

The Gospel According to Paul: Romans

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Concerning Love and Duty (13:8-10)

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery (7th)," "You shall not murder (6th)," "You shall not steal (8th)," "You shall not bear false witness (9th)," "You shall not covet (10th)," [Exodus 20:13-15, 17; Deuteronomy 5:17-19, 21] and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." [Leviticus 19:18] ¹⁰Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

The Decalogue (Ten Commandments) of Exod 20:1-17 (and Deut 5:7-21) was broken into two parts: commandments one through four dealing with the Jew's relationship to his God and commandments five through ten dealing with the Jew's relationship to his fellow Jew [specifically, his neighbor; *neigh* – near and *bour* – farmer]; literally, someone close enough to develop a relationship. Here in Rom 13:9 Paul refers only to those commands dealing with man's relationship to his fellowman and he follows the order of commandments six through ten as they are listed in the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint/LXX) in Deut 5:7-21.

In these words, Paul is no doubt drawing from the teaching of Jesus on the proper understanding of *Torah*. How did he come by this teaching of Jesus? Did he get it from Peter during his stay with him in Jerusalem? Did he get it from the church at Antioch during the period he spent with them

after his conversion? Perhaps, it was from the messianic stories of Jesus circulating through the oral tradition of the early church. Was it revelation from God during his time in Arabia and Syria following his conversion? We don't know, but we do know that the teachings of Jesus were widely circulated throughout Palestine during the early days of the church.

Whatever the source of this interpretation of the Decalogue, the significance of it is found in the last part of v 9 and in v 10, where he sums up the purpose of these laws dealing with human relationships, ". . . and whatever other commandment there may be are summed up in this one rule: "Love (*agapao*) your neighbor as yourself. Love (literally with the definite article "the *agape*") does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love ("the *agape*") is the fulfillment of the law." And the key word here again is *agape* - love characterized by the quality of unselfishness. In James 2:8 this rule of Lev 19:18 is called "*nomon basilikon*" the regal/reigning law (i.e., the law which reigns above all laws).

The word translated "debt" (NIV), "owe" (KJV/NKJV/ASV/RSV) is the Greek word *opheilo* which literally means "I ought" (duty, obligation, responsibility); it is the word the Greek philosophers used when discussing one's moral responsibility – what one ought to do. When we come to issues of love and ought/duty, according to Paul, our "ought" is to love. Not just any love, but *agape* - love in a completely unselfish way: love without strings attached, with no hidden agenda, with no "ifs," with no conditions. The person possessed of this characteristic is a person filled with complete good-will toward his fellowman. I owe you this as a new creation being in Christ. It is the essential "ought" for the disciple of Jesus. It is what makes us most like Jesus of Nazareth.

5. A Call to Awaken to Moral Awareness (13:11-14)

And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.¹² The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.¹³ Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

End Time Imagery

This "call/exhortation" is filled with terms and images associated with the messianic expectation and the end of the age, found throughout Jewish apocalyptic literature. Knowing the time means, "knowing how to read the special signs of the closing of the age." The hour (lit. the now hour) is an expression used for, "the hour of the coming/visitation of God." Awakened from (literally, raised out of) sleep was used of people who had been, "awakened out of the stupor of ignorance by knowledge of God." The nearness of salvation/deliverance had to do with, "the imminence of God's coming visitation." The night far gone (lit. advancing) and the day at hand is a piece of "dawning imagery" associated with the end of time (the *eschaton*) that was to occur as a dawning of the sun in early morning. All of this imagery is found throughout the apocalyptic writings of 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra, Baruch, et. al., of the Pseudepigraphal writings of the Judaism of the late second century BC and early first century AD.

There is a large presence of terminology and concepts in the writings of Paul that are also found in the literature of Jewish apocalypticism. Scholars are finding more and more evidence of a wide influence of this literature within the Judaism of the first century Mediterranean world. With the presence of Hellenistic godfearers in the synagogues, as is evident from the book of Acts, it should be of no surprise to us that Paul assumes that these concepts are familiar to those of the Hellenistic synagogues from which many of the converts of the Roman church no doubt came.

Imagery of Spiritual Transformation

The idea of **casting off** and **putting on** certain types of clothing was a piece of imagery most likely drawn from the ceremonies associated with donning priestly robes, or regal attire, or even the armor of battle. This was a very significant piece of imagery in the Hebrew Scriptures, among some Jewish sects (esp., then Essenes, and/or the Dead Sea Sect), and in the Hellenistic religions as well. In the Mystery Religions (e.g., the Cult of Isis and Osiris, Dionysus, and Gnosticism, and others) the initiate was inducted into the group by casting off an old soiled garment and putting on a new garment or robe of white linen as a symbol of his change of roles and his new identity. This new robe may be the robe of the god or goddess with which the initiate had become one, as with the Gnostics. This was especially so with the priests and priestesses who, for example, wear the robes of Osiris

or Isis. The robing and disrobing ceremony made for a very popular metaphor in the literature of this period.

Perhaps here Paul is drawing on the imagery of the putting on of the robes of the god to whom one has become a devotee - a practice common to many religions from within Hellenism and Judaism as well; e.g., the Essenes, and especially the Dead Sea Sect who saw themselves sons of light and practiced the purification rite of immersion on a daily basis and wore white clothing as a symbol of their purity.

Here Paul uses the imagery of putting off "the works of darkness" and putting on of "the armor or weapons of light." In the Dead Sea Scrolls we read of the sons of light (the Qumran community) who arrayed for battle with the sons of darkness. Paul identifies the works of darkness with such practices as revellings, drunkenness, sexual intercourse (lit. coitus), lasciviousness, strife, and jealousy. Casting off these works of darkness they are to put on (lit. clothe themselves) with the Lord Jesus Christ.

This terminology and imagery is similar, if not identical, to Paul's interpretation of the spiritual transformation that occurs in the conversion of the Christian. Paul's new creation imagery would have been understood by his readers of both Hellenistic and Jewish backgrounds. This theme of new creation with all the attending motifs is very present in the letters of Paul. The motifs of note are: the putting off the old existence and putting on a new existence, as well as clothing oneself with the identity of the deity of one's belief as though one were putting on a garment. Present also are the burial of the old being and the resurrection of the new being out of the waters of purification, now having the characteristics of the one in whose image the believer has been recreated. These themes are prominent in 2 Cor 5:17; Rom 6:1-6; Gal 3:26-27; Ephesians 4:17-5:2; and Colossians 3:5-14.

Conclusion

Paul concludes this Roman 13:8-14 text with the words: "do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh," (13:14). He ends his thoughts in this block of material with the same concerns he expressed in 12:1-2. They must be about the business of presenting themselves as living sacrifices to God. Failure at this point will leave them open to the ever present desire to serve themselves - and thoughts of how to gratify the desires of the flesh (13:14). When this happens self-concern is out of

control and relationships will be destroyed. Here is why Paul is so insistent that this community of believers should give serious concern to their attitudes toward themselves and toward others.

The process of being transformed by the renewing of their minds (*nous*) clearly involved their thinking/mind-set (*phroneo*) with reference to who/what they were as new creations in Christ and who/what they as a community of believers were as a body of beings sharing their new creation existence - an existence which is supposed to be different that the existence of those whose existence was yet that of the old creation existence in Adam.

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