

Something Old, Something New; It's all about Love!  
Romans 13:8-14  
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<sup>8</sup>Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup>The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet,"<sup>[a]</sup> and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>10</sup>Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

<sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. <sup>14</sup>Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

Let us pray...

Last week we began our series on the "mutuality commands", focusing on love songs. Well this week I discovered there is tons of advice out there for how to maintain loving relationships. For instance, Erma Bombeck said: "Think twice about terminating a marriage. You may need that other person someday, to finish your sentences!"

American poet Ogden Nash gives some good advice for marriages or even friendships:

"To keep your marriage brimming  
With love in the loving cup;  
Whenever you're wrong, admit it.  
Whenever you're right, shut up!"

The topic for today is nothing new...it's been around for centuries...millennia really. (In other words, it is an old, old concept!) In this portion of his letter to the church in Rome, Paul quotes Leviticus—part of the OT Torah/Law. <sup>18</sup> “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.” Leviticus 19:18

This is the “old news”—the law—boiled down to it's basic component. Don't bear a grudge, instead “love your neighbor as you love yourself”.

The Law is given to us by God to help us know how to live our lives in relationship to God and to one another. While the ten commandments are best known, they are just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. There are over 650 commandments or laws in the OT...so there! If you were struggling to keep the ten, did you realize you have 640 more to be concerned about?? (Uh oh. We're in deeper trouble than we thought!)

Instead of hundreds of “thou shalt nots” that *one* that we must try to remember, let alone, obey!—is summed up by Jesus in this positive way:

<sup>34</sup> Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. <sup>35</sup> One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: <sup>36</sup> “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

<sup>37</sup> Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>38</sup> This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup> And the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”<sup>[d]</sup> <sup>40</sup> *All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.*” Matthew 22:34-40

Simple, right?

Love God, Love our neighbor. If we can *do* that, we will not be in violation of even one of the 650+ commandments in the Bible. Awesome!

But the truth of it is, we cannot and we do not love God or our neighbor. Period. It is impossible!

I read recently about a couple who went to their pastor. They were wanting to get a divorce, and they were hoping to get the pastor's approval. They told him: “We just no longer *feel* love toward one another”.

But instead of giving his blessing, the pastor said to the husband: “The Bible says you are to love your wife as Christ loved the church.”

He replied: "Oh, I can't do that."

Then the pastor said, "If you can't begin at that level, then start on a lower level. You're supposed to love your neighbor as you love yourself. Can you at least love her as you would love a neighbor?"

The husband replied: "No, that's still too hard."

Then pastor said: "Jesus also said we are to love our enemies. Start there!"

We may laugh, but honestly, there is a little sting in that story, isn't there? Even those who the closest to us, are sometimes hard to love.

Agape love – God's love expressed in Jesus Christ– is far more than a feeling, but an action—self-sacrificing, unconditional, the highest form of love! And as such, it is a debt of love we can never repay!

I don't care what your credit score is...or how much money you have in your IRAS and investment accounts. It matters not. All of us are big-time debtors!

All for love of you and me, Christ died. While we were yet sinners....debtors...Christ died for us and for our salvation. And so we remain, with an unrepayable debt of love.

Not too long after Rob and I purchased our first home, we were surprised to receive a letter, indicating that our debt/mortgage had been purchased by another company. Nothing else had changed. We still owed the same amount, but now we simply paid it to a new entity. Easy, right? Right.

In a similar way, this is what happens to us as believers. Jesus has paid the cost of our salvation. It is a debt that we can never repay, but *Jesus has designated our neighbors as our creditors! (Love one another, as I have loved you!)*

In other words, it is as if Jesus said, "You know how much you owe me, for the cost of your salvation wasn't cheap. Don't pay it back to me," Jesus said. "You pay it back by loving your neighbors." Look at verse 8 one more time, Romans 13:8. He says, "Let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt of love to one another."

In essence, Jesus has "reassigned" our debt... rather than demanding that we repay the debt to him, Jesus have designated you and you and me, each

one of us, as the collection agency. That is the implication of this passage—one way we repay this debt of love is by loving our neighbors.

Verse 8 says, “love one *another*.” The word “*another*” is an interesting word. There is one word in the Greek language that means *another of the same kind*. It’s *allos*. In other words, if used in this context it would mean: “Love people who are just like you, people who act like you, think like you, talk like you, etc.” But that is *not* what it says! (That would be too easy, as Jesus said in the passage we considered last week! Even atheists love people who love them...!)

The word Paul uses here for *love one another*, is the word *heteros*, which means, “Love others who are *different* than you.” We are to love people who don’t think the same way, or act the same way, vote the same way, look the same way we do. They may be different ethnically, economically, educationally, but we are to love each and every person God puts in our lives.

Recently I read about Sally who was recently greeted at church by a woman who gave her a big hug. She found this surprising, as the two of them had had their differences in the past. Sally wondered what had initiated this change of heart. She got her answer at the end of the service. The minister gave the following instruction to the congregation, “Your assignment for next week is the same as last week. I want you to go out there and love somebody you just can’t stand.”

Paul makes reference to some of the ten commandments; the first half focus on our relationship with God, and giving God priority in all of life. The second half focus on our relationships with one another. That is why he spells them out here:

9The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,”<sup>[a]</sup> and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “*Love your neighbor as yourself.*”

Who is our neighbor? Of course it is the obvious—those with whom we live in close proximity. Who is my neighbor is the question raised by Jesus’ story of the Good Samaritan. For Jesus’ hearers, that was an oxymoron. In the minds of Jesus’ original hearers, those two words: “good” and “Samaritan” were mutually exclusive. There was nothing “good” about a “Samaritan”. Jews were to have nothing to do with Samaritans—to the degree that they would travel miles out of their way in order to go around Samaria, in order to get to their destination and avoid any possible contact with “those people”.

Think about it...the first question in the minds of the priest and Levite, when they encountered the wounded man, was:

"If I stop to help this man, *what will happen to me?*"

In the same situation, the Samaritan reversed the question, asking:

"If I do *not* stop to help this man, *what will happen to him?*" (Martin Luther King, Jr.)

Think about it: these represent two totally different ways of thinking: a major shift from the focus being on oneself—to the focus being on the need of the other person.

"Others are our neighbors *not* because they are like us, not even because they are chosen by us, but because *they are given to us by God*, with a need which we can meet. Indeed, Christ himself meets us in that need. (Matthew 25:40,45) (J. Edwards, Romans p.311)

Jesus holds us/believers to a higher standard—we are to love not only our neighbors, but our enemies! We too should be asking:

If we—if you and I--do not help people—the hungry and the homeless, the youth and the seniors of this community—what will happen to them?

*How we answer this question...the action we take based on God's leading...will inform our next 125 years of ministry here on the Plateau!*

*We owe a debt of love we can never repay...but we can begin in how we love one another here as sisters and brothers in Christ, and in how we love those who do not yet know Christ in our community.*

Finally, Paul says: <sup>10</sup>Love does no harm to a neighbor.

Do no harm. That sounds very passive. Benign. As in "do nothing". That's safe. But is that loving?

I actually found a website called "donoharm.org" and this is what it says. (No kidding, this is for real!)

DO NO HARM is a non-profit non-organization.

If you think you're a member, You're a member.  
If you think you're not a member, You're an honorary member.  
There are no dues or fees. There are no donations.

There is no official language or terminology.  
There are no approved or disapproved concepts.

There is nothing special that you must believe.  
There is nothing special that you must do or not do.  
But . . . do no harm.  
p.s: Although not required, a sense of humor is helpful.

WHAT?? It seems kind of silly.

**Love** does no harm. The operative word in Paul's sentence is LOVE. Doing no harm, means in this case to do no evil toward another. But love is so much more...love puts the needs of the loved one ahead of one's own needs.

<sup>4</sup> Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup> It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup> Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. I Corinthians 13:4-7

Jerome, a historian of the early church, wrote that John—the beloved disciple and the author of the Gospel by that name, and the book of Revelation—lived well into his 90's and pastored the church in Ephesus. When he became immobile, he was carried into the church on a stretcher. Then, when he could no longer preach, he would still lean up on one elbow and speak:

"Little children, love one another."

This continued for several weeks. Each week he would repeat this single sentence sermon: "Little children, love one another."

Soon weary of the repetition, the congregation finally asked:

"Master why do you always say this?"

John replied: "Because it is the Lord's command, and if only this is done, it is enough."

Friends, we here at Calvary, are recipients of a legacy of love—first from the Lord, and second from those faithful believers who have worshipped and served God here on the Plateau for the last 125 years! We are indebted to them for their faithful service, and we are indebted to Christ as well!

If Calvary is going to thrive going into the future, we must dear friends:  
*"Love one another. It is the Lord's command, and if only this is done, it is enough."* Let us pray....