

Love Fulfills the Law

⁸ Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet,"^[a] and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."^[a] ¹⁰ Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

The Day Is Near

¹¹ And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. ¹⁴ Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.^[a]

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Romans 13:8-14

Is love invigorating or exhausting? Maybe it just depends on where you are at that time and moment.

Love to those around us takes all kinds of forms in our lives and our experience and expectations of what is involved largely depends on our circumstances. Our experience of a fancy date is very different to caring for a sick child, is very different to letting someone into busy traffic, sharing a cup of tea and conversation or supporting a good cause. They all ask something different of us and effect us in different ways. How should we view acts of love in light of the teaching and life of Jesus and Paul? How much more is our experience of love than just fulfilling requirements and how does our situation make that possible?

If you were going to write a poem about love what would you describe it as? Last week we heard poetic language about God and it was startling as a deceptive brook. Full one moment dry the next. Some really honest language about an experience relating with God. Now this week we have in our Romans letter the description of love as a debt that you are never able to pay off. The context of the

verse makes it even more stark. Paul is literally writing instructions about taxes and while he is there he is like don't leave any debts outstanding OH speaking of debts, let me tell you about the continuing debt you never pay off. Does that sound like love?

I would say that is certainly not the way we like to or instinctively picture when we consider love. I would say how Paul follows it up is another clash for us in how we think of love. Love does no harm to its neighbour and is a fulfillment of law. Is that how you think of love? Keeping a commandment. Doing what you're told. Isn't love something we should feel like doing and isn't the very point of a commandment to keep you from doing something you otherwise might? If I learned anything from Disney and fairy stories it was that love cannot be compelled. They go hard on the whole you couldn't force me to marry someone I don't love. In fact in many of the stories it is only in going against the rules and escaping them that I can really find and experience love. So how do those actually go together. I want to start with those two questions and then see how they inform the next section about the day being near and acts of darkness etc.

First question:

Can love be just don't hurt anyone? Or as the text says: Love does no harm to a neighbour. ?

The parable of the good samaritan speaks pretty closely into this I think. Jesus is asked a question about this whole loving neighbor thing as a fulfillment of the law. He tells a story about three people who are travelling on a road where a man has been robbed and left for dead. Two of them pass by and the third (the Samaritan) stops, attends to the mans immediate needs, takes him to an inn and offers to pay whatever it takes for him to be well. The idea that I want to latch onto here is from the first two men. Did they do any harm to the man? Did they rob him? Did they murder him? They certainly didn't envy him. They did nothing. But they are not held up as having fulfilled the law instead there is an example given of going above and beyond the circumstances to show mercy. Jesus in his life and teaching I think repeatedly gives illustrations that the law is fulfilled by sacrificial proactive love. You'll find the same echoes in the basics from Martin Luther. Keeping the commandment not to murder is not merely avoiding killing anyone on purpose instead we should: help and befriend them in every bodily need. And if we put it in our own terms of love we would think the same. Would you say that a Father is loving because they cause the least harm possible to their children? Dad if you received a card that said something to that effect thankyou for doing your best to minimise the damage in my life you should have alarm bells. So love is more than

this and we see it best through Christ in his proactive sacrificial love that fulfills the law but it is here in this idea of ongoing debt payments as well.

Let's look at that distinction though. Don't love and freedom naturally go together? And if so why is it that they are described alongside commandments which are usually to actively curtail damaging use of freedom. Why wouldn't we want to love? Why does it have to be and sometimes FEEL like it's a rule?

This kind of love is a drain on my resources not just the physical but the emotional and spiritual. Our instincts are not to love but towards self love. We do not instinctively seek the profit and protection of another but the profit and protection of ourselves. This comes from the idea that there just might not be enough. If I give in this way, will there be enough left for me? In this way it is fear and not hate that is the major obstacle to love. Within these choices and commandments is this need to get as much as we can for ourselves just in case or out of desperation. That is what is at the heart of things like adultery and envy. It is all about the self. If you really cared for another or had in your mind actively treating them as you would like to be treated it wouldn't occur to you.

So what do we do? The text addresses these very things and it all hinges on this. It says , "And do this understanding the present time".

Understanding the present time the first week of spring you did your spring clean, your eyes began to water and you started to sneeze and you realised here comes the hay fever season. If you are a gardener you were getting things ready in preparation for the sun to return and everything to come back to life.

So what is the time we are supposed to be understanding? It is when the lights finally come on after a dark night. It's where you finally wake up and realise and become aware of everything that has always been around you. Now when you wake up you might not feel very aware. It might not seem like everything is bright and hopeful. But it is all relative. When it is night and it is dark or your eyes are closed and you are asleep you have no idea at all. You cannot perceive what is real and what isn't. And that is what it is important to understand here. The day is almost here and we are in that moment of just waking up and we are groggy but we can finally realise what is around us and the way things really are. We can see that these selfish acts are just us being afraid of the dark. (Story about camp out)?

The uncertainty of not knowing what's there, if there is going to be enough for us. But the time of salvation is this light has come into our world and we can see.

That's the time we are in: What do we do in it?

We put on the Lord Jesus Christ because here's the thing. Christians don't have exclusive claim to the idea of love your neighbour as yourself, other religions are

all over that too. It's not having a great rule to live by that sets us apart. It's having Christ that set us apart. People are great at making rules that's not the problem. People just can't keep the rules they are so good at making. No matter how hard they try.

It says two things in our passage which I think are different halves of the one whole and the solution to what we have been speaking about. Put aside the deeds of darkness (those things that come from that deceptive instinct, the way we think about love mostly out of fear) and put on the armor of light and the second is clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ and don't think about how to gratify the flesh. Two sides of the same coin and they address our fears of profit and protection and answer that question for us, will I have or be enough? When we think of love as an endless debt that we never pay off, what is it that allows us to keep on endlessly paying out? It's when we realise that we don't have to draw on our own account. That it's not up to us to constantly come up with enough resources instead it is up to him. He has so loved us and the more we live into what he has lavished on us the more we are able to give.. It isn't something that needs to come from within us but love that is given that we put on that protects us from that self deception like armour of light. We love because he first loved us.

1 John 4

¹⁷ This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

¹⁹ We love because he first loved us.

In this world we are like him. Sacrificially loving and proactively loving not because it we are indebted over our heads but because we are filled to overflowing.

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