

Parson to Person

ROMANS 13 PART 8

(Reprinted from last week—yet again, for the third time... Go figure.)

“Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. 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.’ Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Romans 13:8–14 NKJV).

Love is the high water mark of our testimony as believers. It is the filter through which all believers are called to measure their life, attitude, and conduct. However, sadly, many Christians have been taught the “rules” of Christianity and work to live according to those standards from either the motivations of the flesh or through some form of guilt manipulation—rather than by the Biblical “Life Lived by Love” model.

Fleshly motivations clothe the believer from without and may make one feel better about themselves and/or even arrogant concerning their behavioral achievements often while leaving them unchanged from within. This was the problem with the Pharisees: Jesus called them whitewashed tombs filled with dead men’s bones. He also referred to them as blind leaders of the blind. Why? Because, inasmuch as they had the right behaviors and knew the “answers,” they drew near the Lord only by the profession of faith rather than by hearts that had been changed (see Matthew 23).

The guilt model is usually manifest by one of two forces: a sense of debt to Jesus for His great sacrificial offering (see Romans 4:4), or by performance/failure often leading to frustration or worse.

The good news is that fleshly motivations and/or guilt manipulations both lead to failure. God may indeed use human failure. He did this through the Law. He did this in me when I suffered under the erroneous belief in a “performance-driven gospel.” The sooner we come to realize that we are not under the Law and that we do not live by or through a performance-driven gospel, the better. We must come to see that the provisions God has given every believer empowers them/us by grace through faith alone, to grow in righteousness by love from within—rather than by human-centric action motivated by guilt or fleshly effort from without. The regenerated believer is provided indwelling power through the Holy Spirit who leads us to understand the love of God and then how easily that love is translated into a lifestyle befitting the born again.

I have often asked: Which is worse: gossip or smoking? What is worse: self-righteousness or watching an R-rated movie? Christians who refrain from smoking but judge those who still take up a cigarette may be the example of a modern day Pharisee.

I am not suggesting that believers should smoke cigarettes or watch movies that lead toward sin. But we should at the very least recognize that eating bologna, hotdogs, pepperoni, etc. (filled with nitrites and preservatives) or simply just eating too much may be just as dangerous as smoking. Moreover, watching T.V., going to a theater, drinking a glass of wine or mug of beer, smoking, or even eating a Coney Island hotdog (all of which have been condemned by the religious) does not defile the man—it is what comes out of the man that defiles (see Mark 7:18–23). When the heart is unchanged, then there is trouble. *“For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man...” (Matthew 15:19–20 NKJV).*

The maturing believer must come to understand that *“we love Him because He first loved us”* (see 1 John 4:19), and therefore, by His grace at work in us, we love others. Moreover, in loving others, we do not harm, for *“love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the Law”* (vs. 10).

My friends, Jesus said, *“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another”* (John 13:35 NKJV). *“Beloved, let us love one another”* (see 1 John 4:7–19).

Last week I mentioned that we need a revisit on the glory and definition of Biblical love. If love does no harm to a neighbor, then the manifestation of that love (my love) must be beneficial to the one I am calling neighbor. My actions and decisions must be for improvement and support. I will not steal from my neighbor. I

will not covet what my neighbor has—but will rejoice over my neighbor’s blessing. I will not envy, boast against, or lie to my neighbor. I will not lure my neighbor into sin or participate in any sinful act with the man or woman I claim to love.

Today, lust is called love. Sinful acts of adultery and fornication (heterosexual or homosexual) are called love. Stealing from one person in order to give to another is called love. But no! This is not the love proclaimed in the Bible. We must consider all the attributes of the law if one is to properly understand that *“love is the fulfillment of the law.”*

May the Lord lead us and direct us as we grow in grace and learn to walk in love.

Points for review and consideration:

- 1) The need to return to the Biblical definition of “love.”
- 2) The use of Biblical love as a filter for Christian behavior.
- 3) The danger of “rules” when applied from without.
- 4) The power of God and change from within.
- 5) The glory of the “Life Lived by Love” model.
- 6) The testimony of the believer.

I love you all,

Pastor Paul