Romans 13:8-10. (We will hear the text later.)

So what did you notice about the Epistle reading we had? My guess is that most of you caught and heard the lesson on how every government is established by God. That’s what the Lord tells us. He is behind every government there is. Now we know from Bible history that God raises some governments in order to proclaim his name and reveal his kingdom. Some governments he uses as instruments of discipline and punishment against those who oppose and ignore his will. It is all very hard for us to understand because we don’t have the wisdom of God. What we are assured of is this: that every government that exists has been established by the Lord for his purpose, that his will be done.

What else might you have noticed about governments? You might have noticed that governments **“bear the sword.”** There are those who don’t grasp this phrase. Most think that this is a government’s right to wage war. In a way it is, but in fact, the context clearly shows that the phrase in this section of God’s Word is telling us that the government has the right to punish, discipline and even use capital punishment against those who are criminals or those who would do harm to society. In other words, to protect the innocent! The phrase is clarified all the more by the verse that says, **“He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.”**

Anything else you might have caught in this text? Oh yeah, the fact that we are to pay our taxes, revenues and give honor and respect to the government. We gripe and complain about those taxes but this is what happens when you have government. Our duty as Christians is to pay those taxes. We can take every legal deduction we can, but we are still to pay our taxes as the Lord says. However, God commands more than this. God commands that we give honor and respect to those in charge. By the way, as our Catechism leads us to see, those in charge are: Parents, government officials and the leaders in the Church! Give each of these their due honor and respect.

Anything else? Actually there is nothing else concerning government but there is still another lesson that we need to hear and learn to put into practice. To tell you the truth, I think this lesson the most important and I think this lesson is the most ignored in today’s society. I say that because the government will enforce its laws (we always pray this enforcement is with justice and with the drive to learn and know the truth of a situation.). However the lesson we are looking at isn’t necessarily enforced by anyone. In other words, WE are to oversee this lesson in our lives. We are to see that we teach it and live it. Yet we are pretty careless about it. What is that lesson? It is found in verses 8-10 of Romans 13. Those verses say:

**Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not covet,’ and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to it neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.** Let’s consider this lesson then under the simple theme: **LOVE ONE ANOTHER.**

I don’t think there is any doubt here that the Lord is giving us a wonderful command, an important command that tells us to love our neighbor or to be more specific, to love our fellowman. I like how that is put: **“To love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.”** So we have to agree, there is no disputing here as to who we are to love. It is our fellow human beings. It is our neighbor, our family, our fellow citizens, indeed the entire scope of mankind that we are to love. But before we talk about practicing this love, we had better make sure we understand what this love is.

How sad it is that the world has forgotten the very principle of love, yea, even the very understanding of what love is. You’ve heard people proclaim that love will heal the world and that love will overcome all ills. Yet it hasn’t happened. This hasn’t failed because people don’t want to love or haven’t tried to love. It hasn’t happened because the world doesn’t know what love is. When you can’t define love then how do you speak of it or practice it? Once you define love, then you have a base to build things upon. That’s why it is important for you and me to realize the truth of what love is. To begin, understand that love is a debt.

That’s right, love is something we owe! That’s what God’s Word tells us in verse 8, **“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law.”** Notice that this verse first tells you that you are responsible for your debts. It is clear that no debt, nothing you owe is to be left unpaid. It doesn’t matter if the debt is money, respect, or honor. If you owe it you are responsible for it. No debt is to go unpaid. But there is an interesting thing mentioned here. One debt we have is continuing, it can’t be fully paid. Please contemplate the line: **“the continuing debt to love one another.”**

Notice a few things about that. Love is a continuing debt. In other words, you can never repay enough love. God says you have the responsibility to continue loving because what you owe in love will never be paid up. The question to ask is, “Why?”

It is because the love we are talking about is based on God’s love for us. **“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son to die for us.”** You owe God for your eternal salvation. You owe God for all the blessings and benefits of this life. You owe God for all that you are and have. You owe God a sum so great and so vast that you could spend 10 lifetimes returning that love and still you won’t have scratched the surface of love. You owe God, specifically Jesus, for suffering on your behalf the agony of hell, for enduring the darkness of death, for bursting forth into life again for your comfort and salvation. There is no doubt that we owe a debt of love to God. God tells us here that this debt is to be paid back by our **“loving one another.”** We are to love as God has loved us. That, Dear people, is a continuing debt for us. For God continues to pour out his love into our lives every hour of every day of every year. There is why we are to love. There is the love that we need to base our love on.

To grasp true love let’s turn for a moment to 1 John. Listen to the various verses found there: **“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us…Dear Friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God…this is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins…God is love…We love because he first loved us.”** Here is the measure of our love. We have to say that this kind of love is what we are to be and practice. So that there are no mistakes, let’s review what is found in 1 Corinthians 13: **Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”**

God makes the practice of this love even simpler for us. He tells us that **“love is the fulfillment of the law.”** God’s law, God’s Word is how we repay God’s love. We hear, believe and obey God’s law. To help us out we are reminded of some of God’s law. **“Do not commit adultery. Do not murder. Do not steal. Do not covet.”** Just think what a better place it would be if just those four parts of God’s law were followed. Yet note that those are not the only laws we are to follow. Our passage goes on and says, **“And whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to its neighbor.”**

There is a mindful! We understand from Scripture and from Jesus that our neighbor is every single human being in this world. There is no one that we are not to treat with love, love as God has displayed it and as God himself has shown it to be carried out. But there is our problem. We don’t know how to carry out love. We have nutty ideas about love. We think love and sex are the same thing and we act surprised when sleeping around doesn’t cure the world’s ills but rather adds to them. Doesn’t the law say, **“Do not commit adultery?”**

We think love means that we don’t punish the wrong doer or stand up against sin. So we let the thief and murderer, the drug pusher and swindler off lightly. The world gets worse. God’s law tells us to punish the evil doer and to purge the evil from among us. We don’t and then we blame God for our problems.

We forget that the command says, **“Love does no harm to its neighbor.”**  There are so many ways in which we could talk about the application of these words. Is it love to ignore the sins of those around us, especially if those sins endanger souls? Do we think Jesus was without love when he told the religious leaders of his day that they were children of the devil and that they did not belong to the kingdom of God (Jn 8)? Jesus knew he would die for the sins of these men but that they would not benefit from his love because of their persistent disobedience to the Word of God. His was an act of love toward them.

Do you think that Paul and the other disciples had no love when they handed the adulterer of Corinth (1 Co 5) or Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Ti 1) over to Satan? That means they put them out of the church and proclaimed them bound for hell because of disobedience to God’s Holy Word. Do you think Paul had no love when he publicly chewed out the Apostle Peter for his hypocrisy (Ga 2)? Thank goodness Peter had a faith that brought repentance. Don’t you see, love fulfills the law. Love keeps the Law of God and follows the commands of the Lord. You cannot claim to love and not strive to keep the excellence of God’s Holy Word.

Dear people, our world has a problem. It is trying to live without the love of Jesus as God Word lays it forth. May we then, be the example of Jesus to the world. May we show them, in love, God’s law. May we share with them the truth of sin and its absolute horror to our souls. May we lead them to the atonement of Jesus, that sweet truth that he clothes us with his righteousness and leads our repentant hearts in love. May we share the forgiveness of sins, that greatest display of Jesus’s love for the world, as Jesus encourages us to. May we grasp how all of this fits together in our lives as we “**love one another”** in Jesus our Savior. Amen.