

Indebted to Love

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Date: 17 February 2019

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[0 : 00] If you're visiting with us today, we just to let you know we've been going through Romans in our morning worship for a number of months. We did take a break from it, but we're heading towards the end of the book.

And the first eleven chapters are really dense theology, talking a lot about who God is. And then from chapter twelve onwards, we have the implications of that, which are absolutely significant for us.

Last Sunday morning, Bob Ackroyd preached about our responsibility in society with those who lead us, our government and our politicians and those who collect our taxes and all these things. So it's very much dealing with society. So we're beginning to look at it in context. And now it becomes more personal in how we live, how you live and how I live in society.

And what's really great about this is it reminds us we live, and we need to remember this, we live in time and space.

[1 : 15] So our daily lives out of here, you know, whatever else they are, our daily lives out of here is the stuff of God. It's the stuff of God.

He created the life and the world that we go out tomorrow into and go out today into and we're in today.

And He's redeemed that world as well. This is where we live. This is where He wants us. He wants you to be where you are in your work, in your life, in your family, in your holidaying, in your study, when you eat, when you laugh, when you cry, when you breathe, it's the stuff of God.

That there is no sacred secular divide. You don't come to church for some kind of spiritual fix which drains throughout the week until you come back.

That's a really wrong impression of our lives. Our lives are the stuff of God, all of it. And Christ was born into this life, God, God the Son, was born into this life.

[2 : 25] He entered history. He lived here. He walked the ground that we walk on. He made things from wood. He had a family. He knew loss within that family.

He had siblings. And He came into this world to redeem us as those who are separated from Him, to redeem us and this world from death and destruction and from the hell of evil.

The hell of evil. Our guilt and His just judgment for the choices we make to reject Him, He took on Himself.

And we remember that. We know that and we understand that. And it was into this world He came. It's not a figment of the imagination. It's not just a symbolic spiritualization, of course you know that. And as Christians, what Romans is reminding us of, it's a letter to a church, is that He is Lord. So He's Lord, you know, at the end of that verse it says, you know, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, we take Him as Lord and we recognize Him for who He is.

[3 : 35] His mercy is to us, His love for us is incomparable, His grace is priceless. So you'll come and you're going to hear the same old stuff again and again here.

Because our tendency, my tendency is to forget. And I hope that as we look at God's living word, we're reminded, but I hope you're not bored by that.

Because it's hugely important and practical. In the ordinariness of our lives, He wants us to live with Him as our Lord, okay?

In everything we do, that's the fruit of the Spirit. So what we're reminded of when we come to church, I guess, or when you read your Bibles or when you pray, is salvation, isn't it?

It's the grace of God in that you're saved to the cross of Christ. And really, what that's saying is that your salvation is at the heart of absolutely everything that you are and everything that you and I do.

[4 : 37] It's not just the snippet of the Sunday morning. It's not just the spiritual feel-good thing that we do. It's at the core of everything we are. So that's why Paul can speak here about authorities and about tax collecting or the taxes that you owe, and now talk about neighbors and the outstanding debt we have to our neighbor.

And that's what he's speaking about here. And it's great because he's talked about the various debts that we have in the previous that Bob looked at last week, you know, that we have, you know, whoever it is that you have anything to owe to them, whether it's respect or whether it's honor, whether it's revenue, whoever it is, pay what you owe, you know, in society.

That's what he's saying. You know, pay your way in society. He says, pay your taxes. It works to live a debt-free life. Live, he says, within your means.

In time and space, he says that, except in one area. He says, live within your means in one area, in every area of life, without debt as much as you can.

Pay what you owe, pay back what you owe, except in one area. There is an outstanding debt that we keep needing to pay, and that is to love one another.

[6 : 00] Oh, no one, anything except the debt to love one another. So that's what he moves on to. He's talking about society and he moves on to how we live every day, the debt of love to our fellow human beings.

There's no point in your life when you can say, okay, I've loved that, I've loved my neighbor enough, I've paid my debt. There's no final check, there's no due paid, there's no time when we stop serving our neighbor and living in society as a Christian.

We don't say I've lived enough as a Christian this week. Now I'm just going to raise all hell because I've done my due.

I've been obedient enough. And now I just want to live any old way, whether it's loving or not. He's saying that's not what it's for. That's not what the debt we owe.

And he's speaking here very much, not primarily about our behavior in church, our behavior with fellow Christians. It includes that.

[7 : 05] Our neighbor can be our fellow Christian. It's still in that theme of how we live our lives in the world with whoever it is we come into contact with. Where would you go for the great definition of who's your neighbor in the Bible?

We all know that, don't we? It's a rhetorical question. Feel free to answer, but we're not used to it. It's Jesus, isn't it? Because someone asked that question, who's my neighbor?

Who's my neighbor? So we go to Jesus for the answer to who's my neighbor. And who did Jesus say? He said the good Samaritan, or the person that the good Samaritan helped to give the parable of the good Samaritan.

So he was giving this defining description of who the neighbor was. That was, therefore, anyone. It wasn't someone who was a Jew. It wasn't someone who was a disciple.

It wasn't someone who was the same type of person. It was someone really who was just in need. Happened to be a Samaritan that the Jews hated. Someone who was in need. Someone who comes across our life who needs shown mercy to you.

[8 : 07] So really what Jesus is saying is you don't ask questions before you love your neighbor. You don't judge their character and say, well, I'm not sure. I'll wait and see whether they're worth loving.

It's not being moralistic about who we help or love in our lives. We treat everyone we come across in our lives, in our workplace, in our neighborhood, in our home, whatever happens on our university campus, whatever it happens to be, we treat them with the love that Christ has treated us.

We never can repay the debt of love we owe to Christ, and we never stop loving our neighbor. So there's really no, what I'm saying is in terms of who our neighbor is, there's no qualification.

You know, it's not the famous, again maybe this is an ageist comment, the Charles Schultz campaign, cartoon or other of Linus, who was Snoopy's best friend, shouting or with a banner saying, I love mankind, it's people I can't stand.

You know, and that symbolizes so much of what we sometimes think, isn't it? As Christians, we speak in generalities about loving people, or mankind, but actually we can't stand people.

[9 : 23] And that's what's exposed by Jesus here. He says, you can't live your Christian life in generalities. You can't live it with pietistic sound bites.

It's the way we live in our day-to-day life that is so significant. This is the stuff of God, whether it's someone who's homeless, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, black, white, gay, straight, gender-confused, atheist, believer, racist, addict, proud, humble, liberal, conservative, you know, I don't need to go on.

How we make all these categorizations of people and decide and make decisions of whether they're worth our love. And yet Jesus says that's not how it's to be.

So He tells us in this great passage how we live in society today, living in society today and also living in the light of society to come as Christians.

So that's the two things that I'm just briefly going to speak about this morning. Living in society today. In verse 11 He says, besides this, you know the time.

[10:37] Or you could say, you know the present time, the time in which we're living, you know it. And I'm going to refer back to the verses before that to explain how He wants us to live in this present time today, today, today, this world, today.

And He says, we are to live by loving our neighbor because that fulfills God's law. Love does no wrong. Verse 10, to a neighbor, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Now remember He's speaking here to Christians. He's speaking here to people who know they can't keep the law, who know they have broken the law, who know they are sinners and are saved by grace.

So it's not moralism and it's not, this is how I live in order to make myself right with God. But as believers He's saying, this is how you're to live because you're saved and because you have got the Holy Spirit in your life.

It's an astonishing statement. He says, we fulfill God's law. We read the catechism. Perfect obedience. And we fulfill the God's law in the light of what Jesus has done.

[11:49] That's what chapters 1 to 11 are for. That's why they're so important because we must take this passage within the context of what Jesus has done for us. He's fulfilled both parts of the law perfectly in the way the commandment, the catechism speaks about.

He loves God perfectly in fulfillment of the law and He loves His neighbor perfectly. That's the 10 commandments He fulfills that perfectly.

So when we have, in our failure, and He has punished for our failure, but with His love in our hearts, we have the faith to do the impossible, the miraculous.

So you are able to do that as you go into your day-to-day living. So the 10 commandments that you often bulk at, and people often bulk at, are God's laws of love.

That's what they are. Remember that. They are the core of the universe. They are pit law and love against one another. Never cheaply say, oh, I don't believe in the law anymore.

[12:55] I just believe in the love of Jesus. That is a wrong statement. It's very core. It's a deep, deep misunderstanding of the gospel because Jesus reminds us that law is the fulfillment of the law, that love is the fulfillment of the law.

And we recognize that. However, our obedience is never to be moralistic or self-righteous or harsh. But neither is it just to be gushy and emotional. It is to be loving in the way Christ intends us to love.

So as we live our lives, we're fulfilling God's law to our neighbors in society when we love them.

And what does that love look like? I think there's two things at least. One is it's protective. It's absolute core. It's protective. Verse 10, again, love does no wrong to a neighbor.

Okay? Can you apply that today? Just apply it just now. When you think about your neighbor, the person that you regularly come into contact with, a difficult boss, a student that just gives you a hard time, a teacher.

[14:17] I don't know, but my husband, whatever it might be, you know, it's the core of our challenge is to protect, to do no harm, to do no wrong to our neighbor, no harm.

Because harming people, harming another person belongs to the deeds of darkness, and he speaks about these deeds of darkness, doesn't he? And they're just an outworking of the law of God, you know, orgies, drunkenness, sexual immorality, sensuality, quarreling, or jealousy.

You break down these things. They all are acts of darkness, and they harm ourselves or other people. It might be cheapening sex. It might be angry responses and violence.

It might be anger itself here that it's so broad, isn't it? It's the cheapening of life. However, it's framed not caring about the addicted, the vulnerable, the demented, the child in the womb, the disabled, whoever it might be.

If we don't love our neighbor by having an attitude of harm towards them, taking the property of our neighbor's greed in all its form.

[15 : 32] It's harming our neighbor, wishing they were dead in order to get what they have, being jealous or covetous. All of these things are deeds of darkness.

They're harming our neighbor. It's not acting in love. So its core is protective. So you take the Word of God today and you apply it, as I must do, to how I will act tomorrow, or today even and tomorrow from here, that the love we show to our neighbor, whoever it is that comes into contact with us on a day-to-day basis, usually, we are to show them no harm.

That's how we are to live our lives in society as Christians. That's why it's no good just floating about waiting for heaven. That's not what we're asked to do.

We're asked to live for Jesus Christ here. So its core is protective and its character is grace-led engagement.

We are to be led by grace and engaged in the world that we live in so we know our neighbors and we are able to love them. And it's not simply human love.

[16 : 40] It is the love of God. It's the love of God. It's loving God as He loves us. It's not liking everyone and being nice and being a doormat and at the same time compromising God's truth while we do so.

It's not being popular in order to be popular. It's our identity as believers is to love with the authority of God behind us and His truth guiding us in all things.

But it's never monastic. Never use your faith in Jesus Christ as a reason to disengage from society or stay apart from society or live in a Christian ghetto.

There's no place in Scripture for that in our lives. Look at the life of Jesus. But if we want a model for that, we find great, great model, shadowy models that are given in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament had that. Everything in the Old Testament points forward. But we have this great picture of a people in exile, don't we? And of how to live in exile.

[17 : 47] The people who were not yet or banished from the Promised Land, they lived in exile and God told them how they were to live. And it's a model for how we live, as it were, in exile because this is not our home.

This is not the land flowing with milk and honey that we look forward to. So God's model is given to us in the Old Testament for how we fulfill the law of God in the New Testament in our lives.

And Jeremiah 29, 47 is a great example of that. Thus say, this is the command God gave to the people who are exiled in Babylon, how they were to live in exile as believers.

See the Lord God of the exiles who I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat their produce, take wives and have sons and daughters, take wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage that they may bear sons and daughters, multiply there, do not decrease, but seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile and pray to the Lord on its behalf for it in its welfare, you will find your welfare.

And mercy, they were not asked to lose their identity, they were not asked to compromise, but they were not to live in ghetto, they were not to live in monastic circumstances, obeying the Lord yet seeking peace and prosperity of the city, loving their neighbors that they met every week showing mercy.

[19 : 14] The great other Old Testament example of that is Daniel, isn't it? Of course, in the same kind of circumstance, who knew what God wanted and knew what God asked, undefiled Daniel, undefiled yet fully engaged at the top level of politics in his society, fully engaged, always aware that it wasn't his home, but never resorting to living in a ghetto and hating his neighbor and rejecting the opportunities to live out grace in the society in which he lived.

These are the great Old Testament examples of how you and I are to live our lives today. Don't make the sacred secular divide.

Live out your faith respectfully and above all lovingly to your neighbor.

Love your neighbor. Show mercy to those that you meet every day. That's what we're commanded, maybe especially to those who you feel deserve at least. So living in society today, that's a summary of what he's saying here.

But also we live in society today, whatever you are, in the light of a better society that is to come.

[20 : 38] You know, besides this he says, you know the time that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far

gone, the day is at hand.

Now what he's saying there, he's saying, yeah, live absolutely in society. But remember that you're living in the light of a society that is to come. We're to understand the time we live in, the moment that God has that we're living in and who we are.

This is kind of, if you use the sunrise kind of idea, it's the world kind of living in twilight, that's where we're living, at the breaking of dawn.

You know that time. And interestingly, what did they say? Very often people say it's darkest before the dawn. I'm sure that's right.

Not tested it that much. But in some ways, it's a little bit like that for us just now, isn't it? Spiritually, it might seem very dark, but we do know that Jesus is coming back to usher in a new society.

[21 : 43] In other words, we live and we love our neighbor in society. We're fully engaged. We're fully immersed. But we're different because we recognize that this is not our home.

This is not our end destination, even though we're fully engaged. We know His kingdom is coming. We know that because He's already brought His light into the darkness of our experience.

And heaven is getting nearer, and the new heavens and the earth is getting nearer every day when we will see Christ face to face, and His order of a new society with its renewal and righteousness will be fulfilled.

That is cataclysmic, hugely significant that we live in the light, not just of today and living fully for today, but we live in the light of a society that is to come.

Why can we say that? because He says that we have woken up from our sleep. We're alive. It's a kind of death to life metaphor, sleeping to waking metaphor, obviously.

[22 : 54] A new day has dawned for us. So you're living in the light of a spiritual truth that has hit you, a spiritual truth that you've taken into your heart. There's been a huge change.

Night and day, we talk about that. It's as different as night is from day. And that's what's happened, death to life. And what's evidenced of the difference between night and day?

Well, we often think differently. We often act differently. We often dress differently. I was reading, I'm doing this Dynamics of Biblical Counseling course, and one of the essays was about a guy who had a lot of sexual issues in his life, and when he came to faith, he was same sex attracted.

And when he came to faith, his whole life was changed. But he found the 10 minutes just before he went to sleep, the hardest 10 minutes of his life physically went into the darkness of sleep, and his mind and his imagination and his past all attacked and closed in on him at that moment.

And we recognize sometimes that there's that difference of way we think just before we sleep, maybe just before we wake up. And so we recognize the difference between night and day.

[24 : 23] And spiritually, that's what Paul is saying here in the second section. He's reminding us that we have to take responsibility because we are saved by Jesus Christ and He's God has gifted us new life.

We're just at the dawning of a new day, a new hope, and we rise to the challenge every single day and live as those who are no longer in the darkness but are in the light.

And he explains how we are not to live. He shows us from his own law the list of things that he doesn't want us to live in that way with our neighbor, where to get rid of the harmful, dark, damaging behavior, both to ourselves.

And to others, the immorality, the sexual immorality, the sensuality, the drunkenness, the jealousies. He's saying these belong to a different world.

They belong to a world you don't belong to anymore because you've woken up and the night is passing and the day is about to come. So he's saying you're living in the light of a day that is to come.

[25 : 33] Yes, you're living in society now, but you're living with a different understanding and perspective. And so he uses an illustration and he says, therefore you are to dress appropriately, cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light.

Let us walk properly and put on the Lord Jesus Christ. So he's using an illustration he uses a lot, armour or clothing. New Testament uses that illustration quite a lot about what we wear spiritually, what we put on.

You know, there's a responsibility there and there's a knowledge of wearing the right thing. And it goes back a little bit to a couple of weeks ago when I talked about the mirror image.

Remember, and some of you might remember the first thing we tend to do in the morning? We look in the mirror. He applied that spiritually. Well this is kind of a follow on from that because usually after looking in the mirror or maybe before or after, we put clothes on.

We put on clothes that are appropriate for the day. And he's saying just as we do that physically, every single day we put on the clothes. He says so spiritually we are to put on the clothes that befit our status as children of the living God.

[26 : 54] He says, put off the deeds of darkness. So, okay, image here. You put off your pajamas or your nightie and you put on the clothes for the day.

Now generally, unless you're feeling really cold, probably, and this is where the illustration breaks down, you don't put your clothes on top of your pajamas or your nightie. Okay, there's probably someone here still wearing their pajamas underneath because they're really cold.

But generally speaking, you don't. You take off and then you put on, don't you? And that's what he's saying here. It's not like you're putting on a, it's not like you're a hypocrite. You've got all these lustful, terrible thoughts inside but you put on that an outward way of living that maybe is attractive. You're saying no in your heart of hearts because of what Christ has done. It's not a mask. It's from hearts that are transformed by God's grace. It's not moralistic behavior. It's saying what He has done changes who we are in our hearts.

So we daily we're putting off the deeds of darkness and putting on love, loving our neighbor, not living in these ways, not gratifying the desires of our sinful hearts, but doing no wrong, doing no wrong, no harm, no harm to ourselves, which also in us and no harm to others.

[28 : 27] And we're to do that thoughtfully. Make when he says make no provision for the flesh. He's saying don't think about it. Don't get up in the morning saying, well, you know, I'll give the Lord a few hours, but then I really want to go this way and think about how we can gratify sin.

How can I do this so that no one will find out? We're going to do it silently, secretly, whether it's pornography or whether it's what we're watching or what we're thinking. I can think lots of things because nobody sees these things.

But these are damaging not only to others because it changes our attitude to others, but also to ourselves, of course. Don't make provision for gratifying our sinful desires, because what he's really saying here is as you think about your future and you're putting on the clothes of day as you're moving towards heaven, the perfect righteousness that is there, you are to live now for what you're hoping then, what you believe then to be your experience.

And in other words, we are what we wear spiritually. I think that's true physically sometimes as well. Maybe it's not a perfect illustration, but I think sometimes our dress, what we wear does affect our behavior.

I think I act differently when I'm wearing a kilt or a suit compared with a boiler suit. You know, kind of stomp about with a boiler suit and I don't mind if I get things messy and I'm wearing a suit, sharp gear and tie and kind of more upright in a walk, but carefully and I've got a different self-image.

[30 : 01] We are, you know, we are who we wear. But in Christ, we wear grace. You wear grace.

That's what you're to wear. That's what I am to wear, because we've received grace and that should change every step we take, every conversation we have, every decision that we come to, every film we choose to watch, every behavior we choose to engage in, we wear grace and we are seeking to strip off the sinful desires that damage us because they are deeds of darkness and they have no place in our future.

We live not only in this society, we live in the knowledge of the society to come. So the debt of love to our neighbors is lifelong.

It's never paid in this life. It's who we are and it's who you are and it's who I am. And the only right we have to claim to live this way is because we're children of God and because we've called God Father.

So please remember that His Word is a living, powerful model of how you should go from here every moment of every day, whatever circumstances.

[31 : 30] And you think it's easy for you to say from the pulpit, impossible. I know that. I know that. I recognize that.

Of course it's impossible. It's impossible by nature. It's impossible because it's against everything that we're told to do and live in the society that puts self first.

But we have dethroned self because of Jesus Christ and the impossibilities and the weakness and the failure drives us back to Him for the things that are not impossible with Him.

We live that way when we fail, we seek forgiveness and we move on and we seek forgiveness from others because that's all part of it, isn't it? Loving our neighbor is being truthful enough to say, well, I'm sorry, I screwed up there.

Screwed up badly. I'm sorry. That's part of it. That's part of it. It's not a council of perfection. It's that recognition of living in the light.

[32 : 37] The night is far gone, the day is at hand, let us cast off the works of darkness, put on the armour of light. It's a slightly different illustration. It's not just clothing, it's armour.

It's what protects us and what keeps us from harm. You know, we're talking about harm. Loving is doing your neighbor no harm, no wrong.

And so as we wear the protection of God, as you know the Bible, as you know His truth, as you're relying and as your roots are firmly grounded in Him, as we sung about the fruitfulness of our Christian lives are based on where our roots lie and our roots must lie in Him and in His grace.

And I hope and pray that we go from here, not just to each other, but in our lives when maybe nobody is watching and there's no Christians anywhere near that we are loving our neighbor.

In ways that are counter-cultural and impossible and radical and grace-filled. Let's pray. Father God, we ask and pray that you would forgive us because we see the standard of Scripture and we know we fail miserably, but we really ask that we would not use that as an excuse just to give up.

[33 : 59] Because we've accepted by you, we're loved by you because Jesus has done what we could never do, but that's never, Lord, may that never be for us a reason to be complacent because it's a total misunderstanding of grace.

And may we not live our lives as it were, treading water as Christians in this nasty, big bad world until Jesus comes again and rescues us.

But may we see the Kingdom of Heaven is here through your people and we are to live out grace in community, loving our neighbor and loving God.

Help us to do that, we pray. And as I look in front of me at this congregation, I see a people who will spread out into the city in this working week, many on their own, many in situations with no other Christians with a lot of opposition and maybe darkness and difficulty spiritually anyway.

And we pray that they might go in your strength and in reliance on you, seeking to live out the impossible and seeking to be pure and loving and patient and peaceful and not violent and not angry and not discontented and grumbling.

[35 : 25] And Lord, we pray that we would all find that that makes a radical difference to us and to those around us. May we dress as appropriately, as appropriate to our calling as believers, covered in the grace and living out the grace of Jesus.

Amen.