

SHORTCUT TO SIMPLICITY
ROMANS 13:8-14

BIG IDEA: YOU DON'T NEED LOTS OF "DON'TS" WHEN YOU'VE GOT THE RIGHT "DO."

INTRODUCTION:

- A. I spent the summer of 1970 with my family in Bellingham. It was a lean summer for the Waltons because my father was convalescing from major surgery. The only money coming in the door was from my mom's secretarial job. It wasn't enough and the family got behind on debt repayment, especially on the two family vehicles. One morning the doorbell rang under the finger of a sheriff's deputy who had a bill collector in tow with a court order to repossess the car and pick-up, which, we found out later, was illegal.

While my Dad had it out with them at the front door, my mom rushed into the back of the house and told me to take off in the PU which was parked in the rear alley. When the men heard the engine start in back, they rushed around to the rear of the house to intercept me. With perfect timing, my sister shot out the front door, jumped in the Ford Galaxy and took off, which brought the men running around to the front of the house, empty-handed and frustrated, with nothing to show for their efforts but exhaust fumes.

I parked a few blocks away in a Sears lot and walked home, but my sister was so scared she drove all the way out to Mt. Baker before she called home. By then my folks had discovered that there was an All Points Bulletin issued for both vehicles and feared that Martha was going to be pulled over and arrested. Remind me to finish that story some time...

- B. That was just one of many incidents of debt problems in my family. It scared me so much that I emerged pretty much debt-proof. When I saw the grief debt caused my parents, I wanted nothing to do with it. With but two exceptions in 35 years, the only debt Merilee and I have incurred is a home mortgage, and I don't like that either.
- C. I don't like owing people money, and when I do, I pay it off as fast as I can. And I've never been late with a payment.
- D. So I feel pretty good when I read **Romans 13:8**, "*Let no debt remain outstanding.*" By the way, in this passage "*...Paul is not forbidding borrowing....The present imperative will have a continuous force: 'Don't continue owing. Pay your debts.'*" (Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p.467).
- E. But then, when I read the next part of the verse, I don't feel so good: "*except the continuing debt to love one another.*" I can buy off my financial debts and walk away clean. But I can't buy off my relationships. When it comes to relationships, the bill collector is always at the front door. Till the day we die, you and I will be working on our debt of love...but it's a debt we will **never** be able to fully repay.

- **ORIGEN:** *The debt of charity is permanent, and we are never quit of it; for we must pay it daily and yet always owe it.* (in Leon Morris, 468)

I. THIS SINGULAR "DO" COMES STRAIGHT FROM GOD **Verse 8**, *the continuing debt to love one another*

- A. Why Love? Because God Says So
1. Who says I have a continuing debt to love? Well, God does!
 2. I hate getting unexpected bills in the mail. I examine them very carefully to see if I really have to pay them. Some bills are spurious. I don't pay those. Some bills are mistakes. I call and clear it up. But some are inescapable, like an IRS underpayment notification, or a rate increase from PUD.
 3. This one is inescapable.
 4. You've heard of the **Great Commission**, haven't you? **Matthew 28:19**, *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*" We know that's a non-negotiable. We are to be witnessing and

a missionary church. It's a commission packed with all the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

5. But have you heard of the **Great Commandment**? It's in **John 13:34** *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* That's just as non-negotiable as the Great Commission. It too is packed with all the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 6. But you might ask, "What right does God have to command us to love each other?"
 - a. The right of **creation**. We saw the principle back in **Romans 9:20**, *who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'"* The creator has the right to make the rules.
 - b. The right of **redemption**. **I John 4:10** *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. People so loved by God ought to themselves be expert lovers. In fact, God expects it of us.*
- B. Why Love? Because It Makes the World a Better Place
1. When James wanted to picture what authentic religion looked like...
 - he talked about taking care of orphans and widows,
 - he talked about ushering a poor, shabby man to a good seat in church,
 - he talked about giving a coat to a shivering person and feeding the hungry,
 - he talked about not arguing and slandering.Isn't that really the kind of world we all want to live in? Isn't that the kind of church we want to be? It's a scene of safety and integrity. A place where you are loved just because you're you and not because of what you possess or what you can contribute.
 2. The classic illustration of the goodness of love is the story Jesus told called the **Good Samaritan**. **Luke 10:34** *He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'*

II. THIS SINGULAR LOVE IS BETTER THAN LAW

- A. Law Tends to Be Negative; Love Is Positive
1. Look at the list of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. Eight out of 10 are negative.
 1. You shall have **no** other gods before me
 2. You shall **not** make for yourself [or worship]an idol
 3. You shall **not** misuse the name of the LORD your God
 4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy
 5. Honor your father and your mother
 6. You shall **not** murder.
 7. You shall **not** commit adultery
 8. You shall **not** steal.
 9. You shall **not** give false testimony against your neighbor.
 10. You shall **not** covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."
 2. I drove to a class in Kirkland one Friday morning with this subject on my mind. I discovered I was assaulted by negativism.
 - No passing on the right.
 - Don't transport homegrown fruit beyond this point.

- No thru traffic.
- No parking within 20 feet.
- No parking without decal.
- Visitor parking: Two hour limit.
- No smoking in building.
- Don't use this entrance for moving heavy articles.

And that was in just the first 35 minutes of my day. I go through life almost paranoid with all the negative rules that surround us. Whenever a police car pulls in behind me I start to sweat because I'm sure I'm going to do something I'm not supposed to do.

We called the county to ask if we could park RV vehicles on our building site with itinerant CFC volunteers who want to help us build. The official checked and answered, "There's no law against it." "Great," we said. "That means it's OK. Right?" "No," he said. "Just because there's no law against it doesn't mean you can do it."

My goodness, the law is negative even when there isn't a law!

3. Look at what Christ does with all the negatives in **verse 9** [*The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be.*]. He translates them into **one big positive**, "[They] are summed up in this one rule: *"Love your neighbor as yourself."* [**Quotation of Leviticus 19:18**]
4. Don't get the Bible wrong...When you love somebody, there **are** things that you **don't** do. If you love your spouse you certainly will not commit adultery. But the **focus** of love is not on what you **don't** do...It is on what you **do** because you love. Love is overwhelmingly positive.

B. Law Fills Volumes; Love Fills a Sentence **Verse 8**, *for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.*

1. Have you ever walked into a lawyer's office and looked at the shelves of law books? It's overwhelming!
2. The first five books of the Old Testament, which Jews call the **Torah**, contain **613 laws**. Then Jewish rabbis wrote the **Talmud** to explain the Torah and added many more laws. For instance, the House of **Shammai** and the House of **Hillel** debated the best place to put your napkin at dinner so as to keep the laws of cleanness. "*The House of Hillel say you put the napkin on the cushion [on which you are sitting]. Even if the cushion makes the hands unclean, it is not a severe...uncleanness.... So this...will not make food unclean. But you should not put it on the table, lest the table be unclean and render the water in the napkin unclean, which in turn will make the food unclean.*" The House of Shammai say, dry your hands on the napkin and put it on the table, not on the cushion. (Jacob Neusner, *Invitation to the Talmud*, Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1984, pp. 51-52)
3. Are you getting a headache? This is why you take your income tax return to an accountant in April, because all the details of income tax law make you see cross-eyed.
4. We have a hard time remembering more than 5 things unless we write them down, so God has made it very easy on us in the New Testament. He has taken all 613 of the laws of Moses and distilled them into **two easy-to-remember laws**: One for getting along with God and one for getting along with everyone else Matthew 22:35, *One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" 37 Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

5. Our passage here in Romans deals with the second. Everything in the Old Testament Law about human relationships amounts to one sentence: *'Love your neighbor as yourself.'*
6. You don't need a library of 100's of books to understand God's rule for relationships. You don't have to go to Bible College. You don't even have to go to BSF or Sunday School. Just live one sentence with godly integrity.
7. **Josh McDowell** was the 1998 Biola University commencement speaker. As he spent 60 hours preparing for his address, he interviewed 17 people about past commencement addresses and was astounded at what he learned. *"Not one could remember one single point..."* he said. His address lasted all of two minutes. Here it is: *"My commencement message to you is: Always pursue an intimate love relationship with your future spouse, and spend time with your children."* He repeated it two more times, said "God bless" and sat down. President Clyde Cook leaned over to him and whispered, *"Brilliant."* (Northwest Christian Journal, "Biola graduates ponder McDowell's brief message." July 1998, p.16) I think people will remember that commencement address.
8. I think that's why God boiled the Old Testament "people-rules" down to an easy-to-remember one-liner, *"Love your neighbor as yourself."*

III. THIS SINGULAR LOVE IS CRAYON-SIMPLE [LIKE SELF-LOVE]

NOTE: **Verse 8** states that we are to *love our fellow man*. So we ask, "OK, God. How much? How am I to love my fellow man? How do I know when I've got it right? What does it look like?" And God answers, "Very simple. **Verse 9**, *Love your neighbor as yourself.*" Why did God define it that way?

A. Self-Love Is Hard-Wired into Our Souls

1. God explains this in **Ephesians 5** where He uses the same formula, telling men to love their wives as themselves. **Verse 29**, *"After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it,*
2. One of the first words little kids learn is "Mine!" We don't have to go to seminars to learn to love ourselves.
 - When MacDonalds told me I deserved a break today, I believed them.
 - When Albertson's tells me its my store, I believe them.
 - When Burger King tells me to have it my way, I say "Amen!"
3. Not too long ago the American dream was a car in every garage. When I was a young man, newer homes all had two car garages. Now I discover that almost all new homes feature three car garages. We know how to take care of ourselves!
4. About 30 years ago, a self-esteem fad swept through most of our churches. The reasoning went like this, *"You are supposed to love your neighbor as yourself. But you can't love your neighbor if you don't know how to love yourself. So come to our 13 week Sunday School class on "Self-Esteem" so we can teach you to love yourself."* The fad missed the whole point. I **already** love myself. I love myself **too much**. Sin makes me selfish. Sin makes me want to be first in line. Sin makes it hard for me to give away my time and my money. I'd rather keep it for myself.

B. Self-Love Is Easy to Remember [God's Shorthand]

1. God could have given us another whole Bible explaining how to love others, but He put it in short-hand: *"Love your neighbor as yourself."*
2. This revolutionary statement shows up a number of times in the New Testament under different titles:
 - In John, it is the **new** commandment
 - In James, it is the **Royal Law** (2:8)
 - In Galatians, it is the **summation of the entire Law** (5:14)**Eight times** the command, "Love your neighbor as yourself" appears on the pages of the NT.

And it even appears once way back in **Leviticus 19:18** *"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.*

3. So powerful is this command that our culture has given it a special name: Americans call it, **"The Golden Rule."**
4. How does it work?
 - Before I repeat a bad report about a person, the Golden Rule asks, "Is this how I would like people to talk about me?"
 - When it's blue sky on Sunday morning and I'm tempted to head for the lake and just not show up for my Nursery assignment, the Golden Rule asks, "Is that how I would like be treated if I was in charge of the Nursery program?"
 - If you discover some Christian friends are in financial distress and you were planning to buy a hot tub, the Golden Rule asks, "How would I feel if I was broke and a Christian friend gave me a \$1000?"
5. **Ken Hutcherson** reminds us that when Tabitha (Dorcas) died, the Christians in Joppa sent their fastest runner to get Peter from 20 miles away. *"They weren't going after Peter to speak at the memorial service, they wanted Tabitha back from the dead! They loved her and valued her so much they refused to give her up. Even to death!*
"My question to you and me is this: If you or I died, would people want us back? Would people say, 'Oh, he was a good fellow, that Hutcherson. But it's much better that he's not here.' As a Christian, are you living your life and exercising your gifts in such a way that you would leave a major gap in the body of Christ if you passed away?" (**Ken Hutcherson, The Church**, Multnomah Books, Sisters, Oregon, 1998, pp. 128-29)
6. Would people want me back? Give that a big "YES" if I have been loving other people as **I myself** would want to be loved.

CONCLUSION:

- A. Jon Krakauer tells the story of the May 10, 1996 disaster on Mt. Everest. It was the worst single season death toll in the 75 year history of the Everest climbing, with 12 lives lost. As rescue attempts were launched to bring the survivors down the mountain, David Breashears, radioed the high camp to use his 50 canisters of oxygen stashed at 26,000 feet and he delayed his own summit attempt to help with the rescue. Doing so jeopardized his \$5.5 million IMAX filming expedition, but he made the decision without hesitation because lives were at stake. (Into Thin Air, p. 327) He felt the debt of love.
By contrast, on the other side of the mountain a Japanese team climbed past three Indian climbers in desperate condition and did nothing to help them. They just left them to die. Talking to a British journalist on their descent one Japanese climber said, *"We didn't know them. No, we didn't give them any water. We didn't talk to them. They had severe high-altitude sickness. They looked as if they were dangerous."* A climbing companion added, *"We were too tired to help. Above 8,000 meters is not a place where people can afford morality."* (Into Thin Air, p. 314) They felt no debt of love.
- B. God puts no height restrictions on love. No depth restrictions. No time restriction. No financial restrictions. No convenience restrictions. Just do it!
- C. Loving others is a high and holy debt that we will never pay off in this lifetime.

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