



[Pastor Steven Billings](#)

Sermon for the 1st Sunday of Advent
November 26 & 27, 2016

Christ's Love/Our Love

Romans 13:8-14

⁸ Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹ 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." ¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. ¹¹ Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Have you ever considered how much we need love? Whether it's the love of parents or children, friends and relatives, or that of a beloved spouse, without love, this world is a very cold and lonely place. There's nothing better than to sit together with friends and loved ones to share a wonderful meal as we did this week. But more important than the love of family and friends is the love of Christ. We need His love. Without it we're condemned to death, but with it we have the promise of sins forgiven and an eternal home in heaven.

And not only do *we* need Christ's love, the *world* needs it, because many still don't understand what His love means for them. But, for them to have *His* love, they first need *our* love, for Christ has commissioned us to be a conduit of His love, a refuge from the storms of life, a place where people can come to find rest and comfort for their souls, a place of healing for mind, soul, and spirit, and a means for meeting the various physical needs of the destitute in our neighborhood and around the world.

This is what Christ has called us to be as a Christian congregation. It's the challenge He's placed before each and every one of us. We're to show the love of Christ to each other and to the world in which we live.

But do we?



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Paul says that “the one who loves another has fulfilled the law” (v. 9). So let’s consider for a few moments the Law of God. What’s the first commandment? “You shall have no other gods.” And how does Luther explain that in the catechism? “We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” Do we? *Do we* fear, love and trust in God above *all* things? *Does He* hold the highest priority in our lives?

How about the second commandment? Have you ever cursed? Do you ever take the Lord’s name in vain?

Do you ever avoid His house? Do you find more important things to do when you’re supposed to be in church? Do you stay away from worship because you don’t like this or that about the church or because you’re mad at the pastor or someone else?

Well, that takes care of the first table of the Law. How about the second table? Are you disrespectful towards those who hold positions of authority over you? What’s your attitude toward your parents, teachers, government officials, employers, or other authorities?

Have you we ever hurt or harmed your neighbor? Do you ever neglect to help and befriend him in every bodily need?

What about sexual misconduct? Do you have sexual relations with someone you’re not married to? Do you look at pornographic material? Do you tell inappropriate jokes?

Do you take things that don’t belong to you? Have you ever cheated someone out of what was rightfully theirs? Have you ever neglected to help someone whose property was being stolen?

And what about gossip? Do you tell stories about your neighbor behind his back? Do you spread rumors – *even if they’re true*? Have you ever neglected to defend your neighbor when someone’s told *you* a rumor?

Have you ever coveted somebody else’s property or relations? Scripture teaches that it’s not only wrong to *take* what doesn’t belong to you, it’s also wrong to *want* to take what doesn’t belong to you, whether possessions or relationships. To want to steal away from your neighbor what’s rightfully his is just as wrong as actually taking it.

Now, God has given us His Law in these Ten Commandments because He loves us and wants us to love others. Isn’t it easy to see that when you disregard God’s love you tend to neglect your



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responsibility to love others? When we sin against God we're actively sinning against other people – disrespecting them, hurting or harming them, being sexually unfaithful to them, stealing from them, spreading lies about them, and so on. To do such things is *not* loving; it's hateful.

This hatred expresses itself so vividly in our day. People treat each other with such animosity and anger. We see this even among the people of God, in Christian families and congregations. Beloved, this is *far* from what God intends for us. James writes: "From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not so to be. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree . . . bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water" (James 3:10-12). Paul writes to the Galatians: "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19–21). That's not love, folks. As Paul says in our text: "Love does no wrong to a neighbor" (v. 10).

Now, this is not good news for those of us who like to think of ourselves as good Christians. But hold on; it gets worse. Not only do we show lovelessness to God and our neighbor through our contempt for His Law, we also exhibit it through our contempt for the Gospel.

"Why, Pastor, how do we do that?" I'm so glad you asked. We show contempt for the Gospel every time we're confronted with the Law and then try to make excuses for our sinful behavior. Listen, God's Law doesn't come with a set of qualifications. When the Law says "You shall not. . ." it means all the time! There's no conditions. When we try to defend our sin we show contempt for the Gospel.

Avoiding God's house, abstaining from the Sacrament, neglecting to spend time in God's Word – these are all ways in which we show contempt for the Gospel because through them we're saying that we don't *need* the Gospel. "For this or that reason the Law of God doesn't apply to me" or "my faith is as strong as it needs to be, so why do I need to come to church?" or "I haven't sinned lately, so why do I need Communion?" In other words: "I'm good enough as I am, and if God doesn't like it, that's just too bad for Him." Doesn't sound very loving, does it.

Look, I know this isn't easy to hear. Believe me, I do – because I heard it before you did. You see, the Law condemns me, too. It hits all of us without exemption. We all stand accused by its demands and are found guilty. We desperately need the love and forgiveness we can only find in the Gospel. None of us are as strong in our faith as we need to be. We constantly need to be revived and refreshed by the power of God's Spirit working through the Gospel. And we need to



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gather regularly with our fellow believers to be fed together and bound together by the Word of God.

So, if you think God's love for you is important – and I hope you do – and you don't want to reject it, first of all, acknowledge that His Law is perfect and holy, and strive, with His help, to follow it. And secondly, admit that you can't keep His Law as you should, and then recognize the forgiveness He so freely and readily gives in the Gospel.

Only in the Gospel do you find true love – *God's* love – shown in Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection as payment for your sins. Only in the Gospel do you find hope for your life here on earth and forever in heaven. Only in the Gospel do you find strength to follow His command to love one another.

In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen