

Leader's Guide

LESSON 23

Dr. Jerry Nelson

In response to the sermon on February 24th.

Romans 13:8-10 **A Debt of Love**

Key Points

In Romans 13:7, the Apostle Paul begins with a difficult challenge: debt that will never be paid off—the debt of love we owe one another. The command to love one another is never completed. It is on-going and most often requires personal sacrifice. In these brief verses Paul addresses:

- Our debt of love to one another
- Love in relation to the commandments
- Love in relation to our neighbors
- Love as fulfillment of the law

Debt has weight. If we think about a debt that we knew we would *never* pay off, a debt that would follow us to the grave, no doubt the pressure of that debt would weigh heavily upon us. We might even lament the circumstances that got us into that situation in the first place. Our sense of obligation to something or someone would be cumbersome, leaving us open for bitterness or resentment. Though impossible, we would long for the day of release.

At times we are tempted to think of relational debt in the same way. For those who are difficult to love, who demand more than we think we are able to give, do we hope that our efforts will someday be “enough,” that there will be a fulfillment to our obligation, that our debt of love will be “paid in full?” The truth is, no matter how difficult the circumstances may be, we are under obligation to keep on loving. And that obligation comes with a price. Inevitably our “debt of love” will cost us time, resources, and emotional energy. Our challenge is to love one another as naturally as we love ourselves.

Personal Reflection

- This has been stated a number of times throughout this series, but without an experiential understanding of God’s great love for us, our “love” for one another may be more out of duty than from the heart. We cannot give away what we do not possess. Effort alone will be short-lived. It takes the supernatural work of the Spirit within us.
- God’s love has been demonstrated throughout the Book of Romans. You are encouraged to revisit those texts with your group so that they can once again recount the ways that God loves them. It is within this context that we can love others. In preparation for this week’s study, write out a brief prayer of thanksgiving to God for his great love for you. Consider how the Spirit has enabled you to love others, perhaps when you did not have a desire to do so. Ask others to share their stories of Spirit-enabled love. You might also wish to refresh your memory of the excerpt from the book by Thomas Chalmers on *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection* – attached.

Discussion Questions

1. Who is your neighbor?
2. Knowing that we are sinful and self-centered, why would God give us such a difficult command?
3. What are some examples of how we love ourselves?
4. How would simply doing nothing possibly harm our neighbor?
5. What practical actions can we take to “Love your neighbor as yourself?”
6. How does the Spirit enable you to love others when you do not desire to do so?
7. What part does resolve play in our love for one another?
8. What is our greatest struggle in this passage?