

THE DEMAND OF THE HOUR

by: Ray C. Stedman

INTRODUCTION:

A Christian faith that doesn't change your life isn't worth a 'snap of the finger,' but when Christ changes a heart and a life, the change that he makes is going to affect everyone around you!

This is really the theme of what we have in Chapters 12-16 of Romans. It is a picture of a Christian 'up to his ears' in life. The result of a truly Christ-like life, lived out in the world, is going to be that some around you will be upset by the way you act. You will be upsetting some and comforting others. As someone has said, "The ministry of a Christian is to comfort the afflicted, and afflict the comfortable."

We have already seen in this section the true attitudes that a Christian life produces:

First of all, there will be an eagerness to minister among the body of Christ, to other Christians, according to the gift that God has given you. Of course, every believer in Jesus Christ is given gifts; to withhold the ministry of those gifts is to rob Christ of his right to be available and ministering to men through you, and to rob him of his inheritance in the saints. I think it is interesting to face the implications of that.

Then, also, there comes an awareness and a readiness to accept and to love others just because they are brothers in Christ -- not because they are nice, or lovable, but because they are Christians. No matter where they are, what the color of their skin, or the background of their life, we love them because they love the Lord Jesus Christ. This is brought forth beautifully in the twelfth chapter. In the latter part of Chapter 12 we saw the attitudes and changes made in our life as we relate to the sometimes hostile world around us. In this relationship, the attitude of a Christian is to return good for evil; he overcomes evil with good, and he doesn't give back in kind or, if he does, he is not living a Christ-like life.

The third aspect, you remember, was the effect of Christian faith on our attitude toward government. We recognize that government is an institution of God, and that government agencies are servants of God deserving our respect and obedience. We realize, further, that our own fellowship with Christ is affected by the way we behave as citizens, and that our conscience can be very vitally disturbed if we do not give to government, and to those who represent the government, the rightful respect and obedience that they deserve as servants of God.

THE DEMAND OF THE HOUR:

This brings us to Verse 8 of Chapter 13. In the rest of this chapter, Paul flings back the boundaries of life to include all human society, and, in this section, you will find the people that you rub shoulders with every day.

What are you going to do with them? How do you treat them?

Owe no One Anything:

Paul summarizes the Christian outlook here in one great tremendous word, and it is brought before us as the demand of the hour:

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to

a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. {Rom 13:8-10 RSV}

Now, I think that many people have questions about this opening sentence: "Owe no one anything."

They ask themselves, "Is it wrong for a Christian to contract a debt, or to buy on the installment plan or mortgage his house. Is this wrong? Is it prohibited by this sentence, 'Owe no one anything'?"

Well, the answer is, "No!"

It is not wrong because a contract, of course, is really just a mutually agreed upon arrangement by which the money is to be paid. It is mutual, and it is never a debt unless you miss a payment; then you come under the enforcement of this passage. But, of course, if you deliberately go out and contract for more than you are able to pay for, this is dishonesty in the extreme.

Paul is pointing out that no Christian must do this because, if you live on this basis, what you are really doing is living on another person's money without his permission, and that is simply a glorified form of stealing. So he urges, "Owe no one anything."

The Debt of Love:

But there is a debt that you can never fully pay, and it is a continually valid debt -- the debt of love.

You remember, at the beginning of this very letter to the Romans, Paul says, "I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarians," {cf, Rom 1:14}. I owe every man a debt; I owe him the obligation to love him; I owe him the necessity of love.

Law is Fulfilled by Love:

The reason Paul gives here, you will notice, is because law is fulfilled by love: Love alone fulfills the Law.

In other words, love makes a good citizen out of you without any need for a police force, without any need for enforcing agencies, because no man who loves his neighbor is going to injure him. If you love your neighbor:

- Whether he lives next door to you or across town from you,
- Whether he works in the shop next to you or at the desk next to you,
- Whether you have any other relationship with him,
- If you love him, you can't injure him!

You will never commit adultery with his wife, or kill, or steal, or covet something that he has. You won't envy his brand new car, or his fine green lawn, or anything else that he possesses because, if you love him, you are concerned about his welfare. But the man who hasn't learned to love is merely forced to wait until he can find a good opportunity to do some of these things that are unlawful and injurious. That is why love alone fulfills the law.

Love Alone Fulfills the Law:

I was reading just the other day a report in which Chief Justice Warren said that laws are not enough to preserve order in our land. He is right. We need a widespread desire to keep the law, first of all, and, if we don't have that, law alone is insufficient to control life.

This seems to be the missing element today in so much of life. Just this week I heard of a young lawyer across the bay who was prosecuting a couple of men in a case. He had just obtained a conviction when, right in the court room, as soon as the sentence was pronounced, these two young men arose, and ganged up on him, and beat him so seriously that he had to be sent to a hospital.

This happened right in the very presence of the judge, the bailiff, and the other agencies of law in that

courtroom.

This attorney has now discovered that the wife of one of these men is threatening to kill him.

This is a criterion of the lawless spirit that has seized our age, and the reason is because men are losing their ability to love, and their capacity to love, and law is {being} relied upon alone as sufficient to keep order -- but it isn't! As Paul points out here, it is impossible to maintain government if you just have law alone. Love fulfills law.

As a result, in our present situation, the Chief Justice felt the situation is so desperate that he is calling for the formation of what he calls "ethical counselors" -- that is, men who can really teach other people how to love. This the great need -- love alone can fulfill law.

If this is true, then I think you will agree that the great and overwhelming demand of our day is to find a way to create love in men's hearts, to find a way to teach us how to love.

Love thy Neighbor as Thyself:

The other day at a breakfast meeting of executives, one of the men brought up the passage in which our Lord quotes these words: "Love thy neighbor as thyself," {Lev 19:18, Matt 19:19, 22:39, Mark 12:31 KJV}.

It was agreed among all those men present that, if men would do this, this would solve all the problems of our lives. Everybody nodded his head very sagely, and fully agreed, but somebody had the temerity to ask, "How do you do this?" And no one had an answer.

You see, this is the great demand of the hour.

I will Do Good to Someone:

Now, I think it would be easy to leave this right here, but I am not content to do so because this isn't the whole picture of love, and I don't want you to get a false and distorted emphasis. It is true that love will keep a man from ruining or harming his neighbor, but love goes further than that. That will satisfy the law, but that will never satisfy the heart of God if that is all that you show.

I think it is easy for Christians to be very smug right at this point. So many of us pat ourselves on the back, and say, "Well, I have never done any harm to anyone," and we expect to be commended for that position. I have found that kind of an expression usually doesn't stand very close examination when you analyze it carefully. But, even if it did, this isn't the full expression of love. Look at Verse 20 of Chapter 12 of Romans, "... if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head." That is love. Not just an attitude that says, "Well, I've never done any harm to anyone. I won't hurt anyone." But a positive approach that says, "I will do good to someone."

You see, the Golden Rule is not "Don't do unto others as you would not have them do unto you." It is positive. That negative way is the pagan form of the Golden Rule. You'll find it in the writings of Confucius and Buddha, but it is always in the negative form, "Don't do unto others as you have them not do unto you." But that isn't what Jesus said. Jesus said, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," {cf, Matt 7:12}. This is a positive approach.

Now, I think that we will never begin to manifest this kind of love, which is so needed today, for lack of which society is simply coming unglued, coming apart at the seams -- we will never begin to manifest this outreaching love, illustrated by the Lord in the parable of the Good Samaritan, until we first become aware of how pitifully we Christians often lack it.

He Sent Leanness:

I picked up in the bookstore this week a very delightful little book. It is called *He Sent Leanness*. The subtitle

is *Book of Prayers for the Natural Man* . It is a very engaging little book in which are set forth prayers as men are really praying them -- not the words that we usually hear, but the thoughts that are usually behind them -- the way we would pray if we prayed honestly what is in our heart. I want to read a portion of a litany which is written in this book setting forth that kind of prayer. This is the way it reads:

From a universe where things can be extremely unpleasant,
Deliver us, Good Lord.

From everything that calls from us courage and endurance,
Deliver us, Good Lord.

From all ignorance, insecurity, and uncertainty,
Deliver us, Good Lord.

From all personal needs that give the love of others a chance to find expression,
Deliver us, Good Lord.

From suffering the balloon of our pride to be pricked,
>From suffering the castle of our self-satisfaction to be attacked,
>From suffering the thunder of our egotism to be stilled,
Deliver us, Good Lord.

From all vicissitudes and deprivations that throw us back upon You,
Deliver us, Good Lord.

We miserable owners of increasingly luxurious cars, and ever-expanding television screens, do most humbly pray for that two-thirds of the world's population which is undernourished;
You can do all things, O God.

We who seek to maintain a shaky civilization do pray most earnestly that the countries which suffer exploitation may not be angry with the exploiters, that the hungry may not harbor resentment against those who have food, that the downtrodden may take it patiently, that nations with empty larders may prefer starvation to communism, that the "have not" countries may rejoice in the prosperity of those that have, and that all people who have been deeply insulted and despised may have short memories;
You can do all things, O God.

We who prosper through the work and patience of others pray that we may have the sense not to drive them too far;
You can do all things, O God.

We pray that our statesmen may do everything they can to promote peace, so long as our own national history and honor and pride and prosperity and superiority and sovereignty are maintained;
You can do all things, O God.

That the sick may be visited, the prisoner cared for, the refugee rehabilitated, the naked clothed, the orphan housed, and the we may be allowed to enjoy our own firesides, evening by evening, in peace;
You can do all things, O God.

O Son of God, we beg, we beseech, we supplicate, we petition, we implore You to hear us.
Lord, be good to us.
Christ, make things easy for us.
Lord, deliver us from the necessity of doing anything.

This is written with tongue in cheek, but there is much truth in it, isn't there? How this points up the need of the hour -- the supreme need for men and women who have learned how to show the simple grace of love in action.

The Hour that Demands:

We will see in a moment how this is to be done; but now, from the demand of the hour, Paul asks us to take a look at the hour that demands:

Besides this you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake up from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand. {Rom 13:11-12a RSV}

Do you notice what he says here? He says you know what hour, that is, what season it is. Do you know that?

- Do you know where we are in the great program of God's redemption?
- Do you know where the events of our day are taking us?
- Do you know what lies ahead?
- Do you know what God is doing today?
- Do you know that?

Well, if you know these things from the Scriptures, then you know that from the appearance of Christ in the manger at Bethlehem to the present time is what is called in the Scriptures "the last age" or "the last hour" of human history. And, if you know that, then you know, as Paul says, that it is the time to wake up!

It is Time to Wake Up:

I submit that this is the word we need to hear today. I am afraid that we often hear men preaching who are aware of the fact that the age is drawing to a close, but their word to us is not to wake up, but to hurry up. Yet, as I turn to the pages of the New Testament, I never find that word "hurry" occurring. It isn't "hurry up," it is "wake up" that the Lord is continually saying to us. It is not hurry that is needed.

Not Hurry:

Back in Isaiah, Isaiah says, "He that believeth need not make haste" {cf, Isa 28:16 KJV}. That is a wonderful word: "He that believeth need not make haste."

Did you ever see Jesus Christ in a hurry? In all the record of the four Gospels, there is no account of him ever hurrying. He didn't need to hurry because he knew.

What the hour demands of us today is not to hurry up, but to wake up. It is not hurry that is needed, it is awareness.

Awareness:

"Watch," Jesus said over and over to his disciples. "What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch," {Mark 13:37 KJV}.

Watch:

- Act intelligently,
- Don't act in panic, but in knowledge,
- Be aware of what you are doing,
- Act purposefully and intelligently,
- Wake up!

If we look around us, with our Bibles in our hands, I think we can see that the long, dark night is beginning to lighten. This long, dark night of sin began at the fall of man, at the fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden, when man, through disobedience, passed from life unto death, and was plunged into the dark depravity of fallen human life. Thus he introduced the world into the darkness of night which has been running through the course of history from the very beginning. But now, the dawn of God's day of "peace on earth, good will to men," that was first announced by the angels when Jesus came to Bethlehem {cf, Luke 2:14}, is very near at

hand. That is what Paul is saying, and "now is our salvation nearer than when we believed," {Rom 13:11 KJV}.

Of course, these Romans already had salvation in the personal sense, but here he is speaking of salvation in the ultimate sense -- the fact that God is going to save the world and the earth, deliver it, and bring it into a place of blessing.

"But," somebody says, "these words were written two thousand years ago, and if Paul expected the end in his own lifetime, as it implies here, then he must have been mistaken, because it has been two thousand years since these words were written."

No, he wasn't mistaken.

Suppose we were driving down a freeway together, and I looked at your speedometer and it was registering 85 miles per hour, and I knew a sharp curve was ahead, and I said to you, "Be careful. Watch out for that curve up there. Death is near." You would know what I meant, wouldn't you? You would know that I wouldn't necessarily mean that we were going to die in the next few moments, but that there was a very real possibility that we might if you didn't adjust the speed of your car.

But, of course, it is true, isn't it, that death is always near to us. The minute that we are born, death is near. Though you live for seventy-five, eighty-five, or ninety-five years, death has been near all that time. The older we grow, the more we realize, and the more certain it is, that death is nearer than when we were born.

Paul is saying the end of the age, the last age, is near. It has been near all along because no one knew when the end would come, but it is certainly much, much nearer now than when Paul first wrote -- since we can look back across the span of two thousand years of human history.

An Approaching Climax:

It is interesting that thoughtful men (not necessarily Christians) are becoming more and more aware of an approaching climax in human history. You can't read the newspapers without being aware that there is an air of sober experience on every side. You travel about, as I have been privileged to do this last summer, and you get the feeling, as you visit various nations, that things have gotten beyond men's control. We sort of stumbled onto a treadmill which is carrying us with frightening rapidity toward an event from which we cannot escape. Men no longer are in control of their own events. Governments are no longer able to govern by advice and consent; they are governed by crises, muddling through, doing the best they can as each crisis develops, and they never know what is coming.

Charles Malik, president of the United Nations for a while, said recently,

The important thing to learn today is that we are living, as the Germans say, "Zwischen der Zeiten," that is, "between the times," when demonic forces can quickly soar very high and can take possession of the world in very short order. The one thing that we must remember is that there is no security between the times -- no security whatever.

I think that you will agree that one of the most evident characteristics of the present hour in which we live is this growing spirit of lawlessness, and utter disregard for authority and order. This is the age of the goof-off in industry, the pay-off in sports, and the buy-off in politics. It is evident also in the mounting cruelty of our times.

Winston Churchill said,

While men are gathering knowledge and power with ever-increasing speed, their virtues and their wisdom have not shown any notable improvement as the centuries unroll, and under sufficient stress, starvation, terror, war-like passion, or even cold intellectual frenzy, the modern man we know will do the most terrible deeds, and his modern woman will back him up.

Yet, coupled with this, is the most pathetic confusion and blindness that I think the world has ever seen. Men and women today are like children lost in a haunted woods. Every pastor hears the most pitiful stories of people who live like very clever animals, but they have no idea what life is all about, and they are restless, and bored, and they don't know why.

I am sure that you are aware of this as much as I.

The Word for the Age:

Now, what is the word for an age like this? What does this kind of an age need? Judgment? No, that is God's work. God is going to speak that word in his own time, and perhaps very shortly, but that isn't the word for today. What is it? Well, we have already looked at it -- it is love. This is the demand of the hour. On every side this is a great hunger in human hearts, and we are living in a love-starved world where men have forgotten how to show simple concern for one another. The great need, then, is for men and women who can love.

The Hour Fulfilled and the Demand Met:

That brings us to the key question:

How do you do this?

How do you love these crazy, mixed up, hard-eyed, hate-filled, offensive people that are so common today?

How do you love these confused, pathetic, shameless folk who live in moral apathy around us?

How do we meet the demand of the day in which we live?

Paul gives us this in this last section. Here is the hour fulfilled and the demand met:

Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness [anybody can do that], not in debauchery and licentiousness [that is common on every hand], not in quarreling and jealousy [that is what you find in the church]. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. {Rom 13:12b-14 RSV}

The Armor of Light:

I like that expression, "Put on the armor of light." Now, what does it mean?

Well, you remember the words of John in his Gospel about the Lord Jesus: "In him was life and the life was the light of men," {John 1:4}. His life is the armor of light that we are to put on. So, when he says here, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ," he is saying the same thing as when he said, "Put on the armor of light." That is, live in continual dependence upon the risen life within -- this is the only way to love. This is the only possibility of love for this kind of person.

You read the four Gospels and all the way through is a manifestation of our Lord loving this kind of people. How did he do it? Well, he said himself, "The works that I do are not mine, the Father who dwelleth in me, He doeth the works," {cf, John 14:10 KJV}. It is the Father who loved, and, as Jesus sent us forth, he said, "As the Father has sent me, so send I you," {cf, John 20:21}. As the indwelling Father loved through the Son, so the indwelling Son loves through the Christian, through the believer.

This is why we are taught that the secret of loving is not to struggle after it, not to work up some affection for somebody, but simply to **put on the Lord Jesus Christ** {see Col 3:10-14}, make his life available to you, appropriate all that he is, and cast away the works of darkness -- then you begin to love. {Do} you see how this agrees with what we had in Romans 6? "... yield not your members to sin as instruments of wickedness,

but yield yourselves to God ... as instruments of righteousness" {see Rom 6:13}. And in Ephesians, "Put off the old man with his death and put on the new man which after Christ is created in true righteousness and holiness" {see Eph 4:22-24}. This is the same exhortation.

In other words, you *have* Christ,

- Now count on him,
- Appropriate him,
- Use him!

Don't sing,

I need thee, Oh, I need thee.
Every hour I need thee.

Sing,

I *have* thee, Oh, I *have* thee.
Every hour I *have* thee.

And love -- that is what he has come to do!

As Paul points out, there is only one thing that is necessary to this -- the desire to break with the old life of lovelessness, selfishness, greed, ambition, and all the other things. It must be a clean-cut thing; there can be no mental reservations about this or any subtle subterfuge. You take him in all the fullness of his overwhelming adequacy for all your utmost needs, but you are to make no provisions for the flesh to gratify its desires along with it.

The Man at the Pool of Bethesda:

You remember when Jesus went to the pool of Bethesda, he found lying there a man who had been bound with a disease for 38 years {see John 5:1-9}. Without ceremony, Jesus walked up to him, and said, "Do you want to be made whole?" {cf, John 5:6}.

It was a startling question, and I'm sure the man was taken off guard for a moment. But he looked up in his confusion, and said, "Well, Lord, there isn't anybody here. I have no man to help me get into the water." Jesus cut him short, and just simply said, "Arise and take up thy bed and walk" {cf, John 5:8}.

The man, looking into his eyes, saw that here was one whose word was with authority, here was one who had all the resources to supply all that his word inferred; so he arose, took up his bed, and walked.

Now, what was it Jesus said? He said to him, "Take up thy bed and walk."

Now, why "take up they bed"?

Have you ever wondered about that story? Why did Jesus insist that the man take his bed with him -- the little, dirty pallet that he lay on? Why didn't he just have the man leave it behind? It was a filthy enough thing after 38 years, I am sure. Why did he have the man take it?

As someone has well said, "Because he desired that he should make no provision for failure." If the man had left the bed there, he would have been back on it within 24 hours.

When Jesus says, "Arise," in the fullness of deliverance, then he also says, "Take up your bed." Don't make any provision for failure, or, as Paul puts it, "make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." Let this be a complete appropriation of all that he is, which means a total renunciation of all that you are.

Making Provision for Failure:

I heard of a man who was delivered in his Christian experience from smoking. He had the habit of smoking that bothered him, and he was delivered from it. He took all his paraphernalia -- his pipes, his tobacco, and his cans, and everything -- and dug a hole in the back yard and buried them there. Then he put a stone over the spot so he would know where to dig in case he couldn't hold out! You see, that is making provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

You say,

"Because I died with Christ, I see that I no longer need to permit this hot temper to rule my life, and I will appropriate him. I will count on him for continual victory in the hour of temptation -- except when someone does me dirt! If they go too far, I think that is justification to loose my temper."

Well, that is making provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

I had a friend who was a printer, and one day a man brought to him a pornographic card to be printed, one of those filthy, lewd things, which he wanted printed for his personal use. He handed it to my friend, the printer, and he said, "I would like you to print this for me. I will pay you extra well for it." The man looked at the card, saw the nature of it, and handed it back, and said, "No, thank you. I don't print this kind of stuff." The other fellow said, "Oh, come on now. Don't try to pull this pious stuff with me. You know that you really enjoy this kind of thing. Just be honest." And the printer looked at him, and said, "You're right. I do. I have a nature which likes to feed upon this kind of thing, but ***I don't feed it!***"

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ:

That is what Paul is saying here. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, take his life, take all that he is and all the fullness of his being to be all that you need, but, along with it, be sure that you are not making some subtle little provision for the flesh to gratify its desire, because you can have all of his life, all that you need, ***but you can't have it for your program***. That is what he reminds us of here. "No," he says, "clothe yourself with his life." Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, but remember it is never "Christ and I" -- it is "Not I, but Christ." This is what the world is waiting to see.

The Need of the Hour:

Some of you have read the little booklet entitled *The Need of the Hour* that Dawson Trotman, founder of the Navigators, wrote. He delivered this message shortly before he died, and it has been printed and circulated around the world. In that message, Trotman comes to this conclusion:

I believe that the need of the hour is an army of soldiers dedicated to Jesus Christ who believe not only that he is God but that he can fulfill every promise that he has ever made and that there isn't anything too hard for him.

I think he is right.

I like Phillips' rendering of this fourteenth verse:

**Let us be Christ's men from head to foot, give no chances to the flesh to have its fling.
{Rom 13:14 J. B. Phillips}**

CONCLUSION:

Do you know what will happen if you begin to do that? All around you, people will begin to see Jesus Christ in you, and ***their*** lives will be changed. They will begin to feel his love and his concern for them burning out through your heart to touch them, to help them, to pray with them, to weep with them, to rejoice with them, to love them! You'll always be finding yourself, somehow, at the right place, at the right time, with the right

people, saying the right thing. You will discover, as you look back, that your life has become what God asks us to be: A light in the midst of a dark and perverse generation.

Prayer:

Our Father, as we look at the world around us, we are so aware of the truth of these words. How desperately the world needs to see this kind of life lived; and the only place, Lord, that this kind of life can be seen by other people around us is in the lives of men and women like us where your life dwells. We pray, then, that these words may come home to us with increasing meaning. May we see that the secret is not the struggle of our own life to do something, not some effort to approach men through some knowledge of psychological principles, but rather the simple effect of a life and a heart that is filled with the presence and the person and the glory of Jesus Christ. May we feast upon him, thank him, dwell with him, live with him, put him on, and appropriate the fact that he indwells us and is ours. Then, Paul tells us, our own life will be changed from glory to glory into the same image, and people will begin to see Jesus Christ walking in the midst of this twentieth century. Lord, we pray for this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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