

May 26, 2019

## **Encouraging Good News** **1 Thessalonians 3:6-13**

Our sermon text this morning is First Thessalonians chapter 3, verses 6 to 13. Before we read the text, we will pray. Please join me in prayer.

Our Father in heaven, we do now seek and ask that you would bless your word to us, that we would be given ears to hear and eyes to see, and meek and humble hearts which will receive your word for that which it truly is, the very word of God, and that we would thereby be made obedient and Christlike in all that we do. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

First Thessalonians chapter 3, the reading verses 6 to 13. Hear the word of God: “<sup>6</sup> But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you—<sup>7</sup> for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. <sup>8</sup> For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. <sup>9</sup> For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, <sup>10</sup> as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?

“<sup>11</sup> Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, <sup>12</sup> and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, <sup>13</sup> so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.” Amen. May God bless His word to us.

So in the text that we looked at last week, we saw that Paul spoke of the fact that he, Silvanus, and Timothy were desiring to get to Thessalonica. They wanted to get there, they wanted to visit the saints there, they wanted to visit the church that they had planted there, but for whatever reason, Paul himself could not get there. He says back in verse 18 of chapter 2, that Satan hindered him. We could almost literally say, Satan threw up a road block. Satan destroyed the way. He couldn't get there because Satan hindered him.

Paul let it be known he was extremely worried about the Thessalonian church, the Thessalonians. He was worried that somehow or other they had gone astray. If you look at verse 5 of chapter 3 where we finished last week, Paul said, “For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.”

The fact that Paul believes all things come from the hand of God and that nothing occurs that is not within the very ordaining and will of God, doesn't mean that He has become an emotionless puppet, an automaton just marching through life without thought, without care, without love, which is often the accusation that's thrown at someone who is Calvinistic. As I said last week, it is anachronistic to say that Paul was Calvinistic. Obviously, Calvin lived fifteen centuries after Paul. But Paul was most definitely a believer in the doctrine of predestination, and Paul most

definitely believed that all things came from the hand of God, and that all things happened according to the will of God; yet, he still feared that Satan may somehow or other have worked his wicked way amongst the church of the Thessalonians. Once again, that fact is confirmed to us in our text this morning.

If you'd briefly look at First Thessalonians chapter 3, verse 8, of our text, Paul says, "For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord." For now we live. He's basically saying that before we got this good news about you, it was as though we were dying. It's as though we were fading away with worry. Paul was as human as the next man, though he was an apostle, though he is the author of this portion of Scripture, though he had received revelations beyond what any other man had received, he tells us in Second Corinthians.

Paul was as human as the next person, and he was therefore tied up, his whole life was tied up, with the health of churches, and with the spiritual walk of other Christians. And this ought to be the way our lives are lived. We should be happy when other Christians are happy, we should be mourning when other Christians are mourning, we should be connected one to another in such a way that it is as though your lives are our lives. We should be looking one to another for strength and for joy, and we should be offering comfort one to another.

The whole idea of a Christian who is an isolated unit, who gives nothing to other Christians and receives nothing from other Christians, is something that just does not exist in Scripture. Christians are connected to Christians. We're spiritually connected. We're connected by bonds of love. Someone else's good news is our good news. Someone else's troubles are our troubles. Paul is rejoicing because he has heard good news from the Thessalonians, via Timothy.

So let's get down into our text and have a look. First Thessalonians chapter 3, verse 6: "But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you." And there's a word—we call it the gospel, the good news. I'm sure you're all familiar with the word the "gospel," and we call it the good news. And why do we call it the good news? Because in the Greek, the word is *evangelion*, which literally means "good news." It's a message of good news.

Well here in our verse this morning, it's the only time in Scripture that Paul uses the word *evangelion*, or *evangelios*, to describe a report of good news that is not actually literally the gospel. How much did he care about the Thessalonians? How much did he care about the churches that he planted? When Timothy brought him the news that things were going well in Thessalonica, Paul received that as good news. It's exactly the same word that in other places we translate "the gospel." He received that as life-giving good news.

This is an example in Scripture of what the word does mean in its literal meaning, before it was taken by the church, taken by the apostles, and given what you would call a Christian definition. The gospel as far as we're concerned is the good news about Jesus Christ. It's the good news about the things that He has done. It's the good news about His life and His death and His

resurrection and His ascension. And it's the good news that there is salvation for all who put their faith and their trust in Him.

Well Paul has received the good news of their faith and their love, and that they remember them kindly and “long to see us, as we long to see you.” It's a joy to Paul that these attacks of the Devil have not been successful. It's a joy to him that the church grows in spite of the world around it. It's a joy to Paul that, though he knows he is being slandered, those who are hearing the slander—remember in chapter 2, Paul writes a defense of his ministry—those who are hearing the slander, rather than hearing the slander, are remembering the things they know about Paul and saying, “You know, you can say what you like. I know him personally, and what you're saying is not true. He is not the man you say he is.” So Paul rejoices to see this, and he rejoices in the fact that they long to see Paul, or “you long to see us, as we long to see you.”

Reading on into verse 7: “For this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith.” He's confident about them through their faith. Knowing that they are faithful, he knows that God is dealing with them. He knows that God is caring for those Christians, and that God is caring for His church, and He draws comfort from it.

It breaks our hearts when we see people drift away and turn away from the church and from the faith. It breaks our hearts. All of us I'm sure know someone who was actually raised in a church context, in a Christian family, and today they're unbelievers. Today they're in complete rebellion. Today, if they do not repent, we have no reason but to think that they are going to go to God's judgment. All of us know someone like that. All of us mourn over people like that. Paul's joy is that that does not describe the Thessalonians. His joy is that they have faith. And so Paul is “comforted about you through your faith,” about them through their faith.

And on into verse 8: “For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord.” Now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. Why does Paul say, “if you are standing fast in the Lord”? Why does Paul tell them that they should be standing fast in the Lord? Because he knows what the Christian life is. It's a life of coming under attack, at one time or another.

There are times of blessing. There are times where it all seems to be going great, and every day seems to be victorious, but there are times when the world presses in upon you. There are times when all does not seem to go great, and at those times what you have to do, my Christian friend, is stand fast. Take a stand upon the word of God, upon the promises of God, take a stand upon your salvation, and hold on.

Sometimes the Christian life is nothing more or less than riding out a storm. You're basically in the hand of God at times like that. You stand fast. The word implies that you've basically drawn a line. It's a defensive word. You've drawn a line, and you're not going to step back from it. “Here's where I stand.” It's used in a couple of other places in Scripture.

Turn for example to First Corinthians chapter 16, and look at verse 13 of Paul's closing remarks in First Corinthians. First Corinthians chapter 16, verse 13: “Be watchful, stand firm in the faith,

act like men, be strong. <sup>14</sup> Let all that you do be done in love.” He’s piling on the imperatives there—“Be watchful.” It sounds military, doesn’t it? And that’s because that order, if it was given to a soldier, would simply be, “Fight where you are. Do not surrender the ground that you stand upon.” “Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men.”

Men, hear that? Act like men. What’s Paul therefore saying? “Men, you have a role to play. Men, there is a certain thing men do. Don’t be weak, girlie, little effeminate men.” The church doesn’t need weak, girlie, little effeminate men that wouldn’t say “Boo” to a blowfly. The church doesn’t need girlie-boy little Jesus boys. You be men. You stick to your commitments. You stick to your commitment to Christ. You stand fast. You fight for your faith.

Other people should be able to stand behind us. If we are Christian men, other people should be able to take shelter in our faith. We stand fast, we stand firm in the faith. “Act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.” And so here you have Paul’s commandment to the men is to be masculine and to be loving. He’s not talking about being a bullheaded idiot. He’s not saying you be a rough-as-guts clown, even as he says, “Act like a man.” Be a strong man, Christlike, and loving. Fight when you have to fight, draw a line where you have to draw a line, do not back down. And do it in love.

There’s another place where he uses the same phrase in the book of Galatians. Galatians chapter 5, verse 1, speaking to the Galatians, who were coming under the influence of false teaching, and likely to turn to legalism. Paul says to them, “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”

What’s he saying? He’s saying, “You Galatians were once under a yoke of slavery”? In the context of the book of Galatians, he’s speaking of the fact that they were followers of false religions. They were idolaters. They were slaves to the spirits of the earth. And Paul’s saying that if they go into Judaic legalism, it’s the same as if they went back into a life of idolatry. “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” Stand firm. You get the point here.

Paul says then, turning back to the Thessalonians, “<sup>8</sup> For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord.” For now we live, *if* you are standing fast. Why would he say it that way? Because you do have to actually do it. The very fact that Scripture promises that eternal life is indeed that, eternal life, the very fact that Scripture promises that those whom the Lord has saved are certainly and eternally saved and will not be lost, the very fact that Scripture promises those whom Jesus has saved will not be lost, that He will not lose a single one of His sheep, does not mean that we as His sheep don’t actually have to act in obedience and do as we have been told.

Salvation is an ongoing thing. God acts in us, God acts through us, we act in obedience to the will of God. We’re saved through the grace of God, but one of the means by which the grace of God is applied in our lives is our active obedience to the grace of God. You do as you are told, and by doing as you are told, you are saved. You’re not purchased, you’re not redeemed through

obedience, your own obedience; yet salvation is an ongoing thing. We are *being* saved, and one of the means by which we are being saved is our ongoing obedience to the word of God.

We are to stand firm. “For now we live,” says Paul. “Now my life is full. Now my life is complete. I was so worried, it’s like I was dying. Now it’s like I’ve come back to life, if you are standing fast in the Lord, if you continue to do as you are told.”

On into verse 9 of First Thessalonians chapter 3: “For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God.” He’s basically saying here that we don’t have the words of praise to sufficiently thank God for the good that He’s doing in your lives. “What thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God?” How can we praise God enough for the good that God is doing in you?

This is encouragement to do what? To stand fast, to stand firm. “You continue standing firm, and that brings us joy—so much joy that we almost can’t give God enough thanks and praise for the things that are happening in your lives.

Once again, this inter-connected Christian life—the idea of an independent and isolated Christian does not exist in Scripture. Christians form churches, churches sit under the word of God, Christians are influenced by other Christians. Their joy is our joy, our joy is their joy. When they mourn, we mourn. They make Paul joyful.

Moving on into verse 10: “As we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith.” Notice what Paul says. “We pray for you most earnestly night and day.” What’s he praying? He’s praying that they do all of the things that he has commanded them to do. He’s praying that they stand fast in the Lord. He’s praying that their lives will indeed be worthy of the coming of the Lord. I’m thinking of First Thessalonians chapter 2, verse 12. He’s praying that they would “walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.”

The things that Paul commands, Paul prays. When God says He’s going to do something, He doesn’t do it apart from, or without us. Turn very quickly to the book of Acts chapter 27. The book of Acts chapter 27 is about Paul’s traveling to Rome, and probably the most riveting part of this passage is the shipwreck, the destruction of the ship that Paul was on and also the other prisoners and the soldiers, and they get washed up on some island. I want you to notice something. We’ll start reading at verse 21. Acts 27:21:

“<sup>21</sup> Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, ‘Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. <sup>22</sup> Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. <sup>23</sup> For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, <sup>24</sup> and he said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.’ <sup>25</sup> So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. <sup>26</sup> But we must run aground on some island.’”

So what's Paul saying? Paul's saying, "I've got a promise. It's been brought to me directly from God, delivered to me by an angel, and the promise is, None of us are to die. That's God's promise. None of us are to die. Furthermore, I will make it to Rome and I will testify to Caesar."

Let's read on: "27 When the fourteenth night had come, as we were being driven across the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors suspected that they were nearing land. 28 So they took a sounding and found twenty fathoms. A little farther on they took a sounding again and found fifteen fathoms. 29 And fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come. 30 And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, and had lowered the ship's boat into the sea under pretense of laying out anchors from the bow, 31 Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, 'Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.' 32 Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it go."

Okay, what's the point? Paul has a promise that they will all survive, and that he would get to Rome and that he would testify to the emperor. Yet Paul says to the centurion, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved." God gave a promise, and God appointed a means of delivering the promise. God's means of delivering the promise was that all stay on the ship in order that the ship can be steered onto the shore of the island.

Paul says to the Centurion, "We've got the promise, man, but don't let these guys go away, because the means by which the promise is going to be delivered is that the sailors stay on the boat and steer the boat for the island." There was a promise. There was the means of the delivery of the promise—both ordained and appointed by God.

Drop back into First Thessalonians chapter 3 again. Paul prays "most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith." Paul has promises concerning the people who are Christians. Paul knows that God has promised that He will never lose them, that He will never let them go, that He will never let His church fail, that Jesus will build His church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Paul prays according to the promises of God. God promised that He would do something. Paul prays that God would indeed do the things that He has promised. There's a promise, there's an ordaining of God, and then also from God there is a means by which the promises are fulfilled. And for we Christians, one of those means is our prayer life. We pray. We pray according to the will of God. If we're not praying, we're not obeying God. God has ordained that we pray. And notice just at the finish there of verse 10, he says, "and supply what is lacking in your faith."

I actually brought a quote from John Calvin. I liked it. Calvin says, concerning this phrase, "to supply what is lacking in your faith": "For it is never allowable for us to congratulate men whilst they live in this world in such unqualified terms as not always to desire something better for them, for they are as yet in the way. They may fall back, or go astray, or even go back." I'll read it again: "For it is never allowable for us to congratulate men while they live in this world in

such unqualified terms as not always to desire something better for them, for they are as yet in the way. They may fall back, or go astray, or even go back.”

You hear what Calvin’s saying? He’s saying, Be careful of how you give praise to men. Be careful of how you give praise to people. Don’t say good things about people in such a way that you cause them to become overconfident and casual, and to forget that they should always be pressing forward to the goal.

So what is Paul saying here to the Thessalonians? “It’s good—it’s good that your church is together. It’s good that you are faithful. It’s good that you withstood the temptations of Satan. I get great joy from this. But don’t imagine that you’ve made it. Don’t imagine that you’re there yet. You need more teaching. There are things that are lacking in your faith, and it is my hope and my prayer that I will get to you and that God will use me to supply those things to you.” He’s saying, “Don’t ever tell anyone they’ve finished the race until they’ve finished the race.”

We’re all still moving towards that goal of Christlikeness, of true sanctification. It never finishes in this life. We never make it. There’s always something lacking, and that something is to be supplied to us by the teaching that comes from God, through people like the Apostle Paul and those whom God has used to write the Scriptures. There’s always something lacking. We always need something more.

Let’s read on. Now we’re into verses 11, 12, and 13. And before we get too deeply into them and I read them, I want you to understand that these verses are what I would call, almost casually Trinitarian. What do I mean by that?

There’s an assumption in these verses. There’s an assumption built into them. Paul hasn’t written these things here to give us the doctrine of the Trinity, but he has written these things here on the assumption and on the presumption that the doctrine of the Trinity is well and truly established and a fact. It makes no sense, apart from the underlying doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

Let’s read it. Verse 11: “Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you.” So it’s taking the form of a prayer. “May our God and Father”—“I want God to do something. I want God to direct our way to you.” But notice that he speaks of two persons doing the one thing. Who are the two persons? “Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you.”

Who’s Paul praying to? Well, he’s praying to God—he’s praying to God the Father, and to the Lord Jesus. The word “direct” is a singular verb. What do I mean by that? It’s saying there’s one person doing the thing, yet he’s asked for two persons to be the one person doing the thing.

Do you get what I’m saying? It makes no sense unless the two persons are in essence one. He’s here not speaking of the Holy Trinity, but he’s obviously speaking in a way that takes it absolutely for granted that just as Jesus said, “I and the Father are one,” Paul is praying here on the assumption that Jesus and the Father are one. Notice that he calls Jesus the “Lord Jesus.”

And that's why I read to us earlier from Psalm 110. Psalm 110 says, "YAHWEH said to my Adonai." YAHWEH, the covenant name of God, said to "my Adonai," to my Lord.

"But David, isn't YAHWEH your Lord? As a Jewish man, rather than say the name of God, don't you say, 'the Lord says'? David, wasn't it Jewish practice not to use the name YAHWEH, but rather than use the name YAHWEH, use the title Adonai? And everybody who was a Jew, in your presence, understood exactly what you meant when you said the Adonai, the Lord, you were meaning YAHWEH, but you didn't want to say the name of YAHWEH. Isn't that right, David?" And David says, "Yes, that's right. That's exactly right." "Okay, then, what do you mean 'YAHWEH says to my Lord'?" "Well, there's YAHWEH, and there's my Lord, and they are God."

Paul speaks of "our God and Father" Himself, and our kýrios, which is the Greek translation of Adonai, our Lord Jesus—"Our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus"—and Paul, a converted Jew remember, directs his prayer to God the Father and God the Son as though they are one person. The assumption is that Jesus is divine. The assumption is that praying to God the Father is praying to and through Jesus. The assumption is that if you are praying to God, you are praying to Father, Son, and—though he hasn't said it, we can infer—"the Holy Spirit."

"May our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you," on to verse 12, "and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you." Notice again, he says, "the Lord." Now what does he mean in this instance by "the Lord"? Did he mean the Lord Jesus, or did He mean the Father? I think in this instance, he simply means God, the Lord. "May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you."

Verse 13: "So that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints." Once again, there's lots built into this verse and lots that we should see here.

"At the coming of our Lord Jesus," you're going to be "before our God and Father." Work backwards there. Forwards, he says, "So that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before—" Okay, we ask the question, "Before whom?" "Before our God and Father." Okay, so you're going to be "before our God and Father." When are you going to be before our God and Father? "At the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints."

So when the Lord Jesus comes, when the Lord Jesus comes with all His saints. This is a reference to the end of this present evil age, the return of the Lord in judgment and ultimate final salvation, to bring to the end this evil age at the return of the Lord. When the Lord Jesus comes, you will be in the presence of our God and Father. You will be before our God and Father. Notice the assumption: You can't be related to Jesus without being related to God the Father. The relationship that you have with Jesus is the relationship that you have with God the Father.

Yet, it goes even a little deeper than that. Look at the phrase, "at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints"—at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints. Turn in your Old



Testament to the book of Zechariah chapter 14. It's the next to the last book of your Old Testament, if you didn't know. Zechariah chapter 14, reading verse 5. Zechariah chapter 14, verse 5:

“<sup>5</sup> And you shall flee to the valley of my mountains, for the valley of the mountains shall reach to Azal. And you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.” “Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.”

Notice who's coming. Looking there in Zechariah chapter 14 and verse 5, Yahweh. “Then the LORD”—capital L, capital O-R-D. What is that? That is the way that our modern English translations handle the covenant name of God as revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures. Behind that capital L O R D, is YAHWEH, the covenant name of God. “Then YAHWEH my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.”

What does Paul say? “At the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.” Now most of our New Testament citations of the Old Testament is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint. And that's the case here. Paul has cited the Septuagint. He has cited Zechariah chapter 14, verse 5, describing the coming of the Lord. “At the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.” He's taken his citation from the Septuagint.

But what has Paul done? What has he substituted for YAHWEH? Looking again: “Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.” “At the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.” YAHWEH has been exchanged for the Lord Jesus. Not the coming of YAHWEH, but the coming of the Lord Jesus. What's he saying? In his mind, in his Jewish, Pharisaic trained mind, a man who was raised as a strict monotheist, in his mind, it is no blasphemy to exchange the holy covenant name of God with the name of Jesus.

Do you understand the significance of that? Do you get what I'm saying? Do you get what Paul is saying there? When you think about it, Paul is simply working on the underlying assumption that Jesus is God the Son of God. Jesus is YAHWEH the Son. To speak of YAHWEH and to speak of the Lord Jesus is to speak of the same person.

And so verses 11, 12, and 13 are deeply Trinitarian in their implications, in the way that Paul is applying an Old Testament text. As far as Paul is concerned, you don't have any relationship with God other than with a Trinitarian God through Jesus Christ His Son. To come into the presence of the Father, to come before our God and Father, is to come into the presence of Jesus.

People say—you know, it's so often said—they come to your door, they come two by two, they knock on the door and they say something like, “Do you know that nowhere in the Scripture does it say that Jesus Christ is God?” If we know our Bibles, our answer should be, It doesn't *need* to say in the Scripture Jesus Christ is God in those literal words. You've only got to study the Scripture closely enough to understand the implications of what *is* being said. Of course Jesus Christ is YAHWEH the Son of God! That's what the Apostle Paul believed.

Okay, let's look now as we close at just a few thoughts of application. I want you to look at verses 12 and 13: "May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, <sup>13</sup> so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness."

The connection that I want you to see is that to abound in love is to have your heart established blameless in holiness; that you do not abound in love apart from being blameless—or, the word could be "innocent"—in holiness. Love is holy. Love is blameless. Other parts of Scripture support this. Let's quickly look at a few.

Look at First Corinthians chapter 13, verse 6. Now First Corinthians chapter 13, I'm sure you're all aware, is the chapter where Paul speaks of love. Verse 6, speaking of love. I'll insert the word "love"—Love starts the paragraph at verse 4. "Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth." Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. "Does not rejoice at wrongdoing"—wrongdoing. The word behind "wrongdoing," what's it about? It's unrighteousness, sin, evil, wickedness. Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing. It does not rejoice in unrighteousness, or wickedness. But love rejoices? In the truth. It loves that which is true, it loves that which is good.

Turn now in your Bibles to the book of Romans and chapter 13. There we're going to start reading from verse 8. Romans chapter 13, verse 8, reads: "Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup> For 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: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' <sup>10</sup> Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

What's my point? That the fulfillment of the law is in and through love, and that if love is not blameless and holy, it's not what the Scripture calls love. It's not what the Scripture calls love. What the Scripture is calling love is a love that is never, ever, ever against the law. It's a love that instead restrains evil and positively fulfills God's law, God's commandments.

When Paul in the book of Romans in chapter 13 wants to describe to the people what love looks like, where does he go? He goes to the Ten Commandments. He goes to the law that the people of Israel were required to keep. And he tells them, you don't commit adultery, you don't murder, you don't steal, you don't covet. You keep the law. And if you're not keeping the law, it's not love!

We live in a world that wants to call love anything other than what Scripture calls love: "Love is not pointing out that something is wrong. Love is not pointing out that something is destructive. Love is not pointing out that something is a lie. Love is not taking a stand against the world." That's what the world tells us! You disagree with someone, and you obviously therefore don't love them. You dare to challenge someone, you obviously therefore don't love them. That's not what Scripture's telling us.

Scripture's telling us that God defines love, and God has defined love through His law—His good, righteous, holy law. People are not filled with love if they are filled with unrighteousness. People are not filled with love if they make pronouncements and proclamations that are against the law of God. The technical term for what I'm talking about is “antinomianism”—“anti” against; “nomos” the law. “Against the law.”

And so many who claim to be Christians claim that grace makes them against the law. They have to be gracious, they have to be loving; therefore, they can't go to the law of God; therefore, they can't speak of the law of God; therefore, they can't speak of the fact that the law of God condemns people in their sins, and that by the law of God will sinners be judged—because that's not loving.

That's not what Paul says. Paul says that if you're going to abound in love, you will have your hearts established in blamelessness and holiness. That's abounding in love, my friends—faithful obedience to the law of God, which fulfills the law of God. There's no other true love. There is no other true love. Love comes from God.

In First John, we're actually told, God is love. You can't reverse that one and say, therefore, love is God. It doesn't work that way. When John says God is love, he's saying that that which comes from God, that goodness, that righteousness, that holiness, that beauty to which we aspire—this is love.

And when Paul tells us that we're to abound in love, he is obviously therefore telling us that we are to be righteous as our Lord Jesus Christ is righteous. The Apostle Peter said, “Be holy as I am holy,” quoting from the Old Testament. Be holy, as I am holy. Be righteous. Be against sin. Be for righteousness. Be repentant of your wickedness.

Don't think that somehow or other breaking the law of God, and belittling the law of God, and denying the law of God, and failing to apply the law of God—don't imagine that that's love. To be abounding in love is to be established in blamelessness and in holiness, and Paul says “before our God and Father,” in the very presence of God.

My friends, none of us is so righteous that this is not one of the very things that is lacking in our faith. Paul said that he wants to see them face to face and supply what is lacking in their faith. None of us is so righteous that this is not lacking in our faith. You see, this is one of the goals, one of the things that we've got to be moving towards. You've got to be able to see in your Christian life a growth in Christlikeness. You've got to be in the Way, moving towards the Celestial City.

You know, I often end up quoting to you from *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan. A great book. I absolutely love it. But his illustrations, his pastoral illustrations are just so wonderfully apt and fitting, I can't help but going there. We're all in the Way. We're in the Way, moving towards the Celestial City. And along the way, we must be growing in Christlikeness.

What is our future—our perfected future, where we are going to be perfectly, totally, utterly sanctified, perfected in our humanity, perfected in who we are and what we are, and living in the very presence of God through Jesus Christ our Lord, that promise of our eternal life, in the new heavens and the new earth?

That life that is our future must in some way be present here and now in our lives today. That goodness that we know is ours for the future and certainly ours, must be a goodness that is dominating our behavior and our actions today. The love that we know we're going to experience in the new heavens and new earth must be a love that we know here, today, in this current evil age.

These are the things that are lacking, and these are the things that are supplied to us through the teaching of the apostles, and through prayer and through faithful obedience to the word of God. Let's close in prayer.

Father in heaven, we confess before you now that there certainly are things that are lacking, and that we have not reached the goal. Father, we ask and we pray that you would indeed supply to us that which is lacking so that we may be established in our hearts, blameless and holy in your presence at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.