into everyday life, into the world around us—our workplaces, our relationships, and with our neighbors.

Now when the Bible says "Love your neighbor," our instinct is to narrow that down and think, *Okay, who qualifies? Who actually counts? Who's in the HOA?*

Somebody asked Jesus that question once. He said, "Hey, who is my neighbor? Define that word." And Jesus responded by telling him a story. He said that once there was a man who was going on a business trip, and on his way, he was attacked on the road. And he was beaten and left for dead. But a good thing happened—a priest walked by. And the priest ignored him and kept on going. A few minutes later a religious person, a very religious churchgoer, walks by,

but then sees this injured man and crosses to the other side of the street so that he doesn't have to help.

Finally, a Samaritan—somebody who you would not expect, somebody who has to cross cultural and ethnic barriers and boundaries—stops and spends time and energy and money to care about this person. That's your neighbor.

Jesus is saying, *The question isn't "Who qualifies to be my neighbor?" The question is, "Will you love the people that God puts right in your path? Will you love the people right in front of you?"*

Or as one of my favorite TV stars used to sing, "Won't you be my neighbor?" Toward the end of the 1960s, segregation in this country, while no longer the law of the land, was still very much the reality. And one of the places that was most apparent was around water, especially swimming pools.



And if those lines were crossed, if those boundaries were crossed, hostility, and even violence, erupted. Once in Florida a group of white and black students jumped into a motel swimming pool together. And in response, the motel owner took a bottle of acid and poured it into the pool. Thank God, nobody was physically hurt.



But it was in that cultural context that a children’s TV show aired one of its most powerful episodes. One day on *Mr. Roger’s Neighborhood*, Fred Rogers invited Officer Clemmons, a Black policeman, to join him and cool their feet together in a small plastic swimming pool. Clemmons initially declines. He says, “I don’t have a towel.” But Mr. Rogers says, “Hey, that’s okay, we can share mine.”



The two men take off their shoes and their socks, and they roll up their pant legs, and they swish their feet around together in this water, very quietly showing a divided nation what loving your neighbor looks like. When Clemmons had to go, he used Mr. Rogers' towel to dry his feet. And Mr. Rogers actually bent down and washed Officer Clemmons' feet.

Love your neighbor. Not based on sameness or similarity. Love your neighbor out of proximity and opportunity. Your neighbors are the people around you. This word "neighbor" here in Romans 13 is not a fancy word. It's the Greek word *proxi*. It simply means "the ones nearby you." Your neighbors are your nearby ones. They're people within your reach.

There is something profoundly theological about proximity. The story of salvation is a story of proximity. God did not shout the good news to us from a distance. He stepped into our world. He became one of us. He ate our food and breathed our air and walked our streets. The pastor Eugene Peterson says, "The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood." And He did that for us. He did that for us because He loves us.

And listen, God, in His sovereignty, chose to place you at this point in all human history. Just think about that. You are who you are, you live where you do, you live when you do,

because God chose for you to be right here. That means your neighbors are in your proximity on purpose, for a purpose.

And here—we can make this much more concrete. Draw this with me in your Romans notebooks, if you have it, or open up a note on your phone. First draw yourself—this is you ... *[draws a stick figure]* there you go. Then I want you to draw three circles around you.

Now I want you to think of your neighbors—people nearby you—specifically, people nearby you who do not know Jesus—in your neighborhood, in your apartment, in your workplace. Maybe even in your family ... people in your proximity.

Pick three people or family members. Think about them, picture their faces. If you know their names, write down an initial.

All right, everybody got your neighbors? Let me ask you, how do you feel about these people? Do you like them? Do you dislike them? Are you ambivalent, or maybe annoyed? Does it depend on what political sign they put in their yard, or what flag they fly from their front porch? How do you feel about these three neighbors? These are the people God placed within your reach. And none of that is random or accidental. Your everyday environment is an arena of spiritual purpose where you are called to love your neighbors. The Bible actually says we owe them that. Because of what Jesus has done for us we're called to love these people.

And that's not just kind of a Christian slogan or a bumper sticker to remind us to be nice. That is active participation in the mission of God.

So, right now for the next minute together, we're going to pray for our neighbors. We're going to pray for these three circles for sixty seconds, right where we are. Let's just talk to God about these people. We can pray for their good. We can pray that God would open doors for meaningful relationship. We could pray that they would come to know Jesus. If you're not sure what to pray, just say their name to God. He knows who they are. He knows exactly what they need. Can we do that? Let's pray for our neighbors together.

*[Soft music plays.]*

Amen. This is where loving our neighbors begins—with prayerful hearts and open eyes toward people in our proximity.

## Loving Our Neighbors Fulfills the Law

Now here's what Paul wants us to understand: when we love other people, we are living out God's law. In fact, he says this: **"Love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law."**

Love is the fulfilling of the law. That's an insane statement. Loving our neighbors fulfills the law of God? Let me show you what this means.

*[Draws two tablets, with numbers 1-5 on the first and an arrow pointing up, and numbers 6-10 on the second with an arrow pointing both directions horizontally.]*

When God gave the law, the Ten Commandments, they were written on these two stone tablets. The first tablet, commandments one through five, were all commands about loving God. The spiritual obligation was upward. No other gods. No idols. Keep God's name holy. Keep the Sabbath holy. Even the commandment to honor your father and mother is an authority-structure command. Even the fifth commandment is viewed as this spiritual obligation that is primarily upward.

With the second tablet, commandments six through ten, the spiritual obligation is outward. These are all commands about loving other people. Do not murder other people. Do not commit adultery with other people. Do not steal from people. Do not bear false witness against people. Do not covet other people. These commands shape our relationships with our neighbors. The spiritual obligation goes outward.

These are not just a set of religious rules. The law of God is meant to form a community, a group of people, where love for God (upward) and love for our neighbors (outward) is embodied and lived out.

And so, it's with that context, when you look at Romans 13, that we see the commandments that Paul describes here. Adultery (don't commit adultery) breaks covenant love. Murder destroys life. Stealing disregards dignity. Coveting poisons the heart.

Each of these commands shows us the inverse of love. Because real love, true love, is faithful. Real love protects life. Love respects people. Love rejoices in what God has provided.

These commands are love lived out. So, it's not about rule-keeping. It's about relationship-keeping. That's what God's law is always pointing us toward.

And Jesus makes this perfectly clear. Someone asked Him, "Hey, what's the greatest commandment?" *The Ten Commandments—the top ten—what's your number one?*

He said the entire law can be summed up in two commands: love God, and love others. Now the issue is that none of us has loved like that—not perfectly. We’ve all broken God’s law in our actions, in our attitudes, in our motives and desires.

And that’s why Jesus came to save us. Because He perfectly fulfilled the law. He fulfilled it. Every moment of His life was marked by love for God and love for people.

And at one moment in human history, this perfect love was put on display. This perfect love—upward and outward [*draws a cross*]. On the cross the love of God was on display. Jesus paid the penalty for every way that we’ve failed to love God and for every way that we’ve failed to love other people.

So now, through the Gospel, through the cross of Christ, we are called to be people who show that kind of love—not out of some religious duty, but out of delight. Love fulfills the law because love is the law.

And the more deeply we allow the love of God to work in us, the more freely it can move through us toward other people. That’s what the law is about.

### Loving Our Neighbors Seeks Their Ultimate Good

And when we truly love other people, when we really love our neighbor, we seek their ultimate good. Paul writes it this way: **“Love does no wrong to a neighbor.”** But doing no wrong doesn’t just mean avoiding harm; it means pursuing good.

Christian love is not satisfied with temporary comfort or superficial peace. Love longs for the eternal well-being of another person. Because if the Gospel is true, if sin truly separates people from God, and if Jesus is the only way to be reconciled to God the Father, then the most loving thing we can do for our neighbors is to help them know Jesus. Anything less than that is incomplete love.

You can think about it this way. The neighbors that you interact with, the neighbors, the people in your proximity, will exist forever. And they will either exist in the presence of a holy God who created and loved them, or they will exist separated from Him forever.

Seeking another person’s ultimate good is helping them get to know Jesus.

Now, if we’re honest, that’s where so many of us struggle. And we feel this tension. Because we want that. We want to love our neighbors that way. We want them to know Jesus, but we also feel this fear. There’s this fear of awkward interactions, or fear of rejection or

conflict, fear of things being kind of weird with the people next door, fear of damaging relationships.

And that fear makes us hesitant. So, we don't bring up Jesus. We just keep talking about the weather. But listen to this perspective from someone who challenges that fear and challenges that hesitation.

The magician Penn Jillette, an outspoken atheist, shared the story of a man who approached him once after a show and said, "Hey, I just want to tell you that Jesus loves you." And the man proceeded to share the Gospel with him.

Penn Jillette didn't choose to believe in Jesus that night. But he walked away with this conclusion: "If you believe that there's a heaven and hell ...and that Jesus is the only way ... how much do you have to hate somebody to NOT share that with them?"

If the Gospel is good news, silence is not kindness. It's not. Christian love will not let stay silent. Real love points people to Jesus.

And so, what does that look like for us? How do we do that? Let's go back to our circles. Think of those three people has placed near you. What would it look like to love them in a way that seeks their ultimate good; loving them in a way that moves toward them with the Gospel?

### **See Your Neighbors**

I think there are four things. Number one, the first thing is that we need to see them. No more blind spots. We need to see the people that God has placed in our proximity and learn their names and get to know their stories. And then we can pray for them.

Listen, we just did that together. Let's keep that up—regularly, intentionally, praying for these people. Make it a family activity. Make it a roommate activity where you do this around the dinner table.

Pray for your neighbors. Because when you start praying for someone, they move from being kind of a background character to your life into this place where they are someone we know, someone we care about. Pray for the people around you.

### **Care About Your Neighbors' Souls**

And then, pay attention. Look for opportunities to be a neighbor. What that means is caring about them. Care about your neighbors. Take an extra minute before you close the garage

door. Offer to help carry the groceries up the stairs. Ask about their child's soccer game—not because you care about the soccer game (it's eight-year-olds), but because you care about them. And you care about their kid. So, you ask. Listen, when the Zoom call at work ends five minutes early, don't immediately log off. Stay on for the five minutes and just ask, "Hey, how are you doing? Anything going on in your life?" Ask to pray for people. Invite them into your life, and step into theirs. Care about your neighbors. Build relational bridges.

### **Be Winsome**

Number three—be winsome. A missionary friend of mine likes to say, "Be winsome so that you could win some." That's kind of cheesy, so I'm going to take it off. But winsomeness is defined as "attractive in character."

And listen, in 2026, kindness is so disarming to people. Humility is so attractive. Joy is contagious. Winsomeness is being the type of person that someone would actually want to talk to about something as important as faith in Jesus. Be winsome.

In her book about her journey from being a committed lesbian to becoming a committed follower of Jesus, the author Rosario Butterfield tells this story. Before she became a Christian, she viewed every Christian as mean-spirited and hateful and judgmental. She once wrote an op-ed piece criticizing churches. And responses to this article poured in, and she sorted them into two piles. There was fan mail and there was hate mail. And where do you think most of the hate mail came from? Most of it came from people who claimed to know and love Jesus.

And then one day she received this letter, and she didn't know what to do with it. A local pastor wrote to her. And he disagreed with every single one of her conclusions. But he disagreed gently. And he showed her this genuine respect, and even love. So, she put that letter on her desk, and she didn't know which pile to put it in. And for seven days it just sat there. She couldn't take it anymore. She reached out to the guy. They met for coffee. And then they met again. And then the pastor and his wife invited her into their home, and they began to have dinner together. They cared about her. They were winsome.

And Rosario Butterfield credits that relationship as the doorway that led to her placing her faith in Jesus.

Loving your neighbor doesn't mean compromising truth; it means carrying that truth with grace, maybe listening more than you speak, asking good questions, showing genuine interest, being the type of person that somebody would actually want to talk to about Jesus.

### Move Towards Gospel Conversations

Number four: talk about Jesus. Move toward people with the Gospel. Move toward the Gospel. When the opportunity arises don't shrink back. Press in. Talk about your faith. Engage with spiritual topics. Share your own story. Maybe it starts with a question: *Hey, can I pray for you? Can I share about what gives me hope in a world that seems kind of hopeless? Can I tell you how Jesus has completely changed my life?*

Listen, if you love your neighbor, if you see them, if you care about them, if you're winsome and you're part of their lives, God will give you an opportunity where you can move toward them with the Gospel, a Gospel conversation. It might come when you least expect it.

My wife Kate is amazing at this. She sees our neighbors. She reminds me of their names constantly. *Who's that again?* She's not just walking through her day. She really engages with people. She cares about her coworkers, she leans in, she schedules meetings just to talk. She wants them to know Jesus. And I so admire that about her.

Because, y'all, it ain't me. That is so hard for me. Listen, I want them to know Jesus. But I live in fear, and I tend to hesitate. And I give myself excuses. I don't want to come across as too pushy. I want to be kind and caring and neighborly and all that, but I'd rather do a favor and pull up their trashcans or something than bring up Jesus. It's hard.

A couple of weeks ago, one of our neighbor's car wouldn't start. A critter had gotten into the engine and chewed up all the wires. So, it gets towed off and fixed. The car gets brought home. But a few days later she starts to notice a smell. (Some of you know where this is going.)

Now my wife Kate, God bless her heart, volunteered me to go help with this situation. So, I walk across the street. I open the car door. I smell the smell. I pull back this panel, I reach my hand up in there and I'm reaching around, and I pull out a dead squirrel from this woman's vehicle. (Listen, it wouldn't have happened if she'd had a minivan ... just saying ...)

Here's the thing. It's easier for me to go do that than it is to walk over there and just invite her to church. And y'all, I work here! But man, bring on all the critters—I'm your guy. But bringing up Jesus? Well, hem, haw, I don't know whether it's the right time. I don't want it

to be awkward. Maybe I should wait. Maybe I should wait? Are you kidding me? I owe it to her. I owe it to her to love her in that way.

So, here's the opportunity this week. We're going to make this really practical. Think of your three circles—the names you wrote down. Move toward one of them with the Gospel this week. Pick one of them. In the lobby we have these Easter invite cards. Go pick one up. I think there's a QR code you can scan so that you can have it on your phone. Invite one of your three to church next Sunday. Shoot a text, walk it over there. That's what I'm asking all of us to do. That's what I'm asking myself to do. Sometime in the next six days I'm going to walk over to squirrel lady's house, and I'm going to hand her this card and say, "Would you come to church with me next Sunday?" And if she does, please, none of you call her that. That would be a bad way to start.

You don't have to have all the right words. You don't have to answer every question. Just move toward one neighbor with love. Invite one person to church.

And then here's a next step. At Grace we know that every believer is a minister. And we want to equip every one of our ministers to be able to share their faith. We've got a class called Gospel Conversations Training. It's coming up in two weeks, Sunday, April 12<sup>th</sup>, from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm. Lunch is provided, childcare is provided. This is a step-by-step, how-to, very practical class on how to start a conversation, how to continue the conversation. The people who teach it are so winsome. This is an incredible opportunity to learn how to share the Gospel. If you've never taken this class, I could not recommend it more. Sign up today. You can do that online.

Loving our neighbors—God says we owe it to them. Love fulfills the law. And when we love people, we seek their ultimate good.

## **Palm Sunday**

And that brings us back to Palm Sunday. Two thousand years ago, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. There were crowds lining the street. People were waving palm branches and shouting, "Hosanna!"

Jesus the King was riding into His city. But He didn't come to take a throne. He came to go to the cross so that we could be forgiven, so that we could know God and experience His

love. Jesus moved into our neighborhood, and He loved His neighbors so that we could become more than that; so that we could be adopted into His family. That's what He did for us.

And now we get to share that love with other people.

Today we're going to remember what Christ has done for us by celebrating or taking communion together. If you haven't picked up the elements yet, you can do that. They're in the halls leading into here. As a church body let's celebrate communion as believers have done for two thousand years.

The night before Jesus was crucified, He was in a room with His disciples. And He said, "I call you friends." The Last Supper was a meal between friends. And Jesus looked at His friends, and He was thinking about us. At the meal He held up a piece of bread, and He said, "This is my body, and it's broken for you. He knew that within twenty-four hours He would be nailed to a cross. Nails would be going through His hands, through His feet. And He knew that, and He went there out of love for you and for me, His friends, His neighbors.

So, as we eat the bread, we remember that the God of the universe stepped toward us in love so that we could be forgiven and brought back into a relationship with Him. Let's eat the bread together.

After the meal, Jesus took a cup of wine. And He said, "This is my blood, the blood of the new covenant. It's my blood that is poured out for you." On the cross Jesus would bleed from His hands and His feet, from His head where they put a crown of thorns on Him. And the King of the universe did that to bring about a new kingdom. It's a kingdom of love.

As we drink this juice together, we remember Jesus' blood poured out for us so that we could be reconciled with Him. Let's drink together.

Communion is a reminder. It's His body broken for us. It's His blood poured out for us. This is the love that fulfilled the law. The law was never only about words and inscribed on stone. The law was engraved in human flesh and written in Jesus' blood. It is the law of love.

And now we as His followers get to be people who show that love to the Lord. We love one another as a body of Christ. And we love others. That's our calling. That's our mission. And we get to do it together.

Let's ask God to help us do that. Would you please pray with me?

*Heavenly Father, we thank You for who You are; that while we were still sinners, You loved us. You sent Your Son for us. God, we pray that we would be people who represent that love to a world that so desperately needs it.*

*And God, speaking personally as someone who hesitates and who fears initiating conversations about You, I pray that You would calm those fears. Help us as people to be confident—not in ourselves, but in who You are. God, salvation belongs to You. And so, we can reach out and love our neighbors with the Gospel because we trust You.*

*God, I ask this week that You would make it easy for us; that we could ask one of those three neighbors, one of those circles, “Hey, where do you go to church? What do you believe?” Help us to be messengers of the Gospel and of Your love. We pray these things in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*