**Family Responsibilities**

**FBC Albemarle**

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The first sentence of the *New York Times* article said, “It took nearly a decade, but debt has made a comeback.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Americans have now borrowed more money than they had at the height of the credit bubble in 2008. In the first quarter of 2017, the per household debt in U.S. reached a new peak: $12.7 trillion. I don’t think this is something we should celebrate. The fact of the matter is that many Americans are living beyond their means and they are falling further and further into debt.

The average credit card balance-carrying debt is $16,048 per household. The average student loan these days is $29,400 and I don’t have to remind many of you that the price of education is going up every year. Decades ago, people still fell into debt but the controls were much tighter. Today, it is easy to borrow money and fall further into debt. Millions of people in America live beyond their means, taking out more and more loans and getting a wallet full of plastic, which then in turn run up even more interest and other charges.

One of the most terrible things about debt is that it dominates your mind. When you try to make sound financial decisions, debt still obstructs you from doing what is best. When you try to plan for the future, debt stands in the way. Debt determines how you see the world.

So why does Paul begin this passage by saying we’re in debt? Who are we indebted to? Paul walks a fine line here between free grace and earning our salvation. However, I think Paul is definitely right. Our debt is to God who loves us and who saved us through the sacrifice of his one and only son, Jesus. Due to Christ’s life, death and resurrection, we are children of God – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. There is nothing we have done to earn that type of salvation. However, that doesn’t mean that we don’t have any responsibilities when we do become children of God.

Having worked with youth for the better part of the last 25 years, I can pretty quickly figure out which ones have chores they were to accomplish as part of being in the family and those who do not have any responsibilities at home. Their work ethic is different. Their outlook on life is different. Those who have responsibilities at home, however small or large, seem to have less sense of entitlement than those who do not have any responsibilities.

As a kid, I washed dishes after dinner. When I got into middle school, I washed and ironed my own clothes and I mowed 1/3 of the lawn in the summers. I hand-picked weeds out of the gravel driveway and I washed the over-sized Cadillac and the family station wagon when asked. These were not “optional” activities to fill my time. These were my responsibilities in being a part of the family.

As part of God’s family, I believe we also have some responsibilities. These responsibilities are not to earn anything. I did not have to do my chores to be part of the family. I did them BECAUSE I was part of the family. In the same way, we have responsibilities as a follower of Christ BECAUSE we are part of the family of God.

First, Paul says to live an exemplary life. We are not to give into our sinful nature as Christians. We are to live by the Spirit, which helps us to “put to death the misdeeds of the body.” You see, we are not indebted to the flesh; it has done us no favors. If we try to live by the flesh, than we are simply inviting death to take control of our lives. Instead, we are to say ‘NO’ and ‘put to death’ all that our flesh desires. A Christian life that does not involve putting to death that which drags us down into the world of the ‘flesh’ is not worthy of the name.

An exemplary life does not mean life without fault or sin. We all recognize that sin gets the best of us at times. We know that we fall short of Christ’s example, the exemplary life we are to model. Living an exemplary life means that we do the best we can in ‘putting to death’ our fleshly desires and taking up the desires of the kingdom.

I think it is interesting that no matter where you live, people’s perceptions of Christians and the church are pretty similar. While in Peru, as we were sharing our story with people in the town square or in the market, I ran into several guys that had the same answer of why they didn’t go to church. They said churches are just full of hypocrites. My answer took them by surprise…I told them they were right. Yes, the church is full of people who profess Christ but deal with sin on a daily basis. Yes, the church is full of people who live as if Christ is not Lord of their lives. Yet, the church is full of people who have received the free grace of Christ and who are just trying to figure out life together in community. We do not ever achieve an exemplary life. We simply strive towards it.

Second, Paul says to live in freedom and not in a spirit of slavery to fear. When we turned our lives over to Christ, we were all adopted into the kingdom of God. Inside that kingdom is freedom.

I think it is interesting that the world’s perspective of Christians is that we are “slaves” to a list of do’s and don’ts. What is the old saying…”Christians guys shouldn’t smoke, chew or date girls who do.”? Somehow, Christians have been labeled “buzz-kills” or “goody-too-shoes.” Yet, Paul says we are not slaves to fear of “what might happen” or “what-ifs.” In Christ, we have freedom because we are free to live life to the fullest. We are free to chase after our dreams. We are free to love as Christ loved. We are free to pursue the life that God has designed for us to live. As Christians, we are not slaves to the standards of the world or to the world’s definition of happiness. In Christ, there is freedom!

Finally, we are to share in the suffering of Jesus. Living an exemplary life in the freedom of the Spirit caused much suffering for Jesus. Jesus took on the mocking of his people, beating of the soldiers and ultimately sacrificed himself for all people. Living in freedom comes at a cost. There is so much we could talk about when it comes to sharing in Christ’s suffering. Yet, for us today, we will simply remember the suffering we have faced because we live in a broken world.

This, then Paul said is why we are ‘debtors.’ We are debtors to the God who loves us, who has saved us, and who is leading us home to the land we have been promised, and eventual new creation. Inheriting that, we shall forever be in God’s debt. Debtors, after all, are under an obligation. Some people speak and live as if everything simply comes to us from God while we sit still and merely receive it. But God’s gift to us is not for ourselves alone, but for the purpose of transforming the world. Some people are a little anxious to believe that we have a role to play because it might compromise the free grace by which we are saved. However, Paul is pretty sure that as debtors, we have a role to play by living an exemplary life, living in freedom and sharing in the suffering. Let us pick up our responsibilities and allow God to receive the glory!

1. Corkery, Michael, and Stacey Cowley. "Household Debt Makes a Comeback in the U.S." *www.nytimes.com*, May 17, 2017. Accessed July 18, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/17/business/dealbook/household-debt-united-states.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)