

# Churches shaped for glory

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well do turn with me if you would to Romans chapter 13, page 948 in the Church Bibles. And we come back once again to Paul's teaching on church life, that is being shaped by grace and shaped for glory.

From the great therefore that begins Romans chapter 12 verse 1, the rest of this letter for the most part really speaks about worship.

But the spiritual worship that Paul's interested in here and speaking about is not about hymns and songs and liturgy in the church, rather it's all about harmony and service and love in the life of the church.

And the headline verses, verses 1 and 2 of chapter 12, they remind us sharply that the sacrifice that God really desires is a living one.

It's the bodily surrender of Christian character. It's being shaped by the grace of God for the glory of God. And we saw last time in verses 3 to 13 of chapter 12, that the focus of our corporate worship as a church is likewise not on shared ceremonies, but on shared character.

[ 1 : 24 ] Church life shaped in every way by grace. In loving service, Paul says, to one another. And because real love to God will always be visible.

Visible in real love for God's people. And that love is real, it's tangible. Remember we saw that it's manifested in sober thinking about each other, in selfless giving to each other, in sincere loving of one another.

That is real worship, says Paul. That is love in action. It's a tangible evidence of the obedience of faith in our lives.

Because as Paul says in verse 11 of chapter 12, such loving service of one another in the church is in fact what it means to serve the Lord himself.

Serve the Lord, he says. Well, in chapter 13, verse 8, we come to today, Paul comes back to the same theme of loving one another. And he gives another reason why this is so fundamental in the worship of God.

[ 2 : 33 ] That is what serves the Lord, he says, because that is what truly fulfills the law of God. And these verses balance, verses 3 to 13 of chapter 12.

They enclose that central portion that I said speaks about Christian citizenship. We'll come back to that next time. But it's clear that his focus here again in these verses, verse 8 of chapter 13 and following, is on the church community once again.

Love each other, love one another, he says in verse 8. And that clearly echoes all these references to each other and one another that we saw in chapter 12. And it always refers to fellow believers when Paul says that, love one another.

It's almost identical if you read in Galatians 5, verse 13. He says almost the same thing. So he's clearly talking to the church about the conduct of the church in our own life and affairs.

In lives that are transformed by the Spirit of God, not by the Spirit of this age. But of course in saying that, there are no limitations of this love, as if it was only towards fellow Christians.

[ 3 : 47 ] Of course not. That's clear when Paul says, love your neighbour. He's echoing, isn't he, the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is so clear that our neighbours extend not only to those we don't know, but those who we consider as enemies.

Indeed, the whole focus of this chapter also is outwards, in love to all people. And we'll see that God's love, and therefore God's law, is not just about morality, but it's about mission.

Now look at verse 8. The command is very straightforward, isn't it? In the first line, love one another. Don't owe anything, he says, but your absolute duty that you have to love people.

In fact, the implication he gives here is that it's an ongoing debt. It's a debt of love that we owe. It's something that can never be discharged. It's not like a mortgage debt, which one day at last you hope will be discharged.

You don't have to keep paying it. It's more like an annuity. The kind of thing that goes on paying all through your life, whatever happens. Well, that's what our debt of love is.

[ 4 : 59 ] And the reason comes in the second half of the verse. Do you see? Love because love fulfills the law. The one who has loved another has fulfilled the law.

Well, what does that mean? Well, despite all Paul's argument against pursuing works of the law as a way of justifying yourself before God, nevertheless, the whole argument in this book of Romans is not at all that God's law is unimportant, far less that God's law is abolished.

But rather, his argument is that God's law is fulfilled, that it reaches its whole goal, its whole purpose through the Lord Jesus Christ. It's we who establish the law, says Paul, remember back in chapter 3, verse 13.

We establish it as what it truly is, a law of faith, faith in Christ, and the righteousness that alone can bring the righteousness that we need before God.

That righteousness finds its goal in Jesus Christ. Christ for righteousness is the goal of the law for everyone who believes, he said back in chapter 10, verse 4.

[ 6 : 16 ] So, where professing believers truly love, Paul is saying, there is evidence of that divine righteousness that comes through Christ alone to us.

Truly loving shows that we are, in fact, being shaped by God's grace for glory as God's true people of righteousness. Love is the fulfillment, the fullness of the law, says verse 10.

It's important, friends, that we're very, very clear about this relationship between God's love and God's law because people are often very confused. So, I want today to see how these verses, in their immediate context, but also in the wider context of the whole Bible story, how they remind us that loving one another fulfills God's law in at least three ways.

Such love pleases the Lord, such love proclaims the Lord, and such love also is preparing us for the Lord and for his kingdom.

First of all then, Paul teaches us here that loving one another fulfills the purpose of God's law in us. The demand for God's glory and righteousness in us.

[ 7 : 40 ] And so love pleases the Lord. Paul tells us clearly here, doesn't he, that love is what lies at the very heart of all God's commands in the law.

Look at verse 8, love fulfills the law. Verse 10, love is the fullness of the law. Love, therefore, sums up everything that God wants from human beings.

Those who love are the doers of the law who will be justified that Paul spoke of in chapter 2, verse 13. Not just hearers, but doers.

Those who love show that they are not those who are hard and impenitent in heart. But they are those whose hearts are full of the grace of God.

They show that the work of the law, that what really matters to God is written in their hearts. It shows that they are people who are truly circumcised in heart.

[ 8 : 46 ] That's all language Paul used back in chapter 2. Of course, by nature, none of us, none of us truly loves his neighbour like this because none of us truly loves God in righteousness.

People who cherish God's law know that better than anybody else. Paul said that back in chapter 3 of Romans. By the law comes knowledge of sin. Through God's law that we know that all sinned and lack the glory of God, the righteousness that God demands of us.

But those who are justified by faith in Christ have had God's love poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit. Paul said in chapter 5, verse 5.

And the wonder of the gospel is that through Christ's work for us on the cross and Christ's work in us by his Spirit, the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Romans 8, verse 4. And to walk according to the Spirit is to walk in love. To walk in the true and holy love of God our Saviour.

[ 10 : 01 ] Paul's consistent about this all through his writings. Galatians chapter 5. Read it later. See how interchangeably he uses these terms. Love one another, he says. Walk by the Spirit.

Fulfill the law of Christ. Christ. In Ephesians, the same language. Walk worthily, he says. Walk in love. Walk in light. Love and submit to one another.

God is love, says the Apostle John. And Jesus revealed that ultimate love to us. And therefore, love is the most excellent way without which anything else matters nothing in our life in the church.

That's what Paul says to the Corinthians, remember. But to love others, you see, is to truly reflect the heart of God himself. That's why Jesus said to his own disciples, a new commandment I give to you that you love one another as I have loved you.

An old command, certainly, but filled with new and ultimate height and depth and length and breadth because the love of God is revealed to us absolutely in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 11 : 17 ] It's this love, this Christ-like service of one another that shows that the purpose of God is fulfilled in us.

That we are truly right with God in heart. That his love has been poured into our hearts by his Holy Spirit. John says, if anyone says, I love God and hates his brother, he's a liar.

For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

And this commandment we have from him, whoever loves God must also love his brother.

So it says, Paul, love each other for the one who loves has fulfilled the law. True love fulfills the purpose of God's law in us.

It's what God really wants. It's his real righteousness that pleases him. So in a sense, you see, the Beatles were right when they sang love is all you need.

[ 12 : 27 ] That's what the Apostle John says. Whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Love is the very heart of all the commands of God's law.

But what is love? The love that is the only thing that God wants of us. Well friends, don't miss the vital significance of verse 9.

It's true indeed that love is at the very heart of God's commands but it is equally true says Paul here that God's commands are at the very heart of true love.

Love fulfills the law but true love never forgets God's law. It's God's law that teaches us what true love really is.

You see, to love one another, to love our neighbour is just a shorthand way of saying that we live under the control of God's sovereign lordship and he tells us what loving conduct really is like.

[ 13 : 37 ] That's so, so important for us to grasp today. Because in our modern world, our use of this world, love, has just become so threadbare. It's so vague.

It's so emotional. It's so sentimental. I live by love. And people mean by that simply that they live but what they feel the loving thing might be at any particular moment, the form of their own mind or heart.

Even many Christians will say, oh, it's God's love that we live by, not his law. Jesus, Jesus showed love to everyone. That's all that matters surely, isn't it?

My friends, that is not so according to the Bible. Nowhere in the New Testament ever is God's law opposed to God's love or love opposed to God's law.

And here in Romans 13, just as everywhere else, that is as plain as a pike staff. We get to the heart, says Paul, of what real love is when we get to the heart of God's commands.

[ 14 : 43 ] It's God's commands that teach us how to love in practice. Now I'm laboring this point because it's so, so important. Let me go back to what Jesus himself said.

Just listen. If you love me, you will keep my commandments. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.

Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. Have you got that? Love and obedience are two sides of the same coin to Jesus.

Jesus. And so here exactly with the Apostle Paul, verse 9. Verse 9 of chapter 12, look back to that. Let love be genuine, he says. Well, what is genuine love?

Love that's not just sentimentalism. Love that's not just self-deception. Well, it's in the second half of that verse. Love that is genuine is love that abhors evil and clings to good.

[ 15 : 45 ] The love that fulfills the law, the love that fulfills God's will, God's good and well-pleasing and perfect will, as it's put in verse 2 of chapter 12.

That love shows itself in honouring the commands of God and it's God's commands that tell us what is evil and what is good and no other. Do you see?

So, verse 9 of chapter 13, true love, genuine love, is love that guards sexual intimacy within marriage alone, for example.

You shall not commit adultery. It won't harm others. You shall not murder. It won't cheat them. No stealing. It won't harbour covetousness.

It will be content. It will honour every other command of God too, says Paul, because that is what it means to love. God defines love and God directs our love by teaching us what to abhor as evil and what to cling to as good.

[16:54] There are necessary negatives involved in the love that God commands. You shall love your neighbour as yourself, says verse 9, but that involves the four negative you shall not and many more beside because to do all of these things, says Paul, is anti-love.

Look down to verse 13 of chapter 13 and you see the same thing again. To walk properly, to walk in love together, means not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarrelsomeness and jealousy.

All these things are anti-love behaviour because they damage us. They damage our neighbours. They damage the church. They damage families and communities and nations and societies.

All these things, you see, are visible signs of anti-worship. The very opposite of true worship of God that Paul describes in Romans chapter 1 where people exchange the truth of God for a lie and they worship the creature, not the creator.

And God gives them over, he says there, to impurity, to dishonourable passions, to debased minds. And that is manifest in what?

[18:11] All manner of sexual immorality and all manner of social immorality. The things Paul describes right here. All of these things are the very opposite of love because they're the very opposite of the good and well-pleasing and perfect will for our lives that God made us for as his own image.

Now do you see what a tragic confusion it is at best? And in fact, what outright wickedness it is at worst. When there are those in the Christian church today who use the motive of love to justify all kinds of things that God explicitly tells us are evil.

That's to say yes to verse 8 of chapter 13 but to chop verses 9 to 14 out of our Bibles altogether. But no, love cannot possibly fulfil God's law if it forgets God's law.

That's the confusion going on in so many churches in the Western world today including our own denomination about same-sex unions for example. You see people say surely to be loving we must accept these things.

We want to show the love and acceptance of God to everybody. I have no doubt that in tomorrow's debate in our General Assembly that kind of thing will be being said repeatedly on the floor.

[19:41] But Paul says no. It cannot be loving to accept what God unequivocally says is wrong. Yes indeed we must show God's love and his mercy to all but God's true love calls all of us every one of us to repent and to submit to his righteousness.

And if God says as he does in 1 Corinthians 6 that living a lifestyle of sexual immorality or idolatry or adultery or practicing homosexuality or drunkenness or thieving or greed or swindling that that means you cannot inherit the kingdom of God you cannot be saved unless you turn your back on these lifestyles then surely the most unloving thing that we could ever do is not to urge such a person and to help such a person with all of our strength to leave that life of sin to walk in the light of the Lord Jesus Christ under his lordship.

Jesus truly loved the woman taken in adultery in John chapter 8. I do not condemn you he said but go and leave your life of sin.

that's the word of love that the Lord Jesus Christ directs to every single one of us as sinners. And they are the words of love that we must also direct to one another if we're to love one another isn't that so?

We need to be real with one another that's what it means to be loving. The New Testament constantly tells us what Paul says in Galatians 6 that when one another are caught in sins we are to restore one another gently and truthfully.

[21:41] That's real love calling each other to repentance and to faith. And we need to speak that truth in love to one another. That's how we grow up into maturity.

That's one of the reasons that we're starting new men's triplets in the church to help us love one another by calling one another to truth to repentance to holiness.

See, Paul is no idealist. He knows fine that all these issues are in the church but he loves so much that he speaks the truth. He calls us to true love to the obedience to God's commands.

And that is what fulfills the true purpose of God's law in us. That's what really matters to God. Not circumcision or uncircumcision merely outward things as Paul says to the Galatians but faith working through love.

Or to put it another way as he does to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 7 not circumcision or uncircumcision but keeping the commands of God. That is faith working through love.

[ 22 : 55 ] Love is an integral part of the obedience of faith but obedience to God is integral to all true love. Peter, the apostle is just as clear in 1 Peter 1 verse 22 when he says that we're purified through obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love.

The apostle John likewise this is how we know that we're the children of God he says when we love God and obey his commandments for this is the love of God that we keep his commandments.

One last reference turn with me to this it's worth you seeing this 2 John verses 5 and 6 you'll find it on page 1025 in the church bibles Dick Lucas pointed these verses out to me some time ago and it's very helpful for you to know and to be able to turn to when somebody's confused about this issue.

2 John verse 5 Now I ask you dear lady not as though I were writing to you a new commandment but the one we have had from the beginning that we love one another and this is love that we walk according to his commandments.

You see verse 5 a commandment that we love one another verse 6 what is love to obey God's commandments couldn't be clearer So let's be clear about this friends this is Christ's gospel this is the apostolic faith this is what God means by loving one another it means living together under the authority of God's word in all scripture in obedience to his rule and faithfully submitting to his good and well pleasing and perfect will in our lives as he tells us what is evil and he tells us what is good that's the loving that pleases the Lord that fulfills the law There's more than that as the outward focus of these verses implies to love our neighbor to live so as to truly love one another not only pleases the Lord says Paul it proclaims the Lord that's another way in which love fulfills the law loving one another fulfills the purpose of God's law through us it displays to the world

[ 25 : 25 ] God's glory and his righteousness and so it proclaims the Lord see God's law has always been about not just morality but also about mission right from the very start the holiness of God's law it had clear missionary purpose if you read Deuteronomy chapter 4 you'll find that when Moses spoke to Israel he urged them to live in obedience to God's commandments and he said for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of all the peoples they will see your lifestyle of holiness and they'll say to themselves what a wise and understanding people what a great God they have in the midst of them see God's law makes his righteous love visible through his people to the world like a light in the darkness now back in Romans chapter 2

Paul says that Israel clearly understood that that was what they were for because you're instructed from the law he says you know that you are guides to the blind a light to those in the darkness an instructor to the foolish a teacher of children having in the law an embodiment of knowledge and truth that's what they were for but of course the tragedy was that their light was darkness those who boasted in the law dishonoured God said Paul by breaking the law not living in this obedient faith to God not living in his love and so instead of proclaiming the glory of God what does Paul say rather God's name is blasphemed among the nations because of you that was the tragedy of Israel as the prophet said my servant Israel is blind and deaf said Isaiah but you see all that that God's law and his prophets spoke about his people being a light to the world that couldn't possibly be allowed to just fall to the ground no says Jesus

I've come not to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfil them Matthew chapter 5 and you he said you who follow me you who obey my words you are the light of the world let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your father in heaven that's why he said straight afterwards therefore whoever does and teaches God's commandments will be called great in the kingdom of heaven you see Christ's people whether they're circumcised from a Jewish background or uncircumcised Gentiles God's people expressing the obedience of true faith through love will display the righteousness and the glory of God to this world when we live these lives of love we proclaim the Lord that's the sheer drawing power the attractiveness of true holiness because true holiness friends is true humanity it's true

Christ likeness people flock to the light of the Lord Jesus Christ people flock to the light of the early church read the early chapters of Acts great grace was upon them all people saw that love in action and they praised God and they sought God that's what Jesus meant in John 13 when he said all

people will know that you are my disciples if you have love one for another well Paul said back in Romans 1 verse 8 that their faith was being proclaimed in all the world and wouldn't a community of love like that stand out so magnificently in Rome a place full of orgies and sensuality and sexual perversity full of jealousy and envy and social climbing what a witness to see in the community life of the church such a stark contrast to everything in the culture around it would shine like a beacon a place where marriage and chastity was honoured a place where life was honoured and cared for not just treated as dirt a place where people honoured one another protected each other's property didn't pilfer for one another honoured each other's names and reputations where all other works of darkness that verse 12 here speaks of where they're cast off and the bright light of day is visible to everybody in a community that's marked by health and by truth and by God's love well it's just the same today isn't it as it was in ancient

Rome our world is broken even the politicians know that our society is broken but where can the world see the way back to health and to wholeness and to rightness where well the answer of course must be ought to be certainly when they look at the church of the Lord Jesus Christ they see a place of true love of true righteousness where God's loving rightness is tangible visible can be felt in truly loving one another by living in loving obedience to God in Jesus Christ and therefore in loving service of one another we are wielding says Paul in verse 12 weapons weapons of light the word armor there is used in chapter 6 verse 13 also it's used elsewhere always meaning weapons when Paul's talking about the ministry of the gospel that commends itself in every way to the outsider look in 2

[ 31 : 28 ] Corinthians 6 speaks about being truthful in speech and the power of God with the weapons of righteousness in our right hand and in our left you see what he's saying he's saying that in a world of darkness real love at work in the Christian church and shining out is a great gospel weapon loving one another like this fulfills the purpose of God's law of righteousness through us as his goodness and grace and mercy is displayed in the flesh to his great glory and when we love like that as a Christian church we are proclaiming the Lord Jesus Christ his love is seen it's heard it's felt and people will be drawn to find the source of it something the world can never give something people desperately want that they need there are so many people today in our society who have never known deep and true love in their families their work places or anywhere in life and to experience the wholesomeness the health the real humanity of genuine

Christian fellowship it arrests them it has a huge impact on them isn't that a great motivation for us when we find it hard to love one another to love one another and in doing so we are proclaiming the Lord Jesus Christ to the world to truly be the embodiment of knowledge and truth to light up the way of salvation that's how love fulfills the law in us and through us let your light shine says Jesus love is a weapon of light says Paul here draws people to the message of the gospel lastly although briefly but it's also very important love prepares us to the Lord loving one another fulfills the promise of the law for us to the destiny of God's glory and righteousness promised to his people right from the very very beginning what people often don't realize or forget is that above all else

God's law is a promise the promise of salvation that God bound himself to in an everlasting covenant that must be fulfilled now you know God made a covenant to Abraham right at the beginning that God would have a people made from all the peoples of the earth through him a people for his possession and he would be their God always now the law of Moses simply reiterated that promise but gave more and more detail of what that would mean that this people would be not only for God but that this people would be like God be shaped and fashioned by God's redeeming grace back into the true image of God that was marred by sin at the fall that God's people would be holy and pure and divine that's the essence of what God said at Sinai I am the Lord who redeemed you out of Egypt he said and you my people will be mine and you will be like me the

Decalogue is first of all a promise you shall not my people be murderers and liars and idolaters and thieves and covetous you will be holy like me now that's not a vain hope on God's part if God's sort of hoping for the best but doubting really whether it will happen of course not the New Testament is even more plain in Ephesians chapter 1 he chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him so when Moses was speaking these words they weren't just commands to be obeyed although they were they're promises to be fulfilled Leviticus 20 verse 26 says you shall be holy to me for I the Lord am holy and I have separated you from the people that you should be mine Deuteronomy 26 verse 18 the Lord has declared today you to be a people for his treasured possessions as he has promised you to keep all his commands that's a

promise it's a promise that

God made right from the very beginning just as Ephesians 1 says and now says Paul here in Romans 13 verse 11 now the great time of that fulfillment is upon us the dawning of the new age the day of salvation the revealing of the full glory of the sons of God in all their glorious holiness of us who are saved in Jesus Christ and are being made like him to be images of his perfect holiness that day is coming says Paul it's nearer every day it's nearer today than the day we first believed when at last these sinful bodies will be transformed and changed and at last this whole suffering world will be freed from its bondage to sin and God's promise at last will be fulfilled and every one of us in him will be like him like the Lord Jesus Christ the King of love who loved us and gave himself in loving service to

[ 37 : 26 ] God that we might become his people of love and it's his spirit of love that Paul has been telling us in this letter his spirit of love who dwells in us now and who will raise us on the last day to be fully like him to become at last what we're destined to be filled with his love divine but he's preparing us now for that new life it's already begun his love has been poured into our hearts by his spirit we're to live as his church as the inheritors of this new world suffused by his loving righteousness so wouldn't it be extraordinary extraordinary if we weren't preparing ourselves for that future some of you are medical students in your final year and you've already got your first job it's going to start in August and the day is getting nearer when you're going to have to look like a doctor and act like a doctor and be a doctor you're not going to spend these next few months the last few months of your medical training asleep are you as though that day was never coming of course not well if you are you're foolish of course not more and more as the day approaches you're going to put on the role of a doctor you're going to walk around with the doctors on the ward rounds you're going to learn to be what very soon you will have to be otherwise you'll be very embarrassed on that first ward round see Paul's a realist he knows that many

Christians like alas many medical students are asleep and need waking up to reality the day is coming he says verse 12 Christ is coming he's coming soon every time I take a funeral friends that is imprinted again on my mind it's a reminder to me our hour will come there's an urgency about this command none of us knows when that hour will come for us wouldn't it be a terrible thing the Lord came we find ourselves suddenly in the glory of heaven looking back on our lives now our personal life our own life and our church life and we find ourselves having to say this is as different from then as light and day wouldn't that be terrible shouldn't be should it because the light of day should be growing brighter and brighter in our personal life and in our corporate church life every day as we walk in harmony with the spirit of the Lord who is in us not in the works of darkness and sensuality and so on that verse 13 speaks of and in honouring one another in love not in quarrelling and jealousy that behaviour alas too often is the hallmark of the Christian church isn't it quarrelling jealousy how can that be if it's the antithesis of the kingdom that we belong to but loving one another with genuine love that hates evil that holds fast to what is good and wholesome that walks in the light that casts off the works of darkness that is the love that fulfills

God's law that's the love that pleases the Lord that's the love that proclaims the Lord to the world that's the love that is preparing us for the Lord and his coming and his kingdom so that we won't be found ashamed isn't that a wonderful incentive to love God sincerely and determinedly in a world full of sin and in a church alas full of sinful people like us it's hard to love like that isn't it because well I'm naturally unloving and you are naturally unlovable and you can say the same the reality of this age this fallen world is so real isn't it and it's hard not just to conform to be squeezed into the thinking of this world it's hard to say no in our personal lives constantly to the desires of the flesh but we belong not to the night but to the day says Paul we're in

Christ through his marvelous grace his spirit dwells within us so verse 14 put on the Lord Jesus Christ that means say yes to his lordship today and tomorrow and each day one day at a time and rejoice today and tomorrow and each day in his great love for you that has been poured into your heart by his spirit friends if we live like that we will begin to find his love flowing deeply and widely among us and out from us into a world of darkness that makes his light shine owe no one anything except to love each other for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law amen let's pray dear lord our heavenly father how we thank you for your great love shown to the loveless to us who were enemies sinners lost shine in us we pray the light of your great love bow our knee to the commands of your good and well pleasing and perfect will and may we love that our light might shine for the glory of

Jesus today in this world and for the glory that we long for at his coming for we ask it in his name  
amen no what men had■