

All Are in Debt

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Let's go to Romans 13 this morning. It's a text of Scripture that grabbed my heart this week, it honestly made me think of Grace Life Church, the fellowship here we call Grace Life Church and I thought it was a fitting exhortation for this time when we're about to take two Sundays off and have a time of refreshing, a little down time compared to what we normally do. When I say two weeks off, we'll have two morning worship services but no small groups. It gives our teachers a little breathing time, a little time just to refresh and get back at the task. But I want this to stir in our hearts, especially as we think about Christmas and what that's all about and the promise that brings to us and then as we think about getting back on track in January, as being the church God called us to be. There is so much going on out there in the church world about what's a church to do and how you're to do it and there is just an amazing amount of emphasis on churches getting the right style or having the right style when they have very little substance. Here's what I'm going to tell: I've been here 33 years now and you won't get it done for 33 years depending on having the clever or appropriate style, there needs to be some substance. This text is about the substance of what a true church really is and what will matter and will last one generation to another to another generation.

Romans 13, beginning in verse 8, Paul writes to the local church at Rome and says,

“8 Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. 9 For this, 'You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet,' and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. 11 Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. 12 The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.”

I have a confession to make to you this morning, that is: that I am head-over-heels in debt. Actually, I'm in over my head in debt and so are you. We're all in debt in this way, the debt of love. Once you become a Spirit-reborn, truly converted child of God, you inherit an indebtedness that you should pay diligently until your final days and you will never pay it off. It's the debt of love. Every Christian has this debt.

There are two truths about this love that we walk in, that we abide in, that is in us and in one sense even possesses us and that we are to manifest one to another. Two truths I want to point out from this text: first of all, I. It is a miraculous love. It's a supernatural love. One of the great maladies, the great weaknesses of professing Christendom throughout all the generations is those who would crowd into the Christian faith never being changed by the Spirit of God and they try in the strength of their fallen humanity to put on Christian love and it's an ugly, sorry imitation. The love that we express one to another that makes every true local church unique and special is a miraculous, God-ordained, God-imputed love. Look at it there in our text, if you will, first of all verse 11. He talks about awakening there, "Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep." You're who you are when you're asleep but you're not functioning as who you are when you're asleep. You need to be awakened and get about being what you're supposed to be. That's the illustration, the symbol that he uses here. Now, he's saying there's something in you that's true and real but I want you to: II. Awaken it and get it alive and active in your life.

So, it's been put there by someone else but you need to awaken it. Then in verse 12, "The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness," here it is, "and put on the armor of light." Now, you didn't possess the armor of light, there is a new light that's been put in you by the divine work of the Spirit of God if you're a true believer but you need to express it, you need to put it on and let it shine out. Another way he says this, down in verse 14, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts." Now, you didn't put Jesus there. Jesus goes where he wants to go. Amen? He's Lord but if you're truly converted, Christ lives in you. God did that. That's a miracle. It's the new birth. Now you need to put it on and live it out.

So, three different ways he expresses the reality that there is a miraculous change, an actual, I'll use the word "mystical" change within you that you need to awaken, you need to put it on, you need to turn it on, you need to live it out. That's what he's saying to this local church. Now, look at verse 8. He says something about this miracle of love that's been put in us for one another. Notice, this is not one of the points of my outline but I would like to note in verse 8, the love that he's talking about here is for one another. Who is the one another? It's your other brothers and sisters in your particular local church. Granted, we love all Christians everywhere and we are commanded by Scripture the best we can to love all mankind but it's kind of like when you get married, you may love other people but you have a special devoted love for that spouse. When you become a Christian and God adds you to a local church, though you have a love for everyone, God says there is a special miraculous supernatural love that I've given you for your other brothers and sisters in your local church.

So, this is a local church commandment and instruction. As a matter of fact, the overwhelming majority – let me say that again – the great majority of all Christian principles and truths pertains to and is to be lived out in the context of the local church family. So, there are some very popular preachers in the world today who use the Bible as if it's just principles for successful living. While that's not untrue, that's really damaging the original intent of the text. The original intent of the text is for you to live successfully, prosperously, effectively in harmony and in interrelation with a local church family and if you miss that, you miss everything. It's kind of like telling a husband how to love a woman but never talking about his marriage. He needs to know how to love a woman but it needs to be his wife, that's the relationship he's in. Well, we need to know as Christians how we're to love, how to turn on this love, how to live out this love but to understand that you don't just go out into the world and say, "Okay, let's turn on the Christian love." There is a sense in which that's true but the primary emphasis is: turn on that love for those in your church, your body that God has made you a part of.

When we do this, continuing in verse 8, he says, "If you love from this miraculous supernatural love God's put in your heart, then he who loves his neighbor this way has fulfilled the law." That's an interesting statement. He says "the law is then fulfilled." So, when we yield to the Holy Spirit's promptings and the Holy Spirit always prompts you to do what the Scripture says and you love others that way, then you are never going to break the law of God; you're always going to keep the law of God when the Spirit is driving you and you're following the word of God. You see, the Spirit wrote the law, the Spirit loves the law and the law reflects the excellencies of the perfections of God. But only the Christian, the true Spirit-reborn child of God is genuinely motivated from within to love his neighbor, his fellow brother and sister as himself. You see, unbelievers can't do this. They are incapable. They can put on a lot of stuff in their lives that's good and generous and helpful, may make them great neighbors or great citizens of the community but non-Christians are not capable, they do not have the divine capacity within them to love other Christians. It's not there. Now, they can put it on for a while, they can fake it for a while. As a matter of fact, the annals of Christian history just like the Bible teaches so clearly, is full of the truth that professing Christendom will always have false prophets, false pastors and false professors. We always have to wrestle with that, struggle with that and deal with that.

There is an exception: God sometimes matures some churches to where I'm convinced the strong majority are true believers and then they begin to possess and sweetness, a humility, a deference one to another, an ability to get over things that other churches fight about, that's just sweet and precious and shows the goodness and love of God. That does happen, however, there will be no church this side of glorification in heaven that will not have false professors within its pale. That's going to happen. We know that. That is the reality. But those who do not know Christ truly are incapable of loving from the heart. Now listen: they are incapable of loving another Christian for the glory of God. When they do, when non-believers show a type of love, it always at the end of the day has something to do with themselves. They can't do it just for the glory of God.

Again, I've used this example many times but Mother Theresa who served among the lepers in India and she has been so greatly esteemed for the great servitude and humility of her task. Well, as far as humanity goes, that's very commendable but I submit to you that if Mother Theresa holds to works salvation which is Roman Catholic doctrine, at the end of the day she was laboring to exalt herself in heaven because she didn't believe she had already had her redemption purchased by Christ, she thought she was participating with Christ to purchase her redemption. You see, a non-believer does not have the capacity to selflessly love and care for others just for the glory of God.

It's a miraculous supernatural gift from God and this love comes from within and when this love motivation comes from within and comes out of us, then from the heart desire and strive to honor God's law. I think the point is it's no longer that we are under the old covenant whereby we are coerced by an external law to try to keep us in line, we now have been changed from within so that there is a motivation from within to want to please and honor God's law so the external coercion of the external law is no longer essential or needed. That's why he says it fulfills the law. That doesn't mean you perfectly fulfill the law, it means that if it's coming from the heart and the heart desire, God is most pleased with that, not with the one who says, "Give me the outward rules and I'll try to keep them." No, the outward rules are important, we have to have some of that in our families, in our marriages, in our businesses and certainly in the church but the desire to honor those rules should come from a changed heart that loves the God who gave the law, not just a cold, rote, mechanical obedience to gain something in the end for myself.

Now, the prophet prophesied of this change. When God's people would no longer be characterized by those who were laboring under the force of external law but they began to be people who were changed on the inside, who desired from their heart-of-hearts to begin to serve and please God from the heart. Here's what he said, Jeremiah 31:31-34. This should be on your screen.

“31 'Behold, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,' declares the LORD. 33 'But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,'”

That means in the church age after the age of the covenant of law.

“I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 34 They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, declares the LORD, for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

When he says “they will not teach” what he means is: they'll not have to depend solely on external teaching to want to know God and please God, “I will change them by the power of my Spirit in their hearts so that they will have a heart to know the Lord, not just the external voice from someone on the outside.” Did you notice that when you got converted? A new voice started speaking to you from inside of you? That said, “I want to know him. I want to please him. I want to honor him. I want to learn to joy in him. I'm learning to treasure him.” For me, it was a process, it was sanctification. The more I learned and the more I grew and to be quite honest, the more God humbled me and brought me through difficult seasons to get me over some of my pride and self – Amen. Has anybody else been through any of that? Brings you through some tough seasons and gets you through. Then God becomes more precious and more treasured and more joy and you see that internal love for God and his people grow and grow and grow so you're no longer taught by others, you're taught from within primarily. That's the way it is now. That's the new change.

Writing to the Hebrew church, the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews in Hebrews 8:10 said this very same thing trying to get them to cross over from the cold, rote, mechanical observance of law to checking to see if they had the new heart that desired God. “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” So, that's what he's talking about. There is a miraculous new love in you for God and for the brothers and sisters in your local church. You didn't put it there, God put it there.

I wanted to amplify the phrase “put on Christ.” Colossians 3:1-10, you might just jot that down. I'll not take the time to go there but it's a good cross-reference and it amplifies what Paul said to the Romans. He repeated it in an amplified version to the Colossians about all that it means to put on Christ. Romans 5:5, another good cross-reference says, “the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” There has been something poured into you, this is from God. And this is why, brothers and sisters, the preaching of the gospel in the power of the Spirit is the primarily purpose of the local church ministry because under the preaching of the gospel, God has promised to change men's hearts and men and women and boys and girls and young people and senior adults cannot be added to the church until God changes them and, therefore, he adds them to his church. We are the stewards of another's enterprise. We can't build this our way. We can't do what works. We can't do what's clever. We have to do what God says to do for his glory and watch him build his church for his glory his way and he pours that love into our hearts which we have one for another.

This love proceeds from a heart empowered and surrendered to God and will always express itself according to Scripture. Again, that's what he means in the text when he says “when you love this way, you fulfill the law.” No longer do you focus on the external law, you focus on the love that is flowing out of you as the Scripture dictates how you're to express it. Now, let me give you a wrong thinking that dominates the world and is too common in God's church. Here's a wrong thinking: here's a parent and the parent has a very precious, cute, adorable, loving child. Have you ever had one of those? We all have

had some of those, haven't we? And the parent says, "I love him or her so much, I could not discipline her or him," or, "I could not spank her or him." I still believe in spanking. I believe a little red mark on their rear end goes a long way in helping a child do what's right. But when you say, "Well, I just love them too much. I couldn't discipline them," actually what you're saying is, "I don't love them. What I do is I love what they're doing for me." Did you hear that? "They bless me. They are so endeared to me. They bless me. They make me feel so good and special that I will not discipline them." So you're actually saying you love yourself because if you loved them, you will do what the Scripture says is best for them. Are you hearing me, moms and dads?

Alright, what does Scripture say? Proverbs 13:24, "He who withholds his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently." I can't tell you, I don't always in my natural fallen heart feel like doing that to my child or my grandchild but if I love, there's something in me that bears witness that says, "Ah-ha! You need to love according to Scripture in this case and deny your emotions." Obey truth and let your emotions catch up with truth. Now, I always pick on the ladies a little bit here. Ladies, you know I love you but ladies are more emotional beings; ladies are the nurturers; they feel more deeply; they are the carers. Not that men are not at all but, look, thank God women aren't like men. These absolute pseudo-intellectual nutcases that try to make both sexes exactly the same are just absolute idiots. Women are different than men and men are different than women. Amen? And I'm thankful ladies are like that but, ladies, you need to honor your husbands and fight your emotions when your emotions dictate that you are to behave in a way that violates the clear teaching of Scripture. That's love and if you're a child of God there's something in you right now that says, "Amen. That's right. I want to walk in that truth."

That's just an illustration that we as parents probably go through where we call something love, "I love them too much to discipline them," which is really not love at all because true love that God put in us wants to follow what the word of God says. Now, we can go into 1,001 things that apply to church life. There are 1,001 things in church life whereby we can feel very strongly we ought to do it this way but the word of God says, "No, you do it this way," and we have to die to our emotions and let that love God put in us follow the word of God and honor the word of God.

That brings me to my second point. I think I've made that very clear, the apostle wants to make it very clear: this is a miraculous love God put in you primarily for him and for your brothers and sisters in your local church. 2. He gives us the other side of the coin: this love is smothered by sin. Smothered, choked out, if you will, if we have undealt with, unrepented of sin in our lives. It mentions three things that I want to point out to you today and the first one, A. in our outline is: debt. He begins there by saying, "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another." Now, this is not an absolute command like a Ten Commandment and on financial debt. The Bible doesn't absolutely prohibit indebtedness. It has a lot of cautions and a lot of warnings about debt and not putting yourself in bondage in debt but that's not intended to be "one of the Ten Commandments of God," like thou shalt not commit adultery or thou shalt not steal. But he is pointing out that if you're a child of God, you've got to fight the good fight to make sure you don't so

entangle yourself and obligate yourself to so many things whereby you smother out the energies you need to show love one to another. Have you learned as a mom or dad, have you learned as a husband or a wife, have you learned as a faithful church member that loving others takes some time, some effort and some energy? His point is: when you involve yourself in some form of indebtedness, that drains you and enslaves you. You don't have anything left to exhibit and manifest the love that God put in you for one another.

So, we need to be checking up on our hearts that we are not going in debt, materially or otherwise, financially or other ways for worldly motives. Have we let our hearts become too materialistic? Have we adopted worldly values? Have we clung too tightly to temporal values? I as your pastor, have really striven to give you a good biblical balance. We live in a world, it's okay to enjoy the common graces of the world, but there are ways you have to fight and wrestle so that your heart is not too overwhelmed and consumed so that there are interest and energies for the saints of God that you're bound to exercise in love. Can the lack of love and expressing that love one to another in your church family, can that be evidence of you placing your trust and faith in the things of this world to meet your needs rather than in God? Jesus said very clearly, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also," and if your heart is on things, then your heart is not going to be on God and his church, his people. Jesus just simply said, "You can't serve God and mammon." He didn't say mammon was all bad but he said if it becomes your master and you serve it, you end up choking out and smothering out your capacity to love God and love the people of God.

So, the temptation is that instead of paying the debt of love that Paul says to owe nothing to anyone except to love, have a debt in your heart to love others, but the temptation is that instead of paying that debt of love, you're so in bondage to financial indebtedness or some other kind that you have little room in your life to love God or the brethren. You obligate yourself to many things and you drown out the capacity to pay your love debt. He uses the word "debt" here or the idea of debt here. Another thing he mentions is delay. That's another way you smother out the love capacity and the love expression you should have one for another. You delay. Look at verses 11-12. This is a warfare mentality. There is a real strong sense of urgency here, "Do this! Do this! Now is the time. It is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed." He emphasizes the same urgency again, "The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside," in other words, he's saying don't delay. What is God telling you to do that you shouldn't delay? Maybe for some of you, it's believer's baptism. God saved you, your heart has been changed, you feel the weight of your sinfulness, you found joyful rest in your faith in Christ, God has come into you and said, "Don't delay, do that." And that's the great way you can love the brethren. Hey, one of the greatest things you can do for the brethren in love is to encourage them that the gospel is still saving people. Amen. It is worth our time. It is worth our energy. It's worth our tithe. It's worth our offerings. It's worth our prayers. It's worth our visitation program. And when God shows us some fruit and you don't see all of it that we see but we've seen a great increase of people in the last few weeks and it so encourages. Maybe that's where

you are. You need to today decide, "Membership is what's next for me. I'm going to attach myself to this local New Testament church and get on with serving the Lord."

As a matter of fact, we not only encourage, we require time in joining but sometimes we can wait too long if we're not careful. You know, we all have a natural lazy streak. It's in every single one of us. "I'll get busy for the Lord later. I think I could lead a small group. I'm going to talk to Brother David about that later. I think I need to be a part of outreach. I'm good at talking to people. I think I need to go visit those who are hurting or sick. I'll start doing that later. I really think I could really be a blessing to the young people. I think I'll help serve in the student department later. I really need to help with the children's department. I think I'll do that later. You know, I really need to be faithful in returning tithes and offerings and I think I'll do that but I'll do that later." How many lost opportunities? And Paul's exhortation is, "God changed you. He miraculously transformed you and if you allow it, just delay, just putting off, can keep you from doing what God wants you to do in loving the brethren."

Thirdly, he mentions another smothering effect on this love that he's miraculously put into us – by the way, this love factor, this supernatural love factor that's in us that we're to exercise will be, now listen to me, will be the primary issue at the Judgment Seat of Christ. It will be. It will be the primary issue at the Judgment Seat of Christ. How do I know that? Because when the Lord talked about coming in judgment and he's going to separate the sheep from the goats, what did he say would be the difference? He said, "You fed me when I was hungry. You visited me when I was in prison. You clothed me when I was naked." And they say, "What do you mean we did that?" He said, "When you did it to the least of these my brethren, your fellow brothers and sisters, when you cared for them, when you loved them, when you ministered to them, when you loved them, that's when you showed who you belonged to and your heart had been changed and you were a child of God." That will be the grand criteria by which you will be judged at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

So, be careful with being obligated or indebted to things that crowd out your energies. Be careful with delaying, "I'll get to that later." But thirdly, he says another smothering or choking effect on this love is deeds of darkness. Look at verse 12, if you will, "The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light." He describes some of these deeds of darkness, verse 13, "Let us behave properly as in the day." Just as a point there: have you ever noticed that most of the time when people do bad stuff they want the lights off? We had a fellow that, well, at least he said he got converted years ago and he used to work as a bouncer in one of these honky-tonk nightclubs. That's the kind of place you don't need to be. You don't need to be, his wording here is "drinking and carousing." All that goes on in those places is drinking and carousing. That's a deed of darkness. You know it's interesting, I think the law used to be at 2 o'clock they had to close whatever it was but he said, "Whenever that time would come and the owner would flip on the lights of that honky-tonk," he said, "those people would scatter like roaches." Why? Because they knew, their conscience bore witness, they knew they weren't doing right.

He says, "Yes, unfortunately, some children of God slip back into some things they're not supposed to be into." Here's what you'll find: you put that stuff on, love for God and the brethren goes out. Did you hear me? You indulge yourself in deeds of darkness, you'll have a dying, diminishing heart for God and your brothers and sisters in your local church. I've been here 33 years and this ain't my first rodeo. Year after year, decade after decade, you'll always have folks leaving the church. Every church has had it. Every church is going to have it. Now, God leads some away. I'm convinced God doesn't lead them to unhealthy churches but that's another sermon. But, nevertheless, God leads people to do things, I understand that and I support that but time after time, let a little time go by and pretty soon I run into those families down at the Mexican restaurant and they've all got long-neck Budweisers in front of their plates. It wasn't, "Well, I disagree with that. Well, I'm uncomfortable with this." That wasn't it, it was sin that they had come to enjoy and it choked out a love for God and a love for the brethren in their present local church. That's all it was. Don't give me this self-righteous stuff of, "Well, I disagree with that." Look, if you disagree with something, do what the Bible says: come in humility and in confidentiality and appeal to the elders. We're likely to hear you and change it if we possibly can but you don't run off spouting your superiority and the lack or negligence or falseness or error of the church you're leaving, you stay there in lovingkindness and try to fix the error.

Anyway, I'm saying all that to say: love begins to go out of our heart for God's church when sin begins to be cultivated in our own hearts. Again, he uses that phrase "carousing and drunkenness." Carousing and drunkenness. You know, many have lost their love for the church because they found their lust for the world. Sexual promiscuity and sensuality, he says that down in verse 13, that should not be a part of the child of God's life. But some true believers can fall back into that if they're not careful. Brothers and sisters, it'll never change. Listen to me: right has always been right even if nobody does it, and wrong has always been wrong if everybody is doing it. I don't care if the President of the United States stands up, promotes, pushes and celebrates it, if it's evil it's evil, if it's sin it's sin, if it's wrong it's wrong. Always has been, always will be.

Now, this Roman culture was amuck with sexual immoralities much like ours has become and so it's not unheard of for a child of God to fall back into something. Here's his point: "Child of God, you've noticed when you fall into that filth and that sensuality and that sexual immorality that you don't like to go to church anymore. You don't like to be around the brethren in your Sunday School class anymore. You don't like the preaching of the word anymore." All of a sudden, God's leading you to another church. No, he's not. You love your sin and you don't want to be where the lights are on. Amen. T-I-M-E makes these things very plain.

You know, there is no natural or God-given desire stronger than the sexual drive. The sexual desire is given by God. When you're raising children or grandchildren and you know they're struggling with their hormones and the sexual drives are turning on, don't tell your children that's evil or that's bad. It's not evil and bad, it's a gift from God. Tell them when they have temptation in that way, the first thing they're to do is praise God that he made you normal. Amen? If your boys don't have some desires for girls, we need

to work on them. Amen? That's normal and healthy. But God has given parameters for sexual expression and that's why in promiscuous and sensual cultures like Rome or like Corinth, the ancient writer of Scripture commanded husbands and wives to never neglect our duty to fulfill one another sexually because there are too many temptations out there.

Here he says when a Christian falls into that and begins to wallow in that again, they'll find that their heart of love for God and God's church if it's a good and true church, begins to be diminished. One of our church members told me not long ago that he was talking with a leader in the community whose Sunday School teacher gambles and drinks on Saturday night and comes in and teaches Sunday School on Sunday morning. I'm going to tell you something: that will not stand in this congregation. That may be okay there and they may be praised as a great church but that will not happen here if I know about it or if practically anybody in this body knows about it. Now, we won't beat them up. We'll love them; we'll treat them with respect; we'll have a humble spirit but we will call them to repentance. And they can be restored to teaching in 10-15 years. No, when their reputation is clear again, then the public ministry can perhaps be restored again.

The last thing he says here about these deeds of darkness that choke out your love for Christ and your love for his church is the last phrase of verse 13, "not in strife and jealousy." This is the person that when you have jealousy and strife in your life, that means you're not content with the position that God's put you in. Listen to me: 98.9% of all strife, divisions, factions, confusions and problems in local churches is centered on jealousy and strife. I mean, when you cut through all the...they'll say, "Well, I....." All that's leaves on the trees. When you get down to the root of the problem, it's strife and jealousy. Here's what happens: somebody wants the position somebody else has; somebody wants the power in the church that somebody else has; somebody wants the praise somebody else is getting; someone wants the popularity someone else is getting. They try to work their way around it and they don't get what they want so what do they do? They're jealous and immediately begin to talk, "They don't know what they're doing. They're not right. That person is really not qualified. What do you think about this?" When somebody comes up to you and says, "What do you think about....?" Boy, a red flag ought to go up in your mind. "What do you think about...?" Your next words, you say, "What does the Scripture say? And whatever the Scripture says, well, I'll agree to follow the word of God." That resolves 98.9% of all conflicts. We'll just all agree to do what the Bible says. The ones that need to repent will repent. The ones that are right are right. That's just the way it is. But if you could remove the lust for power, position, praise and popularity, you'd remove practically all the problems in the church.

So Paul says to the church at Rome, "Get rid of that stuff. Be content with where God put you and if you will humble yourself and strive to support and love the brethren, if you're supposed to have position or popularity or prominence, God will take care of that." I was eight years old on staff here before I became a Senior Pastor and God forbid I became the Senior Pastor any earlier. I just barely could handle it after eight years of getting ready for it. God knows what he's doing. Get rid of that.

One final thought and I'm concluding here on putting on the Lord Jesus Christ. In verse 14, the last phrase, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts." Again, what's the context? Because that's choking out the love quotient that's in you that you're to be manifesting one to another. Now, if you live in debt, not just financially but any kind of binding obligations that are too big for you, too demanding of you, if you're living in delay, "Well, I'll do that later," if you're living in the deeds of darkness, then what you're doing is you're putting on the old flesh, you're putting on the old man. You're supposed to be putting on the Lord Jesus Christ and Paul uses the imagery here, he does it in the other epistles too of putting on Christ is sort of like a suit of clothes that's hanging in your heart and you need to go and put it on and take off the old and walk in the new. You see, right now everyone in this room is either putting on the Lord Jesus Christ or planning to sin. It's just that simple. I mean, every single person, every moment of every day is striving to put on Christ or planning to sin.

Now, putting on the Lord Jesus Christ means my purpose and my plan is to live for him, to live like him, to live through him and to live to glorify him. Let me say that again: when I'm putting on the Lord Jesus Christ it means I'm purposing and planning to live for him, to live like him, to live through him, that is, by this new power and energy he's put in my heart and to live for his glory. Listen: what is the paramount activity or work of Jesus Christ? He laid down his life for the brethren, for the sheep. So, if we're living for him, like him, through him and for his glory, then we will also be expending our energies for the brethren in love for them the way he loves them. You see, both the shoe of our discipleship and the crown of our discipleship is love for one another in our local church. The Bible says that we're in debt to one another to show this love. Are you behind on your payments? Are you up-to-date on your bill?

John 13:35, Jesus said, "All men will know that you're my disciples by the love that you have one for another." Notice what he did not say: he didn't say "all men will know that you're my disciples by the great ingenuity and creativity of your church program." He didn't say that. He didn't say "all men will know that you're my disciples by the powerful stirring, electrifying music and drama and media ministry that you have in your church." He didn't say that. He didn't say "all men will know that you're my disciples by your doctrine." He didn't say that. A guy can dot every "i" and cross every "t" of sound doctrine and still be lost and not really love the sheep of the church and be in it for himself. Boy, I've had to learn that the hard way. I thought when I found people who had sound Reformed doctrine and then I'd gotten home and everybody was – look, there are more nutcases, goofballs, false teachers in the Reformed movement than there are in the Arminian movement. He didn't say "you'll know them by their doctrine." A guy can have all of his doctrine perfectly right and not love God's sheep. You will know, they will know they're my disciples because over time you'll see a devoted love for true other born-again Christians in a local church family. Look: they will be a person who is learning to die to all the pity, selfish stuff about us, about me and want my church to prosper that God would be glorified. That's how you'll know that they're my disciples, by the love they have. Not just for a church. When I was converted, I was a part of a church or two that seemed to have more lost people than saved people and I kept wondering, "What's wrong with these people?" But, boy, once you start being around true born-again

believers, if your heart doesn't resonate in a love for them, something's wrong. All men will know that you're my disciples by the love that you have one for another.

Whatever else we're reminded of when we think that God became man, a little baby born of a lowly virgin named Mary, whatever else that says, it says, "I love my children. I'm going to condescend beyond comprehension to come get them and save them. I love them." Then he changes us by the power of his gospel and that same love for the children is in there and it grows and it matures and it expands and it resonates. I tell you with all of my heart: I love you more today than I've ever loved you. I do not know what I would do if I didn't have Grace Life Church. I don't know how these people church hop, I don't get it. You might fire me but I ain't leaving if you don't. I mean, it just resonates in your heart as God grows you in Christ.

Let's let that be our theme this Christmas: a growing, expanding, maturing love for the brethren. Then when our shoe leather hits the ground again on January 5th and we head toward a new year in the Lord, let's bump it up one more notch in loving the brethren for the glory of God. A little more forgiving, a little more longsuffering, a little more getting over stuff that shouldn't bother us anyway, a little more unselfishness. Just more love. You say, "Pastor, have we got a problem?" None that I know of, it's just that Paul says, "You're just in debt here. You just need to pay up more if you can." Amen.

Let's stand together.