

Remembering our Purpose: Loving Others.

John 13: 34-35, Romans 13:8-11, 1 John 3:11-19

Encore performance of "Finding our Purpose 3: Loving others" delivered at BPC 11/2013

Here are 22+ song titles explaining how to play the *Game of Love (or) Love in the Fast Lane*.

I Just Called to Say I Love You.
Be My Love, My Secret Love, My Part-time Lover.
Baby I Need Your Loving!
He Don't Love You (Like I Love You).
All I Wanna Do Is Make Love to You.

Will You Love Me Tomorrow?
Yes, Love Will Keep Us Together!

Where Did Our Love Go?
We're Not Making Love No More.
You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin.'
Sometimes Love Just Ain't Enough,
Love Runs Out.
Said I Loved You But I Lied.

Bye Bye Love, Bye Bye Happiness.
This Was Just...Love on the Run, Love Letters in the Sand.
You Give Love a Bad Name!

Why Do Fools Fall in Love?
Love Hurts! Love Stinks!
I'll Never Fall In Love Again.

That's the modern idea of love from song titles. The world thinks that love is temporary; it's just a feeling that we can fall into and out of equally quickly. As we noted last week, the world's idea of love is so messed up, that few people really know what real love is anymore—they wander around asking "*Where is the Love?*" (Sorry, I got just a few more song titles to use).

When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment to live by was, He chose not one but two commandments which describe love in action. From Moses' summary of the 10 Commandments, He took *you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength* (Deuteronomy 6:4). Then from the book of Leviticus he added *you shall love your neighbor as yourself* (19:18). Jesus declared that everything taught in the Bible, and all His own teachings could be summarized in these two statements.

Last week we looked at the first part of this command to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. And we learned that “true love” for God and others is

1. A conscious and lasting decision—love is a commitment not a fleeting emotion.
2. Love requires all of our being—our full and complete dedication to the beloved.
3. This kind of love does involve your emotions, but also includes your willingness to act, and your desire to learn, to grow in knowledge of your beloved.
4. Such love is worth giving our whole life to—and if needed even our death.

Jesus said, if we give this kind of love to God, we need not worry about any of the other laws (we will naturally and easily obey them). Jesus also said if we give this same kind of love to one another we would have it made in life. *What the World Needs Now Is Love Sweet Love*—but specifically this kind of godly, Christian love.

So this week, let’s point our attention to the second part of Jesus’ command which also makes up the third part of our Purpose Statement. If we love God, we are also to love others with the same heart, mind, soul, and strength.

Why don’t we listen to what two of Jesus’ disciples—both now late in life—had to say about this idea of loving others? Interestingly, in their youthful days, one of these disciples very unlovingly wanted to commit murder and the other actually did. Let’s see how they have grown.

First we come to the very old apostle John; now known as the apostle of love. Jesus had earlier nicknamed him “son of thunder” for wanting to call down lightning to destroy a village because they had been inhospitable to Jesus and His disciples. In his first general epistle, John writes (1 John 3: 14-18)

We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death. All who hate a brother or sister are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them.

We know love by this, Jesus laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

In other words, if you want proof of your Christianity, you gotta *Let Your Love Show*. And our love for others is best shown by what we do for others—especially what we give from our own abundance.

How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

This seems plain enough. As Jesus, out of his love for us, laid down his life for us, so should we, in love, lay down our lives for others.

And the opposite truth is equally plain: *Whoever does not love abides in death. All who hate a brother or sister are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them.*

It seems like the Apostle John completely bought into this idea of loving others with all his heart, mind, soul and strength.

But what about the Apostle Paul? He was a more rational, hard living, hard thinking, no nonsense kind of guy (not some nostalgic old man). What does he have to say on our need to *Love others as much as we love ourselves?*

In his letter to the Romans, (chapter 13), Paul is listing the Christian's obligations.

- Our Christian obligation to be subject to all legal authorities.
- Our Christian obligation to pay all our lawful taxes.
- Our Christian obligation to honor our obligations
- And our Christian obligation to love others.

Let's pick up the reading here at verse 8: Paul writes, "**Owe no one anything.**"

Here is a very straightforward life principle don't you think? And Paul is referring to all kinds of debts, whether monetary (loans, bills, taxes, etc.) or non-monetary (civil service, honor, respect, etc.) As a Christian, we are to fulfill or to pay our debts in accordance with what we agreed upon, or what is expected of us socially as well as legally.

This singular command has led some people to conclude that **all** financial debt is wrong, such as having a home mortgage, carrying a credit card, even buying a car on time. But this is not the point Paul is making. The Bible does not forbid believers from going into debt, though it does indicate that doing so should be done with great care and understanding. What the Bible does forbid for the believer, is failing to pay their debts. We are not to take a cavalier approach toward our financial obligations or our verbal promises leaving them to remain "outstanding."

But then Paul makes one incredible exception: Paul does say that there is one debt, one obligation that Christians always owe. **That is the obligation to love others.**

This is why Paul says, "*Owe no one anything, except to love one another...*" The point is that loving others is a lasting obligation. One can never get to the point where he or she is able to say, "I have done enough; I have loved enough."

You and I will never get to the point that we have sacrificed enough for others, given enough of our time, energy, money, and efforts for others, been kind enough or even patient enough with others. There is no end to our obligation to love. No matter how loving we may have been in the past, we're still forever indebted to Jesus' love and obligated to love others as much as he loved us. Loving and serving others is our lasting obligation.

As I often tell church members:

There is no retirement for Christians, only promotions.

Then, echoing Jesus' earlier words, Paul writes, "*...the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.*"

I will explain what is meant by "fulfilling the law" in a moment, but first I want to point out that the word here translated as "another" is the Greek word *heteros*, which basically means, "**those people who are different from you.**" I think the current politically correct word is "diverse" from you.

It is easy to love those who are like ourselves, but if we want to fulfill all the law, we must also love those who are diverse, having different likes and dislikes, different ideas, different political loyalties, a different understanding of Christianity, etc.

So Paul tells us that if we can love all these "different others," our neighbors as much as we love ourselves, we not only fulfill all the Commandments; some of which he lists for us: *You shall not murder, steal, or covet.* But he concludes that we have also fulfilled "**the law.**" What law was he talking about?

Paul was referring to the "Royal Law." What Jesus first called "The Greatest Commandment." From the writings of Jesus' brother James, we have learned that what the Jews of Jesus' day referred to as the Greatest Commandment, the Christian community—especially as it spread throughout the Gentile world—came to call the "Royal Law" (in other words, the law as given by King Jesus). James writes: (2.8) *You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'*

So what does God basically want from all His followers? What is the essence or focus of His commands? Both John and Paul give the same answers that Jesus gave. God wants you to love others as if they were you. This is in some sense an intensification of the Golden Rule: **Not only should we do for others as we would have them do for us, but we should love others as much as we want to be loved by others.**

Now perhaps you are thinking there must be a loophole in that last statement (if you don't care to be loved by others, you don't have to love them). But don't try it. Our love

for others will be graded by how much God loves them...not by our own self-absorbed efforts at love.

So here are two very basic lessons for us to take home today from both the writings of John and Paul:

1. Loving Himself and others as much as HE loves us, is the main thing God wants in return for His everlasting love.
2. Also, loving God and others is our continuing obligation, because of our indebtedness to the love and given life of Jesus.

Now, as a side note, let me point out that these principles in no way imply that the rest of the Ten Commandments, or national and state laws no longer have authority over the Christian life. Why? Because some people have wrongly taught that **the only thing that matters is that we do what seems loving to us.**

The Bible does not teach or endorse this in any way. Though the Law cannot save us, it does serve as a guide for us to know right from wrong. Christians have the added bonus of the Holy Spirit in our lives helping us to understand the law and empowering us to live it out. As the Apostle Peter said, God expects to be just as holy (just as law abiding) as He is holy. We are to obey all national laws that are in accordance with God's laws, but we are also to interpret our response to others under those laws as lovingly as we can--according to the Royal Law.

Having said this, let's get back to the main point of Romans 13:8-14.

In verse nine, Paul list four of the Ten Commandments, and then adds "***and any other commandment***" as examples of how loving others fulfills the law. After all, if you love others, you surely will not commit adultery by cheating on your spouse or by being intimately involved with another person's spouse. The same is true for being jealous or envious of what others have. If you love others, you will not do these things.

As Paul says, "***Love does no wrong to a neighbor.***"

And once again, just like the Apostle John, **Paul equates love as an action; it is in what we do or do not do, not just how we feel about others.**

Here then is the final lesson for us to take home: Just as Jesus said before him (in telling the parable of the Good Samaritan) and John and James also echoed: **Loving others is a matter of action, not emotion.** We must show both our faith and our love by our actions

Thus, the basic principles of Christian living are threefold:

Love God completely,
Love others equally,
Live righteously.

All this is what God wants us to **do, and it is a matter of doing**, not just feeling.

That is why the second and third phrases incorporated into Bedford Presbyterian's Purpose Statement is simply an echo of the commands that Jesus listed as the greatest, and what Christians have come to know as the Royal Law:

We are to love God with all our being, our neighbor equally so, and both of these are best proven by our actions. Or as the Apostle Paul said: *We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another*

During the American Revolution a man in civilian clothes rode past a group of soldiers repairing a small defensive barrier. An officer was shouting instructions, but making no attempt to help them. Asking why he didn't help, he retorted with great dignity, "Sir, I am a corporal!" The stranger apologized, dismounted, and proceeded to help the exhausted soldiers.

The job done, he turned to the corporal and said, "Mr. Corporal, next time you have a job like this and not enough men to do it, go to your commander-in-chief, and I will come and help you again." It was none other than George Washington.

That's the love which we are to show one another! We prove our love by actions done quickly, joyfully, and wholeheartedly! *What's Love Got to Do with It?* Everything.

Let's rehearse our Purpose Statement together:
Bedford Presbyterian Church is a Biblically Guided Christian Community LOVING GOD,
LOVING OTHERS, SERVING THE WORLD, and GROWING DISCIPLES.

Now, go do something about this.