

If you had to summarize God's Law with just one word, what word would you choose? If you had to boil it down to its essence, get at the heart of it, what would you say? Because the word that you choose says something about how you think. Perhaps the word you would choose would be "rules." God's Law are his rules, the rules he wants us to follow, the rules he gives us for our lives. But the problem with that is that we often think of rules as something bad, right? We think of rules as being something oppressive or restrictive. Rules are made to be broken, we say. Rules are something that you follow if you don't want to have a good time. And so, because we think of rules as something negative, that can lead us to think of the Law as something negative, which says something about how we think.

Perhaps the word that you would choose would be "condemnation." The Law condemns us because of our sins. Which, of course, is true. The Law does show us how we have not kept the Law. It shows us the ways that we have sinned. But if that's the heart of the Law, if that's its whole purpose, the word that you would choose to summarize it, it's still something negative. Something which can only criticize, something which only tears us down, which again says something about how we think.

So the question we need to ask is "what does the Bible say about this? What word does God choose to summarize his Law?" That word, Christians, is "love." Love is the fulfillment of the Law. Love is the heart of the Law. Love is the very summary that God gives to us. If we show love to one another, then we have fulfilled the purpose of the Law. And so the Law is not something negative. It's not something bad, something out to get us. The Law is love, which is what Paul wants to show us in our Epistle reading for today.

Because Paul begins by saying in verse 8: "Owe no one anything, except to love each other." So Paul tells us then that we should not be in debt. We should not be always promising to do something, especially if it's something we never intend to keep. We can promise that I'll get around to it, but then never actually do it. And that's not a good thing. So we should not be in those kinds of debts. But there is one debt that we should always have, Paul says, and that is the debt of love. Because that is a debt which cannot be repaid, a debt that we should always be striving for, but never actually get around to finishing. Because all of those other debts are something that come to an end.

We fulfill it, it's paid off, and we're done with it. We have nothing else to do with it. But the debt of love is something that goes on forever. Something we should always be striving for, something we should always seek to fulfill.

And that's especially important for us, because if we think of the Law as something negative, as something bad, then we're not going to want to fulfill it. We're not going to want to do what the Law wants us to do. If we think of the Law simply as rules, we'll say, "Well, the rules are too hard. There's no way I could possibly fulfill them. So why even try?" If we think of the Law as condemnation, we'll say, "Well, I'm never going to measure up. So what's the point? Why should I even try?" But the Law is love, Christians. The Law points us to what God would have us do. And as Paul goes on to say: "For the one who loves another has fulfilled the Law." So when we show love to one another, we are doing what the Law calls us to do. When we show love to one another, we are doing what God wants us to do. And how can that possibly be a bad thing?

Paul explains what he means in the following verse, verse 9, where he says: "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.'" So all of the commandments, every single one of the Ten Commandments is an expression of love. When we try to keep those commandments, we are showing love towards other people. But when we break those commands, we are being loveless and not showing that love that God wants us to show.

Consider the examples that Paul gives here. He says, "You shall not commit adultery." Because if we were to commit adultery, Christians, we would not be showing love, no matter how we try to spin it or justify it to ourselves. Adultery is not love, because it is not being faithful to our spouse. It is not being faithful to our marriage bond. It is putting myself above all and especially above the one that God has given to me. But when we keep the Sixth Commandment, then we are showing love, because then we are being faithful, faithful towards our spouse, faithful towards our marriage, and faithful towards God. It is an expression of love.

Paul goes on to say: "You shall not murder." If we murder someone, we are not showing love, no matter what that murder may be, whether outwardly murdering or just murdering in our heart by hating someone. Because murder is a selfish act. It is wanting to hurt someone. It hates someone else. How could that possibly be an expression of love? But when we keep the Fifth Commandment, then we are showing love, because then we are seeking the good of our neighbor even in his physical possessions and doing everything that we can to build him up.

Paul goes on to say: "You shall not steal." Stealing, of course, is not love, because stealing is being selfish. It's putting my needs above all, saying that I want this thing for myself and forget about all of the consequences. I'm going to do it anyway. But when we keep the Seventh Commandment, it is love, because then we're helping our neighbor, giving them the things that they need and helping them to build up what they already have.

And the last example of "You shall not covet." Coveting is not love, because when we covet, we're being envious of what someone else has, either because we want it for ourselves or because we want them to not have it. If I can't have it, then they can't have it either. It's inherently selfish. It's something that's always seeking my own good above all. But when we keep the Ninth and the Tenth Commandments, then we are showing love, because it shows that we are content with what we have and that we are happy to help our neighbor keep the things that he has as well.

So whatever the commandment may be, Christians, they are all expressions of love, love towards God and also love towards our neighbor. This is why Paul says in verse 10: "Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfilling of the Law." Breaking the commandments is simply doing wrong to a neighbor. It's hurting them rather than helping them. But keeping the commandments is showing love. And this is what God wants us to do.

But wait a minute, we might say. Hold on a second! I thought that we constantly break the Law? Isn't that why we confess our sins at the beginning of the service on Sunday morning, because we're constantly sinning? How can Paul say that we fulfill the Law by showing love? How can

Paul say that we are doing what God wants us to do when we constantly fail to do that? Those are all good questions, all things we need to consider.

So first of all, yes, it is true. We do struggle with sin, sin which causes us to break the Law. Even we as Christians still struggle with sin, because the weakness of our nature leads us constantly to do what God doesn't want us to do. This is why John tells us: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Sin is always something that we will struggle with, something that we will always struggle with as we try to keep the Law. But when we confess those sins to God, asking forgiveness for the things that we have done and have not done, then God is faithful to his promise that he will forgive us because of Jesus Christ. So yes, we do struggle with sin, and that is something that we are always going to struggle with, at least until we go to heaven.

But Paul is not lying here. He's not telling us something wrong or at odds with the rest of the Bible. When we show love, we do fulfill the Law. And the only reason why we can show this love, Christians, is because of Jesus. As John tells us in 1 John 4, verse 19: "We love because he first loved us." Jesus has forgiven us. Jesus has brought us to himself. And because he has shown us mercy and has changed us, we are able to keep the Law. We are able to do what God wants us to do. Because we are Christians, we are able to follow after the Lord. Yes, we're going to do it imperfectly. Yes, we're always going to struggle with it. Sin is always going to be a problem. But because of Jesus, we are able to do what God would have us do. And that's why Jesus makes all the difference here. Because without him, Christians, we wouldn't be able to do it. There's no way. We couldn't possibly keep God's Law. But in Jesus and with Jesus, we are able to do what God wants us to do. It's Jesus, giving us that new birth, regenerating us, that makes all the difference in the world.

So yes, Christians, the summary of the law is love, love towards God and love towards one another. And we are able to show this love because of the love shown to us in Jesus Christ. So let us love one another. Let us do what God would have us do. Let us strive to keep the Law, because we are Christians in Jesus Christ.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have called us to yourself through your Son, Jesus Christ, and given us the Holy Spirit to give us faith. Help us always to seek after your will so that we may do what you would have us do through Jesus. In his name we pray. Amen.