

"Law Rooted In Love, Not Vice Versa"

The law, contrary to what many well-intentioned Christians believe, does not define love. The law and love may intersect at many points, but they are definitely not the same thing. The law is rooted in love, but love is not rooted in the law. Just as the law does not define love, so love does not define law. It transcends the law. The law exists only because God loves. I doubt anyone would want to say that God loves only because He first had a law. Even though the law is a product of love, the law can be misused and turned into something that harms, rather than helps, when it is administered by cruel and unforgiving people. But love, from which law springs, cannot be misused. When we love, we are behaving like God. Jesus said, **"In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets"** (Matthew 7:12) Psychologists say that at the most fundamental level, what all human beings need and want is to be loved. If we want to be loved, then Jesus says we need to love, and that, he says, sums up the Law and Prophets.

"We Love Because God First Loved Us"

We trust God to never stop loving us. John tells us in 1 John 4:16, **"We know and rely on the love God has for us."** In verse 19, he continues, **"We love because God first loved us."** Think about that. It is God at work in us—God Who makes us into a new creation in the perfect humanity of His Son—Who turns us into the kind of people who love. This is not something we bring into being by our will, by setting our mind to it. We do not bring it about through our own reason and effort. We love because God did something for us through Christ that we could never do for ourselves. He became human for us, and He was perfect—He loved and kept the law for us—so that when we are attached to Him through faith (which is the only way we can be attached to Him), we become something new, a new creation in Him. His atoning reconciliation on our behalf is what makes us into something different from what we are, not our actions, attitudes, emotions or willpower. Through faith, through trusting Him, we participate in His perfect love. Don't ever think that we actually love with perfect love ourselves, because we don't. Our salvation from sin and death and our new selves, our new lives in Christ, come only from Him and by Him and of Him, and He gives all this simply because He loves us.

"In Christ Alone"

Christ, and Christ alone, is our righteousness. It is His humanity that God accepts as righteous on our behalf. All religious ideas of human **"Measuring Up"** are worthless, because such a thing is impossible. Humanity is saved only because Christ became the perfect human for us, and we partake of that salvation and become a new creation only in Him and only through faith in Him. There is no other way.



"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." (Romans 13:8-10)

The apostle Paul once wrote of love as a **"Continuing Debt"** to one another, saying, **"He who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law."** He cited four of the Ten Commandments and then included all others, explaining that they **"Are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"** He said, **"Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."** When we consider Paul's teaching about the relationship between love and the law, it is interesting how we seem naturally inclined to reverse it. We seem to find ourselves more comfortable with the idea of the law fulfilling love than we are with the idea of love fulfilling the law.

"Love And Law"



When it comes to relationships, most of us like to know where we stand. We don't feel comfortable not knowing whether others like us or don't like us. We feel better if we have some clear evidence, some way to measure, where we stand with others. Maybe that is why we find ourselves more comfortable with the law being the fulfillment of love, than love being the

fulfillment of the law. The statement, **"Love is the fulfillment of the law,"** does not mean the same thing as the statement, **"The law is the fulfillment of love."**

- The first statement makes **love the principal thing and the law the secondary thing.**
- The second statement makes **the law the principal thing and love the secondary thing.**

In the first statement, the law is included within love. In other words, love is **bigger, wider, broader, deeper and richer than the law.** When one loves, one has fulfilled the law, but one has also done more than that—one has loved.



Let's see how that works with the second statement, **"The Law Is The Fulfillment Of Love."** In this case, we would be saying that love is included within the law. We would be saying that the law is wider, broader, deeper and richer than love. We would be saying that when one kept the

law, one has not only loved, but one has done more than love—one has kept the law. But that is not what Paul is saying. He is saying that love fulfills the law. A person can keep the law without loving. But one cannot love without the law being fulfilled in them. The law gives instruction in the ways that one who loves will live. But the difference between the law and love is that love works from the inside and the law works from the outside.

"Different Motivation"

A person motivated by love does not need to be told to behave in a loving way; a person motivated by law does. Maybe that is why we tend to get uncomfortable with the idea that faith in Christ has superseded the law. We fear that unless there is an outside agent, the law, compelling us to behave rightly, we probably won't. We know our love is weak, so we don't trust ourselves to behave with love without a threat of unpleasant consequences as motivation.

"Love Is Unconditional; Anything Short Is Something Other Than Love"



The problem with that is obvious: Love cannot be compelled, forced, coerced or threatened into being. Love is freely given and freely received, or it isn't anything at all. Love is unconditional; anything short of unconditional is something other than love. It might be acceptance, it might be approval, it might be pleasure, it might be happiness, but it is

not love, because love has no conditions. That is why our "Love" is so easily strained when the people we love fall short of our expectations and demands—as they invariably do. We fall short of theirs, too. But we usually expect them to overlook and understand the ways we fall short of their expectations. In either case, what we call love is often stretched thin by the failure of either party to measure up to what the other feels is appropriate behavior.

"Conditional Love"

When we allow the demands and expectations of the people we love, however unreasonable they may be, to dictate our lives, we are not free, but imprisoned. Likewise, if we withhold our love from others, making it conditional upon whether they are at any given moment pleasing us or doing what we want them to do, then we are being manipulative, not loving. When we love others, we love them for who they are, not for what we want them to be. More precisely, as Christians, we love others for who God has made them to be in Christ, not for who we want them to be for us. It is only when we drop the selfish habit of withholding love from others until they adequately please us, that we can also free ourselves from the prison of striving to please others in order to win or retain their love.

"Love Is Blind Is A Terrible Description Of Love"

"Love Is Blind" is an old saying that illustrates how silly the common understanding of love is. It is usually taken to mean that love does not see the flaws, problems and warts of the object of love, and is therefore naïve. That is a good description of infatuation, but it is a terrible description of love.

"Love Is Honest"

"Love Is Honest". It sees things as they really are, and loves what is real, not some image. A good marriage, for example, is one in which each partner, in love, puts up with the various selfish, immature and obnoxious behaviors of the other. The partners do not waste their emotions and energies trying to manipulate and manage each other through the typical shame games, guilt-trips and favor withholdings that plague so many marriages. We ought to expect that people will not measure up to the silly, grand ideals we hold out for them, and wise people, people who love, know that. When love is unconditional, then iron can truly sharpen iron (Proverbs 27:17) without the accusations, resentments and recriminations that usually go hand in hand with our typical selfish efforts to "correct" one another.

"If You Love Me"

"It would be comical, if it were not tragic, how we can say to each other, "If you loved me, you would not have... (fill in the blank: said that, embarrassed me, done that, forgot that, bought that, sold that, asked that, ruined that, etc.) or "If you loved me, you would have... (been nice to my mother, ironed my pants, stood up for me, known what I meant, etc.) All of us, in every relationship we have ever had or will ever have, at some point along the way, in one way or another, experience disappointment, if not betrayal. That is a two-way street. We eventually, in one way or another, disappoint, if not betray, the people we care about, too. But to love is to know full well what you are dealing with—one flawed, imperfect and weak human being relating to another—and to love in spite of it all.