

THE CHRISTIAN'S RESPONSIBILITY TO HIS NEIGHBOR **Romans 13:8-14**

by Dr. Jack L. Arnold

A Christian faith that doesn't change one's life isn't worth a snap of the fingers. But when Christ changes a heart and life, the change is going to affect everyone with whom the Christian comes into contact. A truly Christlike life lived out in the world convicts and upsets those who are not Christians. Someone has well said, "The ministry of a Christian is to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable."

In Romans 13:1-7, we have been told that as Christians we have a social responsibility to obey our government. Now Paul talks about the Christian's social responsibility to his unsaved neighbors.

RESPONSIBILITY TO LOVE ONE'S NEIGHBOR — Romans 13:8-10

"Owe no man any thing." Paul has just told the Christian that he is to pay taxes to the government, for this is part of his worship of God. Now he says that the Christian is not to be in debt financially to any man, especially those in the non-Christian world. We are not only to pay taxes, we are to pay bills! This verse does not mean that a Christian is not to have debts, but that he is to pay the debts that he incurs. People often ask, "Is it wrong for a Christian to contract a debt, or to buy on the installment plan, or mortgage his house? The answer is no. Financing is simply a mutually agreed upon contract by which money is to be paid. It is not the kind of debt that the Bible prohibits unless the borrower or charger fails to make a payment. If a person contracts for more than he can pay, he is guilty of stealing for he is living off another person's money. Christians who do not pay bills are a poor testimony for Christ.

The exhortation to owe no man anything ought to be a warning to Christians not to go so deeply into debt that they cannot pay their bills. Most ministers are contacted by people who are so deep in debt that they cannot pay the rent or the interest on a loan. These people somehow feel God has let them down. Not so — they have let God down by failing to heed his command.

There are also those who have gone so deeply into debt that they cannot or will not give regularly to the Lord's work, and these folks will not be greatly blessed of the Lord.

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19).

Trying to keep up with the Joneses can present many complex spiritual problems.

“But to love one another.” The Christian’s responsibility is to love. Paul says every Christian owes the debt of love to his neighbor. This is a continually valid debt, and one that can never fully be paid. Because the Christian has experienced God’s love, he is a debtor to God and a debtor to mankind. If he loves his neighbors, possibly some will respond to Christ and experience God’s love as a reality.

When stating the greatest commandment in God’s law, the Lord put loving one’s neighbor next to loving God.

“Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matt. 22:37-39).

“For he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” Love alone fulfills the Mosaic Law; it makes a good citizen out of a Christian without any need for police or other enforcement agencies, because no man who loves his neighbor is going to injure him. If you love a person, you won’t commit adultery with his wife, or kill or steal or covet something that he has. You won’t envy his new car or her mink stole or anything he possesses because true love is concerned about the other person’s welfare.

The Mosaic Law, and all law for that matter, is external to us. As such, it is insufficient to keep order over men. Order requires that we desire to keep the law. Fulfilling the law requires a love, a change of heart, an inward work, that desires to do good to others. We are living in one of the most lawless ages in history, and the reason is that men are losing their ability to love and their capacity to love; law alone is relied upon to keep order.

“Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” The great need for our society is for love and the capacity to love. Our society is coming unglued because it does not know how to love. Genuine love comes when a person has received the new birth from God through faith in Christ, and when the child of God is yielded to the Holy Spirit. The capacity to love comes only from God: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love” (Gal. 5:22).

RESPONSIBILITY TO WITNESS TO OUR NEIGHBOR — Romans 13:11-14

“And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep.” Paul challenges his readers to know the time. The time from the birth of Christ to the second coming of Christ is known as the “last age” in human history. Do you know where the events of today are taking us? Do you know what lies ahead? Are you aware of God’s program? Apparently this last age is drawing to a close.

Men of science are now aware that we are living in a unique age of history, for the world cannot exist much longer under its present conditions. With the population explosion, the world is running short on fuel, food, and even water, as well as other natural resources. There seems to be a feeling among many, saved and unsaved alike, that the world is heading for a big climax. As Christians we believe it is the coming of Jesus Christ to this earth!

We Christians are to awake from the sleep of indifference and get on with the work of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are to wake up and live in light of the fact that Christ is coming again: “And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:10). We are to watch and wait without panicking, acting with intelligent purpose, doing the Lord’s will.

“For now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.” Each day we Christians live brings us one step closer to receiving our completed salvation: the redemption of our bodies at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ for his church.

“The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.” In these closing days when the night is swiftly advancing toward the dawn, the Lord’s return for his own cannot be too far distant. As children of light, we should put off evil works and shine as lights in the world. Never has the world needed to hear the truth of Jesus Christ more than it does now. Only those filled with the love of Christ will be able to reach others in this world for him. To be effective, a light must shine so others might see.

“Let us walk honestly, as in the day.” We are to have lives that will be attractive to non-Christians and cause them to want the same Christ we love.

“Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.” Rioting speaks of feasts and drinking parties that are orgies. Drunkenness is also sin. In our day there are many professing Christians whose hands are so shaky from Saturday night drinks that they have difficulty holding the communion cup on Sunday morning. “Chambering” refers to premarital and extra-marital sexual relationships, and “wantonness” is sexual debauchery. This not only deals with acts but

with the thought life. God commands us to abstain from all physical excesses and from thoughts that lead to those excesses. “Strife” refers to troublemakers and to those who cause divisions. “Jealousy” speaks of envy. Strife and envy are placed next to the gross sins which are so freely manifested in the non-Christian world.

“But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.” We are to put on, or be clothed with, Christ in our daily lives. We are to permit his life to flow through us and show through us. We are to be occupied with him in all that we do and relate him to every area of our lives. We have Christ now, and it is to appropriate to use him in our daily living. The person of Christ is to permeate our very being. This will result in the character of Christ being manifested in our lives.

“And make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.” We are not to provide for the feeding of the sin nature in us which thrives on evil. I have just walked away from groups when men started to tell an off color story or dirty joke. Once they asked me, “What’s the matter, preacher? Can’t you take a joke? You know you like to hear it.” I replied, “You bet I do, for my flesh thrives on these things, but I am not going to feed my flesh!”

In his “Confessions,” St. Augustine tells how in his unconverted days he had allowed himself to become the willing victim of vile and fleshly lusts. He lived his careless life as the pagans of that day, and associated with the corrupt and wicked members of society. When he got converted, the great question on his mind was, “Will I ever be able to live according to the Christian standard of holiness. Will I ever be able to keep myself from the vile, sensuous life in which I have lived so long?” When he first yielded himself to Christ, he took as his life text Romans 13:13-14 where the Apostle exhorts the believer to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and to make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts. For long after his conversion, he did not dare even go near that part of the city where his godless companions of former days lived. But one day a matter of business called him there, and as he was walking along the street he suddenly saw one of the beautiful yet wicked companions of his folly. The moment her eyes lit upon him, her face was illuminated with delight, and she came running with outstretched arms and said, “Austin, where have you been for so long? We have missed you so.” He turned, gathered up his long philosopher’s gown, and started to run — not a very dignified procedure for a professor of rhetoric. The girl ran after him calling, “Austin, Austin, why do you run? It is only I!” He looked back and exclaimed. “I run because it is not I, for I am a new creature in Christ.” Augustine did not want to feed his flesh.

CONCLUSION

We are told that man's two greatest needs are to know that he is loved and to have his guilt feelings removed. Jesus Christ can do both for all who believe in him. To come to Christ is to have him take away the guilt and penalty of sin, and to have the everlasting love of God become a reality.

Men without Christ have no hope for time or eternity, but Christians have the assurance of eternal life and the confidence that Jesus Christ lives in them to help them through the burdens and blessings of life. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.