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# The Epistle of Romans

The Justification of the Ungodly

Romans 13:8-10

There is much confusion in the North American Church these days over the mission and purpose of the church. What is the church about? What is the message of the church? What are we Christians called to be and do?

Now, there are some in the more liberal sectors of the North American Church that would answer this by saying that our calling is to love. Yes, they would say that we are to love, not hate. When asked what this love looks like, the response is that love is inclusive, not judge-y, and is typically expressed with vibrant colors, hugs, and warm smiles of acceptance. Through love, they say, everyone is accepted and the church is fulfilling her mission.

On the other side of the coin, the more conservative sectors of the North American Church would answer this question by saying that our calling is to be a prophetic voice to the culture in adhering to God's Law. Yes, they would say that we are to uphold the Law, not water it down. When asked what this Law looks like, the response is that the Law is exclusive, judges, and is typically expressed with the stone tablets of Moses, a shaking finger, and faces of scrutiny. Through the Law, they say,

everyone knows how to act, and by this, the church is fulfilling her mission.

What is happening here in our two examples?

Well, simply stated, one side has subscribed to love as the main message and purpose of the church. And the other side has subscribed to the Law as the main message and purpose of the church. And like most competitions, these two sides live in tension in the North American Church. The pendulum goes back and forth as each side fights for its view. Like soldiers in bunkers, these two sides launch grenades at each other saying,

"The church is about love!"

And the other side responds,

"No, you are wrong; the church is about the Law!"

And so, those of the more liberal side will accuse the so-called legalists of not loving. And those on the more conservative side will accuse the so-called lawless of disregarding the Law.

What is going on here? Who is right; who is wrong? The answer, they both are. They are both right, and they are both wrong.

In our text from Romans 13:8-10, Paul is not giving us a checklist of ethics. He is also not showing the limitations of love – confining our love exclusively to other Christians. He also is not talking about ways of motivating Christians to do good, “*You Christians are like the engine that could – think you can, know you can do it!*” And Paul is not elevating the Law above love or love above the Law. But instead, Paul is showing that Christ’s love is the fulfillment of the Law. Therefore, since the Christian has Christ, he/she has love.

And so, six things can be noted about Christian love:

- 1) We can’t love our neighbor until we have been rightly loved in Christ.
- 2) We do not love to get love, but we love because we are already loved. We are not motivated by Christ’s love to love, but it is a new reality – that is what happens when we are in Christ – we love! Remember the fruit of the Spirit?
- 3) We love others/everyone – not just Christians. We can’t waste a deed of love, for love is for every one of our neighbors that we interact within our vocations. As soon as we start limiting our love for certain people, we have messed things up tremendously! Christ’s love on the cross was for all humanity, was it not?
- 4) Love is not a gushy feeling. Love is rooted in God – we see love when Christ gives Himself to all via His life, death, and resurrection.
- 5) Love fulfills the Law and does not work contrary to the Law. (Keep in mind that the Law protects God’s Gifts, thus love is about protecting God’s gifts as well. Therefore, if love is destroying a gift of God, it isn’t true love but a counterfeit love.)

As a way of further study, consider how love describes love in 1 Corinthians 13. Here is a paraphrase:

*Love does not act the way that we might think. It does its works of love secretly and hides them from others. Love does not do its acts charity to be seen or known by others. Love is not boastful or arrogant. Love does not seek to gain but seeks to give. Love is not irritable or resentful; it does not make a lot of noise rejoicing in the evil of others. But this love rejoices in the truth. It does not hold on to its works, but it does works for others.*

