

“The Debt of Love and the Armor of Light

Is it a moral issue for a Christian to be in debt? Some teachers insist that it is! I knew one man who seemed to make Romans 13:8 his life command, “Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another.” He insisted that the only godly believers were those who had no financial debt (as they did not). I remember setting in an elders meeting once where he told us that he would never join the church because it had a mortgage. He never joined.

Since the context deals with paying your taxes, and tolls, and fees, naturally people apply this text in terms of money. But does that mean the existence of debt is wrong for a Christian? No! it is not having the mortgage but being late in paying the mortgage to which Paul refers. Suppose you have a mortgage on your house and you owe \$ 80,000 on that mortgage. As long as you make your *payments on time* you do not owe any more. If you are late or fail to make them, you have a debt due. In other words keep your bills current as a testimony to Christ. Don't fail to meet your obligations as a Christian. You make appointments – be there- or apologize. If you make commitments- keep them. If you owe bills – do everything to pay them. Yes, the book of Proverbs tells us to avoid being in debt because the debtor is the lender's slave and you usually have a harder time becoming prosperous through debt, except in an inflationary economy. Christians should strive to be out of financial debt, if possible because it is sound wisdom and a good business practice. But it is not a moral or spiritual issue. Whatever our financial condition, there is one debt Paul says we can never repay.

I. The Debt of Love.

Rom 13: 8 – 10

We all have a debt of love we owe to others because of the love we have all received in Jesus Christ. He set the bar really high. Paul gives the reason why we must express love in verse eight, "*he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.*" Just as Jesus Christ himself said, the whole law of God can be fulfilled in two commands; "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind and strength and you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

The first half of the 10 Commandments are fulfilled by loving God, but the second half of the 10 Commandments are fulfilled by loving the neighbor. Paul focuses on the second half. If you love your neighbor, You will not commit adultery. You will not murder. You will not steal, and you will not covet. If there is any other commandment is summed up in "*you shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" *Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love, therefore, is the fulfillment of the law.* To love one's neighbor is to do for him, what you would like him to do for you. It is to act toward him as you *wish that he would act toward you.* How many of the problems that affect the local church would be solved if we practice just this one command!

Please notice that the commandment "thou shalt not covet" goes beyond behavior to desire. The 10th commandment "thou shalt not covet" is to be read back into every other command, if the law is to be properly understood. That is the way that Jesus interprets it in the sermon on the Mount.

- Thou shalt not commit adultery means that you shall not look up on a woman to lust after her.
- The sin of lying then, is merely the intent to deceive.
- Stealing is the desire to take or to have. It is possessiveness.
- The sin of murder is mere hatred.

All of these are opposite of love, if we love our neighbor. We will not hate him. We will not desire to have what he has. We will not be jealous of him, but happy when he succeeds. *“Love does no wrong to a neighbor therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”*

The aim of Christianity, in part, is to provide the means by which the righteous, god honoring life may be achieved. Christ died to deliver us from our sins, not to confirm us in our sins. The one that God saves is the one that God changes. God's purpose is to have a people for his own possession, who are zealous of good deeds.

God's goal in saving us is that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Holy Spirit. The spirit of Christ is a Spirit of “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control against all those things there is no law.”

God's standards through the ages have not changed. The 10 Commandments still reflect the nature of God, describe the standards of God and what he expects of man. But how we arrive at the righteousness of the law has changed. Instead of looking at the law as a series of Commandments and saying, “Today I'm going out to obey each command, we look to Jesus Christ and draw up on his Holy Spirit for the ability to put them into practice. By Christ's power we fulfill that law rather than by *our own strength*. One major difference between the Old Testament believer and the New Testament saint is that we have the power through the Holy Spirit to live the Christian life!

Loving one-another is the one characteristic that ought to most resemble the people of West Plex church. Our motto is:

Worshipping God; Loving People –

and it is the heart of the biblical message. Every one of us can show this characteristic of love. If God is in us, the love of Christ will shine out through us and from us. Let us let the world know that we are Christians by our love. This is a debt of love that we can never repay as long as we live.

II. The Armor of Light. Rom 13:11-14

But why is love so important in the Christian life? Why are we to live such righteous lives in the world today? Paul tells us versus 11 through 14. The reason is that we are in the last days. These are the last hours the night is almost gone and the day is upon us. He says, “knowing the time that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now our salvation is nearer to us than when we believed.”

The apostle Paul is talking about the last days and the end times. Since nearly 2000 years have passed since Paul wrote those words, how can he be saying that Christians in the 1st century AD lived in the last days? Was he in error?

We know that Jesus taught, and the disciples expected the return of Christ to occur, perhaps in their lifetimes! The NT encourages Christians to live in constant expectation and wonderful anticipation of Christ’s return. How can Paul say these are the last days?

With the manifestation of Jesus Christ, in one sense, the Earth's last days have arrived. Since the Messiah has come in the fullness of time, The final act of the program of God

is being acted out on the stage of history. The age of the church is the last act before the curtain comes down on world history. The next event on God's prophetic calendar is to take home the church from the world and to usher the world into the Great Tribulation which will culminate in the personal glorious return of Jesus Christ to planet Earth.

We as Christians live in this present age “*Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.*” It is common through the literature of the New Testament to refer to “day and night” figuratively.

- This present age is an age of darkness. The kingdom to come is the age of light.
- We live in the night, buffeted by demonic forces, persecuted by wicked men driven by our adversary the devil.
- In this present age of darkness, sin reigns unchecked in the world's population. Governments like Iran, North Korea threaten the earth. All nations, even America, are led largely by evil, power hungry men who suppress the truth and perfect the lie. The wicked rise up and hold great sway. That was true in Paul's time as it is now, and will be during the whole church age.
- It is the time of night; a wicked age. But night doesn't last forever. The Day finally comes; the sun comes up; or in this case the Son comes down from heaven and inaugurates a new age: The long-awaited kingdom age promised in Scripture.

In verse 12, the apostle Paul says “*the night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.*”

This contrasting figure of light and darkness is found in almost every epistle of Paul. In our daily experience,

darkness is associated with sleep and daylight associated with being awake. It is during the darkness that evil is often done. Most crime occurs at night, more drunkenness and carousing occurs after dark. Figuratively, then, evil is associated with darkness and righteousness is associated with light.

In biblical thinking, this present age, in which we live, precedes Christ's coming which will consummate in "the age to come" (Heb 9: 26).

- With the advent of Jesus the drama of human history has entered its final act before the play ends with the return of Jesus.
- And this age in which we live is "evil." This present darkness, this evil age.
- Christians are not to be conformed *to this age* (Rom 12: 1-2).
- Satan is called "the *God of this age* who has blinded the minds of the unbelieving" (2 Cor 4: 4).
- Jesus gave himself for our sins that he might deliver us out of "*this present evil age*" (Gal 1: 4).

Darkness	Light
Most people are asleep	Dawn is the time to awaken
The night is almost gone	The day is at hand
Believers live in alert, expectation of promised salvation to come	Salvation arrives with the Advent of Christ
This present evil age	The Age to Come
Put off the deeds of darkness	Put on the Armor of light
Carousing, drunkenness, sexual immorality, sensuality	Behave properly as in the day
Make no provision for the sinful nature to fulfill its sinful desires	Put on the Lord Jesus Christ

But how does this truth apply in a practical way? What exactly are we to do? The deeds of darkness that we are to put aside are clear enough. The Christian is no carouser. The Christian is to have no part in drunkenness and often the debauchery that goes with it. No Christian is to live the party lifestyle. Sexual promiscuity and sensuality have no place in our lives. But neither do strife and jealousy. Some Christians who pride themselves on avoiding the nasty nine or the filthy five, cannot control their tongues and create disension and division everywhere they go. Both are prohibited here. Instead we are to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision, do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

What does that mean? How does one DO that? This spring we as a church sent Myron to the MSV conference in the Philipines. From the Chapel Harley Marshall and one of his daughters, Julia, went. I saw her last night at the wedding reception for her brother, Jason Marshall and his new bride which was held at the Chapel.

I asked her what she experienced and what God taught her at that conference. She had no trouble thinking of it immediately. She was impressed with the front line missionaries that she met. She said, when you talk to them they exude Christ. They are so committed to Christ that they literally don't care what happens to them. She quoted one man who said, "If Jesus wants me to die for Him- I'm ready. If he wants me to live for him, fine." She said Christ just shines out from them, through their personality in every word they say and everything they do. We gave them gifts of tools they could use and the response was thank you. I know who I will give this to so that he will listen to me tell him about Jesus. No one can deny the reality of Jesus Christ because

He is so obvious in them! I want to be like that! I want people to see Christ in my like that.”

To put on Christ is to allow Christ such control in our lives that we don't even want the sorry substitute this world is offering. It is to be so enamored with Christ that we would not trade that close fellowship with Him for any empty pleasure our sinful nature might desire. It means allowing Christ IN US to live his life through us in power and never do anything that might diminish that power or hinder its flow. Julia said, those men and women are completely surrendered to Jesus Christ, live every day under the threat of being murdered and they simply don't care anymore. She said it was a humbling experience to meet such people.

We are on a spiritual battlefield, not a family vacation. We are in a war against the forces of darkness all around. The enemy wants to lull us asleep so we are not alert and praying. He wants us to forget that time is fast running out for the world around us. He would trap us in some sin or capture us in his web of addiction. We need to wake up and be alert in prayer because Jesus coming may be soon. We need to put on the armor of light to engage in the battle for souls and we need to wrap ourselves in the mighty power of Christ so that when others see us they cannot help but see Christ!