

39. Love your neighbors including the ones you don't like

January 25, 2009

Please close your eyes and think about the person's face or the people's faces whom you don't like or even hate. Don't pretend that you love every single human being on the earth. Be honest with me now. Yes, I am talking about the ones whom you don't care to be around, the ones you think that the world would be a much better place without them. Remember their faces and names for now. We will revisit them later.

Now open your eyes. You might have to wake up the person next to you.

In chapter 12, we were taught from the Word of God, the Bible, that the main purpose of our spiritual gifts is to glorify the Lord and to love others. At the beginning of chapter 13, we learned that we must obey the laws of the land and the authorities over us because it pleases the Lord since He is the One who allowed them to be in those offices including President Obama who is already doing many things against what the Bible teaches as we all expected before the election was ended last year.

Last four weeks, we learned about loving our closest neighbors – our spouses and families. Today we are going to learn about loving the rest.

A. OWE NO ONE ANYTHING

Romans 13:8a Owe no one anything

This statement seems straightforward enough when you keep it in contexts, but unfortunately some people take it too far. They interpret this verse to mean that Christians should never borrow money – not for mortgages, not for car loans, not for anything.

However, the Bible does not forbid borrowing or legal financial transactions that involve interest. What the Bible does forbid is robbing the fellow Christian brothers and sisters with high interest and failing to pay the debts we incurred without thinking.

Proverbs 22:7b The borrower is servant to the lender.

So how should we interpret this verse Romans 13:8a? The answer lies in the verb "owe". A more accurate interpretation of the Greek word should be "don't continue owing" because of the verb's continuing tense. In other words, whatever debts we do owe, we should pay on time. We should be prompt in meeting our financial obligations, like mortgages, rent, loan payments and credit cards.

Do you know what the second biggest reason for divorce in America? You guessed it. Financial crisis in the family. With the credit cards, a couple may enjoy buying and possessing fancy stuff that they can not afford, the day comes and they have to pay the piper. The bills start to roll in with 23 to 29% interest rates. The pressure from bill collectors can easily get into the couple's relationship and they start to blame each other for their financial crisis.

The problem for many Americans, including our government, is that debt financing has become a way of life. The prime example is happening last couple months – financial bailouts. It is because many people overextended themselves beyond what they can handle with their current incomes.

The terrible situation is that people not only have to repay the amount borrowed plus interest, they also have to repay interest on the interest still owed. This is known as compounding. If you live beyond your means by borrowing, compounding interest works against you and can trap you before you are even aware of what is happening.

Even many high income professionals, such as lawyers and doctors, end up filing bankruptcies because they, too, live way above their high incomes.

As many of you know the biggest trap is credit card abuse. If you have credit cards and use them only for convenience, paying the full amount due each month so that you never have to pay interest, you are in fine shape financially. The credit card industry people call these kind of people as a "deadbeat," because they cannot make money on those people.

Consumer credit companies continue to bombard us with appeals to add just one more credit card. This is not because our credit is so good they just cannot resist wanting us as clients, but that they can slap us with very high interest rates on whatever we fail to pay monthly.

B. OWE LOVE TO EVERYONE

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

By reading this verse, we can safely assume that the Lord wants us to be in debt when it comes to loving others. That is the debt the Lord highly encourages us to be in. Once we pay tax for that time period, the IRS can not do anything because we don't owe anything. Once you pay off your mortgage loan, you don't need continuously pay them, because you owe nothing.

But we can never say, "I've done all the loving I need to do for this year." Love is a permanent obligation, a debt impossible to pay off.

So whom should we love? Our families? That is given. The relatives? Alright. In-laws? Well, put them in the "Yes" category. Those Christian brothers and sisters who love you? Definitely. Your co-workers? Hmmm, OK. But what about those who don't like you and can't wait to do something mean to you? Now, you have crossed the line. But Jesus says, "Them, too," then He goes much further.

Matthew 5:43-47 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?"

Real love extends to Christians and non-Christians, rich and poor, people of every color, nationality, age. And, we should add in the militant homosexual people who are doing everything they can to mock and destroy what we cherish in Christianity. We don't approve of their sins, but we should still love the sinners.

Does it mean that we are to show our love to all people in the same way? No, No, because different people need different expressions of love. A Christian living in sin

needs “tough love,” as does a strong-willed child. But if we try to apply that same kind of tough love to an unbeliever who lacks the power to change and you’ll soon find yourself alienating people from Christ instead of attracting them to Him.

Hear me well, please. Love was the foundation upon which the Law of God was built. God intended for our obedience to the Law to be an expression of our love for Him and others. Verse 9 explains it precisely.

C. LOVE AND LAW

Romans 13:9 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.”

When we truly love others, we place their needs before our desires. Because of love we will protect the sacredness and trust of marriage rather than committing adultery. We will build up life rather than murdering. We will treat others and their possessions with respect rather than stealing. And we will hold people as more important rather than our own interests. When we show love in this way, we not only help our “neighbor” but we honor God by fulfilling His Law.

So naturally, apostle Paul sums up all these into one commandment as Jesus did in Matthew 22:

Matthew 22:37-40 Jesus said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

But what does it mean “love your neighbor as yourself”? There is not one person who doesn’t love himself or herself including the ones with a so-called low self-esteem person. Even these people reasonably take care of themselves and continue their living. It is in our sinful nature to take care of ourselves first over anyone else. Now the Lord is telling us to care about others as much as we do for ourselves. A simple command, but we make it complicated.

By the way, I’ve noticed, it is popular for people to say, “It’s complicated,” to the question he or she wants to avoid. It means that that person has a very flimsy and lousy excuse.

D. LOVE – FULFILLMENT OF THE LAW

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

Law and love are often thought to be incompatible. Love needs law for its direction, while law needs love for its inspiration. So, we fulfill the purpose of the Law when we obey God’s commands out of love.

What a great commandment we’ve been given! In a world of darkness, violence and ultimate selfishness, we can be agents of light and healing from God. Only God’s love through us can accomplish this!

E. CORRIE TEN BOOM AND THE GERMAN GUARD

Corrie ten Boom was arrested by the Nazis along with the rest of her family for hiding Jews in their Haarlem home in Holland during the Holocaust of the World War II.

She was imprisoned and eventually sent to the Ravensbruck Concentration Camp along with her beloved sister, Betsie, who died there just days before Corrie's own release on December 31, 1944.

She went on to travel widely as a missionary, preaching God's forgiveness and the need for reconciliation. Corrie came to a church in Munich, Germany with the message that God's forgiveness in 1947. After the message, there was a balding heavy-set man in a gray overcoat, a brown felt hat clutched between his hands, waiting to talk with Corrie. She remembered his face vividly. Less than three years ago, he was the very tormenting German guard against Corrie's sister Betsie and her.

"You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk," the man was saying. "I was a guard in there. But since that time, I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fraulein, will you forgive me?" And he stuck his hand out to shake Corrie's.

For a few moment, she could not. Because she remembered her sister's slow and painful death in the concentration camp and the horrible treatment. She wondered, "Could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?"

It could not have been many seconds that he stood there, hand held out, but to her it seemed hours as she wrestled with the most difficult thing she had ever had to do.

Here is what she said about next moment:

"And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But I realized that forgiveness is not an emotion. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. "Jesus, help me!" I prayed silently. "I can lift my hand, I can do that much. You supply the feeling."

And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

"I forgive you, brother!" I cried. "With all my heart!"

For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then."

F. APPLICATIONS

1) **Only one outstanding debt honors the Lord – the debt to love others.**

2) **Only one truth can release God's love in us – the truth that we can love others with God's help.**

You cannot say, "OK, that's nice. But I am not going to love those who hate me." If that is your mindset, you are the one who is living in a prison of bitterness and you are the one who is sinning against the Lord as soon as you refuse to forgive and love them. Because it is God's commandment. It requires more than listening, but applying and obeying.