



guidelines for living

a 5 minute message

December 11, 2017

What Do You Owe God?

**You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.
1 Corinthians 6:19-20**

Anthropologists will tell you that in almost every known culture and civilization there is an unspoken understanding that comes with a gift—a reciprocity that, in effect, says this: Because I have done *this* for you, you have an obligation to return the favor by doing something for me. In some cultures there are very clear expectations that need to be followed. I remember, years ago, being invited to a child's first birthday celebration in Korea. It was not a balloons and birthday cake sort of thing for the one-year-old, but a very formal gathering of family and friends. Many were dressed in ceremonial attire and there was a veritable feast of wonderful food. But what I most remember is that everyone who attended brought quite expensive gifts or sums of money for the birthday child, and all the gifts were duly noted by the family of the birthday child in a book. With each gift there was an obligation, over a period of years, to return the same value to the donor.

In the Philippines, the obligation sequence is described by the phrase *utangnaloob*, and the proper response to a gratuitous deed or gift is dependent upon the social status and wealth of the recipient. But obligations that may vary are recognized on both sides of the kindness or gift.

Obligations come down to a simple bottom line that says, in effect, "OK, because of what I've done for you, you owe me one in return." When Paul wrote a letter to a wealthy friend and asked him to take back a run-away slave who had been converted in prison, Paul told Philemon that he would repay anything that Onesimus had stolen and subtly reminded Philemon, the slave-owner, that he actually owed his very life to Paul.

Question: Here's an issue that in all probability you have never considered, but think about it. If you are a Christian, what's your obligation to God in response to what He has done for you? In simple terms, what do you owe Him? Some debts are such that no sums of money could ever repay them. For example, if someone saved you from a burning fire, risking his life to save yours, would a simple, "Thank you" be enough? At the same time we talk about grace—everything that God blesses us with including His



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forgiveness, His kindness, His gracious favor—as being free! Just taking it with thanksgiving is popular wisdom, but is this an oversimplification?

If you had asked Paul this question, I think he would have answered and said something like this: “No, you cannot repay God for what He’s done, but you do have an obligation. Here it is: “I’m earnestly contending with you brothers because of God’s mercies that you give your bodies as a living sacrifice. I want them to be holy, and acceptable to God. That’s only your reasonable response to what He’s done for you. And stop allowing the world to force you into its mold and thinking, but be continually transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you may experience and prove what is God’s will, which is good, acceptable and complete.” You will find the essence of what I’ve just said in the 12th chapter of Paul’s letter to the Romans.

To the Corinthians he wrote, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

The redeemed have an obligation to live the same way—not to be worthy of what God has done, not to attempt to pay Him back for the pain and trouble we have caused, but to acknowledge we are His.

Scripture reading: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20