



ROMANS Part 121

Chapter 13:8-10

Love yourself.



To no one owe anything, except to be loving one another, for he who is loving another has fulfilled law. 9 For this: “You shall not commit adultery,” “you shall not murder,” “you shall not steal,” “you shall not testify falsely,” “you shall not covet,” and if there is any other precept, it is summed up in this saying, in this: “You shall love your associate as yourself.” 10 Love is not working evil to an associate. The complement, then, of law, is love.

I have known many people who do not love themselves. It’s a sad thing, and the root of many evils, including the great evil of jealousy. I have known those of this ilk who think that I am a narcissist simply because I have a high opinion of who God made me. Self-

loaters cannot grasp how anyone could love oneself apart from the sin of narcissism. To them, it’s one extreme or another; either you hate yourself or you think that you’re Nebuchadnezzar.

Narcissism is an extreme personality disorder unrelated to the Biblical teaching of self-love. In a classic case of projection, self-haters/doubters/loaters call others not sharing the disability, “narcissists.” Yet they more exactly exemplify the personality disorder by focusing incessantly inward: “I’m so unworthy; I’m hopeless; I’m no good to anyone; why was I even born; how could God choose me,” and so forth. It seems pious, but it’s not. It’s sick. It’s a disease of self-absorption.

As I’ve told you many times, only one who loves him or herself is able to love other people. It stands to reason that no one operating from a place of personal emptiness can give anything to anyone. Spirit Airlines demonstrates this to me many times a year. Whenever I fly, the flight attendant announces that, in the case of pressure loss, oxygen masks will drop from the ceiling, and that I am to “put on [my] own mask before assisting a child.” That seems like such a selfish, narcissistic thing to do: to take care of oneself before helping a poor little kid. Aren’t we supposed to put other people first? Sure—but only after taking proper care of ourselves. I will be of no help to a child if I’m passed out from oxygen deprivation. In the realm of love, how will I have the emotional capital to give to another if I have not first given to myself?

GET AND GIVE

This topic surfaces here because of Paul’s startling statement that the entire law is summed up in the saying, “You shall love your associate as yourself.” (Paul borrows this from Mark 12:31, which borrows it from the law of Moses). This commandment of God to love one’s associate as oneself is second only to that law explained by our Lord in Mark 12:30—



You shall be loving the Lord God out of your whole heart, and out of your whole soul, and out of your whole comprehension, and out of your whole strength.

Paul still occupies the greater context begun in chapter 12, which is “Be not conquered by evil; but conquer evil with good” (Romans 12:21). Anyone conquering evil with good is by necessity filled with love, and is dispensing it. No one can dispense love who does not have a tank full of the stuff in the first place. Having love in the tank begins—according to our Lord—with loving oneself.

HOW DO THEY DO IT?

How is it that the nations fulfill the law without even having the law? Paul writes of the nations in Romans 2:14-16—

Whenever they of the nations that have no law, by nature may be doing that which the law demands, these, having no law, are a law to themselves, *who are displaying the action of the law written in their hearts*, their conscience testifying together and their reckonings between one another, accusing or defending them, in the day when God will be judging the hidden things of humanity, according to my evangel, through Jesus Christ.

It is the action of the law, not the law itself, that God writes on the hearts of non-Israelites who may have never

even heard of Moses. It’s really as simple as having a conscience. The conscience pre-dates Moses. The conscience tells one whether or not one is fighting evil with evil, or acting in accord with the greater precept (love) by, for instance, baking cookies for jerks.

But besides a conscience, what super-charges love and drives it to the surface for it to become noticeable? The spirit of God. No one can buy an eight-ounce bottle of God’s spirit at Walgreens. God invades one’s world and imparts spirit to whomever He wishes in whatever measure He sees fit (Romans 12:3). God has cornered the market on spirit. While the spirit cannot be seen, its effects are everywhere. In this, it mimics the wind. In fact, God employs the same Greek word (*pneuma*) for both “wind” and “spirit.” No one can literally *see* wind, but rustling leaves and hurricane-leveled houses bear witness to its presence.

God gives Israel a righteous law but withholds His spirit so that Israel becomes a demonstration of the inability of flesh and blood to do the dictates of law (Romans 8:7). To the law-bereft nations, on the other hand, God gives wild amounts of spirit, not with an eyedropper but with a firehose. No, it’s not fair, but God is demonstrating with Israel the weakness of flesh and with the nations the power of spirit. What does this spirit produce? Galatians 5:22-23—

Now the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control: against such things there is no law.

JUICY FRUIT

For our purposes in this chapter, we needn't go beyond the first fruit mentioned: love. One filled with a spirit of love will love God, oneself, and one's associates—in that order. The spirit-filled person does this without having to be told to. If I love you, it stands to reason that I will not murder you. I don't need to be told, therefore, "Thou shalt not commit murder." God did not mean the precept to enable anyone to do it. The precept shines as an objective declaration of what is not becoming in a human. Such a marvel as not murdering someone apparently cannot be wrought apart from either a healthy conscience or a healthy dose of God's spirit. Israel had neither. Again, this was necessary to show that humanity, left to its own without the gift of either conscience or spirit, simply cannot obey God (Romans 8:7).

The same goes for adultery, stealing, and bearing false witness. One who loves won't do these things. This is why, besides loving God above all else, "love your associate as yourself" is the greatest commandment. And this is why the first fruit of the spirit of God is love. Love fulfills everything God wants. It is why spirit trumps law.

The rest is details.

It may look from the outside that, because they're not murdering people or committing adultery, spirit-infused people *are* doing law. Don't be fooled. They're not. Question such people and they may not know the first thing about the law of Moses, or even who Moses is. All they know is that they have this crazy little thing called love in their heart for all humanity. They don't *want* to murder anyone. This, by nature, fulfills law, but it does it completely apart from an application of law. Thus, love is a "law" unto itself.

"GENTLEMEN!"

"The complement, then, of law, is love"
(Romans 13:10).

A complement is something that fills. What fills up law is love. But again, love does this without even realizing it. Whenever someone came into the room and addressed The Three Stooges as "Gentlemen!" the Stooges looked behind them, as though to say, "Who are you talking to? It can't be us." The one exercising love responds the same way when Paul says, "You are fulfilling law!" *Who in the world could Paul be talking to?*

These recipients of the spirit of God who then, by reflex, display the fruits of the law, fill the law. Can I possibly say too many times that this occurs apart from law?

PARLEZ VOUS?

I took four years of French in high school, not that you would know it. When our French club traveled to Paris my senior year, I realized how little my training availed me. My classmates and I couldn't get by in even the basics. What worked in the classroom proved worthless in the field. I'll never forget the day that my friend Paul and I listened to a five year old girl talking to her mother in ninety-mile-an-hour, fluent French. "That little girl is a genius!" we exclaimed. But no. What we had struggled to attain in a classroom, she learned easily in a home. What came—or didn't come—to us by rote, came to her by nature. She fulfilled the "law of the French language," not by studying it, but by being endowed with it.



Israel still struggles to perform the dictates of Moses. She will never do it on her own. In the near future, however, God will replace her present heart of stone with one of flesh. Then, she *will* do law; it will still be a *performing* of law. It is not that, for Israel, the spirit replaces the law. That's us. Rather, for Israel, the spirit enables them to law-keep.

Remember, we do not even occupy the arena of law. God's filling us with spirit, therefore, does *not* cause us to do law, but rather to live out the righteous requirements of the law. We do this, not *through* law, but in spite of it.

Comprenez vous? —MZ (To be continued.)