

It's About Time

(Romans Session 49)

Romans 13:8-10

8 Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.

9 For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if *there is* any other commandment, are *all* summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

At this point, Paul is not just talking about the church. He's talking about your neighbor, which obviously includes fellow Christians. But he's also talking about society in general. So the theme seems to continue on here. A couple of weeks ago he was teaching us how to get along in God's family.

Last week we saw how to get along in this world, with an emphasis on doing our civic duty.

And this morning we're being schooled on how to get along in the neighborhood.

We are to love our neighbors as ourselves. Now whenever that phrase is used—"love your neighbor as yourself"—we are reminded of the parable that Jesus used to illustrate that point. The parable of the Good Samaritan found in the 10th chapter of Luke.

You know, those two words just kind of go together, don't they? "**Good Samaritan.**"

But back in Jesus' day, from a Jewish person's perspective, those two words were at odds with each other. **Good** and **Samaritan**? Like oil and water.

The Jews held the Samaritans in contempt, and the Samaritans returned the favor.

This attitude was clearly stated during a conversation that Jesus had with a Samaritan woman. He ends up at this well in Samaria and asks this woman for a drink.

John 4:9

Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" **FOR JEWS HAVE NO DEALINGS WITH SAMARITANS.**

So in **Luke chapter 10** Jesus had just encouraged some people to keep the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself. And this lawyer asked the question, "**Alright then, so who exactly is my neighbor?**"

Luke adds a bit of commentary here regarding the motivation behind the lawyer's question.

Luke 10:29

But he, **WANTING TO JUSTIFY HIMSELF**, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

You know, it sure seems like the lawyers always complicate things.

I heard a story about this couple who were engaged to be married. But they got caught in a storm and got struck by lightning. And tragically, they died before they could ever get married.

But they went to heaven, so it was a happy ending for them. And after they were in heaven for a while they went to Saint Peter and asked if they could get married. And Peter said, "**I'm sorry, that is out of the question.**" They said, "**Alright,**" and went on about their business.

But after a couple hundred years went by, Saint Peter comes up to them and says, "**Hey, you guys still want to get married?**" And they said, "**We sure do.**" And Peter says, "**Alright, but if you get married up here, you can never get**

divorced.” And they said, “Well we don’t plan on getting divorced, but you never know. What if it doesn’t work out?”

And Peter says, “*Nope. If you get married, no divorce. Agreed?*” And they said, “*Alright, we agree. But do you mind telling us why that is?*” And Peter says, “*Look, it took us 200 years to get a preacher up here. Can you imagine how long it gonna take to get a lawyer?*”

So anyway, this was one of “*those*” lawyers that Jesus is dealing with. In fact, when he first asked a question of Jesus, we’re told it was done with a false motive. He did it to “*test*” Jesus. That’s how Luke puts it.

Meaning that this lawyer was trying to trip Jesus up with one of those “*gotcha*” questions. And so Jesus goes ahead and gives him an answer.

Luke 10:30-37

30 Then Jesus answered and said: “A certain *man* went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among [*i*]thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded *him*, and departed, leaving *him* half dead.

31 Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

32 Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side.

33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion.

34 So he went to *him* and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

35 On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave *them* to the innkeeper, and said to him, “Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.”

36 So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?”

37 And he said, “He who showed mercy on him.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

So this lawyer originally asked “*Who is my neighbor*” to justify himself. He was trying to argue for as little personal responsibility as possible.

But much to his surprise, Jesus makes the scenario in this parable as messy as possible. Here is a Samaritan being portrayed as a good guy, and he’s being kind to a Jew. That’s stretching this lawyer’s thinking.

But he had to admit that the two Jewish individuals who passed the man by weren’t being good neighbors. It was the unexpected Samaritan.

And Jesus says to the lawyer, “*Now you go out and try to be like that Samaritan. And then you’ll be doing it right.*” I’ll guarantee you, that lawyer went away and did some hard thinking after that.

But let’s not miss the point as far as it applies to us. Your assignment is to be a good neighbor. And not just to your family and friends. And not just to your fellow Christians.

The love for your neighbor that Jesus speaks of is a kindness and compassion that reaches beyond all boundaries. You might need to be a good neighbor to somebody who rubs you the wrong way. Show a little kindness. Don’t ignore them or just brush them off.

Because when you love your neighbor as yourself, what you are exhibiting is a love that is like the love of God. And you know that God isn’t stingy with His love. He loves the whole world. And gave His Son on the cross for the sake of the whole world.

Check this out from a previous chapter in Romans.

Romans 5:8

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

In the same way, you may have to demonstrate some love towards another person that seems undeserving of it. You may be called upon to extend kindness and compassion when you have no assurance that it will be appreciated. That's how it works sometimes. We follow the example of our Lord.

But let me add that there may be extenuating circumstances. You may have to think things through before you act.

You are not mandated to solve other people's problems just because you have the capacity to do it. There is another side to loving your neighbor. In another place Paul said this:

Galatians 6:5 GNT

For each of you have to carry your own load.

Another translation puts it this way:

Galatians 6:5 GWT

Assume your own responsibility.

You are not being a good neighbor by helping others to live irresponsibly. Paul communicated that very bluntly in another place.

2 Thessalonians 3:10b

...If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.

So here's the reality of the situation, just for those who might not be aware of it. Some folks will try and play you like a fiddle. You need to be able to discern when that's happening, and back off from being kind and compassionate.

Sometimes you commit a grave error if you try and rescue a person from their situation prematurely. In many instances, people need to feel the sting of their own bad choices. Because

that is the only way they will be motivated to change course and start moving in the right direction.

This principle is clearly illustrated in the case of the Prodigal Son. If you are familiar with the parable, you will remember that the father didn't chase after his foolish son and try to fix things for him.

Nope. The father let the son reap what he sowed. Dad let that boy stew in his own juices for a good long time, and experience the pain of his own stubbornness.

Why? Because that's how hearts get changed. Don't act like you've never experienced it in your own life. We all have. I know I have.

Here's how it works: when the pleasure ain't worth the pain, that's when adjustments take place. So don't short-circuit that process in another person's life just because you feel sorry for them.

No, like Paul said, they need to carry their own load, and figure some things out for themselves.

Of course, sometimes counselling helps. Although probably not as much as we would like to think.

I heard a professor of sociology from Eastern University quote some statistics on therapy. He was questioning the actual value of professional counselling in certain cases.

So here are the statistics he cited regarding the results you could expect from the various approaches to counselling:

- **A Psychoanalyst:** You can expect a 44% rate of recovery within one year.
- **A Psychotherapist:** A 53% recovery rate.
- **A Psychiatrist:** A 61% recovery rate.
- **No one at all:** A 73% recovery rate.

I don't know exactly how accurate his statistics are, but I do know from people I've dealt with after the fact that some approaches to counselling seem to be very unhelpful.

But I am happy to report that there is a counsellor available who has a **100% success rate**, if people will only take the advice seriously enough to act on it.

This counsellor is identified for us in the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 15:31

The ear that hears the rebukes of life will abide among the wise.

Did you get that? The advice is coming in the form of a rebuke. And it's not coming from a person. It's coming from life itself.

It's as if life shouts at a person. ***"Hey, you! Stop what you're doing and do it different. Turn around. Repent!"***

Or as the Apostle Peter urged one of the crowds he preached to—***"Save yourselves..."***

I'm sorry, but as badly as we may want to, we can't save other people.

But they can save themselves, in the sense that we're speaking of now. And your job sometimes will be to simply let that process play out, as painful as it might be to watch.

Sometimes the only thing that will help is for you to back off and let them experience the consequences of their own choices.

But all that being said, a Christian should by nature lean in the direction of generosity of spirit, of selfless benevolence, and of wise counsel and assistance.

So if you are dealing with a person who has a repetitive pattern of foolishness going on in their life, but they give evidence of putting in the work

to solve their own problem, well that's when it's good neighbor time. Give them your help.

As you go through life, God will give you many opportunities to be kind and helpful to people in need that you stumble across for the first time. That's mostly when you jump in and do the good neighbor thing right away.

But just to make it we're clear on this: when a person embraces a foolish pattern in their life and refuses to let go of it, and they repeatedly look to you to bail them out—stop bailing them out, alright? Bailing them out again and again is not being a good neighbor. That's being an enabler.

Don't fall for it. Sometimes life needs to hurt in order to bring about needed change. And your responsibility is to discern as best you can if that is what's happening.

In fact, our next verse sort of indirectly addresses that.

Romans 13:11a

11 And do this, knowing the time...

Here is where Paul begins to direct our attention towards end-times thinking. I like that phrase:

KNOWING THE TIME. We are being called to act with some knowledge about what time it is. That's a very useful skill to possess.

A while back in **WordWalk**, we came across this verse in **1 Chronicles**.

1 Chronicles 12:32a

The sons of Issachar who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do...

This is set forth as a special gift that these leaders in the tribe of Issachar possessed.

And it occurred to me. There is a gift of the Spirit noted in **I Corinthians 12** that seems to fit this criteria pretty well.

I Corinthians 12:8

For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit.

Knowing and understanding the times—that is definitely a spiritual thing.

And the question that comes to mind right away is this: ***What time is it anyway?*** I mean in terms of spiritual things. What time is it in my life and yours, spiritually speaking? ***Do we know what time it is?***

Well if we don't, Paul steps up to clear things up for us right away. Let's read on.

Romans 13:11-13

11 And *do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.*

12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.

13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.

It's time to wake up. Paul is functioning as an alarm clock here. Wake up. Salvation is nearer. The day is at hand. Put on the armor of light. Set aside the old ways and walk properly.

Here's a thought provoking question: Have you been discipled yet? Are you currently being discipled? Do you have a more experienced Christian friend that is helping you to grow in your walk with the Lord?

I was telling some of the guys recently, I did a funeral service for a friend a while back. We'll call him Johnny, but that wasn't his real name.

And so during the remembrances when people share their memories about the departed, this young guy gets up to share some things from the Bible. Really good stuff.

And then he signed off by saying something like this: ***"So the next time you light up a joint, do it in Johnny's name. The next time you go to a girlie bar, remember Johnny."***

Now I couldn't help thinking that this kid was probably a real Christian. But he was in desperate need of discipleship. Evidently no one had ever taken him under their wing to make him aware of some changes that needed to be made.

In the same way that Paul was exhorting the Romans here, this boy needed to wake up, and cast off the works of darkness. He needed to understand what time it is.

And so the question stands: do you know what time it is in your own life? Do you have a sense of urgency in your life, an inner pressure to get closer to God, to seek to please Him in every area of your life? If not, consider this morning a courtesy wake up call, compliments of the Apostle Paul.

Romans 13:11b

...it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.

The end isn't far off. Or should I say the beginning? Our salvation—the entire package of body as well as soul—it hovers just beyond the horizon.

And how should people like us—people who know they are standing on the edge of eternity—how should people like us behave?

Paul is kind enough to give us the answer to that question in the last verse of the chapter:

Romans 13:14

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its* lusts.

What does he mean, “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ”? Try to be like Jesus. Imitate Him. Or as Paul put it,

I Corinthians 11:1

Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ.

Build patterns in your life based on what you are learning of Christ. Look for good examples around you, and follow their lead. Don't be a clone of someone else. By all means, be yourself. But don't be too proud to think you can't learn from others. You want to try and be as much like Jesus as you can, any way you can.

And that is actually the end goal for discipleship. If ever there was a time to pursue being like Jesus, it is now.

Now listen to me—don't you just sit around and wait for someone to buttonhole you and drag you along into a discipleship 101 class or something.

Be responsible and get the goods on your own. Get involved. Learn all you can. Put yourself in situations where you can do something to expand the Kingdom of God. He will bless your efforts. That much I can guarantee you. He will bless your efforts.

Ecclesiastes 3:1

To everything *there is* a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.

This is your time. It is your time to grow and to thrive and to know what it's like to be used by God. To see others come to know Jesus through your life and testimony. What an amazing time it is to be alive. We should be very grateful.

I say it's about time for us to do it right. No more nibbling around the edges of the faith. Go for it,

with all you've got. That is how it's supposed to be. This much I can promise you: What you do with your time will reverberate throughout eternity.