



When in Romans Do as the Righteous Do

"Debt Belief"

Romans 13:8-14

Christian financial classes are extremely popular. We not too long ago took some people through Financial Peace University. Whether it's FPU or Crown Ministries, one bedrock principle is to stay out of debt.

There is, however, an ongoing debt you and I owe. It's one we must pay and that we will never be out from under. It's in verse eight.

Romans 13:8 Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.

We, as Christians, owe a debt to society and it is to "love one another."

Can we talk about "love" for a moment? Love is a key attribute of our heavenly Father. Even multitudes of nonbelievers have heard that "God so loved the world..." "God is love" (First John 4:8). It is not simply that God "loves," but that He is love itself. Love is not merely one of His attributes, but His very nature.

I think it important, therefore, to judge things you read and hear according to the love of God. Is the author or the speaker suggesting something that would contradict the fact that God is love? Then the argument and the conclusion of that author or speaker is wrong!

Here's an example. Often Christians struggle with the issue of God's sovereignty versus man's free will. Well, if that is how you approach the problem passages, God's sovereignty always trumps man's free will.

But that is the wrong way to approach the problem passages; wrong entirely. You see, sovereignty is not an attribute of God's. Make no

mistake: He is sovereign. But sovereignty is an activity of God that flows from His nature. His sovereignty is always subordinate to His love; never vice-versa.

For me this means that since God is love, He limits His sovereignty by giving me free will, seeing to it that all things work together for my good.

The alternative is to say that because He is sovereign He limits His love; **and that cannot be true no matter how you argue the point unless you redefine "love" as something that resembles hate or indifference.**

Since God is love, and since He so loved the world, and since we represent Him in the world in the absence of Jesus, then we are to love others with the love of God, the way He loved and loves us.

How do we do it - love others with the love of God? What are the steps?

We keep the commandments of God. But not externally; internally. It's not by effort; it's by enablement.

Romans 13:9 For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Romans 13:10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

The idea is almost too simple.

- If I love another, I will not commit "adultery." Adultery defiles others and shows disregard for all those involved.
- If I love another, I will not commit "murder" or "steal"; love does not rob others of their life or their property.
- If I love another, I won't "lie" against them, or "covet" anything of theirs.

If I "love [my] neighbor as myself" I will automatically fulfill every beneficial law. My "neighbor" is anyone with whom I have contact.

You see why "love is the fulfillment of the law." If I am walking in love, my attitudes and actions will be consistent with **all** God's commandments - whether I am specifically aware of them or not.

Here is another way of saying this. I don't look at another person and say, "I am going to try really hard not to lie to you." Instead I look upon them and think, "I want you to see Jesus, for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to save you." If that's my attitude, I don't have to try to not lie; I just don't because I'm too busy loving the person.

In fact, Paul moves in that direction in the remaining verses.

Romans 13:11 And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.

"Do this." Do what? Pay your debt to society, love one another.

While we ought to do this without the need for any additional encouragement, knowing our struggle with the flesh, Paul mentioned an incentive. The Lord is coming for us at any moment and all opportunities to love another on earth will end.

"Knowing the time..." The rock group *Chicago* asked, "Does anybody really know what time it is?" The answer is, "Yes!" Christians know what time it is; it's Jesus time, meaning His return is imminent. That's the meaning of, "for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed."

Nineteen hundred years ago the Holy Spirit told Christians that the night was far spent. If that was true then, how much more is it true today!

The "night" is a reference to the absence of Jesus from the earth. In John nine Jesus said, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." When Jesus ascended into Heaven the world was plunged into night, and His light is only reflected by those who know Him. But now, even more than before, "the night is far spent." This can only mean that the return of Jesus is imminent. His return is the "day" referred to here. You are to "know the time."

Don't let the word "salvation" throw you. We normally use it to describe a time in the past when a person got saved. But salvation involves daily sanctification and ultimate glorification; all that is considered "salvation."

The *Chicago* song asks a second question about time - "Does anybody really care?" Paul anticipated that, for one reason or another, you as a Christian might become careless loving one another. He illustrated it by comparing it to sleeping, saying, "now it is high time to awake out of sleep," meaning spiritual sleep.

He expanded the illustration in the next three verses.

Romans 13:12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.

Romans 13:13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.

Romans 13:14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

I don't think it's too much of a stretch to suggest that these verses describe a Roman soldier who has duty but has been out all night partying. He's been out all night, in revelry, drunkenness, lewdness, lust, strife, and envy. He needs to awake from his sleep, put on his armor, and take his post on duty.

And not just for that day; no, he needs to "cast off the works of darkness" once-for-all and to be able to "walk properly in the day."

You can be on duty but be far from ready for duty. The soldier who is not serving an assigned shift needs to be getting himself ready for the next shift - not participating in "the works of darkness."

Six works of darkness are listed, in pairs:

- "Revelry" and "drunkenness" go together in that revelry originally meant a festival in honor of the god of wine. The obvious companion to such a festival would be drunkenness. You are not to become drunk, nor are you to involve yourselves in the revelry of this world.

- "Licentiousness" and "lewdness" go together in that licentiousness is sexual excesses and lewdness is the mental state that lusts for them. God commands us to abstain from all physical sexual excesses and from the thoughts that lead to them.
- "Strife" and "envy" go together in that strife means quarreling and debate, which is incited by our envy towards others. We are to abandon all such envy that leads to strife. While this is true in the Church, it is especially true of our envy of this present evil world that leads us to striving for material satisfaction.

The "flesh" is that principle left over in our unredeemed bodies that demands we satisfy ourselves in sinful ways.

How do you "make... provision for the flesh"? By yielding to any one of these six works of darkness.

"Make no provision for the flesh" means you need to starve it and cut it off. Don't give it anything. If something is sin for you, you can't have it in moderation. You can't feed it just a little. Starve it.

By the way - You can starve your flesh all you want but it won't die! Until we are out of these bodies and with the Lord we will struggle against the flesh.

"Let us put on the armor of light... put on the Lord Jesus Christ..."

Body armor is a good thing if you're going into battle. We have a lot of it at our disposal as believers:

- To the Thessalonians Paul wrote, "But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation."
- To the Corinthians he wrote, "But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God... by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left..."
- The best known and most detailed passage on your armor in Ephesians Six.

- Here in Romans you learn that when you "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" you are putting on the whole of His heavenly armor.

You "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" when you yield to the power of His indwelling Spirit rather than to the lusts of your flesh. The armor is the "armor of light" because by it you are empowered to holiness in your walk.

Think of "light" this way. What if someone could shine a light on all of your activities? Things you do at home... or online... Or things you think about.

Well, *God is that someone!* He sees all those things and more. You and I ought to behave in ways that could be revealed and not make us ashamed or embarrassed. Privacy rights and laws aside for a moment, we should be able to be exposed by the light and not have any concern.

Some of you have had extensive background checks for a job. That's the idea only more intense.

Walking in the light as to my own activities, and in love towards others - that's a great summary of what we are to be about knowing the time.