

PRAYERS AND BIBLE REFLECTION, SUNDAY 6 SEPTEMBER

No 25

Prepared by Alan Harper

1 Being ready for worship

We are nearing the end of our journey through Romans. Today, however, we encounter chapter 13, which contains surely one of the most problematic passages in the New Testament. I apologise that the reflection is exceptionally long, but I could not duck that passage, despite the fact that the Lectionary writers chose not to include it. So, along with the prayers and other components of worship, today will enmesh you in a deep consideration of biblical text. That is a good thing, but only begin when you are prepared to engage deeply.

2 Prayer of Adoration

We remain in the midst of a worldwide pandemic. Even in Australia, which has so far fared comparatively well, there has been much suffering through bereavement, illness, job loss and uncertainty, impoverishment, domestic violence and mental health issues. So many other nations have fared so much worse than we. It is a good time to step back and thank God for his mercies and deliverance of so many of us. However, to put things in perspective, and without for a moment wanting to diminish what many here and elsewhere have had to suffer, the situation in which this hymn was composed was without doubt far worse.

The German town of Eilenberg fared very badly in the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648). Eilenberg was a walled city, and during the war, provided a refuge for countless refugees, becoming unhealthily overcrowded, which led to both starvation and plagues. At one point, Martin Rinkart (1586-1649) was left as the only minister in the city, and could find himself conducting forty to fifty funerals a day. Rinkart had been born in Eilenberg, had trained at the University of Leipzig for the Lutheran priesthood, and had then returned to Eilenberg just in time for the outbreak of war. During the overcrowding and famine, he opened his home for refugees, despite the fact that his own family was without sufficient food and clothing.

In the last years of the war, Eilenberg was overrun on three occasions by warring armies – once by the Austrian and twice by the Swedes. During one of the Swedish occupations, the commander demanded a huge tribute payment from the impoverished citizens of Eilenberg. Rinkart negotiated with the commander, initially to no avail; but when he continued to meet intransigence, he called on his parishioners to join him in prayer and the singing of a loved hymn. The Swedish commander was so moved that he relented and lessened the sum asked significantly.

Despite the deprivations of himself, his family and others around him, Rinkart wrote what would become – after A mighty fortress is our God – probably the most popular hymn in Germany to this day, a hymn which has been sung on countless occasions of national rejoicing. Now thank we all our God praises God for his mercies and provision. Except perhaps for a hint in the second verse (“Guide us when perplexed, and free us from all ills”) one would never know from the hymn’s praise and thanksgiving the crushing difficulties through which Rinkart had to live.

The translation into English was made by Catherine Winkworth (1827-1878), a gifted English woman, in 1858 and has, like the hymn itself, stood the test of time.¹ In our own time of pandemic, it is a good hymn to pray with thanks for God’s mercies and blessings.

¹ Kenneth W Osbeck, *101 Hymn Stories. The inspiring true stories behind 101 favourite hymns* (Grand Rapids, 2012), pp. 173f.

Now thank we all our God
with hearts and hands and voices,
who wondrous things has done,
in whom the world rejoices;
who from our mothers' arms
has blessed us on our way
with countless gifts of love,
and still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God
through all our life be near us,
with ever joyful hearts
and blessed peace to cheer us.
Lord, keep us in your grace
and guide us when perplexed,
and free us from all harm
in this world and the next.

All praise and thanks to God
who reigns in highest heaven,
to Father and to Son
and Spirit now be given:
the one eternal God,
whom heaven and earth adore,
who ever was, is now,
and shall be ever more.

Amen

3 **Prayer of Confession**

You may find this prayer helpful, or choose to pray your own more personal prayer, or to pray a combination of each. Only when we repent of and confess our sins will they be forgiven.

Lord our God,
We reflect upon the week that has been,
and we confess to you that there are things of which we are not proud.
Our Lord told us to love our neighbours as we love ourselves,
but we have failed to do that.
We prefer to find fault, to catch people out, and to sit in judgement on them,
celebrating what we try to pretend is our own righteousness,
and condemning them to bolster our own egos.
Forgive us we pray.
There are particular people whom we find it especially difficult to love –
people who offend our ingrained prejudices,
people who don't look like us or live like us or think like us,
people who are set apart by culture or disability or disfigurement or age or gender.
We can find so many reasons not to love,
and can make any number of excuses for failing to do so.
But, whatever excuses we may make to ourselves,
we confess that we know such attitudes to be sinful,
and that our rationalisations cannot deceive you.
Forgive us we pray.

Give us ears to hear the injunctions of Jesus,
and hearts that are open to his calling.
Grant us the courage to stand against our own prejudices and instincts,
and to stare down the attitudes of others around us which encourage our sinfulness.
May we instead follow the example and the instructions of Jesus,
and heed his call that his followers must be known by their love for others.
For our most earnest desire is to follow Jesus,
and so we pray these things in his precious name.

Amen.

4 Assurance of Forgiveness

The message of Jesus was love. It was love which was to distinguish his followers. Love was to be the measure of all things. And it was the love of God which brought Jesus into the world.
For God so loved the world that he sent his only son,
that whoever believes in him might not perish,
but have eternal life
For God did not send his son into the world to judge the world,
but to save the world.
It is the love of God and the love of Jesus that has saved us.
In the risen Christ, our sins are forgiven.
Thanks be to God.

5 Selected Lectionary Reading

Romans 13:1-14 (Lectionary is only 13:8-14)

The other Lectionary Readings

Exodus 12:1-14

Psalm 149

Matthew 18:15-20

6 Bible Reflection –

See below

7 Prayers for the world and Lord's Prayer

Yesterday was the International Day of Charity. Charity is always important, and as Christians we are called to express our love for others in practical ways. However charities have sustained a severe blow due to the pandemic and severe economic downturn. Many people have less money to give, concerns about needs at home have eclipsed awareness and concerns about needs in other nations, and there has been evidence of “donor fatigue” in the wake of so many recent needs. A great many charities depend on volunteers, many of whom are retired and thus in the more vulnerable age groups for Covid-19, and have thus not been permitted to work as usual. So today's prayer is for all charities. You may choose, of course, to pray about other things that are important to you at the moment.

Our loving heavenly Father,
We come before you today to pray for all charitable organisations and activities.
We know that we are called to care for others, both at a personal level,
but also at a community, national and international level.
There is so much need all around us,
from homelessness, illness, disability, and poverty,
to family dysfunction, loneliness, mental health issues
and in any number of other areas.

When we see the news from abroad,
the world presents so many areas of intense need,
from refugees and the victims of war, to those living with endemic poverty,
to those whose homes and livelihoods have been prejudiced by drought or flood,
or whose lives have been disrupted by natural disasters,
to those who suffer from rampant and destructive illnesses.
Sometimes we can find it all overwhelming,
and wonder what possible contribution we can make which would make a difference.
So we pray for all charities who courageously and compassionately take on these challenges,
consolidating and managing resources so that they *do* make a difference.
We pray first that worthy charities might find willing and generous donors,
who do not count the cost, but welcome the opportunity to assist.
May charitable coffers be replete, to resource their important work.
We pray too for those who lead and manage charities,
often for very little personal return.
We pray for their integrity, their courage and their energy,
that they will never lose focus, never be discouraged,
never be tempted by dishonesty or corruption.
We pray for the volunteers who support charities –
from those who offer a day or two a week within their own community,
to those who give professional support on a *pro bono* basis,
to those who go abroad for years as unpaid workers for charitable causes.
For all those who labour overseas for charities,
we pray for safety and security from corrupt governments,
from criminal or terrorist forces, and from disease and deprivation.
And we pray for ourselves,
that we not succumb to “donor fatigue”,
but guard our heart for the needs of others,
and be both disciplined, wise and generous in our giving,
never counting the pennies,
but celebrating the blessings which we can help to bring about.
For we know that we are called to love others and to love the world,
as you love all people and all the world.
May our charitable endeavours never run dry,
and may charities everywhere magnify their resources
to bring love to those who suffer.

We conclude our prayer with the prayer that Jesus taught us to say:
Our father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come;
Your will be done
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread,
and forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil,
for the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and forever.
Amen

8 **Conclusion**

Paul wrote that the Law is “summed up in this word, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ Love does no wrong to a neighbour.”

Think on this as you enter another week,

and live out that love, that the world might know that you belong to Jesus.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,

the love of God,

and the companionship of the Holy Spirit,

be with you now as you go,

and abide with you evermore.

Amen.

BIBLE REFLECTION *LIVING IN THE WORLD*

Following the Lectionary is a good discipline. Without the strictures of a lectionary, it is all too easy for those preparing to preach (or to write material like this) to choose just their favourite passages, and particularly to avoid difficult passages of scripture. However the Lectionary can also disappoint, as it does today. As we move to Romans chapter 13, it omits verses 1-7, a notoriously difficult passage, of which it has been written,

These seven verses have caused more unhappiness and misery in the Christian East and West than any other seven verses in the New Testament by the licence they have given to tyrants, and the support for tyrants the Church has felt called on to offer as a result of the presence of Romans 13 in the canon.²

In this reflection, we'll look at both these first seven verses, and also at what follows. These parts of chapter 13 are very different, but it is important to deal with the chapter in its entirety, and not to bypass the difficulties of verses 1-7.

The opening two sentences set the tone for the difficult passage:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

It is not hard to see the potential problems associated with this apparently bald dictum by Paul. If all those in political authority have been appointed by God himself, and are to be obeyed for that reason, it would appear both to sanction tyrannical or evil governments, and to command the obedience of their citizens to them. To take an historical example, does Paul mean that a régime such as that of the Nazis in Germany in the 1930s and 40s rested on God's authority, and that German citizens – as well as those who increasingly fell under Nazi sway as German forces conquered most of Europe – were obliged to obey even its most obscene commands such as those concerning the Jews? That surely is unthinkable. It is not hard to think of situations in our current world where the same dilemma exists, although in most cases the régime in question probably doesn't quite plumb the depth of Hitler's Nazis. Interestingly, only a couple of years ago the (then) Attorney General of the United States quoted Romans 13 to justify the deeply controversial policy of the Trump administration to separate the families of undocumented immigrants:

I would cite you to the Apostle Paul and his clear and wise command in Romans 13 to obey the laws of the government because God has ordained them for the purpose of order. Orderly and lawful processes are good in themselves and protect the weak and lawful.³

So alarming is the potential problem posed by these seven verses that a variety of solutions have been put forward. The simplest is the assertion that Romans 13:1-7 was added to the text later and was not part of Paul's original manuscript⁴. I am far from sufficiently qualified to rule on that suggestion, but the majority of biblical scholars do not accept it; and no original manuscript does not include this section.⁵ Another author has argued that Paul was actually speaking ironically – that is, he wrote in such a way that a Roman official hearing his words would nod approvingly, while all along his Christian listeners would know that he actually meant quite the opposite.⁶ I confess that I

² JC O'Neill, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Harmondsworth, 1975), p. 209.

³ Cited at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romans_13 accessed 21 August 2020.

⁴ O'Neill, *op. cit.* pp. 207f.

⁵ Sarah Heaner Lancaster, *Romans: A theological commentary on the Bible* (Louisville, 2015), p. 218.

⁶ TL Carter, "The Irony of Romans 13", *Novum Testamentum* xlvii (2004), no 3, pp. 209ff.

find that possibility more than remote, especially considering that Paul had never met the Christians in Rome and thus didn't really know whom he was addressing, or whether they'd pick up the irony.

Another attempt to mitigate the apparent meaning of Paul's words rests on his use of the word "conscience" in verse 5: "Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience." For example one commentator writes,

If obedience is a matter of conscience, then it is no longer servile; when conscience is introduced as the motive of obedience, the latter can no longer be counted on!⁷

Identifying such a "let out clause" would seem to place a very heavy burden on just one word, and give it a force out of keeping with Paul's whole sentence. It surely is another case of grasping at straws.

So what do we do with this difficult passage? I believe that there is a better solution than those mentioned, but it requires that we be clear about the status of biblical text. We speak of the "Christian scriptures", by which we mean the canon of the Old and New Testaments. "Scriptures" simply means "sacred writings", and is an appropriate label for the biblical books. However, when the word is used in the singular, and used in sentences such as, "Scripture teaches that", or "We are commanded by Scripture to", it is given an absolute authority that is both unwarranted and unhealthy. It suggests that the words are both timeless and contextless, that they speak an eternal truth. How do we then respond to the assertion, "Scripture teaches that all governments, including Hitler's Nazis, are placed in power by God and that we must obey them."? It is exactly that kind of thinking that has led, over the centuries, but particularly since the Reformation, when the authority of "Scripture" was elevated, to the dilemma posed by Romans 13:1-7.

In fact biblical books were written by a person (or multiple people). They were written at different times, in different places, to different audiences, and for different purposes. Many were redacted over several iterations. Their authors sought to express their understanding of the role of God in their lives and in their times. Romans was written by the apostle Paul, a Jewish man born in the city of Tarsus, located on the southern coast of modern-day Turkey, but raised in Jerusalem. He was a Roman citizen by birth (Acts 22:28). Like every person, and every biblical author, he inherited a culture, attitudes and a worldview, which are reflected in his writings.

The attitude towards governments which Paul expresses in Romans 13:1-7 is very consistent with the general attitude of Jews at that time.⁸ God established empires, and used them for his purposes. Those purposes may very well include punishing the Jews for their sinfulness, as Jeremiah had said of the Babylonians centuries before (*e.g.* Jeremiah 4).⁹ In the case of the Romans, the Emperor was to be honoured and Roman rule respected. However, just as Jeremiah had foretold the eventual downfall of Babylon for its sinfulness (Jeremiah 50-1), the fact that the Roman empire had been established by God and may act as his agent to achieve his purposes, did not mean that all its acts were therefore sanctioned by God. Thus the seeming endorsement given by Paul in 13:1-7, while appearing to be absolute, should not be read that way. Paul was a proud citizen of the Empire and expressed his loyalty within the general understanding of his contemporaries. None of them would have taken him to be endorsing every act of the Roman emperor or government.

Paul was certainly aware of the shortcomings of Rome. It was the Roman authorities who had executed Jesus (I Corinthians 2:8), and later on, Paul himself was to suffer at their hands (though he

⁷ Franz Leenhardt, *Romans*, p. 335, cited by James R Edwards, *Romans* (Grand Rapids, 1992), p. 308.

⁸ Dean Pinter, "Josephus and Romans 13:1-14", in Ben C Blackwell *et al.* (Edd.), *Reading Romans in Context. Paul and Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids, 2015), pp. 136ff. Pinter demonstrates that the attitudes expressed by Paul's new contemporary, Josephus, closely parallel Paul's own.

⁹ Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone. Romans* (London, 2014), Part 2, p. 87.

was not aware of that when he penned Romans of course). Nevertheless, he had benefited directly from Roman rule, for example in Corinth, when the governor, Gallio, threw the Jews' complaint against Paul out of court (Acts 18:12-17). Paul's world depended on the peace and good order which Roman administration brought, allowing comparatively safe travel, prosperous urban life, a stable currency and even reliable carriage of letters (such as Romans itself) between cities. It was inherent within Paul's Jewish culture to value good order, and thus to show respect to the authority which endowed it¹⁰. Jesus had expressed a similar attitude when he was asked about paying taxes to the Romans: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." (Matthew 22:21). Good order required civic obedience.

Romans was, obviously, addressed to the church in Rome, which Paul had not visited as yet (1:10-11). There is no reason to think that Paul ever thought that his letter would go beyond that original group of Christians, and certainly not that he would ever have anticipated its being read, analysed and dissected word by word, twenty centuries later in a very different world. It was written in the context of its times, that is, the second half of the 50s AD. Very recently, the Emperor Claudius had expelled "the Jews" from Rome, very likely not *all* Jews but more probably Christians, who, at this early stage, were just a Jewish sect to the Romans.¹¹ By the time of Paul's letter, Claudius was almost certainly dead and the new emperor, Nero, had ascended. Nevertheless, there was a very practical reason why the Christian community in Rome should mind its 'p's and 'q's. There was nothing to be gained by inviting another such expulsion, which would work to undermine the growing reach of the gospel.¹² In any case, as Paul makes clear later in chapter 13, he fully anticipated the return of Christ very shortly.

Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. (13:11-12)

If the work of the gospel in the greatest city in the world was to continue, then it was important not to antagonise the Roman authorities.¹³

So Romans 13:1-7 reflects general Jewish attitudes of the time, Paul's own position and experience, and a pragmatic understanding of the situation in Rome. Those considerations should, by themselves, be sufficient to dispel any temptation to read into these verses a universal and eternal dictum about how Christians should relate to governments, especially tyrannical or evil governments. However, if any more is required, then we need only look at the context. Too often biblical passages are taken out of their context to be used as "proof texts". That is to abuse them. In chapter 12, Paul had told his hearers, "hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good." Later in chapter 13 he writes, "the one who loves another has fulfilled the law". It is hard to see how Paul could have written these words, while placing between them seven verses intended – if that were the case – to instruct mindless obedience even to the most cruel and unjust government. Taken in its context within the letter, and its context in time and place, Romans 13:1-7 offer practical advice to a community of Christians living somewhat precariously in the city of Rome.¹⁴ It is by no means a timeless (and deeply disturbing) doctrine for Christians in all circumstances.

---oOo---

¹⁰ Ian Diamond, writing in *With Love to the World* xvi (2020), no 4, p. 23.

¹¹ The Roman biographer, Suetonius, records an expulsion of Jews from Rome: "Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [the Emperor Claudius] expelled them from Rome." (*Divus Claudius* 25). It is generally believed that "Chrestus" actually refers to "Christus", that is, Christ, and that this is the same expulsion referred to in Acts 18:1-18, which led Priscilla and Aquilla to flee from Rome to Corinth where they met Paul.

¹² Edwards, *op. cit.*, pp. 302f.

¹³ Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

¹⁴ So Diamond, *loc. cit.*

The second section of this short chapter is far less problematic, far more edifying and will require far less comment! Paul continues with the practical advice he began in chapter 12. You'll recall that chapters 1-11 expounded Paul's argument about grace and forgiveness, and in chapter 12 he began the second section of the letter – *therefore*, now that you understand all that, *this* is what you must do. Of course co-operating with the civic authorities was part of that advice too, but the second half of chapter 13 returns to more general instruction.

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbour as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

Immediately we recognise Jesus' words at the heart of Paul's teaching. When Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment, he quoted two verses from the books of the Law, Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18:

Jesus replied: "‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:37-40)

Christians fall into two broad camps with respect to the Jewish Law. With the exception of the fourth commandment, relating to the keeping of the Sabbath day, virtually all Christians would agree that the Ten Commandments¹⁵ remain as binding as ever they were. They are, after all, about honouring God and living ethically. Those imperatives will never cease to be important. However the Law was much more than the Ten Commandments. In the Judah of Jesus' day, the scribes were agreed that there were 613 commandments deriving from the Torah. These covered a huge number of activities.

One broad camp among Christians believes that the whole Law remains in force. In support of their position, they cite passages such as Jesus' words in Matthew 5:17, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them." With this understanding, they are happy to quote Torah in particular cases. For example, Leviticus 18:22 forbids male to male sexual relations as an "abomination", and 20:13 decrees that culprits must be put to death. These verses have been endlessly adduced in arguments within and beyond the Church about homosexuality, and on the face of it seem conclusive. However, the other 612 laws would surely have the same authority as this one. So, for example, Leviticus 19:19 forbids planting a field with two kinds of seed, and wearing clothing woven from two types of material. Leviticus 11:10 prohibits eating any seafood without fins and scales. That would include crab, lobster, prawns and oysters. I have yet to see the same Christians picketing clothing stores which sell polyester and cotton garments, farms which use companion planting as a natural solution to insect predations, or the seafood counter at their local supermarket. Their belief in the continuing significance of the Law would appear to be fairly selective and inconsistent.

The other broad camp looks more holistically at Jesus' attitude to the Law. In general Jesus focused on the spirit of the law rather than the letter. So, for example, in relation to the Sabbath, his famous statement, "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath," (Mark 2:27) rejects legalistic regulations which went against common sense, but affirms the importance in principle of the day of rest. One scholar concluded of Jesus' overall attitude to the Law,

¹⁵ Exodus 20:2-17, Deuteronomy 5:6-17

Jesus ... saw himself as a strong upholder of the law. But for him the force of the law was its ethical content, and this he continually stressed. He had little interest in ritual observances whose ethical content was unclear – such as dietary restrictions and other aspects of purity – and saw strict Sabbath observance as objectionable when it hampered doing good.¹⁶

That ethical emphasis is clearly reflected in Jesus' second greatest commandment, "Love your neighbour as yourself." As he says, all the Law and the prophets hang on this commandment and the commandment to love God with one's whole being. Love of God and love of other are the lynchpins, the underlying principles, of the Law.

Paul pick up both the words themselves, and the spirit, of Jesus' attitude, and is even more explicit. For Paul, "the one who loves another has fulfilled the law." All the commandments, he says – including those against adultery, murder, theft and covetousness – are fulfilled if one simply loves one's neighbour as one loves oneself. "Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law." This is an all-encompassing rule for living. It is also a very high standard by which to measure our behaviour.

While strict adherence to the letter of the law can be cumbersome in its detail, and can trip us up when two or more requirements seem to cut across each other, it does leave open the possibility of keeping within the letter of the law, while flagrantly breaching its spirit. Those who might put their trust in tokenistic behaviour, while looking for loopholes to pursue unethical or immoral actions, would welcome this approach. So would those who would seek to appear ethical or law-abiding to the world, so as to create a position from which to condemn others for technical breaches of the law. Jesus was aware of these possibilities when, for example, he taught,

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:27-8)

As every married person knows, unfaithfulness in marriage need not be restricted to a physical act, but can include the granting of one's love and affection to someone other than one's spouse. That would not fall within the technical definition of adultery, but is just as much a betrayal of the sanctity of the marital bond. Jesus' teaching removes such loopholes and excuses.

As does Paul's. Love simply "does no wrong to a neighbour". It is overarching and unequivocal. It is about genuinely loving others as one loves oneself. Genuine love will not knowingly inflict hurt on others. Genuine love will not look for loopholes to pursue selfish behaviour while maintaining the appearance of compliance with the letter of the law. All the wriggle room has been taken away.

There could hardly be a simpler command; nor a more demanding one. But it is love which is to define the Christian community. "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another," Jesus had taught (John 13:35). Last week, we encountered Paul's words, "Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour." (Romans 12:9-10) Chapter 13 continues the same thought. Jesus' kingdom is not about the Law and all its intricacies. Jesus' kingdom is a kingdom of love. It is such love that will turn the world upside down. Paul's call goes out to the church in Rome. "Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law." Jesus did indeed come to *fulfil* the Law, just as he said. But he did not mean what too many people say he did. He was not endorsing 613 commandments, in all their precision and detail. And he certainly wasn't endorsing just the ones that *we* decide are the most important, or that happen to suit us! *Love* is the fulfilling of the Law. The Christians in Rome were, and we are, charged with the same mission.

¹⁶ Alan Watson, *Jesus and the Law* (London, 1996), pp. 126f.

When Jesus said that he came to fulfil the Law, it was precisely such an act of love to which he referred. The true fulfilling of the Law was the act of overwhelming love which took Jesus willingly to the cross of shame and pain and death. It was the true fulfilling of the Law because Jesus' death and resurrection defeated the very power of the Law to convict us of sin. Jesus did not abolish the Law; Jesus did fulfill the Law, but not in some vague and hardly decipherable way that defies description, but by the most powerful act of love that fulfilled the Law's demands, and freed from the fatal grip of the Law all who would believe. Love is, indeed, the fulfilling of the law. Thanks be to God.