

**Putting Others in Their Place**  
**Romans 13:8**

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

Brothers and sisters in Christ, at first glance it looks like Paul is contradicting himself. Right before he has written, “Pay to all what is owed to them . . . taxes . . . revenue . . . respect . . . honor.” But then he writes that we are to “owe no one anything.” So which is it? Do we owe others anything, or do we only worry about ourselves?

The answer is: it depends on what part of life you are talking about or what your perspective is at that moment. So what do I mean? Think about the connections, or relationships, you have with others. Say you belong to a family. What do you want for your family – security, compassion, health? Out of your love for your family do you not owe it to them to give them these things as you are able? Yes, you owe them your time and blessings to make that possible. But perhaps you think such efforts on your part will reward you down the road, perhaps with a large inheritance. Yet now you are being selfish and not truly caring for your family.

Actually, it all comes down to one thing: love. This word in the Greek doesn't mean some kind of romantic love for others; the best way to put it in English is that it is a self-sacrificing love. You have a compassion for the people around you. It is a compassion not just for when others suffer, but for all people at all times. Love each other to fulfill the Law.

God's way of helping us have this self-sacrificing compassion is through His Law, summarized in the 10 Commandments. From Commandment 4 through 10 they are all about how we live with others. Have you given honor to father, mother, and other authorities, even when they have failed? Do you care for your neighbor's life? Do you want to see everyone around you enjoying the blessings God gives?

Unfortunately, we often like to take the 10 Commandments and use them not for self-examination, but to put others in their place. Sadly, we all have those times in our lives when we get a little bit of glee when we see others mess up. It justifies that we are somehow better. We might even get to tell them how wrong they are. Maybe you have even had the thought that that is your purpose in life, to point out other's flaws.

As you know, we don't like to owe others anything. Since Paul mentions our relationship to government, let us consider that. What is the one thing you hear from people every April? It's how much you despise paying taxes. It's the attitude of "Government doesn't do much good, so why should I pay them the money I've worked hard for?"

It might be a little easier if you are thinking about parents, teachers, or maybe soldiers. Parents, we know, generally have done so much for us when we were little. Because of our helpless condition we needed them for food, shelter, love, and support. Teachers have dedicated their lives to helping us learn and improve. Soldiers have put themselves in harm's way to keep us safe at home. There are many things we can do to thank them.

But some people don't grow up in loving homes. They don't have teachers they can trust. Some even think soldiers are pawns of evil government. If that describes part of your life, why would you want to owe them anything?

Of course, it might also be hard to think you owe strangers or anyone who despises the Christian Church any kind of compassion or respect. Strangers we probably just want to ignore because they are not worth our time, and enemies of the Church just deserve God's wrath.

Love that Paul is talking of is about putting people in their place, and that place is before you. So the Law of God really asks you, "How well are you doing at caring for others?" It's not about helping others simply so that God rewards you, for that motivation is still about you.

Rather, you help them so that they can see God. And the verdict is in, not one of us does a good job at fulfilling the law of love. We're put in our place as unloving and uncaring people.

What separates true Christian love from the compassion that anyone else has is the understanding of the love God has for us. His is a merciful love in that we are unworthy of being owed love. We have broken the Commandments in thinking only about "me, me, me!"

But our God is not a God of "me." He has every right to be. He shows us what is right and we don't do it. Therefore we are not right with God and do not deserve to be in heaven.

Yet God has a place for us in His kingdom. It comes from His love which Paul has written about earlier in Romans. That love is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He is the one who came to die for you while you were still a sinner.

Love is Jesus intervening in the lives of those who need help and hope. He showed them that someone cared. It is why several times the Gospels say Jesus had compassion on others.

That compassion led Him to the cross. He loved you so much that He laid down His life for you. He shed His blood to be the payment of sin that you were supposed to owe God. He traded His righteousness to you to take your sinfulness. He paid into your account forgiveness that will be spoken and given to you in the Sacraments over and over. You don't have to work to try to get God's attention by your good deeds. Your selfishness is replaced by compassion.

Love is Jesus rising from the dead to destroy death. He takes away its power, giving you the hope of life in heaven. Not only is death done, but Satan and all God's enemies are also. Now nothing can separate you from God's love. Now you know you will see God face to face.

But being saved is more than just being happy that you can go to heaven. God declares you righteous so that you can be righteous in your actions toward others. This is part of our response of thanks that we do owe God for the gift of salvation in His Son. Yes, we come to

church to sing and pray and receive forgiveness. But we also play our part in society. We support government's role in keeping order. We help the needy. And we point all to Christ.

I mentioned earlier that you might think it is your purpose to point out other's flaws. It is, and it isn't. It's not when there is no love. You just want to tear people down. But like Ezekiel, God wants us to care about the eternal salvation of others. If a person is sinning, go and show him his fault so he can repent. And from that repentance show the love of Christ that forgives sins and leads people in ways of holiness.

Through it all, though, there is nothing really that we can do to pay back God. We owe Him too much. But He never asks for pay back. He calls on you to pay it forward. "We love because He first loved us." He gave up His Son so you can have life. What you will give up for the good of others, or do for them, is not for me to demand of you. As your pastor all I can say is this, "Who needs love?" Your children or parents? Your elderly neighbor? The woman struggling with an unplanned pregnancy? The one with cancer? The list goes on and on.

"Owe no one anything, except to love each other." It is the greatest gift you can offer because it's God's gift to you. God has shown you how and why to love. Love puts you and others right in your place: God's kingdom. Where there's love, God's Word abides. Amen.