We are God’s beloved children. As God’s children, sometimes we are weak. God wants us to be strong.

This is the unspoken idea in the 13th chapter of Paul’s letter to the Romans. Paul says, *Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.* Love is what will make us strong. So give your attention to love.

There are some people who have completely rejected the ways of love. We may look at them and think they are strong, but God sees that they are the weakest of all people. Paul’s words are not directed toward those who have never heard of Jesus. Paul’s words are not directed toward those who have turned from the way of love. Paul’s words are for us, those who are trying to follow the Lord of love.

We are God’s beloved children. God wants us to be strong. Sometimes we are weak.

Sometimes we reveal our weakness in the way we get distracted by many details. We can see our weakness in our difficulty in giving our full attention to the work of love. Paul says, *Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. 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 phrase, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”*

You have heard these other commandments: You shall not bear false witness. You shall not commit adultery. You shall honor your mother and father. These long lists of commandments are true, but our long lists are distracting us from the one thing that will make us strong. So do not worry about the long list. *Owe no one anything, except to love one another.* Give your attention to only one thing: love.

This is similar to the main idea of the poem I used to read with my 3rd grade students. Each September I would start the school year with my 3rd graders by talking about rules for our class. I knew that I needed to get and hold the attention of my students. So each September I began our discussion of classroom rules with a poem titled ‘Rules’ by Karla Kuskin:

*Do not jump on ancient uncles, do not yell at average mice.*  
*Do not wear a broom to breakfast, do not ask a snake’s advice.*  
*Do not bathe in chocolate pudding, do not talk to bearded bears.*  
*Do not smoke cigars on sofas, do not dance on velvet chairs.*  
*Do not take a whale to visit Russell’s mother’s cousins Yacht.*  
*And whatever else you do do it is better you do not.*
What is the main idea of this poem? The main idea is that sometimes we think that we can do the right thing by not doing the wrong thing. But long lists of rules that tell us all of the things we should not do, do not help us do the right thing.

The long list of commandments is not really going to help (Bob, Marion, Harry, Catherine) because (Bob, Marion, Harry, Catherine) is not having a problem with murdering someone or stealing or committing adultery. The long lists of commandments will not make us stronger. If anything, for us, giving our attention to the long list of rules is a warning sign that we are not paying attention to the one important thing.

Once upon a time I worked with someone who had a habit of pulling out a book of rules during the most difficult times. The book was about 200 pages long and it contained about 2000 rules. 2000 specific rules about what is right and wrong in 2000 specific situations. For me, the tendency to reach for the rule book can be an indication of our weakness. Strength comes from only one place.

Paul says, \textit{Owe no one anything, except to love one another}. When we create long lists of commandments we give all of our attention to the long list. We distract ourselves from the one thing that will give us strength. When we rely on our long lists of commandments we betray the fact that we do not trust in the power of the love God has placed in our hearts.

We are God’s beloved children. God wants us to be strong. Sometimes we are weak.

Sometimes we reveal our weakness in the way we put off doing the one important thing. We occupy ourselves with other things. We delay.

Paul says, ‘there isn’t much time left.’ Don’t delay any longer. \textit{You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.} Sometimes we delay doing the one important thing. Sometimes we spend most of our time doing things that are not what we are really about.

Your life is really about just one thing. You are God’s beloved child. God has placed this gift of love in your heart.