

Paying the Debt of Love

I just watched a convicting teaching by Creflo Dollar, which he titled “paying the debt of love.” Creflo is a disciple of Kenneth Copeland, and Creflo’s was one of several early black ministries still with us. Rev Bill Winston’s was another. Of course Dr. Martin Luther King was the greatest “break-out” black minister. His courage cost him his life.

But Kenneth, and Rev. Winston and Creflo are still going strong, and among them they have seen millions from all races saved. Tuning in to any of them can be a life-saving experience. Creflo’s ministry is called “Life Changers International,” and it’s based in Atlanta, but it reaches out to all the world..

So how does one “pay the debt of love?” The first scripture that sprang to mind upon hearing Creflo’s title was, “Owe no man anything, but to love him...” That’s pretty good advice for living debt free, but the scripture Creflo started with was I Peter 3:10. “He that would love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking lies.”

Many self-styled Christians, hearing this, would assume that that’s not talking about them. But Dollar pointed out that lying and phony behavior infect nearly every congregation. Joyce Meyer often zeroes in on such religious hypocrisy. We paste on our *for church only* smiles, and plaster our cars with “Jesus” decals, but routinely spend hours on social media dishing dirt or surfing after worldly fads and frivolities. Some might spend a little time for Jesus on Sunday. But with too many it’s pleasures first, and maybe a little Jesus later.

Dollar often chides some in his congregation for their phony, holy roller behavior: their herky-jerky weird gestures and quavering vocalizations indicate they are “in the spirit.” Creflo’s imitation of such behavior is hilarious. What such performance-based “monkey shines,” (my mother’s name for it,) really does, says

Dollar, is distract from Christ's "love one another" central message, and convince visitors and channel surfers not to come back. Dollar calls such acting out, "spooky."

Some of that kind of behavior was real, back when the Holy Spirit first invaded and revived some of the dead churches, but once the original shouting and shaking and laughing and falling out was over, I think God wanted the people to incline their ears and efforts unto the more vital task of learning how to love one another in preparation for "the great commission."

Paul pointed out that the best sign to others that you are Christians is by the loving even the hard to love, warts and all. That was the big thing that drew Audrey and I into joining a full gospel church. We had never seen so much intimate and friendly fellowship among the believers. Jesus, in John 13:35, makes it clear: "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love, one for another." But that must be by "love unfeigned."

Another form of religious phoniness is class snootiness. This little limerick catches it pretty well. "A remarkable city is Boston/ The home of the bean and the cod/ Where the Cabots speak only to Lowells/ And the Lowells speak only to God."

But Jesus rebuked such self righteousness on that first Palm Sunday, when He entered the city astride a lowly donkey. He would, many thought, have been obliged to visit the elite first, and if possible in the *dignitaries only* section of the temple. Instead he shouted to Zaccheus, the hated tax collector, who had climbed a tree to get a better view, "Zaccheus, come down, I must stay at your house tonight." George Herbert put it well, "Down came Zaccheus, Downward from the tree;/ Bird that was shot ne'er dropped/ So fast as he."

The problem with people clothed in stifling formalism is that they stress performance over the humility that grace delights in. It seems they want others to believe that their exemplary obedience of the law has made them holier than others. Jesus called them whitewashed sepulchres, shiny on the outside, but “inside full of dead men’s bones.” (Robert Burns’ “Holy Willy’s Prayer” satirizes self-righteousness unmercifully.

Incidentally, besides blasphemy, claiming to be god, the big sin that got Jesus condemned by the Pharisees, was dining with “publicans, and sinners.” But Jesus justified that behavior by acting the servant and washing his disciples’ feet after the last supper, even though He was God in human dress. This last lesson taught that humility, not pride was the greater virtue, as we “look not on our own needs, but on the needs of others.” (Phil. 2:4)

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