

Romans 13-1

September 10, 2012

By way of review Romans 12 gave us a list of worthy responses, as Paul called them, to our LORD and Savior Jesus Christ for His mercy in redeeming us by His own suffering, death, burial and resurrection. Grace poured out, a gift we did not deserve and mercy without limit, we need not suffer the punishment for our own sin, it has been atoned. All we have to do is accept this grace and mercy by faith. Recalling Ephesians 2:9, "by grace are you saved through faith, it is a free gift of God, lest any man should boast". In other words, by the grace of God we are offered salvation, we can accept that free gift by faith, it is never by any works of ours so that none of us can feel proud of our salvation, we are to boast in Christ.

Paul said we are to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice as a response to this gift of salvation. He told us also we are to avoid conforming to our culture, our lifestyle must be different from what our culture approves. How are we to do this, how can we know whether we are conforming to our culture? We must renew our minds by our diligent study every day of the WORD of God. That WORD is transforming. Those 66 books by 40 authors, coming to us from outside our world, from the Creator will transform us. The WORD of God is living, active and the study of it will cleanse our lives and transform our thinking. God's Holy Spirit is in us working to renew us and He uses the WORD of God as His tool. When we read and study the bible our minds are informed and then transformed to the patterns of godly thinking, the pattern that God originally intended for us.

The 12th chapter of Romans also told us to avoid pride, to appraise ourselves according to the measure of our faith, not our social position, our bank account, our appearance, nor our faith. Next we are to be part of the body of Christ, serving Him with the gifts and talents He has provided and according to His will. We are to genuinely love others and hate what is evil. Along with this we are to be devoted to one another, the idea here is a type of loyalty and affection that family members have for each other. This is the love that allows for weaknesses and imperfections, it is strongly committed. We are to honor others above ourselves, that is respect and value.

We are to rejoice because of God's great love and plan for us. In addition we are to be patient in suffering, God is in control and He is faithful. We are to be faithful, that is authentic, and diligent in our prayer life.

We are expected to be hospitable, to share with those in need and live in harmony with others, not repaying evil with evil. We are to be careful to do what is right or noble or honorable in the eyes of others as a testimony. Our behavior in public and at home is to bring honor to Christ.

Continuing our instruction for right living from Chapter 12, we are to live at peace with others, not avenging evil done to us but letting God take care of that. Again, hating evil and overcoming it with good.

We have been instructed in the way the Christian is to live with others now we receive instruction as to how to relate to our government. Our context then is this letter written in about 56 AD to believers in Rome, the capital of the great empire. Judaism was a permitted religion until AD 19 when Tiberius expelled all Jews from Rome. Another expulsion occurred about AD 50 by Claudius. The situation for any minority religious sect was iffy, depending on the current ruler. At the time of this writing, Christianity was considered a sect of Judaism, which put believers in an awkward position. Christians were accused of causing trouble all over the world according to Acts 17:6-7 Christians were also accused of defying Caesar's decrees, they were saying that "there is another King called Jesus". Wherever the gospel went it usually caused spiritual upheaval because it was a threat to pagan religions and to Judaism. So Paul's purpose here is to urge believers to be careful in their relationships with government authorities in order to avoid difficulties if possible.

Romans 13:1

Submission to government authorities means cooperation, loyalty and willingness to obey. Consider these recipients were a small group this was good advice. Their submission to the laws would allow

them to continue the work of spreading the gospel. Living within the structure of the law allows sharing the gospel and transforming society.

The bible here says that all governments and leaders function under God's sovereign will. Of course a government should protect and serve its citizens, those leaders who betray their trust will answer to God.

Note that we have been instructed in Romans 12 that we are not to take vengeance personally, that is a function of the government. I cannot avenge a murder but the government has been given the authority to punish that person who takes the life of another.

Even though we are told God has established the government, it is not a divine institution and it is temporary. Jesus told us to pay to Caesar what is Caesars and to God what is God so in no way can the state legitimately demand from us what belongs to God, which is our worship and our morality. Legalizing certain behaviors and acts does not make them right. We ought to obey God rather than man.

I believe this is as much a warning to government as it is to us.

Romans 13:2

Breaking laws will bring judgment. Remember we are to live at peace as much as it depends on us, this means with the state as well as with others. What about when the state does not allow us to live by our religious convictions?

There seem to be some different ideas as to how to approach this, lets look at three of them; First, some believe that the state is corrupt and Christians should avoid it as much as possible. Be a good citizen but don't participate.

Second, others believe God has given the state authority in certain areas but not all. The church has authority when the state does not and both function independently.

Third, some believe that Christians have a responsibility to make the state better, working politically to elect high-principled leaders. They should serve as an influence for good in society. The church and state should work together for the good of all.

Lets be responsible citizens as well as responsible Christians, seeking God's will for our involvement in the political processes of our country. Each of us has a responsibility to seek God in this area so that our testimony is right.

Are there times to not submit to the government?

When government places demands which conflict with God's will for us, then what? We can see Peter's response to such a question in Acts 5. Here the Jewish leaders, specifically the High Priest and his associates, who were filled with jealousy, ordered them to stop teaching in this Name, that is Jesus. Peter's answer in verse 29 was "We must obey God rather than men". You see an angel who appeared to them said to "Go, and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life". This disobedience would have cost the apostles their lives if it had not been for one man who spoke in their behalf.

Romans 13:3-4

When authorities are just, people doing their duty should have nothing to fear. When leaders are godly men we can expect justice. However, we have always to think, to pray and seek God's will. How do we as believers deal with an evil government? We must obey God rather than men if we have to make the choice. We read in our history book about Christians who willingly went along with evil leaders.

A classic case is Nazi Germany. The people were forbidden to preach the gospel; the government took over the church and decided what could be taught. We know some believers suffered and gave their lives protecting Jews and resisting Nazism. Two come to mind; Corrie Ten Boom and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The Ten Boom family was put into a concentration camp for helping Jews, Corrie's elderly

father and older sister died there. Dietrich Bonhoeffer continued to preach the truth of God's word from his pulpit and became part of the resistance, he was hanged. On the whole however, Christian response was slow and ineffective. Many were so dependent on the benefits of the central government that they lost their will to criticize actions. They cooperated rather than risk their perceived security, of course, they lost everything. The only security is found in God. Others were uninformed and were unable to take a stand until it was too late. We must take alert. As Paul said in Ephesians "Awake sleeper!".

We are to pursue right living and to hate what is evil. You will not know what is evil if you get all your information from the TV; no you have to renew your mind with the WORD of God.

Romans 13:5-6

We have two reasons to submit to government; first we are commanded by God to do so and secondly it is the way to avoid punishment. Remember we answer to a higher authority.

At the time Paul wrote this taxation and abuses of taxation were causing great unrest in Rome. Not paying, even unjust taxes put believers in great jeopardy. Remember Jesus said to Peter to pay taxes so as not to offend the authorities, Matthew 17:24-27

Romans 13:7

So pay the taxes but also respect and/or honor. This is our obligation. These are hard sayings, are they not? Its difficult to pay taxes and in some cases its difficult to respect some leaders but again remember whether or not they recognize it, they derive their authority from God and they will answer to Him for all their decisions and actions.

While we are discussing government lets bring it home for a minute. There is something else to consider; there has never before been a nation founded like ours, our American Declaration of Independence states that all men have been endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights among them life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Think with me now, our founding fathers recognized God as the Creator of the world, they firmly stated the truth and that is this; our rights come from God, not the government. The word inalienable means unchallenged and absolute. No country has ever been founded on these principles of truth and sadly many have forgotten this as well. We are now in a place where most people believe rights are given by the government as well as everything else we want. Oh my friends, if the government gives, then the government can take away. If we give away our God given freedom in order to depend on an undependable government, we are very foolish.

Christians are to be law-abiding citizens but if the government would forbid the preaching of the gospel we cannot obey this direct command of God, neither can we obey a government, which would order us to do something evil.

Romans 13:8

The Christian and his finances. We have been told to pay our taxes, but we must also pay our bills. We are to pay what we owe but what else are we to pay, our debt of love is the answer. Jesus said they will know we are His followers by our love for each other. Just as Jesus loved us when we were enemies of His, lost, godless and hopeless, we are to love others. Jesus' love for us broke the power of self, He reconciled the world to God but also to each other. We are permanently in debt to Jesus for His love to us and the only way to repay it is by loving others.

Romans 13:9-10

The laws of love eliminate the behaviors of selfishness, murder, and theft. The laws of love include hospitality according to 1 Peter 4:9, patience and forgiveness Ephesians 4:2, also kindness and tenderhearted, Ephesians 4:23.

1 Thessalonians 4:1;7 says we are to comfort one another and 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says we are to encourage one another. Who doesn't need the comfort of encouragement? And the very practical command in Galatians 6:2; bear one another's burdens.

How are we told here to fulfill the LAW? To Love as Christ loved us. As you get to know Christ and His love for you in return you will love others. Love comes from knowing the LORD Jesus Christ. Study the

bible and learn to do what the LORD wants you to do and do it for His sake. The love in your soul for your heavenly Father will flow out to others and you will fulfill the law. If you love God you will surely fulfill the law of love toward others.

Romans 13:11-12

The last 4 verses of this chapter speak to our salvation past, present and future. We are to behave decently with lifestyles that please God because we are closer now to the end than ever before. Paul told us to wake up, be alert, in the book of Ephesians, that is lethargic attitudes have no business in the believer's heart. Friends there is a sense of urgency, the darkness is getting darker. Why? Remember Jesus said in John 3:19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved the darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil". It is still night on earth but the dawn is soon coming and we are to be prepared. We are light bringers. For believers the darkness is no excuse for indecent behavior, which he goes on to describe.

I hope you catch the significance of this passage, there is going to be a last day of earth history. Seven to 10 years before that day, believers will be taken up to meet Jesus in the air, an event we call the rapture, described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17. The rapture is not the second coming, notice, Jesus does not come to earth, we rise to meet him in the air.

Romans 13:13

Let me quote the J.B. Phillips translation of this verse: "The night is nearly over; the day has almost dawned. Let us therefore fling away the things that men do in the dark; let us arm ourselves for the fight of the day! Let us live cleanly, in the daylight, not in the 'delights' of getting drunk or playing with sex, nor yet in quarreling or jealousies. Let us be Christ's men and women from head to foot, and give no chances to the flesh to have its fling."

These are the activities described as things done in the dark, are so glorified in our culture but are displeasing to God. Just about every program on TV glorifies this type of behavior and makes it seem wonderful and necessary to happiness. Of course they never show the consequences of drunkenness, innocent people killed in automobile accidents, fighting and abuse of women and children. We don't see those whose health is compromised by STD's, pregnancies outside of marriage, kids with single parents or the long-term consequences of abortion. God gives these commands to free us for have wonderful and fulfilling lives, not to ruin our fun.

If we wanted to play a game of tennis and went to a court with no lines because we just didn't want to be bogged down with a bunch of rules, we would have no freedom to play the game of tennis. We could hit the ball; there could be no game. Until we have the boundaries laid out clearly, we do not have the freedom to play tennis. And so it is with life. God gives us boundaries to free us to live lives that are meaningful, fulfilling and full of hope.

Romans 13:14

Paul here tells us to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and in another place he says to put on the armor of light, still another to put on the "whole armor of God".

How do we put on the LORD Jesus Christ, the whole armor of God? Friends we put it on by faith.

God has given it to us, just as He has given us salvation and we accept it by faith and we wear it for the victory promised.