

Romans 13:8-10

8 Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

We continue with the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans. The theme is love and it continues from chapter 12. The theme is so important that it is emphasized by Jesus and Paul. The founding principal that supports the teaching of Jesus is love. This is divine love which is totally different from the other models of love that we may be more familiar with. It is spiritual, unselfish, and primarily focused on care and concern for the other person as they are. In order to understand divine love we need to look at the love of God and Jesus. God gave the very best gift that God had to give and Jesus gave all of himself for others. This is outpouring of sincere care for us and results in platonic outpouring of care from us to another. It is not about what others can do for us in return. It is not about desire, lust, or romance. It is about unselfish care for others.

Jesus is revolutionary. He changed the focus of the law. In the Old Testament, the law is based on sin, shame, and punishment. It is governed by the fear of consequences. The purpose of Israel was to be God's light to the world. However, they proved to be unfaithful. In the New Testament, the law is replaced by the law of love; it is governed by the care for humanity and fulfills the law and the commandments. Jesus replaced the Old Testament law of consequences with the law of love. Jesus brought the love of God into the world. When it comes to biblical love, we are to model our lives after the way Jesus loves us.

Love is the key. The Apostle Paul knows firsthand the power of God's love because he was a persecutor of Christians and, as a consequence, deserved his own persecution. However, Jesus offered to Paul love and forgiveness. The commandments are summed up in the law of love. This means that love is the ruling factor. When we have love, we obey the laws automatically because we don't have the vices. The vices are gone because they only have a seductive appeal when love for self is out of balance with the love for the Lord. I will repeat that for emphasis. Vices only have a seductive appeal when love for self is out of balance with our love for the Lord. The Apostle Paul is specific, adultery is a vice; it is sin not love. The challenge is set before us to follow the teachings of Jesus and love your neighbor as yourself. Obeying the commandment to love is fulfilling the law.

The Apostle Paul's doctrine of salvation is based on the concepts of justification, reconciliation, and redemption. Justification is about the judicial aspects of salvation. Everyone has sinned and since we all have sinned, we are all guilty. If God's only agent of salvation is justice then we all deserve punishment. But God is merciful and presents the death of Christ in the hands of evil to cancel the punishment that is due to the guilty. So, God is just and merciful. Reconciliation is based on relationship. The proper relationship with God includes worship, praise, and temple communion. Christ gave of himself while humanity was hostile toward God. This shows us that the love of God is a very tremendous thing. It means that God cares foremost about our relationship and will maintain the relationship even when we are undeserving. Redemption is about releasing us from punishment. Captured by the power of evil, we cannot

free ourselves. We are held hostage to sin but God frees us up from this captivity and defeats sin through the cross and resurrection. Then God sends the Holy Spirit to the believers so that we can reorient our lives to live by God in the face of daily temptation.

It is a battle that we must win. People do not automatically stop sinning. We still live in a world that is controlled by sin. But the Spirit empowers us to live different lives and with the Holy Spirit living in us, the temptation to sin is overpowered by love. God also gives to us the wonderful gift of grace. We have a promise from God that when we fail, there is forgiveness. This is the perfect situation. We are offered justice, mercy, reconciliation, and redemption. This is true and perfect love. The love of God is the most perfect love. Therefore, the people of God remain faithful and trust that God will remain faithful.

Love is genuine fulfillment of the law. The continuing obligation of the Christian is a debt that is never paid by us. The Love of God is directly linked to humanity. God loves humans and we, out of our love for God are to do the same. Love of your neighbor is God's love. Our response to God's love is compassion. When you love your neighbor, you live according to the love of God. Children of God embrace the character of God. Proof of God's love is the fact that God's law of love is fulfilled when Jesus died for us while we are sinners. In Christ – love is poured out upon us. Love is the supreme gift that you can give. God's love is in us. This provides us the extensive motivational power. We are motivated to abide by the love of God. We are to love others like God does and love others through Jesus.

The dominant thought of Christian theology is to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior. This is actually a matter of accepting God's love by accepting Jesus. This is divine love which is not romantic but caring. Typically we know love as being limited to personal relationships, but divine love is unlimited. It is offered to all. It is not accepted by all but offered to all. Accepting God's love requires us to love as Jesus loves – love and care for everybody. This is totally unselfish, pure, and divine. God's love is the highest good of moral and ethical understanding. Love is the key. There is only one debt that we cannot get rid of – the debt of love. For that we are forever grateful.