

“Don’t run up debts, except for the huge debt of love you owe each other. When you love others, you complete what the law has been after all along. The law code - don’t sleep with another person’s spouse, don’t take someone’s life, don’t take what isn’t yours, don’t always be wanting what you don’t have, and any other “don’t” you can think of – finally adds up to this: Love other people as well as you do yourself. You can’t go wrong when you love others. When you add up everything in the law code, the sum total is *love*” (Romans 13:8-10, The MESSAGE Bible).

A few years ago I had a trip to Nashville. When I arrived at the airport and walked out, a familiar song was heard to me, “Love me tender, love me sweet, never let me go....” They welcomed travelers with the music of Elvis Presley. Following my work, and when I came to the airport again, I bought one Elvis Presley’s music collection CD “The Love Songs.” The word “love” is an universal language that everybody wants to be loved by others as well as everyone want to love others.

The Bible says in today’s Scriptural text: “Love is the fulfillment of the law”; “When you add up everything in the law code, the sum total is love” (v. 10, The Message Bible Trans.). With regard to the law code, we had listened to God’s Words saying the Ten Commandments during the past weeks. While Jesus was ministering to people, an expert in the law tested with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law – among the Ten Commandments? Jesus replied and gave new commandments: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” which is the first and greatest commandment. And “Love your neighbor as yourself” which is the second commandment (Matt. 22:37-40). Then the Apostle Paul succeeded Jesus’ words and said, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Gal. 5:13-14). Throughout the Bible, the word “love” is the core message that God tells us: Love the Lord and love your neighbor.

Two questions come into my mind: What does it mean to love others? Who is my neighbor? First, love means to cease actions that harm another person – physical, mental, financial, etc. Furthermore, it means that no hurting others in emotion and no attacking others in verbal words.

Romans 13:10 says, “Love does no harm to its neighbor.” When you hear that verse, you might think that I didn’t harm my neighbors surrounding my house. The word “neighbor” not only indicates the persons who are living beside your house, it includes family members – spouse, children, and family members. The nearest and dearest neighbors are your family members; do you love your family as yourself?

Second, love consists in doing something for the good of others; love is act, not sentiment; love costs something - time, labor, prayer, gift, and so on. “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10). When we say “love,” we need to understand what Christian love means different from worldly love that we often hear from Hollywood movies or read from romantic books. It has a deeper level of meaning. “Christian love will never allow itself to hate any man, and has won the power to love even the unlovely and the unlovable.

No matter how it is treated, it has nothing but goodwill,” the prominent Bible teacher William Barclay says. “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven...If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:43-48). Jesus really challenges us how we accept others as well as love others – the unlovely, the unlovable, and even enemy.

Third, love is sharing the burdens each other. “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ - love” (Galatians 6:2). Throughout the journey of our lives on earth, we don’t know what we will face in the future. Many times something difficult such as sickness, death, or tragedy take place unexpectedly or unbelievably. We experience ups and downs – mountaintop or valley experiences. As a member of the body of Christ you and I are called to share the burdens each other by showing our loves toward others.

Among many early churches during the first century in the area of Minor Asia, the congregation of Thessalonica was praised by the Apostle Paul; He complimented the Thessalonica because they had shown their love out of their deep faith in Christ: “We (Paul, Silas, and Timothy) always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father *your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope* in our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 1:2). Those words remind us of how we serve our Lord Jesus Christ at the spiritual dimension of Labor Day.

Love is the fulfillment of the law through loving God with our all heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loving our neighbors as we love ourselves.

“How shall we become lovely? By loving Him who is ever lovely” St. Augustine says. Practicing our love daily, we are reminded that we have the example of Jesus as well as we have the help of Jesus. “Love is the goal. Love is the way we wend” (Christina Rossetti). We are living in the world far more hunger for love and appreciation than there is for bread.

“How do I want to be remembered? Not primarily as a Christian scholar but rather as a loving person. This can be the goal of every individual,” Elton Trueblood, who was the prominent Quaker leader as well as political adviser to President Eisenhower, said.

“Love is the fulfilling of the Law.” It is the rule for fulfilling all rules – the Ten Commandments. It is the guideline as well as the foundation for our Christian action and life! Let it be so in our daily lives by God’s grace shown in Jesus Christ, Amen.