

Romans 13:8-14

“A Perpetual Debt”

As our time came to a close last week we left off considering the idea of debt, oh not in the form of credit debt, or even home loans (we’ll speak a little bit about those things today). But we were speaking on the O so ugly subject of tax debt. How that when it comes to God’s place in government we recognize that there is no authority except from God and the authorities that exist are appointed *by* God. Doesn’t mean that they’re “godly” necessarily, or that they wield that authority *righteously* but that we realize that God is the One who’s in control and that some how and in some way they serve His plan and His purpose *ultimately*. Those who create the law, and those who enforce the law, whether they realize it or not are God’s ministers, they’re about His business in keeping the sin nature of man in check. Because apart from structure, apart from accountability and responsibility, man or a society left to itself will self-destruct. There needs to be a system of checks and balances, if not there would be total anarchy, every man doing what is right in his own eyes, the sin nature running rampant and out of control. So God established the institution of human government.

We established the fact of our dual citizenship as Christians, that we’re in the world but not of the world, citizens physically of the country or nation specifically, in which we were born, but that as we’re “Born Again” we’re given Heavenly citizenship. and As Heavenly citizens we’re to be model *societal* citizens submitting to our government. The only exception to that rule being when our local, state, or federal government seeks to subject us to an action be it passively, or actively that goes against the clear contextual teaching of the Word of God. Our allegiance lies 1st to our Heavenly homeland, (we’ve got to obey God rather than man) but as long as we’re not being asked to go against the grain of God’s Word, we’ll be the 1st on the list, sign us up to submit to the law willfully, joyfully, with out reservation. But (getting back to our opening point) if there’s going to be laws, that means there has to be those who are there to enforce the law, how are those people supported who tend to the upholding of the law? Tax dollars, for this reason (amongst others) we pay taxes, Vs 6.

Vs6-7

So what do we have here? That there are certain people, certain platforms, certain positions that we owe various forms of payment to. If a certain office demands honor, pay up, don’t be indebted *to* that office, arrogant and prideful *against* that office, honor it. If a certain platform commands respect, whether you agree with the person or not is irrelevant, we’re to pay proper respect to that particular platform. As believers we’re not to be all prideful, condescending and disdainful, how does that display the person of Jesus to anyone? We’re to be humble, eager to submit, showing and sharing the love of Christ. and If you owe a tax debt, pay up, don’t slide large cash transactions under the table, God knows your income, and He tells us in His Word that we’re to pay our taxes, that we’re to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.

You see all this is leading full circle back to that which we studied in Ch 12 there in Vs 9 where Paul said, “Let love be with out hypocrisy,” and he’s been instructing us a little as to what that looks like practically. Not just amongst brothers and sisters *specifically*, but at large, even in *society*. and The idea here being don’t act like you and Jesus are so intimate, or like you’re so spiritual if you’re rebelling against the government (breaking the law) for no clear cut contextual reason from the Word of God, or if you’re not being respectful to the position and platform of those who are over you, or if you’re cheating on your taxes.

Those things lend themselves to hypocrisy, we’re to pay our debts, positionally (respecting those over us) and financially. Are there any exceptions to *that* rule, is there any debt I’m free to have? Yes, in fact there’s one debt that you and I are *obligated* to have, that we’re forever to pay *on* and we can never be paid *up*. Notice

Vs8-10 (8)

So Paul says, “Speaking of debts, I want you to pay up, but there’s one particular debt that I just want you to pay *on*, and it’s a perpetual debt, it’s the debt of love, I want you to sense the obligation to love one another *continuously/perpetually*.” So he’s coming full circle, “Let love be with out hypocrisy” then he shares with us all of these practical realities, how we’re to interact and react in certain situations personally and on a larger level socially, then he repeats this theme of loving one another. and This theme of loving one another is nothing new or shocking for the believer, in fact it’s the basic principle upon which the Christian life is predicated, that as Christ has loved us, so we’re to love one another. Years and years prior to this, when Jesus was physically ministering on the earth is when He said it, “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.*” John 13:34 and Even at that the thought of loving one another wasn’t a new thing, that theme is woven all throughout the OT. It was the *example* of love that Jesus was emphasizing, “That you love one another *as I have loved you*.” Placing the needs of others before your own, being there to serve rather than being served, laying down your life, your rights, and your ambitions that you might make others your priority. Learning to become the greatest of all by becoming the servant of all, everything about the life of Jesus was “others” oriented. Jesus said, “That’s the way I want you to display your love for one another, even as I have loved you.” He doesn’t ask us to do anything but that He didn’t do it Himself already, He led by example, laid down His life for us, now how do we love one another? By laying down our lives for the benefit of others, those around us, humbling ourselves and placing others as our priority. No one is saying it’s easy, and it’s something we can’t fake, it takes the power of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives, but it’s the call that Christ has given us, to love one another.

We read in 1 Cor 16:14, “*Let all that you do be done with love.*” and Again in Eph 5:2 “*And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.*” I’ll give you one more though there’s many 1 John 3:18 (and 1st John is full of references with regard to loving one another) but here we read, “*My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.*” You see, love goes well beyond a proper attitude, it’s an action. and That’s one of the points that Paul is developing here, but before he establishes that, what he’s emphasizing in Vs 8 is that we’re to pay up on our debts, but when it comes to love it’s a debt we’re to always pay *on* but can never pay *up*. You see he’s saying, “Pay your debts, customs, respect, honor, taxes, get caught up, be paid up, except when it comes to loving one another, don’t think you’ll ever break even on that one, consider it a perpetual debt that you’re never released from paying on.” We can’t show someone love and then the next time a sticky situation arises say, “You know what, I’ve been there for you, shown love *to* you, now I’m finished *with* you, I don’t owe you anything, when it comes to love, I’ve paid you enough.” We can’t do that as believers, because the call that Christ has placed on our lives is a perpetual debt of love towards one another. Remember when Peter was talking to the Lord regarding the topic of forgiveness? Wanting to know how many times he needed to forgive someone with respect to the same offense? We read it there in Matthews gospel, “*Peter came to Him and said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.’*” Matt 18:21-22 and As we all know Jesus wasn’t seeking to communicate a hard legalistic line of 490 times, “and that’s it!”

He was saying, “Consider it your perpetual obligation.” You’re not going to be able to forgive someone enough, I’m not going to be able to display love to the point of a satisfactory requirement, as a believer it’s my perpetual debt to you, the Christian life is predicated on it, its part of the package deal. and Again we remember that it’s not a legalistic thing, it’s the way that a life in love with Jesus overflows, it’s the practical outpouring of a life dedicated, consecrated, head over heels in love with Jesus. After all the love that I’ve been shown, and the insurmountable debt of forgiveness that I’ve been given, how can I not love you in return, how can I not forgive you when the need presents itself? It’s the principle taught in Matt 18:23-35 check it out later.

Now real quick when Paul says, “Owe no one anything,” what exactly does he mean by that? Is he saying that we’re to never have a loan out on a car, or a house, or even a credit card at times? There are those who think that J. Hudson Taylor the famous missionary to China never incurred a debt based upon his conviction from this Vs. Charles Spurgeon had the same conviction. But just so that you know the bible doesn’t forbid borrowing or lending in either the OT or the New. It does speak of not ripping off your bro or sister through exorbitant interest rates, and we read in Prov 22:7 that, “*The rich rules over the poor, And the borrower is servant to the lender.*” So that I believe we’re given a word of caution, not to just go out there and incur debt unnecessarily and no doubt we shouldn’t take on debt that we can’t afford to pay, that’s what we’re reading here with regard to paying our debts.

If you take on a debt that's beyond your means and you can't pay it, then in essence you're stealing from someone who's lent to you in good faith and you've ripped them off. Paul is saying don't owe people like that, pay your debts. But you'll find in the law where God made provision for the need at times to borrow, or for lending, what was upright and fair with regards to that. Jesus said, *"Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away."* Matt 5:42 In one of His parables He spoke of investing and banking, making interest on your investments and all, so the idea of doing business, borrowing and lending isn't unbiblical. It's not sin to borrow for a house, or for a car, but I think the bible teaches us to exercise wisdom and to live within our means, that we pay what we owe. and That's the point that Paul is making, you can pay off your house and say, "We're even, I owe you nothing." You can pay off your car, or your line of credit somewhere and be done with it, but you can't make good on your debt of love, I can't square up, be even, and be done loving people, I'll be paying on that until I hit the grave. (Now Paul goes on to speak of the fact that love is more than attitude, or an idealistic emotion its action, it's a verb. It's not displayed simply in what we say, but in what we show.) and He demonstrates how that love actively fulfills the law.

Vs 9-10

Jesus in quoting the scripture said, *"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."* Matt 22:37-40 Now Paul dealt with the 1st and greatest commandment in Vs 1-2 of Ch 12 as he spoke of our primary priority being that we be whole heartedly dedicated and consecrated to God 1st and foremost. Here's he's referencing the 2nd which is like it, that we're to love our neighbor as our self. Now understand that the bible doesn't teach that we 1st need to learn to love ourselves before we can adequately, and accurately love others. The bible take the presupposition that man already loves himself, is absorbed by himself, places priority in himself, that's the problem, we're self consumed, Jesus taught us to *deny* ourselves, to place *others* as the priority. So he's not saying love yourself, then you can love your neighbor. He's saying you're already overly consumed with yourself, but you need to be giving that platform to your neighbor.

He speaks here on the 2nd tablet of the 10 commandments, if you truly love someone, you're not going to murder them. You're not going to steal from them, you're not going to lie *about* them or *for* them, you covet or lust over what they have desiring to have it instead of them. and Notice the mention of adultery. Often committed under the pretense of what? Love. The bible says, "No way." Adultery in nothing more than unbridled lust, it doesn't consider your spouse, the purity of the other person, it's not placing any concern for the spiritual, emotional, or physical well being of any of the above mentioned, it's entirely self consumed, out of control lust, and it's sin.

Paul isn't seeking to place us under the law, he's showing us the more excellent way of love. In essence he says there's no need for law if we'll just abide by the principle of love, because love fulfills the law. Every precept ever uttered under OT law can be summed up in even one word, "love." It's repeated again in Galatians, "*For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'*" Gal 5:14 Now we want to focus for just a minute here on this word, "Neighbor." Because it's easy to get abstract and idealistic when it comes to love, I can speak of how I just love people, you know I just love everyone of you. But that's sort of abstract, and though it's true that I need to love you all, and in the broad scope I certainly do. But for me to do something practically, that's beneficial on a personal level for even *one* of you, is certainly different than issuing a blanket statement of love for *all* of you. Love is to go beyond the words of my mouth, it's to touch your life personally, in reality. Leave the book of Romans go quickly to Luke Ch 10 (25-37)

So there's no idealizing, no theorizing as to who my ambiguous neighbor is, and it's not limited to the guy next door or across the street. We're talking about whomever you happen to be near to in the moment, if you're around them you're to love on them, be good to them, not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth. and Here's the deal, it's essential that you understand that love be the compelling factor behind the deeds that you do. Because you can also get into a religious routine, actions that appear good and well, but what I do can in fact be a snare if I start thinking that doing this, or being available for that makes me righteous. We've got to remember as we go through these things that they're not ways in which I'm made right *before* God, but rather it's simply the overflow of a life in love *with* God. You see I can be all about looking good, doing religious works, but if love isn't the motive behind it, or the reason for it, than I may as well not even do it. I'm always reminded when I hear of the great things that some people do for others, donating huge amounts to charity, or being an advocate for poverty or disease in the world, but not knowing the Lord, or doing things motivated by the Love *of* the Lord, but rather just being a good humanitarian. and I'm always reminded of what Paul said there in 1 Cor 13:3 when there the Holy Spirit reminded us, "*And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.*" and I think, "Man how great that would be if it could count for eternity, but though I give my body to be burned, but have not love... in reality, as far as eternity goes, it counts for nothing." How sad, so legalism doesn't fulfill the law, love does.

Vs11

That's true on both a *personal* level, and on a *prophetic* level, personally everyday that goes by we're getting closer and closer to seeing Jesus, that should be a sobering fact for each of us to consider. We don't know the day or the hour that our soul will be required of us, and the call here is to alertness as opposed to apathy, you don't want to be caught ill prepared to stand before Jesus. Man I want to stand before Him with confidence, not because of anything I've done but because I've allowed Him to have His way through me, always being ready for Him to use me.

1st John 2:28 tells us that some people will actually be ashamed to stand before Him at His appearing, I don't want to be in that #. Over and over again Jesus said, "Watch and be ready, for the Son of Man comes at an hour when you do not expect." and Jesus intentionally left the details of His return a bit ambiguous, why? So that we wouldn't grow lazy, thinking that we'd do what we want the way we want knowing that He delays His coming and then think that just before He comes we'll get right. Look at Matt 24 (45-Ch 25 Vs1-13)

What's the warning? Don't allow yourself to fall into spiritual lethargy, to fall asleep spiritually. and Paul here is echoing that warning, "Wake up, Christ is coming." The prophetic calendar is complete with regards to the rapture, Jesus could come for His church at any moment, Rev 22 over and over again we read the words of Jesus, "*Behold, I am coming quickly!*" Rev 22:7 Now's not the time to check out, and start playing games with your walk and relationship with the Lord. You can do more than one thing and still be asleep, you can walk in your sleep, you can talk in your sleep, at times interact with others in your sleep. and Here we are today, perhaps your with us physically, interacting, walking around, carrying on conversation, but you're sleep walking spiritually, and the Spirit says, "It's high time to awake."

Vs12-14

Now for times sake here we need to be a bit concise but the picture here is that of changing clothes. and The idea is that the rags of sin need to be put off if we're to put on the robe of Christ. and Real quick notice that in Vs 12 we're told to put on the armor of light, in Vs 14 we're told to put on the Lord Jesus Christ which in essence is 2 ways of saying the same thing. We're to be robed with Christ, the light of the world, Jesus is our shield and our fortress, Eph 6:13 speaking about the full armor of God, the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, the belt of truth, having our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith by which we're able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one, and the Sword of the Spirit which is Word of God. We're to be suited up, having done all to stand in the evil day, put on the armor of light, or to understand all that another way, put on the Lord Jesus Christ We learned Wednesday evening about the mystery of Christ *in* you, here we're reading of the covering of Christ *over* you like a robe, like a suit of armor, or as Paul told the Colossians, "...*Christ is all and in all.*" Col 3:11 Christ is our all consuming everything, He's *with* us, He's *in* us, a shield and armor *about* us, a hiding place and covering *for* us, He is our all in all.

But here's the deal, He calls for willful cooperation *from* us, He won't live our lives *for* us, but He wants to live His life *through* us, but He won't force us into subjection. We have to cast off the works of darkness, that speaks of human responsibility. He'll give you the grace, the power by His Spirit, but you have to be willing, you've got to decide, not just ideally, or consenting theoretically, but in reality whether or not you desire Him, or you desire your sin. Which is the priority in my life, Him, or my sin? Not just once or twice, but for the totality of my life, where it says, "Let us walk properly," you know what that means, the walk speaks of a forward progression, the general pattern of my lifestyle, the way I lead my life, and if I'm to walk properly there's a negative and a positive.

To the negative, I'm *not* to lead my life after the flesh, for example in revelry and drunkenness, partying and leading a loose life. Or lewdness which speaks of illicit sexual behavior, fornication, premarital or adulterous type situations, not in lust, or strife, envy/jealousy. I'm to put off those things, to the Galatians Paul said, "*And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*" Gal 5:24 To the positive we *are* to robed in the Lord Jesus Christ to walk properly, to put on the armor of light, to walk in the Spirit that we not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.

Or as it says here, "...and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill it's lusts." If you have a struggle with alcohol, you don't go into a restaurant as ask for the table closest to the bar, you're setting yourself up for a fall. Don't place yourself in precarious situations, the word, "provision" here actually speaks of forethought. Don't give forethought as to time spent in the flesh. I would conservatively estimate that the high 90 percentile of all sin that makes it into physical fruition begins where? In the mind, meditating on it, contemplating the gratification of it, giving forethought to it. The Holy Spirit says, "Don't do that, don't give forethought to the flesh, to fulfill it's lusts." We're to crucify the flesh, deny ourselves, put on Christ and pay on our perpetual debt of love, love one another, love one another, love one another.

Prayer Points: Father we recognize that our debt of love is one that we can only pay *on* and never pay up. Help us to do so willingly and from the heart. Help us to be a good neighbor, placing priority on others, bearing one another's burdens and so fulfilling the law of Christ. God I pray for anyone here who may be spiritually asleep, rattle our cage God as to the reality of the need to watch and be ready, that we might be found faithful servants so doing that which You've called us to when you come. May we lead lives pure before You, that we might be available *to* You, that You might use us for Your glory.

Jesus is coming soon, the day or the hour I don't know, but the times, the signs and the seasons, I do, and the pace just keeps picking up. Let me encourage you to be ready, if you don't know Jesus Christ you're not ready, but all that can change today. You can know that when your soul is required of you and you stand to give an account before God that you'll receive an acceptance into Heaven. How can you know that, because Jesus said that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that whoever would believe on Him, would never perish but have everlasting life. So let me encourage you that if God is dealing with you today, don't resist Him, receive Him, just open your heart and invite Him in.