

Sunday, August 25, 2024

Romans 13:8-14.

Love is the perfection of the law

Here's a quiz for you. Who is the one who said, "Even if the world were to end tomorrow, today I would plant an apple tree?" The correct answer is 'Martin Luther'. It is the saying of Luther who gave us the Reformation. But why an apple? The question remains. Any way, it is a good saying that tells us to have hope even after the world ends. What will you do when the world ends tomorrow?

Verse 8: Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.

What is the debt of love"? I would like to think what the Apostle Paul means by 'the debt of loving one another'. In Romans 1:14-15, he says, "I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you also who are in Rome." The Apostle Paul says that this debt repayment is 'to preach the gospel to the Gentiles'. There are many kinds of love, but the greatest love is to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with family and friends who do not yet know Jesus.

The Bible says that we should not owe anyone anything except love one another. The God Father's culture teaches us that it is okay to owe each other love. By the way, the debt of love can hardly be repaid. I owe so much love to the Mennonite Japanese Church. Kenta and Taishi were a nuisance to you all at every weekly service. You have loved me and my children very much, and I owe you all a lot of love. I know that I cannot repay this debt of love. Now I am returning the favor a little by doing message like this. Your patience and love for me has kept me alive. To love in this way is to help those in need in the church. Preaching the gospel and leading to salvation, all acts of love fulfill the law.

Verse 9: "The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

As you know, the laws that the Apostle Paul enumerates are some of the Ten Commandments that are laws about human relationships. These Ten Commandments of Moses were compiled into a code called the Mishnah around the 3rd century, and the Talmud was later written as a commentary on it. The laws are the pride of modern Israel, too. To summarize these great laws, "Love your neighbor as yourself." In Matthew 22:34-40, Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment. Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and

the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” These Words are like a constitution compared to laws among many another laws. Many of the laws are all about ‘love God and love your neighbor.’

Verse10: Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

The way to love is to actively do good and love, and the other way is to do no evil to one's neighbor. Matthew 5:17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets ; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." Jesus Christ died on the cross for us to perfect God's law. Through the love of the cross of Jesus Christ, all of God's laws are completed, and salvation is given to those who believe in this cross. John 19:30 "When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit." On the cross, Jesus completed God's law and fulfilled His mission to complete the salvation of mankind. God is very pleased that we also live out the love of Jesus Christ, who completed the law.

Verse11: And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believe.

The Apostle Paul says "And do this," emphasizing that there is more to loving one another. The reason for this is that salvation is certainly closer than when we began to believe. Salvation has two aspects. The first is the salvation that will come to us at the time of our personal death. The second is the consummation of salvation, the coming of the Kingdom of God in the new heavens and the new earth at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Even if we do not know when the Second Coming will be as this verse says, we are certainly approaching the time of our own death. So, we should wake up from our sleep, says the Apostle Paul.

We know that Christian cults scare their followers about the second coming of Jesus Christ and make them run away from real daily life. When I was in Canada, Kenta was in 4th grade. A Korean boy in the same class told his friends, "This world will end; if you get 666, you will not be saved." That day, Kenta was really frightened for days and days, so much so that he couldn't sleep because he was shocked and scared. This kind of thing actually happens to adult Christians when we don't understand the Bible correctly about the end of the world. It is unbiblical if the teaching makes us to be fearful of the end of the world.

The Bible tells us that the Thessalonian church was confused about the second coming of Jesus Christ. Certain members of the Thessalonian church were causing financial trouble for their brothers and sisters in the church, saying that they did not have to work because Jesus was coming soon (2 Thessalonians 3:6-8). They were misinterpreting the end of the world.

Verse12: The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

The Apostle Paul is not all that optimistic about the end of the world. He tells the world is ending and the end is near. Jesus teaches about the signs of the time of the second coming of Jesus Christ in [Matthew 24:3-31](#). He said, "[For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many \(v.5\).](#)" So, it is with many cults. Also, looking at the international situation, we are [hearing news of war and rumors of wars\(v6\)](#). People are turning against people as in an ethnic conflict. The international situation was in a mood of world peace during the Cold War era, but now countries are turning against each other. The global trend is getting to be nationalism, for example 'America First' and 'UK leaving from the European Union'. And the advanced nations are even preparing for space warfare, too.

Christians all over the world must have been shocked at the opening ceremony of the Paris Olympics last month. From the beginning to the end of the opening ceremony, like a Grim Reaper was consistently on display. That person wearing the mask of the Grim Reaper was not revealed until the end of the ceremony. It gave us negative message. And that was not all. In a fashion show inspired by Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece, 'The Last Supper', the performance insulted Jesus Christ. In the next day, the Catholic Church objected them strongly for this, and the head of the Olympic Committee in Paris apologized for it. The French people also showed their opinions about the opening ceremony, saying that it went too far from the Olympic philosophy. Many Christians would think that the night was near as the Apostle Paul told.

However, the Bible teaches that the end of the world is a time of rejoicing for us Christians as we approach "the day" of the consummation of salvation. Revelation 19 prophesies about the wedding of the Lamb Jesus. Jesus is the groom and we are the bride. On that day, the wedding with Jesus Christ will take place. We praise God the Father because His peaceful reign will begin.

[Revelation 19:6-8](#), "[Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.](#)" (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.)" At the end of the world, the holy wedding with the Lamb Jesus Christ will begin. For that we should put on our bridal gowns, fine linen.

The Apostle Paul uses many expressions such as 'put on' and 'take off' in his letters. These expressions means that we have to wear the bridal gown for the wedding with Jesus Christ. As a bride who welcomes a holy Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, we should do holy deeds. To live holy lives on a daily basis is to put off darkness and put on light. [Ephesians 6:11-13](#) "[Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities,](#)

against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand." The struggle of the believers is not a visible happening before our eyes, but a struggle against invisible evils. Do you all really believe that?

Verse 13-14: Let us behave decently, as in the day time, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy (13). Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh (14).

The apostle Paul encourages us to abandon the banquet of drinking. Alcoholic beverages are like drunkenness, and it is easy to make sexual harassment. And also, we should take off other conflicts with our neighbors and even the envy that is happening in our own hearts because Jesus Christ, whom we receive, is the Holy One. We should not live a life that satisfies our own desires. And we should not have sinful thoughts like the flesh.

I am sure we have heard testimonies like this one. "After I believed in Jesus Christ, I hated the smell of cigarettes and was able to stop smoking naturally." When we make the decision to believe in Jesus Christ, God allows the Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts. Through the work of the Holy Spirit we can quit smoking, abstain from alcohol, or quit gambling and so on. We can put off our old dark ways and put on the armor of light of Jesus. By the Holy Spirit we can put on Jesus Christ. And we can love one another at the end of the world!

1 Thessalonians 5:8-11 "But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." To the Thessalonians, who were waiting to see when this world would end, the Apostle Paul encourages them to walk with the Lord Jesus Christ, whether awake or asleep, and to love one another. Finally, I have a quiz for you. What would you do if you knew that tomorrow the world would end? The correct answer is: "Love one another!" Let us pray.

Beloved Heavenly Father! I thank that God's perfect salvation will come at the end of this world. As we look forward to that day, please help us, Holy Spirit, to clothe ourselves with Jesus Christ and to live a life of love for one another. For those who have not yet accepted and believed in Jesus Christ, I pray that they will believe in Jesus and be saved as soon as possible. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.