

Freedom in Love

“What’s their angle?” asked Kyle “Have they asked you for money?”

“Money? No.” said his wife, Toni, who came, stood, and looked out the window with him at the Black woman rolling her mother’s trash container into its bin.

“She does it for the three other elderly people up the street on every trash day,” Toni said, returning to the kitchen table.

“But why?”

“You mean why after you were insulting and rude to her teenage son and their friends, when they first moved to the neighborhood?” Toni said.

“I thought they did look suspicious,” Kyle retorted.

“At 2 P.M. in their backyard? Her son shovels mom’s walkway and the other seniors’. He says his mother won’t let him take any money.”

“Are they part of some cult or something?” asked Kyle.

“Mrs. Anderson is a nice Christian woman,” said Mrs. Sullivan, wheeling herself into the living room. “She doesn’t go on about it. She’s just invited me to church a couple of times. She has been such a kind and loving neighbor to me. She sees after me, gets my groceries, and runs errands when Toni can’t.”

“You’ve never told me that, Mom,” Toni said, turning around with a little alarm in her voice.

“I didn’t want to bother you, dear,” Mrs. Sullivan said.

“The point is,” she continued. “Mrs. Anderson is a dear. Now, step away from the window, Kyle.”

1. *Thinking about other people in your life, who stands out in your mind as the best example of love?*

2. *What makes you see them this way?*

3. *How can you know if you are showing this kind of love to others?*

Love Fulfills the Law

Romans 13:8-10, KJV

8 Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

9 For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

10 Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Romans 13:8-10, NIV

⁸Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. ⁹The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Paul was writing to Christians in Rome, and in chapter 13, he gave particular attention to the need to be good citizens so as not to bring disrepute to the way of Christ. Thus, we must be subject to governmental authorities, pay our taxes, and give respect and honor to those who serve in government (Rom. 13:1-7). Paul also insisted that Christians must pay their debts, whatever they may be, but should never consider the obligation to love others to be "paid in full" and no longer necessary (vs. 8).

If loving one another is a continuing, unpayable debt, this means we continually see ourselves as a servant to others. As righteous people, we continue paying this debt of love and do so cheerfully and generously even though we will never be finished with it. Why is loving others a continuing debt? Because it sums up and fulfills the entire moral law of God. Will God's prohibition of adultery, murder, stealing, or coveting ever be lifted or declared wrong ever be declared right? No, because doing those things

are unloving toward others. So, if the prohibition on these actions will never be lifted, then the obligation to continue loving others will also never be completed and lifted.

If this command seems burdensome, particularly with people who are difficult to love or unable to return our love, we can take heart from the fact that Jesus sees and remembers even the smallest acts of compassion, promising that "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matt. 25:40).

4. *What debt should we always continue paying?*

5. *What one statement summarizes the commandments of the law?*

6. *Why is love the fulfillment of the law?*

Love Never Fails

1 Corinthians 13:8-12, KJV

8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

1 Corinthians 13:8-12, NIV

⁸Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. ¹¹When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. ¹²For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

Paul wanted the Corinthian Christians to understand that even if they had every spiritual gift, without love they were nothing. In verse 8, the primacy of love is contrasted with the gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge, which Paul addressed in verse 1-7. The Corinthians seemed to care more about the attention-grabbing gifts (such as tongues) that would make themselves look impressive than what would truly edify the church—which is the true purpose of the gifts (1 Cor. 12:7). Their use of the gifts that God had given them was reduced to a public display of selfishness that boasted of one's own assumed superior spiritual status.

Paul approached this problem by putting into context the significance of miraculous spiritual gifts, pointing out that they will cease one day, when that which is perfect or complete comes (see vs. 10). The point of the passage is that tongues and prophecies will not endure for all eternity, the way that love certainly will, seeing as God Himself is love (1 John 4:8).

In verse 11, Paul is likely emphasizing his point in the immediately preceding verses that the mentioned gifts are incomplete and destined to be set aside, as the things of childhood are. Paul reinforces this idea in verse 12 with the illustration of a darkened glass or mirror. Unlike modern times when mirrors can reflect a nearly perfect image, in Roman times mirrors were made from bronze, tin, or silver polished to a high sheen to reflect a shadowy image. We might imagine looking in such a mirror to see the dim image of someone approaching from behind us, unable to make out quite who it is, then turning and seeing clearly the person we anticipated. Once we can see clearly, we set aside the mirror with its inferior ability to see.

That is like only partially knowing God now, in this life. Eventually we will know Him more fully, though we will never know God completely or have His complete knowledge. When we are suffering or confused, we can remember that God knows us fully and cares about us. Remembering that we are fully known by God is always

good for our spiritual welfare.

7. *What are some examples of gifts that will pass away?*

8. *What will occur in our exercise of spiritual gifts as we mature in Christ?*

9. *Why is it good that God knows us (vs. 12)?*

Love Is the Greatest

1 Corinthians 13:13, KJV
 13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

1 Corinthians 13:13, NIV
¹³And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

What does it mean to say that faith “remain[s]”? In the preceding verses, Paul has argued that in contrast to love, spiritual gifts like tongues and prophecy are temporary, like things of childhood or dim images through a glass or a mirror. Now in verse 13 he speaks not only of love, but also of faith and hope, saying that all three will remain.

Faith, hope, and love appear frequently in the New Testament and, in a sense, sum up the Christian life. “Faith” denotes trust in Christ and commitment to His teachings. “Hope” denotes an unshakable confidence that the promises of God will ultimately be fulfilled by the Savior. Thanks to Paul we’ve already seen what “love” denotes.

When Paul said, “The greatest of these is love,” he probably meant that love is greater than the other two because it lasts forever, whereas faith and hope (like the spiritual gifts) are for this age only. Faith is not necessary in eternity because then we’ll be in the presence of God. Hope is not necessary in eternity because then our hopes will have been fulfilled. Paul ends with the point he most wanted to make about love: it is important and eternal.

10. *What three qualities will always remain? Why?*

11. *Which of the three is the greatest? Why?*

The Story of the Other Wise Man

The Story of the Other Wise Man is a fictional short novel by Henry van Dyke. It tells the story of Artaban, a Persian Magi, who has seen the star of Jesus' nativity and plans to go with his friends to see the Child. At great cost, he brings with him three precious gifts: a sapphire, a ruby, and a pearl of great price. Along the way he encounters a dying man and stops to help him, making him late to meet up with his friends. Now on his own, he must sell one of the stones to outfit his own caravan to complete the journey.

When he finally reaches Bethlehem, his friends have already been there and left. Jesus and His parents have fled to Egypt to escape Herod, and as the soldiers go house to house searching for infants, Artaban gives a pleading mother a second precious stone to save the life of a child.

Artaban makes his way to Egypt and back to Israel searching for Jesus, always just a little too late to catch up to Him. He saves his pearl of great price to present as a gift to Him. At the end of his life, Artaban reaches Jerusalem as Jesus is being taken away to crucifixion. He hopes to use his pearl to ransom His life but gives it to a young woman about to be sold into slavery. An earthquake marks Jesus' death, but also dislodges a roof tile that strikes a fatal blow to Artaban. He feels he has failed the Lord, but he hears a voice saying, "Verily I say unto thee, inasmuch as thou hast done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, thou hast done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40, KV). He dies, having found his King at last.

12. *What are the greatest, most costly gifts you have available to give to Jesus?*

13. *What are some examples of times you have not had the time, energy, or resources to do "religious" activities because of more pressing needs to serve others such as family members or neighbors?*

14. *How much would you be willing to sacrifice to show love for strangers or even enemies?*

Living by Love

Writing to the church near the end of his life, the apostle John emphasized above all else the message of love: “This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another” (1 John 3:11). Our love, he says, is how we know we have passed from death to life, and how we set our hearts at rest when they condemn us (vss. 14, 19).

► *If you were looking at your life from the outside, like an objective reporter, what evidence could you see that you are a person who loves others? List it here:*

If you cannot see much (or any) evidence, what will you do about that?

KEY VERSE

For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. —Romans 13:9, KJV

The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,” and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” —Romans 13:9, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

Week of November 13 through November 19

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

- Mon.** 2 Corinthians 3:12-18—The Lord’s Spirit Brings Freedom.
- Tue.** James 2:8-13—Judged by the Law of Liberty.
- Wed.** Leviticus 25:8-17—Proclaim Liberty Throughout the Land.
- Thu.** Luke 4:14-22—Jesus Announces Freedom and Release.
- Fri.** Psalm 23—God Provides and Comforts.
- Sat.** Colossians 2:6-15—Rooted and Built Up in Christ.
- Sun.** Colossians 2:16-23—Hold Fast to Christ.