

Eternity Daily Bible Study

Romans 9-16 The Implications of Salvation

PLEASE PRAY FOR THE MINISTRY OF THE AIBI

Number: 610

Verses: Romans 13:8-10

Topic: The Debt Of Love

Date: 22nd January 2007

Romans 13:8-10 HCSB *Do not owe anyone anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. (9) The commandments: **You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet,** and if there is any other commandment--all are summed up by this: **You shall love your neighbor as yourself.** (10) Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Love, therefore, is the fulfillment of the law.*

Love is the only debt a Christian should have. All other debt is bondage:

Proverbs 22:7 HCSB *The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is a slave to the lender.*

But the "debt to love" brings inner freedom! It is easy to see that I owe a continuous 'debt of love' to my excellent wife Minda, after all she loves me in return! Every day I am to "pay" my debt by loving her – and there is nothing terribly hard or onerous about that.

However it gets tougher when we have a 'debt of love' to other Christians, or to difficult relatives or even to a neighbor who litters the footpath with trash. In fact we are to 'love one another' - especially in the Christian community, as if we 'owed them' love. Love is not an "extra" - it is an obligation. And our soul grows and is sanctified as we undertake this obligation.

Now when we think of obligation we think of the Law, of commandments and of rules and ceremonies that we must keep. Paul tells us that all such legal and ceremonial obligations have, spiritually speaking, being replaced by this duty to love one another.

All the commandments are summed up in one "You shall love your neighbor and yourself", all the ritual requirements, all the things we "must do" under the Law – are fulfilled by Christian love. Love is the complete spiritual fulfillment of the Law. This is so, Paul tells us because "love does no wrong to a neighbor". Love is harm-less, therefore love never breaks the Law.

This enables Christian ethics to be boiled down to the single consideration "am I loving my neighbor or am I harming my neighbor?" Abortion (except when the mother's life is in danger) is clearly "harming" the neighbor (the unborn child) and can harm the mother as well. Lying, theft, murder, rape, swindling, treachery – these all harm one's neighbor and are violations of love. On a larger level destroying the environment so that one's neighbor lives in a polluted and unsafe world is also an act against love. Pouring dioxane into a river so people get cancer may be legal in some very poor nations, but it is not Christian love.

Is it Christian love to provide good medical attention to the rich while the uninsured poor often die from easily preventable causes? Is such a system "loving" or is it doing great harm to many people? Christians in such a system must work to find a way for the poor to be served with adequate and affordable medical help.

The parable of the Good Samaritan, which is the way Jesus defined 'loving one's neighbor as yourself' – tells us that ignoring pain is not appropriate (that is what the priest and the Levite did). The loving person acts and acts in practical and compassionate ways:

Luke 10:29-37 HCSB *But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" (30) Jesus took up the question and said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him, beat him up, and fled, leaving him half dead. (31) A priest happened to be going down that road. When he saw him, he passed by on the other side. (32) In the same way, a Levite, when he arrived at the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. (33) But a Samaritan on his journey came up to him, and when he saw the man, he had compassion. (34) He went over to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. (35) The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him. When I come back I'll reimburse you for whatever extra you spend.'* (36) *"Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" (37) "The one who showed mercy to him," he said. Then Jesus told him, "Go and do the same."*

We can harm our neighbor by 'leaving him for dead' – the simple act of walking by on the other side as he bleeds out is an act of harm in and of itself. Mercy, compassion, and practical help are part and parcel of the loving Christian life. Love is more than smiles and hugs – it is a muscular, active thing that sees needs and does good.

For instance I have found that if my wife is busy doing housework and I give her a hug, then go and switch on the TV and ignore her need for help – then my wife perceives me as being "unhelpful" and selfish and sees the hug as just a "con", a way of getting out of work. On the other hand if I hug her and then ask "how can I help" then the hug is seen as a genuine act of love because I am willing to meet her need for help instead of just thinking of myself. Similarly the smiles and hugs and Christian greetings at church need to be also backed up by the practical meeting of felt needs.

James 2:15-16 HCSB *If a brother or sister is without clothes and lacks daily food, (16) and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well," but you don't give them what the body needs, what good is it?*

1 John 3:16-17 HCSB *This is how we have come to know love: He laid down His life for us. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers. (17) If anyone has this world's goods and sees his brother in need but shuts off his compassion from him--how can God's love reside in him?*

Places like Africa are a vast challenge to our Christian love and compassion. But so is the lonely widow, the friendless school student, the old woman with dementia, and the newcomer at church. We need to see all the people that the Lord brings into our life as

folk for whom Christ died and who He wants us to love. We "owe it" to the woman with dementia to be kind and patient with her and to genuinely ask how she is. We "owe it" to the lonely kid at school to help him to fit in. We "owe it" to the newcomer at church to greet them, and to ask them to lunch.

One last thing – do not expect people to ask for help! The wounded man had an obvious need and did not need to ask for help, indeed he may even have been unconscious. But the Good Samaritan saw the need and took the initiative. Take the initiative to ask someone "would you like a drink", "have you eaten", "would you like lunch" and so on.

Blessings,

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