

COCK-A DOODLE-DO!

September 3, 2017

Romans 13:8-14

Paul writes:

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.

But make sure that you don't get so absorbed and exhausted in taking care of all your day-by-day obligations that you lose track of the time and doze off, oblivious to God. The night is about over, dawn is about to break. Be up and awake to what God is doing! God is putting the finishing touches on the salvation work he began when we first believed. We can't afford to waste a minute, must not squander these precious daylight hours in frivolity and indulgence, in sleeping around and dissipation, in bickering and grabbing everything in sight. Get out of bed and get dressed! Don't loiter and linger, waiting until the very last minute. Dress yourselves in Christ, and be up and about!

"When you love others, you complete what the law has been after all along." What does that mean, and what does law have to do with love, anyway?

A bevy of evangelical ministers this week, calling themselves "The Nashville Statement," set forth and published what they feel should be the law of Christian sexual practice. Just like Paul did in about year 58 AD, a group of about 170 conservatives signed a document that intended to direct the whole of the Christian population in its interpretation of sin and righteousness.

Leaders of that movement, calling themselves The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, felt it was their God-given right and duty to lecture us all in morality, Bible inerrancy, and right conduct. In so doing, they stated their belief that sexual relationships and marriages are just to be between a man and a woman. They rejected all persons who gender-identify outside their norms, all practicing homosexuals, and all persons who experience sexual relations other than in husband-and wife- relationships. Those of us clergy who support rather than condemn any of the above persons, they termed, "heretics." And so, you might say, I am proudly heretical.

Owen Strachan, a professor at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary writes, "One cannot embrace a homosexual or transgender identity as a believer, any more than one can be an 'alcoholic Christian' or a 'white-lie-telling Christian.'" So, here's the news bulletin for you, I guess: Along with homosexuals and transgendered persons, if you

struggle with alcohol addiction or you are accused of telling a fib now and then, you are out of the Jesus Club. Leave your WWJD bracelet at the door as you leave.

Absurd. Idolatry.

I had a great conversation with one of our church members on Friday about the issue and use of the word, "privilege." I have his permission to share some of that discourse with you today. We were talking about what that means in the social and cultural context of race relations. He suggested an alternate word to the phrase, "white privilege." He heard the term "white chauvinism," and that resonated with him more than the word "privilege."

I think I can buy that. "Chauvinism" is defined as: "an exaggerated patriotism and a belief in national superiority and glory." Now we have all heard of "male chauvinism." This is defined as, "the belief that men are superior to women in terms of ability, intelligence, etc." When you add "Christian" to chauvinism, you get the point. Christian chauvinism is when Christians self-appoint as better than everyone else, superior, having greater ability to know God's will and favor than others.

I think it is idolatry.

I think you get a situation where some male theologians deign to decide for everyone else what God wants, what God values and devalues. I think you get a situation where the sin is in trying to see sin in the souls of others.

Paul tells us, "*We can't afford to waste a minute, must not squander these precious daylight hours in frivolity and indulgence, in sleeping around and dissipation, in bickering and grabbing everything in sight.*"

In other words, Paul's is an urgent message to wake up! Cock-a-doodle-do! Let's be about God's work and not our own perversions of that.

About a year ago, a young woman who identified as male came tentatively walking into our church. She was warmly received by you, and because of that welcome, she felt comfortable in coming out to me in her true gender identity. She gave me permission to share her story with you today.

Her birth family are evangelicals. She refers to them as "trans-phobic." At the time, our story intersected with hers, she was living at home, dependent on her parents while she attended college here. She

was terrified to tell them about her self-discovery, knowing they would react poorly and probably would kick her out of the family home.

After a few weeks of coming here, she stood up in the back pew during "Joys and Concerns" and outed herself to us right then and there. What courage that took! I remember the congregation—you all—clapping loudly for her and then praying for her as well.

Downstairs in Fellowship Hall, at the suggestion of Martha, the lead of our Care and Nurture Team, we presented her with one of our handmade prayer shawls, and she cried. It was a touching, connecting, uplifting moment. It was a God-thing. It was loving your neighbor. It was waking up to what God is doing in the world, to what was doing right here in our little Open & Affirming, Accessible-to-All church.

It was beautiful and it was right and it started Steph-now Stephan-- on the path to recovery. She took the plunge at home and came out to her entire family, enduring the verbal tirade and dishonoring of her story and her feelings. She left to go live with adoptive parents who could accept and nurture her as him, and then Stef moved up to Canada to be with his girlfriend-now wife.

This is what Stephan recently wrote me, and again, I have his permission to broadcast it to you:

I'm doing a lot better now and am now working on immigration papers so I can stay here in Canada. I'm so thankful for everything your church did for me during my coming out process and appreciated all the support I was given! My rainbow shawl I was given by you when I came out is hanging above my wife's and my bed as a reminder that there are good people in this world.

Love? Or law? Which is better? Funny, hearing a former judge ask that question, right? But for me, the relationship between the two is clear; law exists to serve love, not the other way around. If we have no community, if we do not value compassion, if we do not seek to experience God's love through our relationships, then we have no need for law, for we have nothing tangible or meaningful to preserve.

It's my favorite Greek word again! It's *eudaimonia*, the best kind of spirit and devotion that humans can muster. It's about bringing people *into* the love of Christ, rather than excluding them from the religiously-chauvinistic Jesus Club. It's about waking up to the marvelous things that God is doing in the world—yes, in this messed up, flooded, angry, unjust, threatening, political, divisive world.

"Cock-a doodle-do!" says the Gospel, "Wake up! A new day has dawned! A new way is before you! Look to God in the way you are best

suites. If you are Muslim, look to God in your sacred texts and in your prayers for peace. If you are Jewish, look to God in your Torah and in your stories of the ancients. If you are Christian, look to God in your Bible and in the way you live as disciples of Jesus."

You see, it's all the same: live for the expression of love and let law serve the higher calling. Female, male, transgender, married, single, homosexual, heterosexual, Democrat, Republican—it does not matter. Jesus said it. Buddha said it. Muhammad said it. Abraham said it. Paul said it, too. Love your neighbor. Leave the rest to God to sort out.

That's not The Nashville Statement. That's the Parker Hilltop statement. That's living the gospel truth in the flesh so as to lift up one lonely, frightened, child of God and give her the strength to claim his true, God-given identity.

And if that makes me a heretic, then so be it. I stand then with some pretty good company: Joan of Arc, 1431; Thomas Harding, 1532; and Teresa of Avila, 1582. And oh, yes, Jesus himself. Jesus was murdered by his people because he dared speak the language of love rather than the language of law.

I denounce the Nashville Statement. The ethic of this church denounces the Nashville Statement. Any statement that seeks to diminish God's love needs to be likewise diminished. We never know when someone is going to walk in through that door back there who needs desperately to know that God loves them. We never know when they will walk into our workplace, into the restaurant or shop we are patronizing, onto our sports teams, or into our homes. And when that happens, whom shall we serve?

The God of law? Or the God of love? The way is clear. Paul said, *"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.*

Barbara Brown Taylor says it this way, "God has no hands but ours, no bread but the bread we bake, and no prayers but the ones we bake."

Let us *bake* bread together on our knees. Let's throw away the recipe book, take a whole bunch of random ingredients and mix them all together with a whole lot of love. What comes out of the oven will not last long at the table of the hungry souls.

May It Be So.