

## **Romans 13:8-14**

*Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.*

*Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*

Good morning. It is a beautiful sunny day so far here in Greenville. It is not the same this morning in Florida. I hope that we all will hold them in our prayers as Irma makes landfall in the Keys and races up the state.

You know, when we get passages like the one we get from Romans this morning, I am tempted to come up here for the sermon and say to us all, "Good morning. Go and love each other! Amen" and call it good. It is simple and straight to the point. And it's a true statement and it would definitely make my sermon prep so much easier and get us out so much earlier to lunch or football or whatever we have scheduled for our day. Just Love! Go forth! Amen.

The thing is, while it may be simple, it's not that easy. At least, it's not for us, as human beings. If we get past the first verse of what Paul wrote to the church in Rome, we see that, that which it sounds so simple, is, really, not all that easy.

Paul starts simply. He tells us that the only things that we should owe to one another is love. Just love each other. And it would stay apparently that simple for us, if Paul just could have left well enough alone. But he didn't. He continued to clarify. Paul ties love to the law. He makes Love more than an emotion and good feelings. He makes it, in many ways, a call to action...or maybe a plea for restraint.

Here is what love for neighbor looks like, Paul tells us. Don't commit adultery. Don't break relationship with your spouse or cause relationship to be broken between another couple. Honor the vows that you have taken, because not to do so causes damage, to ourselves and to others. It also does damage to humanity. It is not something, like so many say, that is just

contained between consenting adults. Children are damaged. Parents are damaged. The whole concept of faithful relationships within a covenantal community as God intended is undermined. If you are to Love, love faithfully.

Don't murder. Technically it says, "Don't take innocent life". And it doesn't qualify this expression of love any further. It doesn't say that we shouldn't take adult lives, but children under twelve are ok. It doesn't say that it only applies to men, but you women are just out of luck. It doesn't say that babies up to a year old are fair game because they present a burden, or are the wrong gender, or might have a deformity of some sort. It doesn't say that love only applies after first breath is drawn. It says that that we should love one another, all people, throughout their entire lives because when life is present, a neighbor exists. If you are to Love, love always.

And don't steal. Don't steal because it reduces relationship to the material. Don't covet, which means wanting what someone else has. Don't do either, because it diminishes relationship to things, instead of elevating it, elevating us, to who we are made to be.. how we are made by God to be. If you are to Love, love the people, not things.

Love! Love your neighbor. Love all neighbors. Love is the life, it is the reality, that we were made for. It is the stream in which we were made to swim in, together. Love is the energy, the life force, that holds us together and the existence that we were made to strive for and thrive in. It is patient and kind. It doesn't envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way and is never irritable or resentful. It never rejoices in wrongdoing and it always rejoices in God's truth. And Love never ends. Everything else does! But love survives it all.

Paul wrote to the divided church in Rome and told them to wake up! Look around! The night of our way is far gone. Don't stay asleep. Wake up to what is upon us. The day of salvation is nearer to us right now, this day, than it has ever been. Open your eyes and put on the armor of light so that we can no longer embrace the works of darkness. Live honorably. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, love incarnate, for the sake of life for the world. "Draw near to God in order to make and equip disciples and to live as faithful followers of God."

Summer is gone. I hope that everyone enjoyed it. It is time now, however, for us to refocus. And I would like to invite us to again dedicate ourselves to disciple being, and disciple making, and God following. This fall at Redeemer we will be launching an effort to do all of that. First of all, beginning on September 24<sup>th</sup>, we will launch a new adult program called Equip, Engage, and Embrace. It will be a rotating program that will engage our faith, equip us for ministry and mission, while we embrace each other on our faith journey.

Here is how it will work. On the first and third Sundays, we will equip ourselves through God's word. On these Sundays, we will dig deeper into God's word through a targeted Bible study. This might mean that we chose a book of the Bible to study, or look at a particular

passage, or consider a certain season in the church, or, on occasion, just follow our lectionary. The bottom line is that we cannot apply God's word to our lives, if we don't know it.

On the second and fourth Sundays, we will engage our faith. We will come together to discuss the issues in our lives and in our world and look at them through eyes of faith. It will be an open discussion with the only two restrictions. The first is that, together, our ultimate goal will be to seek God's direction and His truth for the complex issues of our day. The second restriction is that all discussion be civil and loving.

Finally, in months when there is a fifth Sunday, we will intentionally embrace each other in fellowship. This might mean a Holy Chow Meal, or some other way for us to be the community of faith that we are called together to be.

Equip, Engage, and Embrace. It is the journey of disciples.

Another plan for this fall is a continuation of our SHIFT discussion of how we reconnect to be the church that we are made to be. This will include us gathering together for a few evenings to discuss and create a Rule of Life for us at Redeemer. This statement will be designed to remind us who we are as God call us to be.

Paul tells us, through his letter to the Church in Rome, that we are to be awake and embrace Love. It is not a passive thing that we are called to. It takes dedication. It requires us to seek God's equipping, and to apply that equipping to engage the issues of our lives, all done within a community of faith that we embrace for our journey. The truth is that anything short of that misses the fullness of discipleship, as a follower of Christ, called and sent as part of God's mission within the world.

Amen