

Debt of Love

Romans 13:8b

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Would you say you have faith in God - you, yourself? Would you say you personally have faith in God? In other words, if I had said to you, "Have you faith in God?" -- how would you answer? Now, would you say, "Yes, I certainly believe in God." Would you say that? But I mean, have you faith in God for the practical things in your everyday life? Do you have faith in him for those things?

Have you faith in God for your finances, for instance? Would you tend to answer, "Well, I certainly try to. I do try to have faith in him for my finances." Can I show you that faith isn't a thing you can try to have? It's a thing you either have or you haven't. I think it'll help you to see that. You may say, "Oh wait a minute! You're trying to prove that I am not right!" I am not trying to prove that you're not right. I am trying to show you that you either do or you don't. It helps you to see where you are by facing up to that.

So, I say to you, "Look at this chair. We made it here so it's good and strong. It really is. It's a strong chair and you really can trust it. Look, look, I have faith in it. I am sitting in it." And you look at it and you're on your chair over here and you say, "Well, yeah, boy, I certainly believe that that chair would hold me. I certainly do." And I said, "Have you faith in it?" And you say, "Well I certainly have. I can see the way it holds you and you certainly have faith in it, and I certainly have faith in it, too. I certainly do." And I say to you, "Well then, sit in it." And you say, "Well, I am certainly trying to have faith in it. I am trying to have faith in it."

Well, I just answer you, "Don't be silly. As long as you keep sitting on your own chair and won't move on to my chair, you don't have faith in it." And so when you say, "I am trying to have faith", that's bluff. It's just a nice way of saying, "No, I don't have faith." We need to see that, brothers and sisters, because we're allowing all kinds of spirits of deception to bluff us out of a lot of peace of mind, and a lot of rest in our hearts that we could have, if we'd see that too often, what we mean is we really have faith in other things. But we like to think that if we got into real trouble, and we're in desperate straits, maybe we could jump on this chair fast, and we could depend on it. But actually, we're kind of glad that we're not at that state yet and we don't have to have faith in it.

You may say, "Well, no. I mean I have faith. I have faith for my finances. I do! I have faith in God for my finances." Well, if I told you, "Just now, I've just heard, you've been fired", or, "Your bank account is badly overdrawn", or, "You owe the IRS \$20,000 back taxes." Now, would your heart leap into your mouth? Would you just kind of cold sweat for a moment?

Well, if you would, it's because you don't have faith in God for your finances, but you actually have faith in your job or in your ability to manage your bank account, or you have faith in your knowledge of the way your income taxes are going. But you don't really have faith in God. If you say to me, "Oh no Pastor, that's not fair!" No, it is loved ones, because if you had a millionaire uncle, who said to you, "You get into trouble with your bank account? I'll supply the money. Lose your job? I'll give you a job. You have to pay back taxes? I'll pay them."

If you had a millionaire uncle who said that to you, you know that if I told you this morning,

"You've been fired" -- or I told you this morning your bank account was overdrawn -- or I told you this morning, "You owe \$20,000 back taxes" -- you know you would say, "No problem. No problem. I can face that. My uncle, he'll cover that." You know fine well there'd be all the difference in the world in our little tummies and our hearts and everything else. There would be no writhing and wrestling and worried nights in anxiety. We would just take it smooth like that. We wouldn't turn a hair.

You see the fact is that God has promised he will supply every need of yours from his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. He has reinforced that by reminding you that your body may have come out of your mom's womb, but she has less idea of how it was made than probably even you have, and that he has already made you and given you everything you have. He is far greater than a millionaire uncle, and He will take care of all your needs -- if you have faith in him. And that's the heart of it -- if you have faith in him.

I think there's a great tendency for us to say, "Well, I mean I think I have faith, but I really think it's reasonable, isn't it, and it's natural to kind of be momentarily worried when somebody tells you, you lost your job?" Well, no. You know it isn't. If you have faith in somebody who will meet all your needs, that wouldn't cause you a moment's concern.

The fact is that even a twinge of worry reveals to you that your faith is in your job and in your money and not in God. You shouldn't get all worried and say, "Oh, you're right. I am not a Christian." Forget that stuff. It doesn't matter about that. What is important is that you're living in faith in yourself who are very unreliable and are a very weak puny little creature. Or you're living on faith in your company which can go bankrupt tomorrow. Or you're living in faith in your employer, or in faith in somebody else, or in faith in the economy which can turn around in a moment. Really, you're not meant to live by those faiths.

God means you to live by absolute faith in him and not to turn a hair when those things go wrong because you know him so well. That's, you remember, what we were talking about last Sunday. We were saying that there are different things that reveal to you who you have faith in or what your faith is in. One of those things are the things that we've been talking about and another is the thing that's mentioned in Romans 13:8. That would get us back to that verse today to see what God has to show us through it.

Romans 13:8, "Owe no one anything except to love one another." You remember, we were saying that it doesn't mean that car loans or mortgages on our homes or consumer loans are wrong. In a sense, all you contract yourself to do is to meet the payment dates. If you meet those payment dates, as far as the law is concerned, you don't owe anybody anything until that payment date comes around for the car payment, or for the mortgage to be paid, or the consumer loan to be paid. You remember, we reinforced that by saying that there are indications in scripture that God does tell us to lend to people.

So, in a sense though, it's better to watch how deeply you get into that. Yet lending or borrowing itself is not necessarily condemned in scripture. But what God is saying here is when the payment date comes around, and you can't meet it, then you're owing somebody. Even though this owing is talking primarily about respect and love, yet it applies to us, "Owe nobody anything."

Don't keep on owing anybody anything, that's what the present tense "opheilete" means -- don't keep on owing. So say the next month comes around, you're not only going to be in trouble with the people

that want your money, but God is saying, if you end up in that position, see that you're reaching for a bridge too far.

You're reaching for a bridge too far. You're reaching for a car or a house or a stereo that he isn't supplying you with the money to buy even on the payment system. It means you're putting your faith in something there that you're hoping to get some security from -- the old house or some happiness from the old stereo -- that he wants you to be getting from himself. So he is gently saying to you when you end up in that position, "Look, rectify this. You can't maybe do it just this month. Some things you have to keep on for a while, but get your life into order again. Get your faith back into me. You don't need these things. Have faith in me and get your financial life into order." That's what we shared last day, you remember, that one of the things that can indicate to you that you are not having faith in God for all that you needed in your life is if your payment debts get out of balance. That's one expression.

Now, another expression of that lack of faith is in this phrase that follows, "Owe no one anything except to love one another." You can tell by your loving whether you have faith in God or not. Interesting. Love is the only debt that God says we all have and it's the only debt that we ought to have. He says that we ought to keep on paying again and again. And yet, we never eliminate it because you've always more to pay. And yet he says it's the paying of that debt that gives you fulfilment in your life and gives you freedom and liberty in your life.

So he is saying, "Owe nothing to anybody except to love one another." Now, what is love? You remember John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave..." Start at that level. Love is giving. It's giving to each other. That's at least what love is. And God says, "We were made to give." We were made to give. We were made to give things to each other and give time to each other.

We were made to give to each other, but you know the classic statement that all the theatrical people know -- and all of us who have dealt with the famous plays know -- where the woman comes into the room -- (Why we blame you ladies for it? Well, I don't know. We men do it, too.) -- but the woman comes into the room and says, "Things, things, things! All you give me are things! That's not love." We know that actually. Love is giving. But if it's only giving things, it's not really love, and we kind of all know that.

I don't know how many of us here were sons of rich parents, but I think there are probably some of us who were sons and daughters of wealthy parents. They thought by giving us things they were kind of showing their love to us. And of course, you ladies who are wives know how we men make that error. We kind of work all hours, don't come home til late, and then we bring a present. Or we're off on a trip somewhere and we bring you a present, and we hope that the present will kind of express our love. In a way it does, but so often, the lady is saying, "Well, yeah, but really, it's not a thing that I want." So, love is giving. But do you see, loved ones, that it's not just giving things?

You remember John 3:16 goes on, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son." Love is giving something more than things. It's giving the most precious thing that you have. For God, it was Jesus. It's giving a part of yourself to another person. It's giving yourself.

Love is giving yourself. Too many of us think, "Yeah, I'd like to do that. I am such a wonderful person! I'd like to just give myself to you. Here I am!" And we think, "Oh yeah, well, I just like to give myself and spread myself all over the world." But giving yourself is not that kind of bluff

philosophical stuff. Giving yourself is giving your time. Giving your time, giving your brain, your mind, your thoughts, your insights, your abilities, your talents, your aptitudes -- the things that make up you -- all your advantages.

Giving everything that is useful in you -- giving that to the other person and laying it at their feet and giving it to them to use. That's what it is. And that's why so many husbands and wives, so many parents, so many children -- but even go beyond the relations thing -- that's why so many people at work know we don't love them. It's all talk. It's all talk because we don't give them our time. We don't give them our interest. We don't think, "How are they feeling? What are they thinking? How are they feeling today? Boy, he looks a bit down today. I should ask him, 'Would you like to go out for coffee? 'Would you like...' " We don't.

We don't give our interest to other people. We give our interest to ourselves. We don't give our time to other people. We don't think, "I can see how he could fix that car easily." And then, give ourselves to helping him repair the car. We don't do that. See, that's what love is.

Love is very practical, down-to-earth, giving of all that you are to other people for their benefit. It's giving them time, attitude, interest, aptitudes, abilities, talents -- all the things that you have -- laying them at their feet for their benefit.

Now the amazing thing is that there's one other thing that makes love, love. Would you believe it that you could do those two things that I've mentioned and people would still feel that they weren't loved? I am going to tell you the thing that is absent that actually makes so many of us feel we're not loved.

In a way, I think it's unhealthy first to be saying, "Oh, I am not loved. Why doesn't somebody love me?" I say, "Get up and love somebody else." But still, in fairness to all of us, I do think there are many of us in our society -- maybe all of us -- who don't really feel loved because there isn't much real love going around our society.

So, in a way, if you're sitting there and thinking, "Well brother, I would like to get up and love, but I do still feel that nobody really does love me." I would join with you and I would say, "Yeah, brother/sister. I know why that is." I'd like to show you why it is, loved ones, because the one vital factor that makes love love is missing in most of the love that we share. It's in John 15:13.

John 15:13, "Greater love has no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends." You can be theological and call it the vicarious element, or you can just be down to earth and say, "You see, you can't give your life -- lay down your life for your friends and hold on to your life at the same time. You can't." If love is laying down your life for your friends, it means you give up your life so that they can have their lives.

In other words, if I could add to the second part of the definition, "Love is giving yourself, your time and your abilities and your talents and your interests and your aptitudes for their best advantage, even at the expense of yours, that's love." If you say to me, "Do you mean that? Do you mean that the abilities that I've got and the talents that I've got, that I've been taught to use to make myself secure, do you mean that if I really love, it means giving those to everybody else and using them for everybody else's benefit and advantage -- even at the expense of my own?" Yes. That's what love is. I'd tell you, that's why so many of us don't feel loved because that kind of love isn't going around.

We kind of know, "Yeah, the guy says he loves me but he loves me as long as it's to his advantage. But if it ever turns out to his disadvantage, I know he'll go to the wall." It's amazing how many parents and children and how many husbands and wives, but certainly I mean our friends at work and at school, have no doubt. They have no doubt of it. They know with all our talk that that element is not present in our love.

If you say to me, "Now, wait a minute brother. We don't have to lay down our lives for each other." No, but the person whom you think you're loving, they know whether that element is present in your love or not. Do you see that? They know. Maybe all you're doing is giving them a present. Maybe all you're doing is helping them repair their car. But they know whether that life-giving-up element is present in your love or not. They know whether you would die for them if you had to. That's why so few of us feel loved today. We've kind of backed it up with that old satanic definition, "Oh you can't love other people until you love yourself."

Well, the poor guy in that situation, he could never have loved himself. If Jesus had said, "No, no. I am not giving up my life because that's not loving myself. I am going to love myself and keep my life here, but I want to love you people as much as I can at the same time." Well, it wouldn't have worked.

He had to give up his life so that we could have ours. That's what love is. It's taking all that you are, your job ability, your professional ability, your mental ability and your physical abilities and your intellectual insights and your sharpness and your aptitudes and it's laying them out for everybody else.

You know the question that comes up in your mind? "What will happen to me? What will happen to me? I'm out there looking after all you. What's going to happen to me?" Well, you're finished -- unless there's somebody else who loves you the same way -- you're finished.

Isn't that the wonder of it? The guy who spoke these words, "Greater love has no man than this", is the same guy that loves you. The very thing that he is saying to you do, he is already doing for you -- and He will do for you. In other words, you can only love if you have faith in God that he loves you and he will not let you go to the wall.

Loved ones, it's a whole new life when you start to live like that. Instead of trying to look after yourself -- and you know how small and petty that gets -- we call it ethical choices. It's just dumb. It's just selfishness or unselfishness, but we call selfishness ethical choices. You know all those subtle ethical choices you have to make: "Will I do this for myself or this for the other?" It's a petty kind of existence.

There's a glorious liberated life that God has for every one of us. He is saying, "For goodness sake, love. Love and live the way I've loved and lived with you. Do what I am doing and you'll see the whole world will work together. That's the way I made it to work. I won't leave you. I won't let your cause go to the wall. I won't. I'll take care of you. You'll be amazed at the way I supply money for you. You'll be amazed at the way I give you happiness. That's all right. That'll all come, but get out there and start giving yourself for other people, and living for other people and doing things for other people. Let my Son's self-giving life live in you. Let his Spirit come into you and take over your whole life. And for goodness sake, begin to love the way I love you. Have faith in me. I'll look after you. Stop trying to look after yourself. You take care of my people and I'll

take care of you." That's what it is.

So really, have you faith in God? Well, you can tell by the way you're loving. You can. Now, I agree with you. I think it's a great, risky enterprise, but if it doesn't come off, we're finished anyway because he hasn't kept his word and it's all a lie. So the whole thing's a mess anyway. So there's a lot hanging on it and therefore of course, you have a lot going for you, haven't you?

I mean this Creator has to deny himself and we may as well find it out now. Wouldn't it be better? I'd rather find out that this was all bluff now, and then try to hack out some course for myself the rest of my life, than keep on pretending. So loved ones, I think you either have faith in him or you haven't. I think you either start loving the rest of us and laying yourself at our disposal for our benefit -- even at the expense of your own. Or you keep on living for yourself and growing smaller and smaller, and withering more and more, and ending up like Howard Hughes in that darkened room with the Kleenex sticking to his fingers, dying of malnutrition with more money in his bank account than anybody else in the world.

In other words, could it not be that it's all a great lie that you have to look after yourself? Is it not possible that it's a great lie that you have to look after yourself and that it's not true at all? And everybody -- whether it's Buckminster Fuller or whether it's Schwitzer or whether it's Paul or Peter or Wesley or Jesus or Teresa -- when you start living that way and laying yourself out for all our benefits -- there are laws that begin to operate. The mighty God who is your father begins to take your life into his own hands and begins to protect you and to guide you. Let us pray.

Dear Father, we thank you for showing us plainly the contrast between this imitation love and this real love. We thank you Father for showing us plainly the difference between faith in you and faith in ourselves. Father, we thank you for giving us a glimpse, in your miraculous way through your Spirit this morning, of what kind of life that could be.

Lord, we all feel some of the freshness of it. We sense some of the freedom that it could mean. Lord, there's something inside us that yearns for it. There's something inside us that wants to believe that the other is a complete lie, that we have to take care of ourselves. Father, when we think that the very man who said, "Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends", is the very man that is your Son and that is our Maker.

Lord, we would not hesitate another moment. We would change the way our life has been going. We turn back from this protection of ourselves and this using of our own abilities for our own benefits. Lord, we'd start living for each other here in this room. We'd even start it right now and wonder what the other person is going to do for lunch or how the other person beside me is feeling. Father, we'd start right now. We'd start loving so that other people can begin to believe that there is such a thing as real love where people will give themselves to others -- even at their own expense -- because they know there's somebody else that is taking care of them better than they could. Lord, thank you.

Thank you for the whole vision of it and the whole possibility that this very morning, we can now have faith in you. It's an act of the will. We can now say, "Lord God, will you take care of me? I am going to start living this way from this day forward." Thank you, Father. We'll do that this moment for your glory. Amen.

