

Fulfilling the Law
Psalm 119:33-40
Romans 13:8-10

As difficult as Paul is to read and understand with his long sentences and windy dissertations, it is clear that he makes every attempt to align his thinking with Jesus. His words here to the Romans demonstrate that he really understood what Jesus said when he spoke about the commandments. Commandments, rules, law...whatever you want to call them are for the purpose of order and fair treatment of all persons. They are a clear cut guide of do's and don'ts in order to help everyone get along.

Moses brought the people the law in the form of the Ten Commandments. Simple to understand and follow, the Ten Commandments were given to us for our benefit. Following them should be commonplace for all who trust in God. Yet as easy as they may appear to be, we still have trouble following them. This is why Jesus summed up the Ten Commandments into two: love God with all your heart, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. Put simply: love God and love others. Sounds easy, right? Well, it should be, but apparently it is not as easy as it seems. Even Paul had to reinforce the love command when he spoke to fellow Christians living in Rome.

Paul reminds the Roman Christians that to love others is to fulfill the law. When we truly demonstrate love to others then we naturally follow the Ten Commandments. This means loving our neighbors as ourselves. But how do we do that? What does it really mean to love someone else as we love ourselves? Think of it in terms of how you treat yourself. Do you care for your own needs? Are you getting enough to eat? Do you have a roof over your head? Do you have clothing to wear? Do you take the time to bathe, brush your teeth, and comb your hair?

When we love ourselves, we take care of ourselves. When we love others as ourselves, this means that we will treat them in the same manner we treat ourselves. Love, in this way, means care. In order to love, we have to care. To care is to take action. Caring is not a passive act of simply saying something nice about a person. Love as caring is stepping up to the plate and intentionally making a difference in the life of another.

William Schultz reminds us that people need people. His daughter, Laurie, was about three when one night she requested her dad's aid in getting undressed. He was downstairs and she was upstairs. "You know how to undress yourself," He reminded. "Yes," she explained, "but sometimes people need people anyway, even if they do know how to do things by themselves."¹

¹ William C. Schultz, *Bits & Pieces*, December 1990. <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/h/help.htm> (accessed September 1, 2011)

Loving others does not imply giving up our own needs in order to meet the needs of the other. Rather, loving others means caring for others in the same way as we care for ourselves. Does this mean that we care for everyone we see all the time? No, for to do so would mean that we would have to give up caring for ourselves. But one day one person may need our care and another day another person may need our care. As we balance caring for ourselves and for others, we learn what it truly means to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

But love is not just care, love is also respect. Respect has to do with valuing the life, opinion, and boundaries of another. Forms of abuse, including mental and physical, are extremely disrespectful. They do not at all respect the person whom is being abused. Everyone has opinions, comfort zones, and values. When we devalue a person's opinion or cross over comfort zones, then we are not respecting that person. Even if we totally disagree with another person, in loving that person we are called to respect that person. After all, we all are equally God's children.

Respecting others is reflected highly in how we treat others. Do we give proper respect to our leaders? Do we give respect to teachers and doctors? Do we respect the guy who picks up our trash and the man who changes the irrigation pipes in the fields? Adultery, murder, theft, and coveting all relate to lack of respect for the other. That is why they are part of the Ten Commandments.

There is a Chinese legend about a group of elderly, cultured gentlemen who met often to exchange wisdom and drink tea. Each host tried to find the finest and most costly varieties, to create exotic blends that would arouse the admiration of his guests. When the most venerable and respected of the group entertained, he served his tea with unprecedented ceremony, measuring the leaves from a golden box. The assembled epicures praised this exquisite tea. The host smiled and said, "The tea you have found so delightful is the same tea our peasants drink. I hope it will be a reminder to all that the good things in life are not necessarily the rarest or the most costly."²

Love as respect is about valuing everyone equally. Love doesn't see anyone or anything as more valuable as anyone or anything else. Christ's death and resurrection was not about salvation for a select number of persons, but for all persons, no matter who the person was or is.

What if we put all our actions in life to the "love God and love neighbor" test? What if before we acted on impulses and situations we thought to ourselves... will my actions demonstrate loving God and loving our neighbors? Do my thoughts and actions demonstrate care AND respect for the other? While it is not easy to do, it is something we should strive for. For in working to live our lives to demonstrate loving God and loving our neighbor, we are also fulfilling the law and doing what is best for our families, our community, and our world. May you strive to put everything you do to the "love test". Love God with all your heart, and mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. Amen.

² Morris Mandel in *Jewish Press*. <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/a/appreciation.htm> (accessed September 1, 2011)

Prayer:

Gracious and loving Lord,

Guide us in our ways and we might fulfill your law by using the principle of love. Fill our hearts with your love so that your love will spill out into all that we do and say. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.