

Title: We Are Eskimos

Let us pray.

Most holy, Lord God, you gave us the freedom to love and to hate. We give you thanks for your unconditional love. Give us the wisdom to express love and to stand up to hate, emboldened by the love of Christ Jesus, our Lord, through whom we pray. Amen.

There is a story about a man who went up to Alaska. After he had been there for a few months, he ran into a priest and said, "Father, I hate to tell you this, but I've lost my faith in God and the power of prayer." "Why is that, my son?" the priest asked politely. "Because," said the man, "a few weeks ago while hunting in the Alaskan wilderness, I became separated from my friends. It was terrible! I was out there all alone. I was in danger of freezing to death. So, I prayed and prayed to the Lord to save me, but nothing happened." The priest was perplexed and he said, "But you are here now telling me this story, so obviously you were rescued." "Oh, yes," the man said, "but God had nothing to do with it. I was saved by an Eskimo!"

Did the man expect a hand to come down from the heavens, scooping him up, placing him in a hotel room in Anchorage? God doesn't work that way. God works through people.

Sometimes people ask questions like these: Why did God allow Jeffery Dahmer to kill those people? Why didn't God stop the hurricane from causing all that misery in Texas? Why did God allow ISIS do all those evil acts? Well, the short answer is that God didn't allow anyone to do evil. God doesn't allow evil. People do evil. To stop evil acts, God would have to take away our free will and if that were to happen then Jesus came for nothing.

God won't stop hurricanes. The weather this planet has allows life to exist. We have hurricanes because we have oceans. If we didn't have oceans, there would be no life on this planet. I suppose God could stop a hurricane, but we would all have to die for that to happen.

We can pray all we want for evil acts to go away, but those prayers will not be directly answered. God will not directly intervene. What we need to pray for is more Eskimos. Of course, when it comes down to it, we are the Eskimos.

So, as Eskimos, what are we to do about evil? St. Paul addresses that issue in the twelfth chapter his letter to the Romans.

The basis of Christian living and ethics is love. St. Paul says that love should be genuine. Genuine is the opposite of fake. To be genuine is to be yourself. Paul described genuine love in his first letter to the Corinthians: "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable

or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8)

Some might say that the opposite of love is hate. I might even be one of those people. But in extolling love, Paul says we should hate evil. I’m not sure what Paul meant by hating evil and how he reconciles this hate with a commandment to love. There was and is a lot of tension over how we deal with evil. The general consensus is that evil must be confronted. Is inflicting bodily harm, on one perceived to be evil, a loving act?

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The easy example of wrestling with this is how Nazi Germany was confronted. The first response was appeasement. Drawing a line in the sand did not work. The second choice was war. That almost didn’t work either. Martin Luther King, Jr. led a movement of non-violence in confronting the evil of racism. A simple response is to call evil, evil. Evil does not like to be outed and there may be consequences.

We cannot confront evil with evil. Those who responded with violence in confronting racists in Berkeley were no better than the KKK. Instead, we should “hold fast to what is good.”

Love is expressed through mutual affection and honor. Certainly, we can love someone who does not love us. But where love can be seen, is in mutual action. Paul is talking to the church, not to society. What church can exist if there is not love for one another? The church should be a place of love, a place that is an example to society, so society can be healed.

When we love one another, we are being faithful to God. When we serve one another, we are being faithful to God. When we serve, we are strengthened by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit compels us to live a life worthy of Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who connects us to the source of love, God.

Paul lists five activities that Christians are to do. We are to rejoice in hope. We should be forward thinking. We are not to dwell on a past that weighs on us or a future that may not look bright. We are to hope for a better future for all. No one gets through this life without suffering. Life is not always easy. We are asked to be patient when we are suffering. Suffering will come to an end. Even then, there is always hope.

Christians are to be engaged in prayer. Prayer is talking to God. At one time, I would occasionally ask a hospice patient if they prayed. I unintentionally made people feel bad, because they would think that they did not pray often enough or do it right. So instead, I asked if they have talked to God. It’s the same question, but people responded more positively to the latter question and would often describe the experience.

Paul asks that we contribute to the needs of the saints. When Paul talks about a saint, he’s not talking about Francis of Assisi. Francis wasn’t even born yet. Every baptized

Christian is a saint. Paul asks that we support fellow Christians and show hospitality to strangers. Paul comes from a society where hospitality was expected for anyone and everyone.

Paul paraphrases what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. (Matthew 5:11) We are to bless those who persecute us. They will not be cursed. That is a non-violent response. However, it is not like this when a southerner says, "Well, bless her/his heart." If you are unaware, this is not a blessing. It is often said after someone does something foolish. I saw a video of someone loading a motorcycle on the back of a pickup using a ramp. The rider hit the throttle, the bike hit the back of the cab, and the rider found himself on top of cab. Well, bless his heart.

Evil expects to be met with evil. The racists in Charlottesville came armed expecting a violent response. They seem to have a perverse joy in physical confrontation. The best way to metaphorically poke evil in the eye is by blessing the perpetrators. As their hate increases, so should the response of love increase. They hate that.

To repress the urge to react, requires wisdom. We tend to get wiser as we age, just through daily living, if for no other reason. (There must be a lot of wisdom in this room.) Paul says we are not to claim to be wiser than we are. Maybe true wisdom is knowing how wise we are. I don't think we are capable of self-evaluating this. We need to hear the wisdom of others. But no matter how wise we think we are, we are to be with those less fortunate than ourselves and be humble.

By living in peace, we are setting the example that Jesus asked of us. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Matthew 5:44) Paul reaches into scripture to prove his point. First, quoting God in Deuteronomy 32:35a, "Vengeance is mine." Then Paul strings together two quotes, one from Proverbs and a paraphrase from Isaiah, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Proverbs 25:21-22, 20:22, Isaiah 1:16)

Wisdom and love have a goal of peace. What Paul is describing is what Jesus called the kingdom of God. Jesus went to Jerusalem to face evil and submitted to it, even death on a cross. Jesus set the example of love over hate, conquering death. We Eskimos, who are still on this earth, continue working toward a world of peace and concord. This is a spiritual issue.

What can we do? We can decide to march to Selma. We can decide to peacefully stand up at an alt-right rally. We can remind people that Christians stand for love. We can, simply, put signs in our front yards that say we stand up against hate. We can pray that God give us the strength to face adversity.

Text: **Romans 12:9–21** (NRSV)

⁹ Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰ love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.^e ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly;^f do not claim to be wiser than you are. ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God;^g for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” ²⁰ No, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

^c Other ancient authorities read *serve the opportune time*#

^f Or *give yourselves to humble tasks*

^g Gk *the wrath*

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](#). (1989). (Ro 12:9–21). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.