

Romans 13:1-10August 12, 2012 – 11th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**Love in Debt**✂ **to government (vv.1-7)**✝ **to our neighbor (vv.8-10)**

In the name of Jesus, the Commander of the Lord's army, our loving Savior, dear citizens of heaven:

The Christian in the world is challenged. We may be insulated a bit in suburban neighborhoods from flying bullets and flashing knives, but imagine being a Christian in prison. Whether falsely accused or repentant of his crimes, living among convicts is hard. Some prisons have residences where Christians can support each other. Early Christians like Paul did not have that luxury. Many still don't.

The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to open this section on the Christian in the world a few verses before our text: ***"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."*** Unfortunately, some folks resist our efforts to ***"overcome evil with good."*** (Romans 12:18, 21 NIV84) For instance, Christians have patiently worked to help fellow Americans see the sanctity of life and marriage. Yet activist judges and godless politicians manipulate the legal process to force Christians to pay for abortions. The defense of marriage amendment in Minnesota this Fall could help protect God's institution of marriage from activist judges. If you do not vote, it will be taken as a vote in favor of homosexual unions. In our frustration we sometimes need to be reminded about **Love in Debt**....

✂ **to government (vv.1-7)**

"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves." Not rebellion, but **Love in Debt** to government sometimes requires resistance if rulers try to be church or demand sin against a clear command of God.

Paul traveled on missionary journeys all over the ancient world. And he seems to have made friends with many government officials. During the riot in Ephesus we read: ***"Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater."*** (Acts 19:31 NIV84) But in Philippi it was a different story. There Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned without trial. So Paul pressed his Roman citizenship, insisting government officials escort them out of town. (Acts 16:37-40) Paul knew how to hold law enforcement accountable for the sake of the Gospel.

But things did not always work out. Paul waited two years for trial in Jerusalem. He finally had to appeal to Caesar to stand before the Emperor himself. One thumbs-down and it would be over for Paul. It took another two years of house arrest in Rome before he was finally released. (Acts 24:27; 28:30) But a few years later Paul was arrested again. Wicked Emperor Nero blamed Christians for the devastating fire he started. The Roman government executed the Lord's apostle who wrote these words.

So why does the Holy Spirit go on like this? ***"For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you."*** Rome used terror in its conquests. On the summit overlooking New Ulm, Minnesota, is a huge statue of Hermann the German, who stopped the Roman advance into Europe, A.D. 9, about the time Jesus was a teenager. His real name was Arminius, a former Roman legionnaire. He knew the Roman armies could not maneuver in thick forest. He stopped the terror there.

You see, Paul could resist without rebelling because he feared God who delegated authority to **government**. Through Paul the Holy Spirit explains: ***"For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath"***

to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience." Capital punishment is clearly allowed here. Even though Paul suffered it wrongfully, his conscience was at peace. A thousand years earlier, a young warrior ran for his life from King Saul. David was already anointed to be the next king. Yet he refused to allow his men to kill Saul. David resisted, but he would not rebel. He left the results to God.

Daniel and his three friends did the same. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's statue; he threw them into a fiery furnace. Daniel kept on praying openly in spite of a new law; King Darius threw him into the lion's den. In both cases God delivered them. But the four young Jewish believers were willing to suffer death rather than sin against God. In Egypt when Pharaoh commanded Jewish midwives to kill all the baby boys, they resisted. And God gave them families of their own. All applied the principle echoed by the apostles when commanded not to preach the name of Christ-crucified and risen: ***"We ought to obey God rather than men."*** (Acts 5:29)

It's **Love in Debt** that gives that kind of courage and power over evil. We see **Love** in action in the Garden of Gethsemane. A mob comes to arrest Jesus. He goes out to meet them and asks who they're looking for. When they say, ***"Jesus of Nazareth,"*** He boldly answers, ***"I AM he."*** His words drive them back. They fall to the ground. Peter isn't going down so easy. He draws his sword and cuts off the right ear of the high priest's servant. Jesus picks it up and puts it back, healing the man. Then Jesus scolds Peter, ***"Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"*** (John 18:5-11) That's your credit in God's courtroom. Every time we have rebelled against authority in our hearts, Jesus suffered and died to forgive. Christ's submission **to government** God credits to our account. All our crimes He forgives for Jesus' sake. **Love in Debt** keeps us repaying God in gratitude also....

† **to our neighbor (vv.8-10)**

Taxes, revenue, respect and honor we owe as **Love in Debt – to government**. But Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan to show that everyone in need is our **neighbor**. God wants us to repay His great grace in Christ by caring for our **neighbor**. He says through Paul: ***"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."***

When the Holy Spirit repeats the Ten Commandments in the New Testament, He shows they are the holy, immutable will of God for all people of all time. God's Law condemns us for breaking every one. But all our crimes against God and our neighbor were punished in full on the innocent head of God's own Son. This Gospel grace calls for loving kindness and tender mercy from us too. It reminds me of that bus driver in one of Pastor Patterson's sermons who was savagely beaten by gang members. He went to their trial and told the judge he would pay for their crimes by taking their place in jail. The judge was amazed. Who would do that? Jesus did – for us! If memory serves, the judge would not allow it. But the criminals were so amazed by this display of undeserved forgiveness that they repented and turned to Christ. ***"Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."***

To do no harm is one of our goals in China Partners. We serve Christians with God's Word in their culture. And sometimes even Chinese Communist officials see their **Love in Debt** to God.

One of our pastors liked to tell about traveling with a world renowned Chinese scholar. One time she whispered, "If you preach your usual way, I'm going out that door." "Why?" he asked. "See the two men in suits in the front row? One is in charge of the state church, the other is the chief of police." So the pastor preached on these verses from Romans 13, and the respect we owe **to government**. Afterwards, one official kept insisting they get into his car. They thought they were in trouble. But a few blocks away he confided, "I too am a Christian. If you need anything, I would be honored to help you." **Love in Debt to neighbor** gave them a ride. Amen.