

The Fulfillment of the Law

By Rev. Sheryl Stewart

Ezekiel 33: 7-11

Romans 13: 8-14

Matthew 18: 15-29

Psalm 119: 33-40

Summary: If we keep Jesus' one commandment, we have kept the whole 10. Yet, to really keep it, we are obliged to help each other keep it, too.

When I hear “the fulfillment of the Law,” I tend to think of Jesus’ sacrifice of His life for our sakes, which pays the debt of sin for me and for everyone. That is quite right, but this gift goes even further. Jesus’ presence in our lives and his gift of the Holy Spirit gives us the hope that we can keep this Law. We are not only considered righteous; we are made righteous by God’s love.

So, when Jesus said, “I give you a new Commandment, ‘Love one another,’” He was not giving an extra Commandment as much as He was summarizing them all in one rule. Love, of course, is more than good will and affection, it involves action, especially the action of helping each other obey the rule of love.

We see God getting at this point with Ezekiel when he assures sinners that they can turn away from sin. For him to fail to warn them and give them God’s promise would be a failure of the law of love and make the prophet a worse sinner!

Paul confirms this when he remarks, “Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love is therefore the fulfillment of the law.” All those “Thou shalt nots” are covered by this one “Thou shalt.”

The Gospel lesson puts us on the spot when Jesus instructs us to reprove and correct our brothers and sisters in faith. He says that what we bind on earth will be bound in heaven and what is loosed on earth will be loosed in heaven. That is something we usually think of as reserved to only Peter, but here it applies to all of us. The very nature of heaven is altered, not by Papal decree or some sort of consensus of church rule, but by our own consistency.

I am not sure what that will look like in heaven. It is possible that heaven is so vast that we will each end up in a neighborhood where things are bound or loosed according to what we have said “No” or “Yes” to and taught others the same.

As I prepared this, an old episode of “Father Knows Best” came to mind. The oldest daughter was trying to apply school lessons about useless, primitive beliefs. She had decided against fancy presents, cake, and cards for her birthday and even for Christmas. In a tough love decision, Father let her try this out for her birthday, which was at hand.

This was an epic failure for her, of course, and led to sorrow for herself and the whole family. My favorite part of the episode was when her father prevailed upon her to let her younger sister give her the present she had prepared since she was too young to grasp the principle the older girl was testing.

The little girl gave away a necklace she loved and had won in school, one her older sister did not win but had wanted. At first, the older girl did not want to accept this sacrifice of love, but she did once she saw that the giving made her sister feel good about herself.

The father never said outright, "Daughter, you are wrong." He arranged things so that she discovered her error herself. This was an elegant way to reprove someone you love. Although everyone was uncomfortable though this whole process, especially Mom and Dad, they won their child and fulfilled the law of love.

So, as tough, and painful as it is to warn others their actions have gone contrary to God's Will, this is an essential act of obedience to fulfill God's Plan in our lives. We must so love as individuals and we must so love as a church lest heaven itself go to Hell. We *can* obey the law of love for, behold, where two or three have gathered in Jesus Name, He is there in our midst to help us. Amen.