

through the desert, past numerous military check-points, to his monastic home. I was one of few overseas church visitors allowed to see him during those years, and my wife certainly was the first woman! We had a marvelous day with that great man and his companions. Their faith was transparent, and even their limited opportunities for service were used to the fullest and rooted in their faith in Jesus. As we prepared to leave later that day, I asked the patriarch if he had a message for the Coptic community in Melbourne. He became quiet and reflected carefully before saying:

Tell them that God is so good to me. I am well, and they should not worry about me. Remember God is in control, and not this government.

But there is a final story to share. Some years ago, while I was an assistant bishop in Melbourne, I went to St. Aldan's Anglican church in one of our suburbs to announce the decision of their minister to retire due to the rapid advance of cancer. Arthur's honesty and simple trust in Jesus deeply affected many lives. In his last letter to the parish before he died, he wrote:

Our ways are not God's ways! At times this is very difficult to believe—I freely acknowledge that! But I want to affirm something that I feel deep down in my inner being, that out of every situation God brings good.

This is what it means to live the Christian life to the fullest. The common factor in these lives is not the individual, the life lived, or the interpretation given to varying circumstances. The common factor is: Jesus, who is the Good News of God; Jesus, who infuses our ideas with his purposes; Jesus, who authenticates our behavior and lifestyle; and Jesus, in the words with which we began, who is in himself God's mercy, and who leads us to sacrificial living and shows us how to live life to its fullest.

BIBLE STUDIES ON ROMANS 9–15

Love in the End Times

David Penman

The Unifying Power of Love (Romans 13:14)

Over the past few days we have considered God's plan for the Jewish people and the nations, illustrated by a study of the theme of the great missionary passage in Romans 10:14–17: How, and through whom, can they hear the message?

May I say, in passing, to my Jewish friends who are in Christ, and who are such an important part of this Congress, that many of us believe you bring special gifts and insights. We need to hear what you have to say, and we need to accept you in Christ as you are. We love you dearly as brothers and sisters in the Lord, and want to learn from the precious insights you bring to this family. I fear that sometimes we fail to care for you as we ought, and fail to learn from you all we can.

We examined the life and witness of all Christians. We considered that marvelous message in Romans 12–13, with its focus on Christian faith in practice. And we concluded with an exposition of Romans 12:1–2, in which we were exhorted by the apostle to be living sacrifices—living life to the fullest.

I have experienced some difficulty in doing justice to the extensive passages before us each day. I have tried to spend half of the time on general textual comments and the remainder on special focus.

As our Congress draws to a close, in our reading there is a growing emphasis on the approaching end (i.e., the end of all time) and an emphasis on the urgency of love. We will concentrate on the theme: The unifying power of love (Romans 13:8–14).

In Romans 13:12–14 we are reminded that the night is far spent and the day is at hand. The apostle explores the special reasons for ending our old way of life and embarking on a new life in Christ. For this Congress, this chapter is a fresh reminder of the urgency of the times, and of the sacrificial service that is required as the "night is nearly over; the day is almost here" (v. 12). I have no doubt whatsoever of the literal meaning of the passage, nor of its imperative for us as we conclude our considerations in this Congress of World Evangelization.

In terms of earthly time, Paul's new day was not as near as many had thought, but the emphasis is exact. We live in the last chapter of the world's history, however long that chapter may turn out to be. We must live with God's future in mind. It is no wonder verses 13–14 became the "womb" from which Augustine was born in A.D. 386 and became the inspiration of Wesley's comment, "Herein is contained the whole of our salvation."

Let's return to verse 8. In the RSV, this verse is translated, "Owe no one anything," but the New International Version makes it clear that Paul is not forbidding borrowing,

but saying, rather, that the believer should not leave debts unpaid. That is, they should be settled promptly. The present imperative has a continuous force: "Don't continue owing. Pay your debts." Not a bad reminder on the last day of Lausanne II in Manila!

Is it too much to apply this more generally to our relationships, as in "let not the sun go down upon your wrath"? How utterly transforming it would be if we were to leave here with all our debts cleared away, all our reconciliations concluded, and our old enmities transformed. It is not too much for God, even if it seems like an unreasonable request to us.

I am aware of the difficulties many people have experienced: the tensions of a missionary past, the memory of paternalistic relationships, the growth of an unhealthy and sometimes ungodly nationalism, and much more. Even in this Congress, there has been much for which we need to ask God for his mercy, and our brothers and sisters for forgiveness.

Paul then applies the same principle to loving. Love is a permanent obligation—a debt impossible to discharge. As Origen put it long ago: "The debt of charity is permanent, we are never quit of it; for we must pay it daily and yet always owe it."

Paul sees this as a simple duty resting on the humblest believer, not just the work of the greatest of saints. Whatever else we do, or do not do, we are to love. Those who love fulfill the commands: do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not covet.

Love does no harm to its neighbor, and is in this sense the fulfillment of the law. Paul reminds his listeners they are to live in this way, understanding the present time. The J. B. Phillips paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 13 helps us even more:

This love of which I speak is slow to lose patience—it looks for a way of being constructive. It is not possessive: it is neither anxious to impress nor does it cherish inflated ideas of its own importance.

Love has good manners and does not pursue selfish advantage. It is not touchy. It does not keep account of evil or gloat over the wickedness of other people. On the contrary, it is glad with all good men when Truth prevails.

Love knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope; it can outlast anything. It is, in fact, the one thing that still stands when all else has fallen (1 Corinthians 13:4–8).

We now come to the famous verse of Augustine's conversion, verse 14. He tells us of it in his *Confessions*. The metaphor is that of being clothed in the moral disposition and character of Christ, taking the garments which are the most visible feature of all. J. B. Phillips expresses it well when he says: "Let us be Christ's men from head to foot, and give no chances to the flesh to have its fling."

My very dear friend, David Bentley-Taylor, writing of Augustine's conversion says:

As he lay there in intense distress he heard what seemed to be a child's voice from one of the other houses, saying, "Take and read," over and over again. He rose and went back to where Alypius was sitting, for he had left the copy of Paul's Epistles there. "I snatched it up, opened it, and in silence read the passage on which my eyes first fell." It was Romans 13:13–14: "Not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissention and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." There was no need for him to read on. "In that instant, with the very ending of the sentence it was as though a light of utter confidence shown in my heart and all the darkness of

uncertainty vanished." There and then the wayward, proud, immoral Augustine, unhappy and full of doubts, was gone. A new Augustine was born "in that instant" (*Augustine: Wayward Genius* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1981], 39).

In response to this, there are four things I'd like to address. We need to clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ: in our personal morality, in our worshiping life, in our community concern and involvement, and as we anticipate his coming.

Clothe Ourselves in Personal Morality

Romans 13:13–14 is directed to our individual moral activity: It is a call for purity and godliness. It is suggesting a standard different from the world around us. Today, it is not fashionable to teach or call for such an "apartness" in many of our communities. It wasn't in Paul's day either!

This is not to suggest we won't be tempted, we won't fail, or we won't despair in ourselves. Rather, this tremendous verse seeks to set before us a way of living that: is God's way, is different, protects the family, limits sexual promiscuity, honors personal discipline and restraint, and offers us the unifying power of the Holy Spirit through whom all this is possible

I have a dear friend who lives in Central Asia. He is involved in a tentmaking ministry. For thirty years, he has lived in his adopted land and identified with the language, culture and customs of this strongly Islamic nation. His engineering and construction business has been a blessing to thousands of individual Christians and many national and international mission agencies. In recent years, his determined stand for honesty and truth has been challenged by the authorities. His determination when undertaking any contracts to not offer or accept a bribe (in any form) has meant delayed payments, vilification, and continuous court cases. One case has been proceeding for almost ten years. He is currently before the courts on a new charge and refuses to buy his way out of trouble, but, rather, trusts the Lord for his needs and for his ultimate justification. This is what it means to clothe yourself with personal morality.

Clothe Ourselves in Our Worship Life

The fellowship we are to experience is also included. A detailed description of the partnership of the early church is found in Acts 2:42–47:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

We need to confess honestly that this fellowship in the Lord Jesus and with each other, has not always been an obvious characteristic in our congregational experience, even though it has been splendidly present at this Congress.

If we do not anticipate a deeper sharing and loving, then we shall be no different from the community of people that surround us, from whom we have been called to become a special people.

The apostle Peter was specific when he said:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Peter 2:9).

From time to time, I share in a worshipping community where such unity and spiritual power is manifestly present. There was a youth convention in Waitarere, New Zealand, about ten years ago, when we prayed and sang and witnessed on an Easter evening until early in the morning. And I remember a mere handful of unlikely believers in Teheran, Iran, in 1986, whose worship was as splendid and awesome as that in any great and magnificent cathedral. Along with three other bishops, I went to consecrate a new bishop. We were the first such official “delegation” in five years. The atmosphere was electric, the welcome overwhelming, and the worship quite indescribable. I returned there again last year and hope to do so again in a few weeks’ time. My dear sisters and brothers, please pray for the church, for the people of God in Iran. I shall never forget the vitality and overpowering joy of the worship of the congregation my own mission team visited in Soweto, in South Africa, just twelve months ago.

In the tiny village of Ibillin in Galilee, my Palestinian brother in Christ, Elias Chacour, seeks to apply this same principle in his small Melkite village community. He has told his amazing story in a book titled *Blood Brothers*. In this excerpt, he demonstrates the effect of salvation and repentance in their lives:

The momentum carried us out of the church and into the streets where true Christianity belongs. For the rest of the day and far into the evening, I joined the groups of believers as they went from house to house throughout Ibillin. At every door, someone had to ask forgiveness for a certain wrong. Never was forgiveness withheld. Now I knew that inner peace could be passed from man to man and woman to woman.

As I watched, I recalled, too, an image that had come to me as a young boy in Haifa. Before my eyes, I was seeing a ruined church rebuilt at last, not with mortar and rock, but with living stones.

Clothe Ourselves in Community Concern and Involvement

In 1983, the Australian churches produced a social justice statement entitled, “Changing Australia?” It was issued on behalf of most of the churches and called for a “fair chance” for all Australians, and criticized the inequalities and lack of justice in our society. However we understood the contents of that material (and it was strongly criticized in some sections of our community), the fact that churches together spoke to the society, questioned the direction we were taking, and denied the omnipotence of the politicians, was in itself a marvelous example and achievement.

The Lausanne movement has something to prove, in its spoken and written example, and in its leadership. A dichotomy between gospel and community is a false one. A dichotomy between the sacred and the secular is a travesty of the truth. A dichotomy between salvation and life is a heresy from which the New Testament, when carefully and faithfully read, will rescue us. We need to clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ in new community concern and involvement.

Clothe Ourselves with the Lord as We Anticipate His Coming

His coming was fulfilled in the Bethlehem event, and is relived again and again in our devotions. His coming is our daily experience, in each of the ways we have been sharing. His coming will be fulfilled again in glory, possibly sooner than we might think or presume.

There is a story that sums up the themes of these studies:

- The urgency of the task (Romans 10:14–17)
- The sacrificial lifestyle required of us (Romans 12:1–2), and
- The unifying power of love-service (Romans 13:13–14).

Several years ago a group of salesmen went to a regional sales convention. They assured their wives that they would be home in plenty of time for dinner. But with one thing and another the meeting ran overtime so the men had to race to the station, tickets in hand. As they charged through the terminal, one man (the one telling this story) inadvertently kicked over a table supporting a basket of apples. Without stopping, they all reached the train and boarded it with a sigh of relief. All but one. He paused, realized what had happened, and experienced a twinge of compunction for the boy whose apple stand had been overturned. He waved good-bye to his companions and returned to the terminal. He was glad that he did. The ten-year-old boy was blind. The salesman gathered up the apples, and noticed that several of them were bruised. He reached into his wallet and said to the boy, “Here, please take this ten dollars for the damage we did. I hope it didn’t spoil your day.” As he started to walk away, the bewildered boy called after him, “Sir, are you Jesus?” The salesman stopped in his tracks. And he wondered! (William J. Bausch, *Storytelling, Imagination and Faith* [Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Pubns., 1986], 177.)

May the Lord in his mercy continue to give us time to be Jesus to one another, and to the millions who do not know him as Savior and Lord. And, may the conclusion of this Congress be the beginning of glory for man.