

Spiritual Insights 03 Rom 13:8

by William MacDonald

William MacDonald's sermon emphasizes the importance of managing debt wisely, serving God in adversity, and recognizing human imperfection while striving for love and contentment in life.

Duration: 45:21

Scripture: 2 Kings 4:8-13, Proverbs 22:7, Matthew 5:16, Matthew 22:37-39, John 3:20, Acts 4:29, Romans 13:8

Topics: "Spiritual Insights"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of wisdom and obedience to God's word. He contrasts the actions of wise individuals who seek to please the Lord with the foolishness of those who only seek to please themselves. The preacher also highlights the need for Christians to be realistic while still maintaining their idealism for perfection. He uses various examples, such as the imperfections in the world and the flaws in every person, to illustrate this point. Additionally, the preacher draws inspiration from the early Christians who did not wait for circumstances to change before serving God, but instead chose to glorify Him in their present circumstances.

Transcript

Contracting a water bill, or a telephone bill, or a light bill. I mean, they come in relentlessly every month, and they are a form of debt. But as far as this verse is concerned, they're not considered as debt when they're paid on time.

Also, it would be quite impossible to run a business today without contracting debt, wouldn't it? Because when the delivery man comes with your supplies and your raw materials, he's not interested in collecting the money every time. They want to put it on an account and bill you every 30 days. So, we need not think of this as being every form of indebtedness.

For instance, a mortgage on a home can represent a very good form of discipleship. I can conceive of a family buying a home with a mortgage. The mortgage is secured by the home, and their total payments might be less than they'd be paying for rent.

And in addition to that, they'd be building up an equity in the home. So, as far as the New Testament is concerned, that would be really a better form of discipleship, wouldn't it? When you say, what does this mean? Well, it means several things. For instance, this forbids going into debt when there's a slim chance to repay.

It forbids that. It forbids borrowing to purchase a product that depreciates in value. It forbids getting into arrears, you know, getting up to your neck in debt and not paying on time.

It forbids borrowing to buy non-essentials. It's very easy to do that, especially with modern advertising being what it is. It forbids overspending on impulse.

You see that latest gadget, and if you believe the advertising, you can't live a normal life without it. Of course, you have lived a normal life without it. But they want to make you so upset and so discontent that you have to get it and you borrow to buy it.

It forbids paying exorbitant interest rates. I think those of you who know anything about interest rates today know that people buying on the installment plan pay anywhere from 18 to 36 percent a year, which is pretty steep in any man's language. This verse of Scripture would forbid that.

This verse is designed to save Christians from dunning creditors, from creditors who are calling you and knocking on your door and ringing your bell all the time. This verse of Scripture is designed to save people from marital troubles as a result of financial mismanagement. And we all know that there are many family troubles and squabbles that arise from that.

This verse of Scripture is designed to save you and me from bankruptcy court. And finally, it's designed to save us from a ruined testimony. Christianity is very practical, and the way we manage our finances oftentimes is a reflection of our Christianity.

And I believe this verse teaches that we should live modestly, within our means, always remembering that the borrower is slave to the lender. And he is, too. Debt is a form of bondage.

Proverbs 22, 7, the borrower is slave to the lender. There's one debt, however, that's always outstanding for the child of God, and that is to love one another. Oh, no man anything but to love one another, for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

Okay, number two. Acts chapter 4 and verse 29. Acts chapter 4 and verse 29.

Now, this is in the early days of the church, and the Christians are being hounded, persecuted, chased. Life is being made as miserable as possible. The apostles Peter and John have just been released from the authorities, and they immediately go to the other Christians.

They find the other Christians huddled together. Somebody has called the Christians, at this time, and the huddled flock whose only crime was Christ. Beautiful, isn't it? The huddled flock whose only crime was Christ.

And they have a prayer meeting, and the verse I'm particularly interested in is verse 29. And now, Lord, they said, behold their threatenings, that is, the threatenings of their enemies, and grant unto thy servants that with all boldness they may speak thy word by stretching forth thine hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child, or servant, Jesus. Now, I see a spiritual insight in this passage, and the insight is this.

The early Christians didn't wait for circumstances to change before they did something for the Lord. They determined to glorify God in the present circumstances, whatever they were. Let me say that again.

The early Christians didn't wait for circumstances to change. They didn't say, manana. No, no.

Whatever the circumstances were, they said, this is the hour, and we're going to live for God in this hour. Oftentimes, we do. We procrastinate.

The student doesn't want to become involved for the Lord until first he gets through college. By the time he gets through college, the graduate is thinking in terms of romance and marriage, if not before then. Well, certainly put it off until after marriage.

Then employment comes along, and the family, and he thinks, well, I'm so involved right now that I'll just put it off for a few years. Pretty soon, he's on the treadmill, and he's working for retirement. That's when I'm going to serve the Lord.

Too often by then, his energy is gone, and his vision for the work of the Lord is gone, and he settles down to a game of golf. Or it might be a situation like this. Oftentimes in life, we are thrown in with people who rub us the wrong way.

They have a dill-pickle personality, or at least we think they have. Maybe it's a leader, and we find he's hardworking and all the rest of it. He's just objectionable.

It's not uncommon for people to go through life waiting for a few first-class funerals before they do something for God. They say, well, when God removes him or her, then I'm going to get busy for the Lord. Well, I want to tell you something.

That kind of person really has exceptionally longevity, exceptional longevity. They really live and live and live. And if you wait until they're removed from the scene, you might be removed from the scene first.

Really. But this is what we do, isn't it? This is what we do. We wait until our circumstances change.

We want a few first-class funerals, and it's not the right thing. Joseph didn't wait. Joseph was taken down to Egypt, thrown into jail, prison, and all the rest.

He didn't wait for his circumstances to change. I might have, but he didn't. He glorified God.

He was witnessing for God there in the prison, interpreting dreams for the butler and the baker, and all the rest. Every moment of Joseph's life, it seemed, he was right on the beam, and it would have been easy for him to procrastinate. Daniel didn't wait.

My, those were dark days, weren't they, when Daniel was taken into captivity, living in a heathen court. He didn't wait. He glorified God right in whatever the circumstances were.

Paul didn't wait. If Paul had waited until situations were ideal, he would have waited too long, because they never were ideal in his life. But I see that here with Peter and John in Acts chapter 4. They didn't say, Lord, clear the air and we'll serve you.

They said, Lord, give us boldness. Here we are, right in the middle of the pressure cooker. Give us boldness to glorify you.

Circumstances in life are never ideal, are they? And not only so, they're not going to get any better if we believe the Bible. And so, I think the spiritual insight here is, now is the accepted time, not only for salvation, but for service as well. Now is the accepted time.

Don't wait until you're older. Don't wait until circumstances improve. Go to work for the Lord right now.

Proverbs chapter 14 and verse 13. Proverbs chapter 14 and verse 13. And this is closely related to the one that we just had, and so it's good that it comes next.

It says, Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness. Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful. What does that mean? Well, it means in the world in which we live, there's no such a thing as pure, unadulterated joy.

That is, happiness, that even when things seem outwardly so happy, yet underneath there's always that which grieves the heart. It's true, too. Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful.

And the lesson, the spiritual insight I learn in this is, there's nothing perfect in this world, that is, under the sun. Nothing that the world has to offer is perfect. Laughter is mixed with sorrow.

Every diamond has a flaw. No perfect diamond. Every person in life has some character defect.

Everybody. Some of us more than others. Every apple has its worm.

Why is this important? Well, it's important for this reason. First of all, it's good to be idealistic. It really is good to be idealistic.

I think God has set in the heart of man and woman the desire for perfection. I really do. He has set eternity in their hearts.

I think God has set in every one of us the desire for perfection. Now, it's good to be idealistic, but it's good to be realistic, too. It's good to be realistic and realize that you and I will never find absolute perfection under the sun.

Because it isn't to be found under the sun. You say, why do you emphasize that? Well, because it's easy for young people to think, well, my family is the only family that has squabbles. Everybody else's family, they're absolutely serene.

They just get along beautifully all the time. Nobody ever makes waves. It's easy for young people to think, well, my parents are the only parents that don't have TV personalities.

Everybody else's parents are just absolutely ideal. Well, you grow older and you learn better. Nothing is ideal under the sun.

It's easy for people to think, to be in a local fellowship, a local church fellowship, a local assembly fellowship, and get kind of discouraged and disappointed when not everything goes smoothly, and you look beyond and the grass is always greener in the other fellow's yard, and you think everything is, they don't have any problems over there. Oh, no? Maybe more. It's easy to go through life looking for friends who are absolutely ideal.

Absolutely ideal. Friends who will never disappoint you. If you find them, you're very, very fortunate.

The fact of the matter is everybody has personality flaws, and as I said before, some more obvious than others. Most of us don't bear too close inspection. You know what I mean? Most of us don't bear too close inspection.

The better you get to know me, the better you get to know me. It's true, too. Really true.

And God has arranged this purposely for a good reason. So instead of being disappointed with people's shortcomings, I think we should emphasize their good points. And I often think of this.

I often think of people I know who have wonderful, sterling quality. This man has this outstanding quality, and this woman has something else in her life. And really, you just marvel.

It's really beautiful, this character that she has. What I often think in that connection, if I could take all of those beautiful character traits and put them all together, do you know what I'd have? Jesus. He combines every perfection of human character.

And I really believe that that's why God has set you and me in a world of imperfection, with this desire for perfection in our hearts, so that we'll look off to Jesus. I said that there was no perfection under the sun, but there is perfection above the sun. And God's purpose is that we be occupied with his beloved son.

We're to look to him, and we'll never be disappointed in him. Looking off unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God. There's no disappointment in him.

Proverbs 19, verse 3. I'm going to read this one from the R.S.E. I'll read it in the King James first, and then in another version. It says in the King James, The foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord. Now listen to it in another version.

When a man's folly brings his way to ruin, his heart rages against the Lord. There's no book on psychology like the Bible. There's no book that gives such insight on human behavior.

You find things here that you won't find in any other book. No textbook on psychology will give you this. Now, who is this man described here? Well, he's a man, perhaps, who makes a profession of faith in Christ.

Let's say that he makes a profession of faith in Christ, and then not everything goes serenely. Maybe he gets caught up into temptation, and he makes ruin out of his life. Let's say he falls into gross sin, and he just fouls his life up.

Now, what does he do? Well, it says here that instead of just bowing and repenting before the Lord, and crying out to the Lord for forgiveness, he turns against the Lord. He turns, his heart rages against the Lord. What does he do? He's blaming God.

That's what he's doing. Now, I think this is a valuable spiritual insight, because down through the history of the Church, you find men who are really vehement in their opposition to the Lord. Maybe they once professed to be Christians, and all of a sudden they just do a big flip-flop, and they become enemies of Jesus Christ.

And you say, whatever caused that? Well, this tells me that oftentimes behind apostasy, and behind turning away from the Lord, you'll find moral failure. Moral failure. This man, by his sin, falls into shame, and disgrace, and financial ruin.

What should he do? He should throw himself on the mercy of the Lord, that's all. God is willing to forgive. But will he do that? No.

He turns against Christ, he renounces the faith, and he becomes a militant atheist. And history is filled with him. The spiritual insight here is that apostasy often finds its roots in moral failure.

Mr. H.H. Pollock was walking down the street one day, and he met a young man who had professed to be a Christian. And when they got talking, this young man began to spew out all kinds of doubts and denials about the Bible, and criticisms of the Lord, and all the rest. And Mr. Pollock listened patiently for a while, and then when the young man had run out of steam, Mr. Pollock said to him, young man, what sin have you been indulging lately? And his arrow hit the spot, and out came a lurid story of sexual sin and failure.

When a man's folly brings his way to ruin, his heart rages against the Lord. Someone has said this, I'd like you to think about it. It is monstrous to charge the providence of God with the consequences of actions that he has forbidden.

Let me explain that. It is monstrous to charge the providence of God with the consequences of actions that he has forbidden. God has said, don't do this.

If you do this, this will follow. Okay, I go ahead and do it, and the consequences follow, and I blame God for the consequences. He's already warned me against it.

He's already told me not to do it. And I do it, and then I blame him for it. When a man's folly brings his way to ruin, his heart rages against the Lord.

It's monstrous to charge the providence of God with the consequences of actions that he has forbidden. That's what men do. There's nothing as bad, really, as the heart of fallen man.

There's nothing as bad. It says in John chapter 3, verse 20, Everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. There's a lot of insight in that verse.

John 3, 20. Everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. Okay, now I'd like to turn back for another verse in 2 Kings 4, verse 13.

And this is a very favorite story of mine. 2 Kings 4, verse 13. Maybe we'd better go back to verse 8. 2 Kings 4, verse 8. And it fell on a day that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman.

And she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread. And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God which passeth by us continually.

Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall. Let us set for him there a bed and a table and a stool and a candlestick. And it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither.

And it fell on a day that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber and lay there. He said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunemite. And when he had called her, she stood before him.

And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care. What is to be done for thee? Wouldst thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among mine own people. I'd just like to take those verses tonight and find a real spiritual insight in them.

I dwell among mine own people. Here is a woman with a great heart and great vision, and Elisha passes by, and he finds a home where he has shown hospitality. And one day she says to her husband, I think it would be a very good thing to add an extra room to our house, just to use for showing hospitality to this servant of the Lord.

He is a man of God. And so they build the chamber, and any time Elisha goes by, he has a place to stay. And so Elisha says to his servant, what are we going to do to reward this woman for what she's done? Because what she did to him, she really did to the Lord.

And so they call the woman in, and they say to her now, what would you like? Would you like, in today's language it would be, would you like to get out of the White House and have an introduction to the president? Or, I don't know why this would be so great, but would you like to go to the Pentagon and meet the commander-in-chief? What it really means is, they were offering her an introduction to some of the great names of that day. And her answer was, I dwell among my people. Now, when you think of that at first, that doesn't seem to have any relationship to what they said to her.

They said, what do you want? Do you want an introduction? She said, I dwell among my own people. What was she saying? She's saying, I'm absolutely content with the lot that God has given me in life. I have no desire to mix with the upper crust, to move among famous people, to hobnob with the elite, she said, quite happy with the position and the place that the Lord has given me in life.

She was a wise woman. The Bible commends her, speaks of her as a great woman. Why? Because there are some people that are never happy with their lot in life.

And they watch TV, and they listen to the radio, and read the magazines, and they think that if they could just mingle with the blue bloods and the great of this world, that everything would be so rosy, and so lovely. If they could just know all the best athletes, and so forth. All the people that make the headlines.

It's a good thing for us to learn that most of God's choices people never make the headlines. They never make the society page. In fact, the only page that most of us ever make is the obituary page when we pass off the theme.

There it's only a few lines. It's been my experience, even in the evangelical world, to meet some big names. And maybe I'll shock you when I say this, but largely it's been a disappointing experience.

I often feel like this great woman of Shunem. I dwell among my people. There's so much ballyhoo in the Christian press.

But I tell you, when you get behind the themes and see what it really is, it's a lot of ballyhoo. It really is. It really doesn't stack up.

Give me the humble, godly, solid citizens, unknown as far as the world is concerned, but well known to God. A. W. Tozer wrote this. I think you'll like it.

I think it's good. He said, I believe in saints. I've met the comics.

I've met the promoters. I've met the founder who puts his name on the front of the building so people will know he founded it. I've met converted cowboys, not too well converted.

I've met all kinds of weird Christians throughout the United States and Canada, but my heart is looking for saints. I want to meet the people who are like the Lord Jesus Christ. Actually, what we want and ought to have is the beauty of the Lord our God in human breasts.

A winsome, magnetic saint is worth 500 promoters and gadgeteers and religious engineers. That's a good sentence. Let me read it again.

A winsome, magnetic saint is worth 500 promoters and gadgeteers and religious engineers. Charles Stimian once said, From the first day I set off to the present hour, my intercourse has been with the excellence of the earth. And every one of them striving to the utmost of his power to show me kindness for the Lord's sake.

Well, it's a good lesson for all of us to learn, Isaac. I dwell among my people. It's a good lesson to know that most Christians don't come from the upper crust.

The weak, the base, the despised, what they would call in India the untouchable, that's where most of us come from. And a wonderful thing to be happy in the place where God has put us and to rejoice that he takes up such unlikely people to use for his glory. Okay, back to the book of Proverbs once again.

And chapter one. Proverbs chapter one. And verse five.

It says, A wise man will hear and will increase learning and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsel. I'm just going to take those first words, the first five words, because there's a wonderful spiritual insight there. A wise man will hear.

In the book of Proverbs you'll find the wise man and the fool. You get those words repeated over and over and over again. The wise man and the fool.

And the difference between the wise man and the fool in the book of Proverbs is that you can tell something to the wise man and you can't tell anything to the fool. That's the difference in a nutshell. The wise man is teachable.

The fool knows all the answers. Don't try to tell him anything. Now that isn't true in the book of Psalms.

The fool is a different man altogether. In the book of Psalms the fool has said in his heart there is no God. You have the agnostic, the atheist in the book of Psalms.

That's the fool. But here in Proverbs and it will help you in your study of the book of Proverbs that the difference between the wise man and the fool is the wise man is open to instruction. The fool says, my mind is made up.

Don't confuse me with the facts. It's not a question of mental capacity at all. This fool here may have a very high IQ.

It's not a question of that at all. It's just that he can't be told anything. He labors under the fatal delusion that his knowledge is infinite and his judgments are absolutely infallible.

He couldn't call a wrong play. When friends tried to counsel this fellow they received nothing but scorn for it. Can't be told.

Rebuke a scorner and he'll hate you. His friends watch him going on headlong. They can see the trouble he's going to get into.

They watch him trying to escape the inevitable results of his folly. But they're helpless to avert the crash. They tell him he won't thank them.

He goes from one crisis to another through life. For instance, his finances. Well, it's just a disaster.

His personal life is in shambles. His business is tottering on the edge of chaos. And what does he say? Does he say, just possibly the fault could be me.

Oh no, he never says that. He says, life is giving me a bad deal. Life is giving me a bad deal.

It never occurs to him that he's the cause of all his trouble. He's generous in offering advice to others and completely oblivious of his own inability to run his own life. Have you ever met this man? He's a compulsive talker.

Seldom comes up for air. And he holds forth with all the aplomb of the Oracle of Delphi. Now the wise man in the book of Proverbs, he's made of better stuff than that.

The wise man realizes, he thinks like this, well I realize that as a result of entrance of sin into the world, sometimes the wires up here are crossed. Sometimes there are shorts. And he realizes that other people can sometimes see aspects to a problem that he might not be able to see.

That he is not capable really of making all the best decisions. And that if he goes to somebody else and shares his problem, often times they can see things that never dawned on him at all. And so he realizes that in the multitude of counselors, there's safety.

The wise man is willing to acknowledge that his memory may be faulty. Do you ever get in an argument with somebody in your home? You say, well this is the way it happened. And they say, no it didn't happen that way at all.

And you're just as sure as you're standing there that that's the way it happened. But then when you check with a third person you find it wasn't that way at all. You know what happens? Your memory was faulty.

And don't think it improves with age. Very embarrassing isn't it? Well the wise man is willing to admit this. Strange really.

We had an illustration of this last week. It could have been very, very sure. The man was absolutely sure.

He said something and was absolutely sure it wasn't that way at all. And yet he couldn't be told it wasn't that way. The wise man, he sometimes makes mistakes, just like the fool.

But he profits from his mistakes. He makes his mistakes a stepping stone to success. The wise man is grateful for a rebuke.

When somebody rebukes a wise man he'll say, well thank you very much. I know it wasn't easy for you to say that to me but I want you to know I appreciate it. That's a wise man.

And most of all, the wise man is willing to say I was wrong. We went over that this morning but here it is again tonight. The Lord must want us to get this lesson.

I was wrong. Three hardest words in the English language to say, in any language. Wise children submit to their parents.

Foolish children rebel. Wise young people obey the scriptural precepts concerning moral purity. Foolish young people do their own thing and reap the consequences.

Wise adults judge everything by whether it's pleasing to the Lord. Foolish adults judge everything by whether it pleases themselves. And so the wise get wiser and the fools are stuck fast in the rut of their own folly.

A wise man will hear. Now as you go through life just keep those five words in mind and keep your eyes open. You'll see illustrations of it every day of your life.

A wise man will hear. We have time for just one more I think. And this one is found in Acts chapter 10 and verse 36.

Acts chapter 10 and verse 36. It says, The word which God sent unto the children of Israel preaching peace by Jesus Christ he is Lord of all. I'd just like to take those closing words and use them as a sentence.

Jesus Christ is Lord of all. One of the great themes of the New Testament is the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Over and over again we're reminded that he is Lord and that we should give him that place in our lives.

To crown Jesus Lord means to surrender our lives to him. It means to have no will of our own. It means to go anywhere, do anything, say anything he wants us to go do or say.

Remember in the Old Testament when the Lord Jesus appeared to Joshua as captain of the host of the Lord he came in an angelic form and appeared to Joshua and Joshua said, Are you for us or against us? He said, Neither. I didn't come to be for you or against you. I came to take over.

This is true. The Lord Jesus does not come to us as a glorified assistant in our lives. He comes to take over.

I know it's easy to sit here in community and say this and hear it. It's another thing to put it into practice. The word Savior occurs 24 times in the New Testament.

Does that come as a shock to you? The word Savior occurs 24 times in the New Testament. The word Lord occurs 522 times. There must be a significance behind that.

The reason I say that is we're always talking about Jesus as Savior. Well, he is Savior. But I'll tell you, he's Lord before he's Savior.

We always say, Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The New Testament never says that. It always says, We say, Our Savior and Lord.

The New Testament says, Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. To make Jesus Lord of my life is the most reasonable thing I can do. He died for me.

If he died for me, the least I can do is live for him. He bought me on the cross of Calvary. If he bought me, then I belong to him.

And if I take my life and use it the way I want to use it, I'm a thief. I'm taking something that doesn't belong to me. We sing it.

Our hymnology is sound. Sometimes our practice of that hymnology is not so good. We say, Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

That's true. O Christ, by bleeding hands and feet, thy sacrifice for me, each wound, each tear demands my life. A sacrifice.

If we can trust God, if we can trust the Lord Jesus for our soul's salvation, why can't we trust him to run our lives? Robert Laidlaw said that, and I'd like to share it with you. He said, There is a lack of sincerity about committing the eternal soul to God and holding back the mortal life. Processing to give him the greater and withholding the lesser.

And we do. We say, I want to trust Jesus for salvation from sin, but I want to live my life the way I want to live it. And Laidlaw says, that's not consistent.

If you can trust the Lord for your eternal welfare, you should be able to trust him to run your life for a few short years down here on earth. How do we crown Jesus, Lord? It must be a first time in my life when I get down on my knees and say, Lord Jesus, I turn over control of my life to you. And then every day of life after that I should renew that act of dedication.

It makes good sense. It really makes good sense. The Lord Jesus can run our lives better than we can.

With his wisdom, love, and power, he can do a better job of it than we. If God had said to me years ago, you can have anything you want in life and just map it out and that's what it will be, I tell you, I couldn't have done it as well as he's done it. Much better to just leave the choice with him and surrender your life to him and let him work out the details.

Jesus Christ is Lord of all, shall we pray. Father, we thank you once again for these spiritual insights that we've had before us tonight. Thank you for the practice.

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