

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
August 28, 2016

Lesson Text: Matthew 22:35-40; Romans 12:1-2; 13:8-10
Lesson Title: Love Fulfills the Law

Introduction

Love for God and love for one's neighbor: these two commandments sum up the entire Law (Deuteronomy 6:5; Romans 13:8-10). God is pleased when we love Him and others. Of course, no one can love God or others apart from knowing Jesus Christ as Savior (John 8:42). When you know and love God, the love of God will be shared with others (Romans 5:5).

Created in God's image, we were meant to love both God and others as He loves. God loves perfectly, and He wants to teach us how to love in a biblical and healthy way. Jesus said, "*A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another*" (John 13:34). Love fulfills the law.

A Question about Love (Matthew 22:35-40)

Note: Matthew 22:35-40 is not included in some printed texts for this week's study.

Verse 35-36

"Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law?"

Matthew 22 opens with the parable of the great wedding feast. This parable served as a warning to the Jewish leaders who rejected the Messiah. The Pharisees tried to change the subject to the question of giving tribute to Caesar. From there the Sadducees directed the discussion toward the resurrection. Finally, in an all-out attempt to trap Jesus, "One of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law?"

It is obvious the question is loaded and designed to discredit Jesus and cause him to say something against Moses or contradict the law. It was a familiar question. The Scribes had debated this for centuries. There were over 600 commandments in the law. Some were important and others were deemed unimportant. All the "lawyer" wanted to know was if Jesus' opinion balanced with theirs.

The “lawyer” figures if Jesus keeps talking he will eventually say something contradictory to Moses and reveal himself as a fraud. Our Lord’s answer was scriptural and undebatable.

Verse 37

“Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.”

Quoting from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 our Lord answered in greater detail than his listeners really wanted to hear. The “first and great commandment” is to “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart” referring to giving of self to God, the *vertical relationship* of love. In order to “love” in this manner, one must give his “heart...soul...and mind.” The use of “heart, soul, and mind” is not meant to identify distinct human features, but to magnify the completeness of the kind of love called for.

Verse 38-40

“This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Jesus’ words, “This is the first and great commandment” emphasizes the thing man should be doing in comparison with what man has failed to do. Following up on His words, Jesus continues, “And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” This refers to giving of self to others, the *horizontal relationship* of love. Love for God cannot be separated from love for people (Romans 13:8-10; James 2:8-9).

“Love” means “care, yielding, being sensitive, meeting the needs of others” (Luke 10:29-37). “Neighbour” refers to anyone you come in contact with. This is the unconditional demand of Christ! Christ Himself showed no distinction or prejudice in loving and dealing with people (Matthew 9:26; 14:14; 15:32; Mark 1:41; Luke 7:13).

“As thyself” reminded the lawyer and those listening that man’s basic problem is selfishness. What do you do for yourself when you are hungry, cold, sick, or tired? Jesus is saying, “Treat your neighbor the same way.” To accomplish this, we must deal with selfishness in our lives.

Note: When it comes to loving people, we have a lot of hidden feelings and prejudices in our heart (Matthew 15:21-24, 32-33). What the disciples wanted to get rid of, Jesus placed a priority upon.

“On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” is a tremendous statement. It means all the teaching of Moses and the prophets rests on loving God and loving your neighbor. Loving God and your neighbor touches all of life’s relationships (Ecclesiastes 12:13). This is the law of love.

A Transformation for Love (Romans 12:1-2)

Until now in the book of Romans everything seems to have been *vertical*, focused on our relationship to God. Paul had dealt primarily with doctrine (Romans 1-11). But doctrine is never taught in the Bible as an end in itself. It is always taught for the purpose of being translated into practice. From Romans 12 until the end of the book Paul’s teaching is *horizontal*. It is now Paul’s purpose to tie together all the doctrinal material he has presented and tell his Roman readers what it means for them in everyday terms.

Verse 1

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”

This verse teaches separation from a secular worldview to a Christ like purpose and way of life. Paul begins with the Greek word *parakaleo*, “I beseech” or “I urge you.” It carries the idea of standing alongside someone in order to provide counsel, courage, comfort, hope, and positive perspective. Like a coach who encourages and challenges an athlete to reach a particular goal, Paul urges believers to separate themselves to a life of holiness.

“Therefore brethren” is speaking to believers. Romans 12:1-2 does not happen to the believer at conversion. This is something which takes place at a turning point in your relationship with Christ. These are commands to be obeyed and spiritual growth to be experienced. Unbelievers cannot live holy lives. They are not capable of loving God or their fellow man.

“By the mercies of God” is the basis on which Paul urges the believer to live a life of sacrifice. Paul has just spoken about God’s mercies in Romans 11:30-32, so the subject would be fresh on the mind of his readers. Also, God’s “mercies” are the foundation of everything Paul has said in the first 11 chapters of Romans. The word “mercies” is the Greek word *oiktirmos*. It means “pity or compassion.” Paul wants the Romans to remember all the compassion God showered on people who deserved none of it. Based on that compassion, Paul urges his friends in Rome to sacrifice their bodies to Christ because of God’s mercy.

“Present” is the Greek word *paristemi*, and means “to hand over a gift.” To “present” one’s body is a voluntary response of the believer to God’s mercy and grace. The “body” is used in this text to represent the complete man. God wants to express His perfect will through every part of our being.

A Christian life dedicated to holiness is a “living sacrifice.” “Living” means “a deliberate, ongoing sacrifice given again and again over a lifetime.” “Holy” means “undefiled and dedicated exclusively to the Lord and His purposes.” “Acceptable unto God” means “well-pleasing in which it honors God’s character.” Paul calls this dedication of our bodies “your reasonable service.” “Reasonable” means “logical” in the sense if a Christian realizes the price paid for his salvation he will have no problem living a holy life. The word “reasonable” also carries with it the idea living holy is not out of obligation. Our reason for living dedicated lives is voluntary because of Christ’s great sacrifice for us.

Presenting our bodies as living sacrifices is completely logical and in keeping with what should be expected of God’s children.

Verse 2

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

Two key words in verse 2 are “be not” and “but be.” First, “be not conformed to this world.” The word “conformed” means “to be molded according to a pattern.” It lays stress on that which is external. Paul is cautioning the Romans not to be fashioned after the pattern of “this world” or “this age.” He is speaking about being squeezed by the thinking of the age into a lifestyle, while perfectly acceptable to those around us, is perfectly unacceptable to God. Today, we would say this means our lives are not to be governed by postmodern thinking in which we tolerate everything, believe nothing, and care about no one.

Second, if we are to behave differently from the fallen world system into which we were born and now live, we must change. Unfortunately, we cannot change ourselves, so we must “be transformed.” The word “transformed” means “changed.” It is the Greek word *metamorphoo* and implies a fundamental change. This is much deeper than just the outward appearance. It means the Christian’s inward nature and character is changed. It basically is speaking of a Christian’s response to the new nature of Christ living within us.

As we respond to the call of God through presenting our bodies as living sacrifices, the Lord does the transforming. We learn to view the world through the lens of Scripture and we learn to respond as Scripture prescribes. We learn to think biblically about every situation in life. By the truth of the Word of God

and the help of the Spirit of God, gradually and supernaturally, our “minds” begin to think as God thinks, desire what God desires, love as God loves, and see things as God sees them.

Why must this change take place? Paul says, “...that ye may prove what it that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” There is no greater joy on earth or in heaven than the realization of the will of God, and you can never do His will until you are a yielded Christian. God’s will is “good.” That is, it is beneficial in its effect upon us. God’s will is “acceptable.” Meaning it is pleasing. God’s will is never grievous (1 John 5:3). God’s will is “perfect.” Which means flawless and mature. It achieves the desired end God has in mind.

An Obligation to Love (Romans 13:8-10)

The reason Paul writes about a subject then writes about something else and then comes back to the same subject is because we live in a world of sin and what we need has never changed. Throughout this wonderful epistle dealing with various doctrinal truth, Paul never abandons the subject of “love.” Remember, the “love” in Romans 13:8-10, is not talking about human love or a love which is produced in your own heart. Paul is talking about *agape* love which is of divine origin, a “love” which is given into the human heart by God Himself.

In Romans 13:8-10, Paul tells us several important things. He tells us to pay our debts so we might be good witnesses. He tells us we can never pay off the debt of love we owe. He tells us to love everyone, not just believers. He tells us this kind of love fulfills the law.

Verse 8

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

“Owe no many any thing, but to love one another” means the only exception to not owing someone is the exception of “love.” Pay your taxes; pay your respects; but always be in debt to “love.” Believers are not to “owe” anyone anything but there is a debt you will “owe” the rest of your life and that is the debt of “love.”

The two words “another” have different meanings in this verse. To “love one another” means “love people that are like you.” It is a reference to loving brothers and sisters in Christ (1 John 4:7). The word “another” is used the second time in the verse, “For he that loveth another,” and means “love people of a different kind.” It is one thing to “love” a brother or sister in Christ; but it is something else to “love” someone different from you.

To “love” people different from you goes beyond just loving the unsaved. It means we are to “love” people who are different from us politically, racially, theologically, and even personally. This does not mean we compromise truth for the sake of love. It simply means we have a “debt of love” toward those like us and those different from us we must never pay off.

When we live with the kind of love that loves those like us and those different from us, Paul said, “we have fulfilled the law.” The “law” is not only an expression of God’s character, it points to His original created order, His vision for how the universe should operate.

Verse 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.”

In support of what Paul is saying about “love” he quotes from half of the Ten Commandments and summarizes the rest by saying, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” The point Paul is making is when you “love” you do not “commit adultery, kill, steal, lie, or covet.” “Love” always seeks the highest good of the other person. There is no possible way to “commit adultery, kill, steal, lie, or covet” when you are loving God and loving your neighbor.

Verse 10

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

“Love worketh no ill to his neighbor” means when we live a submissive life, we place the needs of our “neighbour” above our own needs because we “love” our “neighbours” as we love ourselves. “Worketh no ill” means “love does not have an injurious or destructive attitude” towards those we are associated with.

Paul’s statement, “Therefore love is the fulfilling of the law,” brings the Jewish and Christian world to a crossroad. Doctor John Phillips writes, “*The underlying principle of the Jewish economy was law. The underlying principle of the Christian economy is love. Imagine love, like that which Paul describes, being turned on one’s neighbor! No wonder Paul says ‘love is the fulfilling of the law.’ Love’s moral conscience fulfills the law not only out of debt and duty but also out of desire.*” (John Phillips Commentary Series, The - The John Phillips Commentary Series – Exploring Romans: An Expository Commentary.)

Conclusion

When we fulfill God's law, we are not in some kind of slavery to God's demands. Because of the new life we have in Christ and our decision to present our bodies as living sacrifices to the Lord, we are able to love as God's law demands.

We cannot change ourselves no matter how hard we try. Love cannot be legislated. Only God through the life changing power of His Word and His Holy Spirit can cause us to fulfill His law by loving Him and our fellow man. May our relationships with one another reflect a true change of heart and attitude through Jesus Christ and the power of His cross.

Amen.