

Pastor Ben Libby
 Sermon
 2/22/2019

In Christ Jesus, who would have us call upon Him for salvation, Fellow Redeemed:

The Word of the Lord which forms a portion for our sermon text this morning comes to us from Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 13, starting at verse 8:

Romans 13:8-10 ⁸ Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹ For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if *there is* any other commandment, are *all* summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰ Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love *is* the fulfillment of the law.

This is the Word of God. Congregation may be seated.

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and from your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear fellow Redeemed...

Today is the first Sunday of the second month of the year. It is crazy sometimes how time can really fly. It's hard to believe it is February already.

For me personally, when it comes to months, I relate them with the holidays that occur in them. We have all these holidays, and most of them occur during the worst months weather-wise. That way there is always something to look forward to. In October, it is Halloween or reformation day. In November, we have Thanksgiving. In December, it's Christmas. January has New Year's Day...

What does February have? It has Valentines Day, the holiday of love. Some people will tell you that Hallmark invented this holiday as a ploy to sell more greeting cards. I'm not sure if that is true or not, but if they did, this month is an ideal time for it. February is prime for another Holliday to look forward to. When the calendar hits March, well then spring is right around the corner (at least here). Then you have the summer when people go on vacation

and enjoy the sunlight and heat. February is a month when we need something to look forward to.

But that doesn't mean that everyone looks forward to February 14th. If you don't have a special Valentine in your life, then this holiday is just another reminder that you're alone. Even if you do have a valentine, you might fail to look forward to it enough. Forgetting valentine's day is deemed to be a major offense, and you could end up in the dog house if you forget to get something for your valentine.

But of course, the way the world looks at the subject of love is very different compared to how the Bible describes it. We equate love with romantic feelings. But True Love, the love that your God has for you is drastically different than simply buying chocolates and flowers. God loved the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son to die for it. God loved us so much that He died for us! As Jesus correctly pointed out, **John 15:13 "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."**

In our sermon text today from the letter to the church at Rome, Paul points out another aspect of real love. He says here that **Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.** People might think about many different things when it comes to love. But I doubt many people think about the law when it comes to love. But true love is the fulfillment of the law! As we dig into what God tells us here, we will see how this is indeed the case. And so, we pray **MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH AND THE MEDIATIONS OF OUR HEARTS BE ACCEPTABLE IN YOUR SIGHT O LORD, OUR MAKER AND REDEEMER, AMEN.**

Romans 13:8 ⁸ Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.

Some people read this passage and take it to mean that we are not to take out loans of any kind. After all, Paul says here "Owe no one anything..." So, is that really the case, are we not to use loans?

Well, no. It is quite impossible today to have absolutely zero debt. How could anyone own a new car or a house without taking out a loan? Most mortgages take 30 years to pay off fully. And what about credit cards? According to a recent Gallop poll, the average American has 2.6 credit cards. This same poll said that even 7% of Americans have more than 7 credit cards!

And then there is also the national debt to consider. My son was born almost 2 months ago. How much do you think he owes? Well, he's a newborn, he has no credit cards or cars. Yet, he already owes about 43...THOUSAND dollars!!! How can this be the case? Well, just being born into this country means that you take on a part of the national debt. America's Nation Debt is, to put it bluntly, crazy. We, as a nation, owe about 22 TRILLION dollars. How can anyone owe no one anything?

Now, I am a pastor and not an economist. I do not understand much about the national debt. I cannot speak to what that debt truly means. But what is Paul saying here? The reason we can use loans and credit cards is not because that's just the way business is done today. In the preceding verses to our text, Paul talks about the fact that we should pay taxes, that is, what we owe to our own country. We pay taxes because that is what citizens do. But we also pay these taxes because God tells us to.

When Paul says here "owe no one anything", he is saying simply that we should pay what we owe. Whether it is credit charges, mortgages, or taxes, it is our duty to pay these things. That is why we work, to pay what we owe. It is "how the world turns"...

But, what Paul points out here is that while we do have this duty, we also have a higher calling. No matter who you are, what country you are born into, how thrifty you are, you do owe something great. We can owe all kinds of things, but nothing is greater than what we owe in love. All we owe is Love!

God tells us here through the pen of Paul that the only thing we should owe is love! A lot has been written and sung about the subject of love. "All we need is love". "Love lifts us up where we belong." But how can someone borrow/owe love? What is Paul talking about here?

He goes on. ⁹ **For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if *there* is any other commandment, are *all* summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."**

Paul list several of the 10 commandments here. Specifically, commandments 5-9. These make up the majority of what we would classify as "The second tablet of the Law". These are the commandments that God sets down which govern the relationships we have with our fellow man, who the Bible commonly calls our "neighbor".

As was mentioned, what jumps to mind when people think about love, it's probably not going to be the law. More likely, the common stuff of Valentines Day would come to mind. Hearts, roses, perhaps poetry. Even narrowing down the subject of love to biblical love, and the law is still not automatic. The Gospel? That would make sense. That is the message of how God loved us so much He was willing to die for us! But the Law, the commandments? What's so loving about "thou shalt not!"?

But really, when you boil the Law down, it is all about love. In the 10 commandments, God tells us A. How we are supposed to act towards Him and B. How we are supposed to act towards others. Two weeks ago, we discussed the Biblical sense of fear. Luther would always explain each commandment with that motivation of honor and respect. But hand in hand with that proper fear is the action of love! "we should fear and love God!"

Paul says here that the entire second part of the Law can be summarized and summed up like this: "We should love our neighbors as ourselves". When it comes to our everyday relationships, or even encounters with strangers or people we consider to be our enemies, God tells us to love them! Love them so much in fact, that you value their lives as if it is your own!

So, how are you doing at loving your neighbors as yourself? Valentine's day is the "Holiday of love", but usually we think about our spouses or our dates at valentine's day. Yet in reality, every day should be all about love! Not just about the love between you and that special someone but love between you and everyone! Love your neighbors as yourself!

And of course, we don't do that do we? Every single relationship we have is essentially a failure because every relationship goes to show us how little love we have truly shown. You might object... "Pastor, how dare you! I love my spouse and family more than anything else in the world!" And I'm sure

you do... but not to the levels at which you should! Have you heard the saying "we often hurt the ones we love the most"? It is so true!

Just look at the list of the commandments that Paul references here. In each case, if we are honest with ourselves, we come up momentarily short. No matter how much love you have for someone, you have failed! We all fail at being husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, neighbors.

If you forget to get that special someone something for Valentines, you may end up in the dog house. But what about God? His dog house is, by far, the WORST! Even 1 sin gets us into the dog house of hell!

Just take the example of the rich young man who came to Jesus and asked Him what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. What was Jesus' answer to that all-important question? **Matthew 19:17 if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.** He then asked which commandments Jesus is talking about, and He tells him what Paul tells us here, love your neighbor as yourself. The man replies, **Matthew 19:20 "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?"** So Jesus then goes on to add that he should give all he had to poor and follow after Him. We are told the man went away sad because he had great possessions. He failed to see that he was guilty of the law, and he left sorrowful because his love for the material things trumped his love for Jesus.

And that is what makes God's love for us so incredible. We love Him because He first loved us!

When putting together the service, often the question I ask myself is, "What do these readings have to do with each other". Today in the Old Testament reading, we read about how God delivered the Israelites from the hand of Pharaoh at the Red Sea. In the Gospel, we read about how Jesus rebuked the storm on the sea, and in turn, rebuked

His disciples. While these are great readings, what do they have to do with this text from Romans?

Well, they really personify the love that God had for those who believed in Him. God used His mighty power to physically part the Red Sea when the enemies of Israel tried to destroy and capture them. Jesus used His mighty Word to turn a tumultuous storm into a calm and peaceful resolution. God truly does love us, and in these readings, He bent nature itself to deliver and save His believers.

The commandments that Paul lists off here, we know that we are guilty of them. Adultery, murder, stealing, lying, and coveting are all sins. There are obvious times when it is clear we have broken them. But when you take a closer look at them, you realize that you are even more guilty than you thought. Anyone who looks at another person with lust is guilty of adultery. Anyone who has hate is guilty of murder. There are a number of ways in which we steal, lie, and covet. The rich young man either did not know the Law very well or was not honest with himself. None of these things have any of us kept from our youth.

But, in each commandment, there are also ways in which we can keep them. There are always ways we can see in which we fail to measure up to them, but each commandment also has a positive element to them. They are 10 things we shouldn't do, but they are also 10 things we should be doing as well. The only way in which we are able to follow these commandments, as Paul says correctly, is to truly love!

Take the parable of the talents. Jesus described a situation where a servant owed his master an extreme amount of money. But the master had compassion and forgave him his debt. Yet, the servant then went out and called in a debt on a fellow servant. He was not willing to forgive his neighbor a small debt when he had been forgiven so much more! That was why he was thrown over to jail and torture. That was why his Master called him wicked because

he lacked love. This parable really makes one thing clear: Love and forgiveness go hand in hand.

Our spiritual state really reflects our nation's national debt. We owe SO SO much! Trillions in fact. Just being born in this country means being born into incredible debt. And that is the same thing with us. We were born dead in our trespasses and sins. But yet, God displayed incredible love for us who owed so much. Paul summarized God's love for us in Ephesians, **Ephesians 2:4-5** ⁴ **But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,** ⁵ **even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)**

How could we ever repay the love that we have been shown to us by God? We can't! We could never do that! It's like trying to repay the national debt. It's too much! But just because we can't repay what we have been given doesn't mean that we can't be grateful!

Romans 13:10 ¹⁰ **Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.**

How does love fulfill the Law? We look at the Law and we see how miserably we have failed. But then, look at what Jesus did! He kept the Law perfectly. Every single time we failed to do what God demanded, Jesus always did. He loved His God and His neighbors so much that He never broke the Law even once. Then He showed the world how much He loved them by going to the cross and dying for them. Indeed, **"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.**

Something you often hear when people talk about Jesus is "His message was all about love". This statement is, of course, true. But sadly, many times people say this they are trying to excuse themselves of the Law. They try to say that as long as you have love, nothing else matters. The problem really has to do with how you understand what love is. What is real love? It's not about how you feel about someone,

it's about how you act. Jesus said many things that people might not see as "loving". He condemned many people's sins. But this was love! To warn someone that they are guilty of sin sounds unloving. But it is a great display of real love. Concern over someone's soul is the definition of preventing real harm. Jesus was truly all about love. His life and ultimately His death showed how much He loved everyone!

February is the month in which the Holliday of Valentine's day occurs. It is the special day when we are supposed to make those who are special to us feel loved and appreciated. This is admirable. But your valentine is not the only one to whom you should show love! We should show our love to everyone all the time! How sad it is that we often don't do that...

But we can! How can you show others how much you love them? You can show them what real love looks like. Real love puts others first. Real love is patient and is kind. Real love is the love that God has for you!

Love and forgiveness are the same things! The most loving thing you can do is show forgiveness. Show forgiveness by forgiving people when they have wronged you, whether they ask for it or not. Show love by asking for forgiveness when you have wronged them! But, the best way to show love is to show others the forgiveness that God has given them!

God shows us how to love. He has forgiven us so much. There is nothing we can do to repay that love. But we are grateful. We can live a life that reflects that love the Jesus had for us! We can fulfill the law. Not by doing everything it demands, but by believing that Jesus has done it all for us! That was the greatest display of love ever, our perfect Savior dying on the cross for us. He has forgiven us so much, loved us so much. Show that same love to others! Repay His love with your love for others! **John 13:34-35** ³⁴ "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved

you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

In this life, we owe much. How great would it feel if you were debt free? What a relief that would be! The truth is that we are truly debt free through the love of Christ! We no longer owe anyone anything! It has all been forgiven! All we owe is love. We always need to love! Rack up as much love as you can! Set others free by forgiving them as much as you have been forgiven. Loan as many people as much love as you can! True love is forgiveness. Show that forgiveness to others, because no matter what you forgive them, it is nothing compared to what God has forgiven you! Eternal thanks and praise be to the LORD, for He has truly forgiven us all of our sins, and has saved us through His love! AMEN!