
“Love Does No Wrong”

ROMANS 13:8-10

OCTOBER 27, 2024

PASTOR BRIAN SMITH

WILDWOOD CHURCH

EAST MOLINE, ILLINOIS

AT A GLANCE

What is love? What is loving? Ask 10 people and you might get 10 different definitions. The Bible tells us love is the fulfilling of the Law because love does not wrong to a neighbor. Whatever we may think love is, if it doesn't pass that test, it's not love.

INTRODUCTION

When you think about love, what comes to mind? I think of Valentine's Day. I think of my wife. I think of my kids and my parents. I think of my church family. Things that make me feel good. I call this the “warm-fuzzies.” Love is an emotion, it involves feelings. Paul tells us in Romans 12:9 to let love be genuine and then to love one another with brotherly affection in verse 10. We're to love one another with a shared affection. That is, with warm feelings. But love is also governed by the law. Genuine love has guardrails, and genuine love does no wrong to a neighbor.

Daniel Doriani says, “Laws show people how to love.” We might imagine that law and love are contradictory. Laws are harsh. Love is, well, loving. But the truth is, you and I have a sin nature that needs to be constrained. And without guardrails on our love, we're prone to justify just about any act as a loving one. We need the “you shalls” and the “you shall nots” to restrain our love so that we do no wrong to our neighbor.

ROMANS 13:8-10

⁸Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹For 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: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁰Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

In verse 7 we're commanded to render payment and in **verse 8** we called to not neglect the rendering of the payment. We get the positive and the negative form of the command.

Owe no one anything. In other words, do not fail to render what you owe. Do not be indebted to anyone that you cannot repay. Some take this verse to teach that debt is sinful. This not what Paul says at all. In fact, he tells us to pay what we owe, implying debt. The sin is taking out debt you cannot afford to pay back. The bible never forbids the taking of a loan, only the taking of a loan you cannot repay. The point of this verse is that whatever debt you do take, you repay. This is secondary to the point of the text, though.

INEXHAUSTIBLE DEBT OF LOVE

There is one debt we can never repay, though, and this is the point. It's a debt of love. Paul says owe no one anything, **except to love each other.** Love is the one debt that we can never fully pay off. Where would Paul get that idea?

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.” John 13:34 How else would you describe the kind of love that Christ commanded us to have for one another if not an inexhaustible debt of love? This is far more encompassing than we think it is. This is a radical love.

Christ emptied Himself, Christ suffered, Christ died. That’s what His love cost Him. That was His love debt. That’s the kind of love He commands of us. Whoa! Who can fulfill this? With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible. Lord, help us! And we ought to want to love like this. Why?

As one commentator said, “the command comes with a promise.” *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34-35*

The kind of love Jesus and Paul speak of is not generic. Generic love is meaningless. You cannot claim to love the whole world like Christ loved you. We ought to love the world, generally speaking. We ought to pray that the Lord of the harvest would send out workers for the harvest is ripe. We should render ourselves available to be sent wherever and to whomever He would send us.

But the commands of Paul and Jesus are more focused and more deliberate than that. They command us to love **each other** with an inexhaustible love. This doesn’t excuse us from loving non-believers, but it does specify that we must love each other in the household of God.

MORE THAN A FEELING

And genuine love is often more action than feeling **for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.** Kent Hughes writes, “There is a sense in which love for our neighbor is a more obvious measure of where we stand with God than our love for God himself. We can easily convince others that we love God, but it is far more difficult to feign love for our neighbors.”

It’s not hard to have an affection for God, is it? He is the One from whom all good things come! However, the sincerity of our love for God is revealed not by our emotions about Him, but by actions toward others. How we treat others is the most accurate representation of our love for God. We can claim to love God, but the true test is how we treat one another.

What is amazing is that God uses *our* sincere love for Him, which we express with loving acts toward our neighbor, to manifest *His* love for them. It’s like this, how many times has the Lord provided for you, comforted you, encouraged you, corrected you, restrained you, and otherwise loved you through the direct actions of a fellow believer?

It was the provision of God given through another believer. It was the comfort of God rendered through another Christian. It was the encouragement of God spoken through a fellow churchman. How cool is this, our love for God causes us to love others and He uses us to manifest His love for them, and vice versa. Man!

Last week Wildwood Church definitely manifested the love of God for our four pastors. You made God’s love tangible in so many ways! Through gifts and generous financial offerings, and even more generous words of encouragement.

You did for us what we strive to do for you: you were the agents through which God’s love touched our hearts. We sincerely thank you! That’s how genuine love works.

LOVE REGULATED

One of my favorite verses about love is Philippians 1. *“And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and*

blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” Philippians 1:9-11

Do you see how Paul regulates love – love regulated by knowledge and discernment which produces the fruit of righteousness to the glory and praise of God.

Think about that. Love devoid of knowledge and discernment, that lacks purity and is not filled with the fruit of righteousness, fails to glorify God. Love decoupled from the **law** is not really love at all.

When you consider the law, do you think of it as a set of rules handed down by a stern parent meant to restrict us and punish us out of spite? I think it’s easy to let our minds go there. Here’s a list of rules to make your life miserable. But the reality is quite the opposite. The Law of God is truly meant for our good. It orders interpersonal life in such way that we flourish and thrive and live together in peaceful community when it is followed.

Granted, no one can perfectly fulfill the Law in and of themselves. We needed Jesus to do that on our behalf and we need the Holy Spirit in us to help us thereafter. By faith in Christ, we are given His righteousness. As it is written, *“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.” Romans 3:21-22*

By the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, we are now able to follow His moral laws. *“For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” Romans 8:3-5*

We’re set free from the Law as a means of obtaining righteousness, but through His power and by His grace, we ought to attempt to do all that God requires and not do anything God forbids in His moral law. That’s what it means to lay down our lives as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God. We are to let love be genuine: real, God-honoring, law-fulfilling love.

When we seek to honor God and fulfill God’s law, the inevitable result is that we end up loving other people. Thus, Augustine could famously say, “Love God and do what you want.” Dwell on that for a moment. When you love God the way you should love God, you can pretty much do whatever you want because love for God will always lead you to fulfill the law, and fulfilling the law means you’re never going to do wrong.

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF

This is essentially what Paul says in **verse 9**. **For 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: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”**

I think it’s fairly obvious that love for God and love for others restrains us from adultery, murder, stealing, and coveting. Coveting may not be so obvious, but it’s a strong desire to have what someone else has. It carries a connotation of lust. It’s a wicked sin that causes so much pain and relational frustration and often leads to the other sins of adultery, murder, and theft.

And any other commandment – What others commandments might Paul have in mind? The two commandments he omitted are the fifth and the ninth. “You shall honor your father and mother” and “You shall not bear false witness.” I don’t know why didn’t Paul mention these specifically. But these two are other commandments and certainly fall within this clause and certainly warrant reflection. Do I treat my parents the way the love of the Lord would have me? Do my words that I speak about other people reflect a sincere love for God?

It's easy to see Paul's point. These Laws are given to us to protect us and other people. These are basic laws essential to human flourishing. God's Laws are not spiteful rules. They are loving guardrails to keep us from spiraling into societal chaos. Thank the Lord for His moral laws.

Paul says the laws **are summed up in this word "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."** Jesus called this the second greatest commandment, in Matthew 22:39. The laws are summed up in that word because, **verse 10, Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.**

Genuine love, the kind that fulfills the law, **does no wrong to a neighbor.** Love will never lead us to do anything that wrongs our neighbor. This is not to say love never hurts or feels hard. *"For the Lord disciplines the one he loves."* Hebrews 12:6

Sometimes love does feel painful. Like when a father disciplines his disobedient son. Or a church disciplines an unrepentant member. Or the state punishes a criminal. None of those are wrongdoing. They're biblical expressions of love. When love is genuine, even discipline is loving.

But we can also say that when love is not genuine, whatever action flows from it is wrong, even if it appears kind. Thomas Schreiner warns, "If love is cut free from any commands, it easily dissolves into sentimentality, and virtually any course of action can be defended as 'loving.'"

THE LOVE TEST

I addressed several moral issues related to our election in last week's sermon, and I'd like to revisit one particularly sensitive moral issue today and address it according to what I would call a love test – that love does no wrong.

There is a supposed "love" that advocates for what is deceptively being called "women's reproductive rights." It appears the motive is to help desperate women deal with an unwanted pregnancy out of compassion. But in light of this passage, we must consider, is it really compassionate and truly loving? Beyond the obvious – "You shall not murder" – we must ask the question, "If love does no wrong to a neighbor, is it loving to lead a desperate woman to believe an abortion will solve her problems?"

Is it loving to lead a woman to abort her baby under the pretense that there is no lasting moral injury in the taking of her unborn baby's life? It may feel like the loving thing is to help the woman gain access to an abortion and bring her crisis to an expedient end. But in reality abortion is just the beginning of a lifetime of emotional trauma.

Is this love? It's *called* love, but is it? Love does no wrong to a neighbor.

In her book, *Toxic Empathy*, author Allie Beth Stuckey makes the case that the progressive left heralds itself as being the side of love and empathy. James tells us that wisdom from above can be discerned by its fruits, though. If, in fact, the left is the party of genuine love, and if abortion access is genuinely loving, we can tell that by its fruit. So, let's consider the fruits.

The motive of the left is not the individual woman in crisis, but rather the national legalization of unrestricted abortion. When an individual woman determines to keep her child, Planned Parenthood and other abortion mills no longer have any interest in that woman. They offer no prenatal support or post-natal care. They offer no help in raising a baby and they provide no parenting resources.

True to their founder, eugenicist Margeret Sanger, their one goal is to kill the undesired babies of the world. A non-abortive woman is useless to the abortion cult. She's a drain on resources the moment she determines not to abort her child.

Don't let the appearance of compassion fool you. Don't believe the sentiment. They only make money when a woman determines to kill her unborn child. Speaking of her unborn child, this is a neighbor that rarely gets a mention in the whole "love your neighbor" conversation. In every successful abortion a person dies.

WHO IS OUR NEIGHBOR?

The pro-abortion advocates only want to consider the immediate needs of the woman, and they like to think they're occupying the moral high ground. But there are two more considerations we must make in determining what is genuinely loving: the child and the long-term impact on the woman.

In both of these two considerations it is plain to see that abortion fails the love test because it does harm to a neighbor. It harms the woman long-term, and it kills the child within her. This is to speak nothing of the inherent risk to the mother in the act of the abortion.

I stand by my statement last week; abortion is demonic and those who advocate for it under a demonic delusion. When will we wake up to this abhorrent practice?!

It's not as though we can simply make that claim and congratulate ourselves for having fulfilled the law of love. And we do not. No, the Church does far more than just call abortion murder. We do what the so-called "compassionate" Left refuses to do.

We come alongside a woman in her crisis, and we offer help and hope. We offer help in the form of parenting classes, baby clothes, diapers, strollers, infant car seats, prenatal vitamins, and perhaps most importantly, we provide loving Gospel-community for life.

Wildwood Church supports Pregnancy Resources of the Quad Cities, which has two locations and a mobile van that takes its sonogram equipment on the road and offers its services for free. They conduct classes and provide those essential services not only leading up to birth, but after the birth of the child as well.

They give these women, and many of their husbands or boyfriends, real and lasting hope when they find themselves in crisis. Hope that there is another option, like keeping and raising the child with proper support, or adoption as a last resort.

The church has historically been, and is still, the most eager and most effective in offering support to the poor, the needy, and the afflicted at every stage of life. It is the church, not the progressive, that truly loves our neighbors by offering long-term care, real solutions to life's crises, and genuine hope.

HOPE FOR THE HOPELESS

Speaking of genuine hope, I want to give some genuine hope to those here or watching online who are abortion-minded or have had an abortion in the past.

To the abortion minded, I appeal to you for the life of your child. I understand that you are in a crisis; that you feel there is no hope. There's nothing more debilitating than losing hope, is there? You'll do whatever you can to restore it, and you think that ending your pregnancy, taking your child's life, will be the answer to your pain.

I will tell you what Planned Parenthood, the Left, and anyone else urging you to get an abortion never will and what everyone who has had an abortion sincerely wished they would have been told: the abortion will be just the beginning of your pain.

I beg you to consider the alternatives to killing your child. I warn you that what is being sold to you as an immediate solution to your crisis is really a life-long crisis in the making. You will never forget that decision and you will always regret it. You do not have to kill your baby.

Adoption is a much better alternative if you absolutely cannot raise this child yourself. I'm not speaking hypothetically. Kellye and I have personally walked alongside a young lady in your shoes. We have seen the anguish; we have wept with her. Thank the Lord this young woman did not abort her child but chose adoption instead.

To the woman who has had an abortion or the person who made her get one, you know exactly what I am saying. And I know you'd want to speak up and share your experiences, but shame keeps you silent. This is the enemy's scheme in every temptation. He gets us in the sin and then he gets us in the shame. You're thinking, "If anyone found out that I've had an abortion!" It feels like the unforgivable sin.

You replay it over and over again in your head as each year you remember what would have been the birthday of your child. You wonder what she'd be like. You wonder if she would have your eyes or her father's. Would she twirl in a dress or play in the mud? Or both?

You try to console yourself with the well-rehearsed thought that you were in no place to raise a child when you made that decision all those years ago. You desperately try to convince yourself that you made the right decision, but you can never really get to a place of peace about it.

And truthfully, you shouldn't get to a place of peace. At least not until you recognize it for what it is: sin, the taking of the life of an image-bearer. Your sin is no different than any other which is why love compels me to tell you to not treat it any differently. Compassion requires that we deal with this sin just the way we deal with any other sin. I invite you to repent and be forgiven.

I urge you to acknowledge abortion for what it is. It is a sin for which Jesus died. It is murder, the taking of a sacred human life. Agree with the Lord that it was wrong and receive His mercy and be free! Whether you've had one abortion or a dozen, Christ died for you.

COME TO ME

I invite you to step into the river of life and have the stain and shame of sin be washed away from you. I invite you to taste and see that the Lord is good. He is gracious to the sinner. He is merciful and He is quick to forgive. Hear the invitation of Jesus...

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus will give you rest for your soul. Will you trust in Him today?

If you are a Christian, if you have confessed your sin and you've been forgiven, I urge you to put the shame to death. It is part of your testimony. It's not who you are, it's what Jesus saved you from.

The enemy loves to throw our sin back in our faces. That's when we must take every thought captive. That's when we must remind ourselves of God's incredible mercy and amazing grace. Abortion is sin, but it's not an unforgivable sin. Only disbelief is unforgivable. Do you believe the Gospel? Have you repented of your sin? If so, you are forgiven. Walk as a child of the light. You have been set free!

Today I spoke of abortion, but this test of genuine love, that love does no wrong to a neighbor, is a great test of all our ideologies and philosophies. If the second or third order effect of our love is harm, or it violates the law of God, one thing is sure, it's not love.

As we transition to communion today, I think of two words, “my body.” These are words of two competing worldviews confronting us this morning, both claiming love as their motive.

One says, “my body, broken for you.” The other says, “my body, my choice.” One sacrifices His body to save our souls, the other sacrifices her baby to save her lifestyle. Love does no harm, it is the fulfilling of the law. Thank you, Jesus, for showing us how it’s done.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bruce, F. F. (2008). *Romans: An introduction and commentary*. Inter-Varsity Press.
- Doriani, D. M. (2021). *Romans*. P&R Publishing.
- Hughes, Kent R. (1991). *Romans – Righteousness from Heaven*. Crossway.
- Kruse, Colin G. (2012). *Paul's Letter to the Romans*. W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Longenecker, Richard N. (2016). *The Epistle to the Romans*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- MacArthur, John. (1991). *Romans 1-8*. Moody Publishers.
- MacArthur, John. (1991). *Romans 9-16*. Moody Publishers.
- Moo, Douglas J. (2018). *The Letter to the Romans, Second Edition*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- Mounce, Robert. (1995). *Romans*. B&H Publishing.
- Schreiner, Thomas R. (2018). *Romans, Second Edition*. Baker Publishing Group.
- Sproul, R. C. (2019). *The Righteous Shall Live By Faith – Romans*. Ligonier Ministries