

# ***Sabbath School Today***

## **With the 1888 Message Dynamic**

### ***Stewardship: Motives of the Heart***

#### **Lesson 11. Debt—A Daily Decision**

Our lesson gives us excellent advice and wise counsel on borrowing and spending money, and staying out of debt. However, the 1888 message goes beyond our day-to-day interaction with money to a different kind of "debt," one that never can be repaid. Let's start with what Ellet J. Waggoner had to say:

"'I Am Debtor.'—That was the keynote of Paul's life, and it was the secret of his success. Nowadays we hear of men saying, 'The world owes me a living.' But Paul considered that he owed himself to the world. And yet he received nothing from the world but stripes and abuse. Even that which he had received before Christ found him was a total loss. But Christ had found him, and given Himself to him, so that he could say, 'I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me' (Gal. 2:20).

"As Christ's life was his life, and Christ gave Himself for the world, Paul necessarily became a debtor to the whole world. This has been the case of every man who has been a servant of the Lord. ... 'Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant; even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many' (Matt. 20:26-28)." [1]

Whether or not you believe the gospel, the fact is that Christ died in your place when He died for "all" ("for the world"). Therefore, if He had not died for us, you would now at this moment be dead and in your grave. When Paul realized *that*, he took a deep breath. "I don't belong to myself! I don't possess anything that is mine by right—even my physical life I owe to Christ who died for me. My money, my house, my land, my education, my time, my strength—not one of these things I have called "mine" is really mine at all. I am infinitely and eternally in debt, a debt imposed by the grace of Christ."

Paul continues and explains to us *how* this mighty motivation works in our hearts: "He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again" (2 Cor. 5:15). In the original language the idea is clear that those who understand and believe this great truth of grace will "henceforth" find it *impossible* to live self-centered lives. No more gritting your teeth and clenching your fists and trying to *force* yourself to work hard for the Lord; it is automatic. An appreciation of the love of Christ has transformed you into a slave forever, a slave "under grace," Christ's freeman.

The key word there, and of course throughout the Bible, is "love." You cannot truly live under grace unless you appreciate that love revealed at the cross. When the sinner sees that cross, and appreciates that kind of love poured out, all for him, the tears come in his eyes. His heart is melted.

But must the one who truly believes in Jesus live under the tension of feeling unworthy, "the chief of sinners," sensing a constant conviction of being in debt? Is this the proper way for a Christian to feel? If Jesus were living here, would He feel like He had a daily debt to pay, an obligation to live for others and not for Himself? What can we know for sure?

(1) He invites us to "come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ... My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30).

(2) "The Savior of the world" has redeemed you, saved you, pulled you out of the mire, died the second death that would have been yours; adopted you into the Father's family. Ephesians 1:3-12 details in precision all the riches of His grace that He has already *given* you in the gift of Himself. Even the bread you have eaten today is the purchase of His cross, for you. Infinite wealth has been lavished upon you; and you are to know, to realize, to revel in your new status as a prince or princess "in heavenly places in Christ."

(3) But genuine faith has a built-in defense against a terrible spiritual arrogance that is so bad that it actually drives people away from Christ. Most pathetic of all delusions is the vain self-confidence that can assume you are specially honored by Heaven when in fact Jesus may be deeply ashamed of you, and abhors your unlikeness to His character.

(4) The built-in defense against this tragedy? The heart-awareness of what it cost the Son of God to save you. In the midst of your rejoicing in your salvation you forever sense that it is all a gift undeserved. It becomes a joy to remember that you are eternally, infinitely in debt.

As the innocent and divine Son of God, Christ became one of us. He entered the corporate stream of our fallen humanity so that He could take the load of guilt upon Himself, and pay our debt of death. By His perfect life He satisfied the demands of the law, and His death is accounted as our death because He became one of us.

The reason Paul can say, "I have been crucified with Christ," and "If one died for all, then all died" (Gal. 2:20; 2 Cor. 5:14) is because the Bible sees this corporate union of Himself with us as very real. This does not mean that *we* paid the debt for our sins, but that *we* are identified with Christ as *He* paid the debt. Our huge balance on the books of heaven is stamped "Paid!" As we consent to be united with Christ by faith, His death on the cross becomes *our* death and His righteousness becomes *ours*.

When the Father gave His Son, Christ also gave Himself. The price that Jesus paid was not merely a brief time spent as a visiting diplomat to this earth after which He returned

to His former home; rather He gave Himself to be one of us, with us, forever. He will always retain His humanity. The price He paid was not a few days or hours of physical or spiritual agony to be endured with the prospect in view of relief and restoration; He actually went to hell in order to save us. He consented to die the equivalent of the "second death" which means, as one author puts it, "goodbye to life forever." He had to "taste death for everyone," so that we might not have to taste its bitterness (Heb. 2:9).

It's time to realize how infinitely in debt we are to a Savior who has saved us from what is in ourselves. Think it through, and you'll be singing the Hallelujah Chorus.

—*From the writings of Robert J. Wieland*

**Endnote:**

[1] Ellet J. Waggoner, *Waggoner on Romans*, pp. 18, 19.

**Notes:**

Pastor Paul Penno's video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://youtu.be/vnMVpSqMmc4>

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