

Galatians 5:14 in the Navajo Bible

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T'áá ni ádíí'íní'ínígi át'éego bił k'ééhót'íinii ayóó'íí'íní; kót'éego t'áá'áhídi ha'oodz'ígíí bee, bee haz'áanii t'áá át'é bi'al'í. (Galatians 5:14)¹

The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Galatians 5:1-4)²

Introduction

The statement quoted above does not appear only here. We find Paul saying the same thing on two other occasions, in the book of Romans.

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. (Romans 13:8)

Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Romans 13:10)

Thus, when the commandment says, "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13), that means we should not hate those around us but love and protect them. Similarly, the words, "You shall not commit adultery (Exodus 20:14), mean we should not betray the trust of the one person who is closer to us than any other. This would wound them deeply. Instead we should love and honor the one we marry. And so on. Stealing from someone does not show love, nor does lying, or coveting.

When we love other people in the way Paul has in mind, what form will our love take? What does such love mean? How could we describe it? It would mean protecting them, being true and loyal to them, respecting their property, telling them the truth in love, and being glad that they have what they do instead of wishing we had those things.

The Immediate Context

Paul has given us a good overview of the law here, but he has done it a context and we need to understand what that context is. So what context is he working within?

¹ Navajo Bible quotations are from *Diyin God Bizaad. The Holy Bible in Navajo*. Revised edition. New York: American Bible Society, 2000.

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Everything we have talked about so far has to do with our relationships to other people. This is an important part of the law, and it is the part Paul has in view. The commandments we have referred to so far are all contained in what we call the second table, i.e., the second group of commandments. We have referred to commandments 6 (murder), 7 (adultery), 8 (stealing), 9 (lying), and 10 (coveting).

These are the same commandments Jesus commented on in Matthew 5:21-48. There we have murder (vss. 21-26), adultery (vss. 27-32), lying (vss. 33-37), stealing (vss. 38-42), and coveting (vss. 43-48). Notice that in this list lying (#9) comes before stealing (#8).

What Jesus says about murder is clear ("You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder,' . . ." [vs. 21]). What He says about adultery is also clear ("You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery'" [vs. 27]). What He says about the three remaining commandments does not lie on the surface, like the first two, but it is there nonetheless. What He says about lying is, tell the truth ("Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one" [vs. 37]). What He says about stealing is, give ("Give to anyone who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you" [vs. 42]).

What Jesus says in the remaining verses is a comment on coveting. Coveting is something we do only in our hearts. So the issue is, how should we think in the privacy of our own minds when no one can tell what we're thinking? And the answer is, we should love our enemies as well as our friends (see vss. 43-48). That's what Paul was saying: "[H]e who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8). And again,

The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Galatians 5:1-4)

What Is Included in the Law?

The second table (6-10)

Do interpersonal relationships make up the *entire* law? Are commandments 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 all there is? No, there are Ten Commandments, not just five. The part of the law that talks about how people should relate to other people is a complete summary of how people should relate to other people, but there are five other commandments which show what our relationship is to God.

The second table is what Paul was focusing on in Galatians 5:14 (above). What Paul says about the commandments of the second table is certainly true, but he is not saying that we no longer have any obligation to God. We should understand his remarks within their intended context.

The fifth commandment

Notice that the fifth commandment occupies middle ground. That is the commandment that says, "Honor your father and mother, . . ." (Exodus 20:12). When we

are first born into the world, we know nothing about God. When we are infants our father and mother stand in the place of God to us. They are the only God we know. Then gradually, as we get older and learn more, we come to realize that our parents have weaknesses and shortcomings. We realize that there is One who stands over and above them and that this holy Being deserves, not only respect, but worship.

Then as our parents grow older the roles are reversed and we become like parents to them – always showing honor and respect, but now caring for them and supplying their needs as they once supplied ours. So the fifth commandment is transitional, but here I include it with the other commandments of the first table.

The first table

In the first table of the law God tells us that He alone is God and we are to worship no one else (#1, Exodus 20:2). He says we are to make no idol for ourselves (#2, Exodus 20:3-6). He says we are to honor His name and not take it lightly or use it without respect (#3, Exodus 20:7). And He says we are to worship on the seventh day in honor of the fact that He made us (#4, Exodus 20:8-11). We have already talked about the commandment to honor our parents (#5, Exodus 20:12).

The fourth commandment is the one that makes the Ten Commandments so controversial today. There is a theology that says we should no longer obey this one. The other nine are alright, but not #4. And yet there is no biblical basis for dividing the commandments up like this. We can divide them into groups by saying these talk about our relationship to God, while these talk about our relationship to other people. That is far different, however, from saying we'll keep these, but not those. We cannot pick and choose what we wish to obey. Serving God is a package that includes both blessings and obligations. He alone is responsible for supplying the one and defining the other.

What Is Idolatry?

The fourth commandment shows us the reasons, not just for worshiping God on the seventh day, but for worshiping Him at all. In this way the fourth commandment leads us back to the first – the one that says we must worship only God. Think about it. Why should anyone worship God? What are the reasons? Or I should, what is the reason? There is one that stands above all others. We worship God because He made us. As such we belong to Him. We are His possession. This is the starting point for all right worship and the proof against all idolatry.

Idolatry puts one in the position of worshiping what he himself has made. If we were to extend the significance of such an act, i.e., if we were to explore the significance of people worshiping what they make, that act would create a logic in which God worships us.

Actually it would create a logic infinitely worse than that. If we're talking about worshiping what we make, remember that God made Lucifer. He did not make himself. When Lucifer's life began long ages ago, God set him as the highest angel in heaven – the one closest to His throne. So when we talk about Satan's fall, this is what he fell from. He had the highest position it was possible for any created being to have.

You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones. 15 You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you. 16 Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, O guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. 17 Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings. (Ezekiel 28:14-17)

As we talk about the impressive things God has made, consider a form of idolatry that was common in Bible times and has been widely practiced down to our own day. I'm talking about people worshiping the sun. The sun is the biggest, brightest, and most spectacular object in all of human experience. There is nothing in our solar system more powerful than the sun. And so many people have worshiped it.

When someone worships the sun, there is symbolism in that act. It is not without meaning. We just said that the most impressive thing God ever made was a living being, i.e., Lucifer. The symbolism behind worshiping big impressive things is that Lucifer – at one time the best and brightest of all the angels – would receive worship which belongs only to God. When someone worships the sun, that person might not be thinking about the significance of what he does, but Lucifer or Satan is thinking about it. Make no mistake, worship is something he wants, and he wants it badly. God is not in competition with him, but he is in competition with God.

You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. 14 I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." 15 But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit. (Isa 14:13-15)

When Jesus was just beginning His ministry and went to be baptized in the Jordan river, and afterward went into the desert to fast and pray, Satan went there too, although he was not invited, and confronted Jesus after He had been weakened by 40 days of fasting. Satan thought that in His weakened condition Jesus would be an easy mark and could be defeated at the outset of His ministry. Under these very unequal conditions Satan presented three temptations. In the third temptation he tore the mask aside, dropping His disguise, and openly asked Jesus to join the rebellion with him. Of course he, Satan, was in it first so Jesus must acknowledge this by bowing down to him, but if He would do this, Satan offered to simply give Jesus the world He had come to win back for fallen Adam at infinite cost.

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." 10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" (Matthew 4:8-10)

If things like we've been talking about don't ever cross your mind, trust me, they cross Satan's mind. He very much wants to have first place in our lives. He doesn't ask us to bow down in any physical way or even say his name. Instead he asks us to put our own selfish interests ahead of God's will for our lives. That's all it takes. Don't do it!

Discussion

So what does all of this have to do with the first table of the law and the fourth commandment? The fourth commandment tells us where we came from and in this way shows who we must worship. At the same time and for the same reasons, it also shows the reason for worship. The first commandment is a command to worship only God. The fourth commandment clarifies that we worship God because He made us. From this same commandment comes the reason why we must not make idols (we worship our Maker, not things that we make), and why we must honor God's name (His name deserves honor, praise, and respect because He is Author of our being). He is "the First and the Last" (Revelation 1:17; 2:8; 22:13), the Alpha and the Omega (Revelation 1:8; 21:6; 22:13), the Beginning and the End (Revelation 21:6; 22:13).

Notice carefully that the fourth commandment does not look forward to something Christ would do at a later time. Instead it looks back to something He has already done. Both John (1:1-3) and the author of Hebrews (1:1-3), as well as Paul (Colossians 1:15-18),³ describe Christ as the Creator of our world. This does not mean He takes the Father's place as the Creator. Instead it means that the Father and the Son acted in union with each other to bring our world into existence. Thus, as we rest on the seventh day in obedience to the commandment, we are not just honoring the Father; we are honoring both the Father and the Son – and the Holy Spirit.

On one occasion Jesus said, "So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28). The present discussion provides a context for that remark. How could Jesus be Lord of the seventh day of creation without doing all the work of creating that led up to it? This passage is a claim to deity. By claiming to be Lord of the Sabbath Jesus was claiming to be Lord of all creation. Some argue that worshiping on the first day honors Him, but how can disobeying someone honor them?

The Sabbath can't be displaced by later events, any more than someone's birthday can be displaced by his or her wedding anniversary. We can hope to change the future, but we can't change the past. The Sabbath does not look forward to the cross; it looks back to creation. Nothing can ever change the fact that God made us, and so nothing can ever change the memorial of that act. We will always have occasion to remember that God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is our Creator, and so it will always be appropriate to "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy" (Exodus 20:8).

Calling some other day the "Sabbath" doesn't make it the Sabbath. If names could change things, no one would ever go hungry. We could just call something food that is not food and our needs would always be met. It doesn't work that way. Another thing that doesn't work is claiming to keep the Sabbath by resting and worshiping on another day. Doing this has nothing to do with keeping the fourth commandment. Fooling ourselves is not the same as obeying God. There is only one way to obey God, and that is by doing what He says.

³ Notice the word "for" at the beginning of Colossians 1:16. Verses 16-18 explain what vs. 15 means. So when it says Christ is "the firstborn over all creation" in vs. 15, what that means is, he created all things (vss. 16-18).

Conclusion

When Paul says that love is the fulfillment of the law, that statement is true within the context he intended, i.e., within the context of the second table. Paul was not denying there are other commandments in the first table. He was simply focusing on the part of the law that deals with how we relate to other people.

The first table of the law is the part that contains the fourth commandment, and this commandment deserves special attention because people disagree so widely on how to obey it without resting on the seventh day, or how to fulfill it by doing something other than what it says, or how to set this one commandment aside (which they don't want) without removing the rest of the law (which they do want). It's a genuine problem, until we decide to give up, submit to God with a loving and teachable spirit, and just do what He says. Jesus tells us,

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

No Christian would suggest that coming to Christ is inconsistent with the gospel, even though there is a yoke for us to bear when we do this. His yoke is not heavy, nor is accepting it the same as submitting to a yoke of slavery. "For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (vs. 30). I submit that the yoke of Christ is the law of God. It is the means by which we demonstrate publicly that we have accepted God's authority over our lives and willingly submit to it.

Christians should be foremost in their willingness to accept this commandment, even more than the other commandments in the first table, because it specifically honors the Son as our Creator. In union with the Father and the Holy Spirit, Jesus is said to be our Creator in Mark 2:27-28; John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-18; and Hebrews 1:1-3, for example. Thus, we are twice His – once by creation, and again by redemption. As we come to understand these things, let us respond from our hearts to what He has done on our behalf and serve Him gladly.