

ROMANS

13:1-14

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Taught by Simeon Forder on Sunday morning, 21st May 2023 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: Romans 13:1-14

Introduction

Charles Dickens said *“The New Testament is the very best book that ever was or ever will be known in the world.”* He only got one thing wrong — for the *whole* Bible is the best book that ever was or ever will be known in the world. And that perspective is one that it is helpful to keep in mind. For how much time do we spend reading other books, or magazines, or news articles, or blogs, or sports news, or twitter, or scrolling through the comments on Facebook posts?

It should make us pause for thought that people have literally died so that we can read this book in our language in our own homes. Yet don't we too often think *“I'm too tired to read my Bible”* but then go on to read something on social media or the news?

Chapter overview of Romans

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- **Chapters 1-8:** Christian doctrine
 - Sin (1-3), Salvation (4-5), Sanctification (6-8)

- **Chapters 9-11:** Israel
 - Israel - Past (9), Present (10), Future (11)
- **Chapters 12-16:** Practical Christian living
 - Practical Christianity

We're in the wonderful book of Romans, written by the Apostle Paul to the Christians in Rome. As we've studied over the last couple of months; in the first 8 chapters he gave them, and us, the most comprehensive of statements on Christian doctrine, that is; what we believe. Then from chapters 9-11 he explained God's faithfulness to Israel — despite their fickleness — and in doing so gave us much reassurance of God's faithfulness to *us*. And now, in this final section, Paul is giving practical instruction on how we should live as Christians in response to all we have read.

Last week as we studied chapter 12, we were urged to present our bodies as a living sacrifice — a reasonable response to the glorious gospel of Christ. And then, as he instructed us to serve God *and* one another in love, he also gave us instruction on how to behave like a Christian - giving 10 commands about our actions, and 10 more about our reactions.

Overview of chapter thirteen

Overview of chapter thirteen

- **v1-7** — Submit to Government
- **v8-10** — Love your neighbour
- **v11-14** — Put on Christ

And this morning, we'll study all of chapter 13 where Paul starts by explaining our Christian duty government (to those in civil authority), and then, our Christian duty of love to others, before asking us to wake up, and shape up in our Christian walk — to live for the Lord as if He is returning tomorrow.

Chapter thirteen

Let's get started in verse 1 then, where we'll spend a bit of time before moving on. We read:

Romans 13:1

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

Who is this talking to? Well, it says every soul. There are no exceptions. And of course, as Christians we should be obedient to God's Word. So what should our attitude be toward the Government? We should be subject to them. What about a bad Government? It's the same answer.

Why? Because it is God who puts them in place. *"But I thought we voted?"* Indeed you do. Indeed you should. But, nothing happens without it being in God's permissive will — that is, He allows it to happen. And more than that, we see God specifically raises up nations and leaders for *His* purposes. *"Oh, but God can't have raised up our government, for they are ungodly and doing things that are just awful!"*. Really? Remember how Pharaoh enslaved the Jews, putting them to hard labour, yet we read in Exodus chapter 9, which Paul also quoted in Romans chapter 9:

Exodus 9:16

But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.

God raised Pharaoh up with enormous power and wealth so that God might show His power in delivering Israel from his hand, that He might glorified. *"But Pharaoh's an exception!"* Is he? What about Nebuchadnezzar who took Israel captive? We read in Daniel chapter 2:

Daniel 2:20-21

Daniel answered and said: "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, For wisdom and might are His. And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise And knowledge to those who have understanding.

Then in Daniel chapter 4:

Daniel 4:17

'This decision is by the decree of the watchers, And the sentence by the word of the holy ones, In order that the living may know That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, Gives it to whomever He will, And sets over it the lowest of men.'

Then in chapter 5, speaking of Nebuchadnezzar when he was humbled by God:

Daniel 5:21

Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses.

"Ah, but now Christ has come, we're to establish His kingdom." Is that so?

In the garden of Gethsemane as Jesus was betrayed and arrested, Peter drew his sword and cut off the ear of one of the High Priest servants. What did Jesus say? It wasn't *"Way to go Peter! Let's start a revolution!"*. No, he told Peter to put his sword away.

Then, when standing before Pilate we read:

John 18:36

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

"Ah, but this Government is persecuting Christians." What, like the Emperor Nero was when he set Christians on fire as candlesticks in his garden? Or fed them to the lions? "But our politicians set such a poor example". Indeed many do, but I've shared before how we read Nero murdered his own mother, was implicated in the murder of one of his 3 wives, and he married two men - one as his husband, one as his wife, even dressing as Roman empress. This was the *same* Nero that was ruling as Paul wrote these words in Romans.

We are to submit to the governing authorities. That doesn't mean we're to aspire to be like them. Or agree with everything they say, do, or legislate for. But we are to submit to them. Indeed, what Paul writes here in Romans is, unsurprisingly, consistent with the rest of scripture. In Exodus 22 we read:

Exodus 22:28

You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people.

This very verse was the one Paul recalled when standing before the High Priest in Acts 22:

Acts 23:5

Then Paul said, "I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.' "

And when writing to Titus he wrote:

Titus 3:1-2

Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.

And Peter also wrote in his first letter:

1 Peter 2:13-16

Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men— as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.

We might not approve of or respect the Prime Minister, or the individuals in our Cabinet, the wider Government or Parliament as a whole — but we must recognise that God both allows and raises up governments for *His* purposes, even if we can't see what that purpose is at the time. The authorities, indeed our Government are appointed *by* God, though He is not *responsible* for their actions. If they step out of line He will judge them, just as He will judge any who lead within the church contrary to His will.

So then, **what are we to do under ungodly government?** I suggest we look at Israel in Egypt, and how they cried out to God, and how He heard their prayers. And likewise we should note what Paul writes to Timothy, as to how we're to pray for the King, the Prime Minister, the Cabinet, the Government, MPs, and all those who provide counsel to them. We read:

1 Timothy 2:1-4

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

We are to pray for our leaders, and we're to submit to Government. Why? Because they are godly? No - rather, we do so in order that we may live godly lives ourselves, *and* that we may freely share the gospel. *That* is the purpose of all this. Sadly, in the pandemonium of the pandemic there was so much time that was frankly wasted by Christian's campaigning against each facet of Government policy, when instead of placards, there should have been prayer. And instead of shouting, there should have been sharing the gospel. For at a time when so many people were worried, frightened, and uncertain - we had the gospel of peace and the hope that each person needs. We had the good news of Salvation in Jesus Christ.

But what if we're told to do something unbiblical? Well, as our starting place is that we are to submit to the governing authorities - that is we are to obey the law of the land. Indeed we see, even though the Roman rulers were not morally perfect, that Paul instructed the Christians in Rome to be good, law-abiding citizens. As indeed we are to be in our land. However, we have dual citizenship. We are citizens of Heaven, *and* in *our* case of the United Kingdom. And where there is a conflict between the mandates of the two, we are to submit to God. But we're not to twist this to try and get out of parking tickets or such.

We know from scripture that children are to obey their parents. And that wives are to submit to their husbands. But the exception to those things is when they tell you to do something contrary to the Bible. And note that the sole example we read in the Bible of standing against those in authority is specifically regarding the preaching of the Word of God, where the issue was spiritual and not political. We read of this in Acts chapter 4, where Luke is writing about the Sanhedrin:

Acts 4:18-20

So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

We need to be prepared to do anything for the sake of the gospel. Including, if need be, being imprisoned for sharing it, just as Paul was. But that does not mean we do anything we feel is right using the gospel as an excuse. The gospel is the *end* to which we act.

Now, given the constant political turmoil we have grown up with, and continue to endure today, **should we be worried?** In short, no. While these trials are unpleasant at best, they are not worthy to be compared with what awaits us in Heaven, nor are we to lose sight of the fact that God is still on His throne. He is still in control. We read God's words to Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 27:5-6

I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are on the ground, by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and have given it to whom it seemed proper to Me. And now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant; and the beasts of the field I have also given him to serve him.

Nothing takes God by surprise. Not one captivity, or scandal, or resignation, or coup, or backbench rebellion has ever caught Him off guard. I was reading J Vernon McGee's commentary, as I often do, and he noted this:

You will recall that when Uzziah, king of Judah, died, Isaiah was disturbed and very much discouraged. Uzziah had been a good king, and Isaiah thought the government would disintegrate after he was gone. So Isaiah went into the temple, which is a good place to go at a time like that. He came into God's presence, and He saw the Lord sitting upon the throne, high and lifted up. In other words, God had not abdicated. Uzziah was dead, but God was not dead. God was still on the throne. Now the allegiance of the Christian is to that throne. And his relationship to his government on earth is submission.

J Vernon McGee

So we are to submit. We're to pray. We're to hold fast to the Word of God over all else. And we're to trust in our unfailing God who is still on His throne. **But perhaps one question remains, and that is whether we should get involved in politics.**

Well, as mentioned, we have a responsibility to vote, and to advocate for righteousness in our land. I think it is right and proper that we raise our voice on Christian issues, if need be writing to our MP, or to the PM, to advocate for good and moral policy. And perhaps as individuals we may feel it right to get involved in politics. And I don't think that's an inherently wrong thing to do as a Christian, but I do give this warning - that your allegiance is to be to Christ, and not a political party. It should be the Bible and not the party manifesto that determines how you vote.

But should we mix politics and religion? Charles Spurgeon thought we should. He said:

I long for the day when the precepts of the Christian religion shall be the rule among all classes of men, in all transactions. I often hear it said, 'Do not bring religion into politics.' This is precisely where it ought to be brought, and set there in the face of all men as on a candlestick. I would have the Cabinet and the members of Parliament do the work of the nation as before the Lord, and I would have the nation, either in making war or peace, consider the matter by the light of righteousness. We are to deal with other nations about this or that upon the principles of the New Testament.

Charles Spurgeon

Oh, that we would have even more Christian MPs that would advocate for the fair treatment of all, that would work for the peace of our nation, and fight for the sanctity of life. However, we must not think politics is where we are to start. Rather, that should be a natural result of the gospel being shared, received, believed and acted upon.

Here's another comment from J Vernon McGee that I shared in our study of Titus earlier this year:

A good example of this is the Wesleyan movement in England. Wesley never tried to straighten out the king of England or even the Church of England. He just went out and preached the Word of God. Men were converted, among whom were men like William Wilberforce, the great philanthropist and abolitionist. They were men who had been gamblers and drunkards, with no concern for the poor, until they came to know Christ. These men started the great labor movement associated with the Wesleyan revival in England, which was the beginning of the movement against child labor and the protection of workmen on the job. We need individuals who will enter into government and take social action, but the church as an organization is not called upon to go into politics.

J Vernon McGee

So then, we are to submit to government for the cause of Christ. But the cause of Christ is not to submit to government.

Let's continue in Romans 13:

Romans 13:2

Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

That is, we should not be rebellious citizens. And if you *are* rebellious against the government (without clear scriptural reason to do so) then not only are you disobeying God, but you can rightfully expect consequences from those that govern you.

Romans 13:3

For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.

The responsibility of government is not to make people afraid of doing good, but to punish those who do evil. So then, if you steal or murder, then you *should* be afraid of governing authorities. For people don't get arrested for being generous, but they rightfully do for being corrupt. People don't get in trouble for *providing* a free meal, but they rightfully do for walking out of a restaurant without paying for one. But as for us, people should see our good works. Jesus said:

Matthew 5:16

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

There should be no inconsistency between what we believe or preach, and what we do. A sure way to look a hypocrite as a Christian is to break the law of the land. Paul continues this warning:

Romans 13:4

For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

Does this mean that our Government or indeed our police are without fault? Of course not. We're aware of the failings we see reported all too often. But there should be a level of respect we have for our Government, Police, and military. Not because they are perfect, but because they are ultimately placed there by God for our protection and to ensure the continued peace in our country. They are not here to cause trouble, but to prevent it. And if we do wrong, we should be afraid. Just as your stomach may sink as you see the blue lights behind you on the motorway. That doesn't happen because you're keeping the speed limit does it?

The very first instruction for human Government, where men would hold each other to account, was soon after the flood in Genesis chapter 9:

Genesis 9:6

Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man.

And it is therefore right and proper that we have law and order, and that those who break the law are punished accordingly. *"But what about vengeance is mine, says the Lord?"* Well, you're not to go and set your neighbour's car on fire because they drove over your garden gnome. You're not to throw mud pies at their house because they insulted you. That is, you are not to react as an individual - but rather leave the governing authorities to handle the law they have instituted. That may require our support or involvement, but that's not the same as taking vengeance yourself - indeed we read just last week that *"If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."*

Romans 13:5

Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake.

As Christians, we are to live with a clean/clear conscience - not simply so we can avoid punishment or jail, community service, or speeding tickets. Even if the Government doesn't know what we've done wrong, we do, and God does. And we should not grieve Him.

Romans 13:6

For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing.

So, we are to pay our taxes that law and order may continue to function within our country. We might not enjoy paying taxes, and we may balk at the *way* they are used or the *efficiency* with *which* they are used. We may even disagree with *how much* tax we pay. But we are are to pay our taxes.

"But our Government uses our taxes to fund the teaching of evolution, access to abortion, and funding LGBT agendas in our schools. Therefore we shouldn't pay tax". No, no. Of course it should pain us that our taxes are used in this way, but it's not like the taxes being collected by Nero were being used to fund Christian schools and hospitals. Yet Paul said we are to pay taxes.

And of course Jesus was crystal clear on this matter. He was asked:

Matthew 22:17-22

Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the tax money." So they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left Him and went their way.

As Christians we should be honest tax payers. Does that mean we should not make sure we are on the correct tax code, or that we shouldn't use opportunity to save paying taxes in a legal way? Of course not. We are to be good stewards with the money we have. But tax *avoidance* is not something a Christian should be doing. We should not be escaping tax through any illicit means, including cash under the table. But what if you're short on money? Well, will God not honour you if you are honest in this area? In the early church it was said that what the Roman authorities lost in revenue at the pagan temples, they gained in the honest tax paying of Christian citizens. What a testimony that is!

Romans 13:7

Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour.

If you ignore Paul, you have to ignore Jesus too. So render to Caesar what is Caesar's. You are not to withhold your taxes because you disagree with government policy.

Now, having explained what we owe our Government, Paul now explains what we are to owe our neighbour, whom Jesus made clear are *all* those around us — not simply those who live on our street, or go to our church. And he writes:

Romans 13:8

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.

Now, we are to be good stewards of all God has entrusted us with — our time, our relationships, our families, our jobs, our ministries, *and* our finances. It is His anyway, so how we use it is important. And building up debt is not something we should desire. Now of course there are circumstances, such as those many in this country find themselves in right now, where money can be very tight — indeed worryingly so. I'm not here to analyse anyone's finances.

But whether in times of plenty, or times of difficulty, we are to make choices that honour the Lord. And we should carefully assess what we truly need, for all too easily, we spend money we don't have on things we don't need to impress people we don't like. Likewise, we can let our greed and covetousness result in us spending money unwisely. So before borrowing a penny, carefully consider whether you are doing so because you truly have need and no other way forward in the situation, or if you are doing so for your flesh. It is not a good witness for a Christian to live beyond their means as a result of greed and lust, even when the borrowing is from a bank.

However, what I think Paul is getting at here, is our treatment of others, because he links this with love. It is both poor friendship and a poor witness to borrow money from a friend and not repay it. Or repay it late. Even in simple matters, such as if you're out with a friend and they lend you a £20 note for dinner, or pay for your dinner on their card because you left yours at home, then they should not need to remind you to pay it back. We are to be men and women of our word.

What we do owe, however — in the sense that we have an obligation to do to others — is to love others. Not in some sort of fluffy sentimental way. But in action. And Paul continues...

Romans 13:9

For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."

So he references the second half of the ten commandments which relate to our fellow man, saying that the sum of these is that we should love our neighbour as ourselves. And indeed, it should be obvious that adultery, murder, theft, lying and coveting are not ways to express our love toward anyone. But we should also remember the *spiritual* nature of the law that Jesus explained, that if we look at someone with lust, we have committed adultery in our heart. And if we hate someone without cause, we are guilty of murder in our heart.

"But our thoughts don't hurt anyone" you might say. Wrong. For our actions come *from* the thoughts and intents of our heart. Affairs start in the head before they occur in the bed. Likewise, arguments, fights and wars come from hatred in our hearts that occurs before verbal or physical outbursts. If we truly loved others as ourselves, we wouldn't find our selves doing these things — whether watching pornography, posting vitriolic comments on social media, stealing time from our employers, lying to our spouses, or grinding our teeth and snarling with covetousness as someone we know drives up in *our* favourite car that *they* just purchased.

One commentator put it very well: *Paul is saying that our love for our neighbour is revealed in what we do rather than in what we say. He is not putting the Christian back under the Law; he is saying that love manifests itself in not committing adultery, not killing, not stealing, not coveting. You can talk about love all you want to, but if you commit these acts against your neighbour, you have no love for him.*

And we read in verse 10...

Romans 13:10

Love does no harm to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.

We should not forget Jesus' words that we read in Matthew chapter 22 and Mark chapter 12 where we read:

Mark 12:28-31

Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?" Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

So, having written about our Christian duty to government and to our fellow man, Paul now writes:

Romans 13:11

And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.

In other words, don't be a sleepy Christian! Wake up, and act as a Christian should in these things and *all* things, living as if the Lord could come back at any moment. For the reality is that He could. Indeed, there is no prophecy that we're waiting to be fulfilled before Jesus returns. And like as a teenager or young adult you'll hurry up tidying up or washing up the mess you've made when you know your parents are just about to come home from a few days away, so when we have our hope fixed *on Jesus'* return, we will tidy up our act as John writes in his first letter, saying "*everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*"

And as such, Paul exhorts us...

Romans 13:12-13

The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.

That is, we have wasted enough of our lives living for things that are not of the Lord, and rather now we should be ready to stand before the Lord today. Therefore, Paul urges you and I to cast off the works of darkness. Not gently move away from them. We're to flee sexual immorality, flee idolatry, flee the love of money, and flee all other youthful lusts. And instead, we're to put on the armour of light, walking as is fitting for Christians — not getting even-half drunk and partying through the night, nor being sexually immoral or living in unbridled lust, nor being argumentative and difficult, nor living in jealousy of others.

But, we read...

Romans 13:14

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts.

So then, we are to put on Jesus — to be clothed with Him — that we might look so much like Him in the way we act and talk, that we would be almost indistinguishable from Him. What a picture! And for that to be a reality, we must neither plan nor prepare for the possibility of sin.

No Christian should ever look at the day or date and say “ah, today I’m going to sin”. But we must be careful not to make provision much more subtly, such as keeping our subscription to that streaming service that we know is filled with content we’re drawn to, but should keep from. Or by keeping our phones or computer in our bedroom when we know our late night internetting leads us into lust. Or going on Pinterest when we know we’re inclined to covet. Or by going to the pub to be social, when we know we’re drawn to drink in excess. Or by keeping a change of clothes in your car just in case you stay over at your girlfriends house.

But rather we are to cut off opportunity to sin. And we’re to take that seriously, as Jesus explained in Matthew chapter 5:

Matthew 5:29-30

If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

It is more profitable for you that you unsubscribe from Netflix, or abstain from going to the pub, or delete your Twitter account, than to spend your eternity in hell.

Conclusion

That is the shortest chapter in Romans, but it is another rich one. One that we should take care to apply to our lives, but not twist for our purposes. We should acknowledge our responsibilities as both citizens of Heaven and this country, and show the love and kindness the gospel urges us to do. And ultimately we should imitate Christ in all we do, for we have been bought with a price - and that price was Jesus’ blood shed for you.

Application questions

As we go into this coming week, let’s consider how we can apply what we’ve read to our lives.

- How will you submit to Government? How diligently are you praying for them? Are you advocating for righteousness in how you vote?
- In what ways can you love your neighbour? Do your actions match your words?
- How will you be clothed with Jesus’ this week that you might look like Him?

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