

LIGHTHOUSE GROUP CURRICULUM

Romans 13:8-14

LEADER'S STUDY

The Law of Love

Romans 13:8-14

What is happening?

The apostle Paul is writing to Christ-followers in Rome to help them understand some of the basic principles of the faith and encourage them in their walk with the Lord. In verses 1-12 of this chapter, he addressed the importance of being subject to the civil government, which includes paying our taxes and other worldly debts. Being as debt-free as possible is a consistent scriptural principle that God's people are called to follow, and Paul builds upon that when he says we should owe no one anything—except to love. And that is something we owe everyone. By owing love to everyone, Paul declares, we fulfill the whole law.

What law? God's law, for starters, but all civil law as well. If we love others, our actions will be respectful toward authorities, considerate of those around us, generous with our resources, merciful toward those who suffer, and faithful to our word. Fulfilling God's "law of love" covers all the bases! But more importantly, it glorifies God and makes the gospel attractive to the world.

Where is the gospel?

The gospel exemplifies this "law of love." God is both altogether holy (He fulfills all the law) and altogether merciful (He loves us despite our sin). Because He is altogether righteous, He can't overlook our sin, pretending it doesn't exist; perfect righteousness requires that justice be served. But His perfect love moved Him to pay the required penalty for our sin Himself, through the sacrifice of His own Son on the cross, so we can legally be declared righteous before Him. His love fulfills every requirement of His law.

When we accept His atonement on our behalf, we must accept the reality that it extends not to us alone, but to everyone. We must understand it's not based on our merit (for we have none!) but on the sinless perfection of Jesus Christ. When we receive this mercy, realizing what a gift it is that we've received enables us to extend that same love and mercy to others—with no regard whatsoever to their worthiness or lack thereof. It transforms our perspectives and attitudes. It frees us from old habits of thought and action. It empowers us to walk in the light of God's love rather than the desires of the flesh.

As you prepare for this week, ask yourself questions like these: Do I see a conflict between obeying civil laws and obeying God's law? How does God's love draw me out of the world's darkness and into His light? How is God calling me to depend on Him more? How does this change my perspective today? How is God calling me to respond based on this scripture?

Spend some time reading and meditating on these truths as you prepare for your meeting. Be willing to share this with your group and invite them to join you in sharing how God is asking them to respond to His word. Be willing to share areas that He is calling you to "follow Him" and make clear "I" statements about how you are going to align with Him.

Some helpful scriptures: Psalm 19:7; Matthew 22:35-40; John 13:34-35; 1 Corinthians 15:34; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; Ephesians 6:11; Colossians 3:14. What other places in scripture speak this same truth?

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INTENTIONAL BIBLE READING

READ Romans 13:8-14
and meditate on it.

Read in the ESV or similar word-for-word translation. Read it again in the NLT or other thought-for-thought version to get a different perspective.

Try to summarize this passage in your own words.

Consider the historical context:

1- Paul wrote this letter to Christians in Rome, a place he had not yet visited but hoped to one day (1:8-15). Until such time as he could make the trip and speak to them in person (which he eventually did, Acts 28:11-30), he wrote this letter to strengthen their faith.

2 – The church in Rome was comprised of both Jews and Gentiles, and that is reflected in the issues Paul addressed.

3 – Keeping God's commandments (v. 9) would have been of particular importance to the Jewish believers, and keeping the civil law was applicable to everyone. Does God require us to keep the Old Testament commandments today?

POTENTIAL STUDY QUESTIONS

These are just questions you might ask to help your group discussion. Don't feel like you need to answer all of these as a group

What seems to be the main point of this passage?

What does it mean that we are to "owe" others love?

How does paying this debt of love fulfill the commandments?

What does Paul mean in v. 11 that it's time to wake from sleep?

In v. 12, what does it mean to cast off the works of darkness?

In v. 12, what "day" is at hand? How do we "put on the armor of light"?

What relation does "put on the armor of light" in v. 12 have with "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" in v. 14?

Does making no provision for the flesh (v. 14) mean we shouldn't provide for our physical needs?

What do you learn about God from this passage?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

Do I have a hard time thinking of love as a debt I owe to others?

How can loving others (a positive command) fulfill the "Thou Shalt Not" (negative) commandments?

The "works of darkness" behaviors in v. 13 run the gamut from the *Oh, my, I'd never do that!* type of sin (i.e., "orgies") to the *That's not really all that bad, is it?* variety (i.e. "jealousy"). Why are they all on the same list? Do they all have equal weight in God's eyes?

In what ways to I sleepwalk through life, forgetting that "the day is at hand"?

What is your "I will" statement?

(Encourage everyone to steer clear of "we" or "us" or "Christians" statements)

With whom are you going to share what you have learned?

(If we can share it with someone else it means we really understand it, it cements it in our own minds, it makes us accountable to the truth, and it blesses the one who hears it. Rom 10:17)

Based on this passage, how should we pray?