

breathtaking grace
THE BOOK OF ROMANS

I love Romans chapter 13. It's short, it's fun, and it's very practical. But ... also very challenging. Today there is so much political unrest in our world, as well as in our own country. People, Christian people, are at odds with each other over issues, and rather than discussing opinions, have ended up in ungodly "wars" of words filled with hate and contempt. Sisters, these things "ought not to be so." Let's agree to disagree peaceably and do more praying than fighting! With that said, Paul brings up the topic of civil obedience and the authority government has in our lives. Believers are not called to live in isolation, but we are members of societies, countries, neighborhoods, and churches. And in chapters 12-16, Paul offers his wisdom about all these relationships. As far as Christian service and behavior, Paul describes a Christian servant in chapter 12, a Christian citizen in chapter 13, and a Christian brother in chapter 14. Many of us are angry about what's happening in our society, but let's ask the Holy Spirit to lead us into HIS truth this week rather than simply being wise "in our own opinions." (Romans 12:16)

1. Let's begin today by reading Romans 13:1-14. Observe the text and list any repeated words, phrases, or thoughts you find. What would you say is Paul's main point?
2. What does Paul say about this same topic in 1 Timothy 2:1-3?
3. What does Peter add in 1 Peter 2:13-17?

Paul's desire seems to be to instruct us as to how a believer is supposed to live as a citizen of our own country. We need to remember that Paul was writing during a time of a very pagan Roman government. In fact, the Jews in Rome were notorious for their turbulence. The government authorities were pretty hostile to the "church" during that time. Keller said, "The increasingly secular west is only just beginning to experience the level of hostility that first-century believers faced; the 21st century persecuted church experiences it every day. It is this type of 'state' which Paul tells the Christian to submit himself to."

4. In the first seven verses, Paul tells us HOW we can be good citizens. What does he say?

5. In verses 8-10, how does Paul instruct us to be good neighbors?

6. Chapter 13 ends with WHY we should do these things. What is our incentive?

7. Do you think we are called to submit in EVERYTHING? Do you see any exceptions? Write your thoughts.

8. What immediate application do you see for yourself?

That's it for today, my friends. I pray this chapter challenges us and stirs us to pray more fervently for our city, state, and local officials. They need it!

Memory Verse of the Week: "Owe no man anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law." Romans 13:8

Second Day

Work on your memory verse.

1. Read Romans 13:1-14 again, then focus on verses 1-7. According to verse one, what does Paul say about authority? Does that refer to bad or immoral leaders as well? How would you answer that? What does Daniel 4:17 say about that?
2. If we resist government, who are we actually resisting, according to verse 2? Why?
3. Paul discusses "fearing" the government. If we do what is right and wise, how can we be free from fear?
4. How does Paul refer to the one in authority in verse 4? Why?
5. It's important that Christians be good citizens. Why?

Human government was instituted by God. The Open Bible wrote, “The general function of the human government, as instituted by God, may be said to be threefold: to protect, punish, and promote.”

The Function of Protection: The moment Adam sinned, it was obvious that civilizations would need some form of restraint and rule to protect citizens from themselves. An example of this function is seen in Acts 21:27-37 where Roman soldiers step in and save Paul from being murdered by his own enraged countrymen in Jerusalem.

The Function of Punishment: Both Paul and Peter bring this out. Paul writes that duly appointed human officials are to be regarded as God’s servants to ‘bear the sword,’ that is, to impose punishment on criminals (vv. 3 and 4). Peter tells us that governors are ‘sent by Him’ for the punishment of evildoers (1 Peter 2:3,14).

The Function of Promotion: Human government is to promote the general welfare of the community where its laws are in effect. Paul commands us to pray for human leaders ‘that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty’ (1 Timothy 2:1,2).

Later we will discuss if and when Christians should engage in civil disobedience, but for now, it’s important to remember that Paul’s main point in this chapter was not to offer a Biblical view of civil disobedience. As Swindoll points out, “Rather, Paul was penning a letter to a specific group of people with specific needs. He was not advising believers on how to deal with rebellious government but with rebellious Christians; those who refuse to submit to a civil authority operating within its God-given parameters. In essence, Paul was placing boundaries on our freedom to engage in civil disobedience.”

6. People view government in many different ways, and some of those views can be very destructive. What do you think is meant by this statement?

I like Shepherd’s Notes’ definition of the word “submit” or “be subject to.” They write, “In Romans 13:1 the word means ‘to be in subjection to’ governing authorities. This word occurs 38 times in the New Testament, most often in the middle voice, meaning to ‘subordinate oneself.’ It is used of submission to political authorities (Titus 3:1), wives to husbands (Col. 3:18), the younger toward elders (1 Peter 5:5). Cranfield argues that the predominant thought is not obedience but the conduct that flows naturally from the recognition that the other person as Christ’s representative has an infinitely greater claim on one than one has on oneself.”

7. According to these verses, what can happen if you don’t submit?

8. How would you describe your feelings toward government? Rebellious? Indifferent? Hateful? How do our actions prove this? Give it some thought before you answer.

9. Ok, now let me ask this question. When do you think it's ok **NOT** to submit to your governing authorities?

Again, I love Swindoll's opinion on this. He wrote, "Illegal actions taken in the name of civil disobedience perplex us because the 'disobedient' faction can often persuasively justify what they've done. Often one law is broken to fight another. (Such as the bombings of abortion clinics where a few clinic workers are killed to preserve the 'rights' of the innocent babies.) Can we rightly advocate breaking any law if it is done with good intentions? Something inside us shudders at the thought. What, then, are the limits of civil disobedience? When do we cross the line from civil disobedience that is God-honoring to that which is sinful? Acts 4 records that Peter and John had been arrested and brought before the Jewish authorities for preaching the Gospel. The officials commanded the two disciples not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus again (Acts 4:18). The two, however, made it clear that they could not obey the order (vs. 19-20), so they were threatened further and eventually released. Clearly, Peter and John were godly rebels, rightly defying these government-approved authorities who tried to impose a policy contradicting one of God's commands. So, the Bible does support disobedience in cases where human laws defy God's law. Charles Ryrie wrote, 'When civil law and God's law are in opposition, the illustrations of the Bible sanction, if not obligate, the believer to protest or disobey. But when a believer feels he should disobey his government, he must be sure it is not because the government has denied him **HIS** rights, but because it has denied him **God's** rights.' We can conclude, then, that disobedience to civil authority is justified when that authority requires us to disobey God."

Acts 5:20 makes the principle clear that if the government commands what God forbids, or if the government forbids what God commands, then civil disobedience is a Christian duty.

10. Write your thoughts on the paragraph above.

11. Give some specific examples of behavior that can often be twisted and seen as justifiable acts of “civil disobedience” that aren’t. Have you, personally, ever been called to disobey an authority in order to obey God?

Keller wrote, “In Scripture, we have examples of believers submitting to and supporting civil authorities that disobeyed God’s Word and often punished the good. Two examples are Joseph (who was a kind of prime minister of Egypt) and Jeremiah (who counseled Judah to surrender and concede power to a cruel, pagan, Babylonian civil power, Jeremiah 21:9). Christians are not to undermine or show disrespect for the authority even of a government that is foolish and that supports behavior disobedient to God. On the other hand, you have examples of believers who courageously disobey and oppose civil authority when it requires behavior of its citizens that is disobedient to God. The classic Biblical example of this is Daniel and his associates. In pagan Babylon, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were actively involved in civic affairs, even in a pagan society. But when citizens were commanded to do what was forbidden (idol worship in Daniel 3:4-6), or forbidden to do what was commanded (prayer to the Lord in Daniel 6:7), then the believers disobeyed the state and submitted to the punishment, with an attitude of fearless respect (Daniel 3:16-18). Another example, when Israel was in slavery in Egypt, is the civil disobedience of the Hebrew midwives, who did not kill the infant boys as Pharaoh decreed (Exodus 1:17), reminding us of those who hid Jews in defiance of the Nazi government during World War 2.”

12. What does verse 7 tell us about showing respect to those in authority? This isn’t limited to those in government, but in how we treat other authorities such as parents, ministers, bosses, etc.

13. That’s it for today. Let’s remember that Paul’s point is to exhort them, in a general sense, to obey the governing authorities. He wants them to honor them, respect them, and obey them. (Don’t forget that this was during a very “unrestful” governmental period.) **Has this section of Scripture challenged you in any way?**

See you soon!

Third Day

What's your memory verse?

Paul's been talking about the divine role of government and the believer's response to it. Our allegiance and loyalty to God doesn't remove our responsibility to our secular governing authority. Paul reminds them they are to submit to the authorities (vs. 1-2), recognize their function (vs. 3-5), and support them (vs. 6-7).

1. Today let's read Romans 13:1-14, focusing on verses 8-10. Paul moves on to discuss our responsibilities and obligations toward our "neighbors." How would you summarize this section?

Notice the connection of chapter 12 and 13. In 12:21, Paul commands us to “overcome evil with good” and then goes on to talk about our involvement in society. We are to “overcome evil with good” by “living good” as a citizen. In verse 7 he goes on to tell us to “give everyone what you owe them,” whether its taxes, honor, or respect. (Have you ever thought about “owing” someone respect?) Now in verse 8, Paul shifts that same idea to all those we live with. Not only are we called to be good citizens, but good people as well, in our neighborhood, cities, and communities. We are always called to “overcome evil with good.”

2. How do these verses show us that love fulfills the law?
3. We love our city by obeying God's commands. Believers shouldn't shut themselves off from society, nor should we conform to it. What, then, are we called to do? How do we live in this world without compromise?

4. Verse 10 says that love does no harm to a neighbor. How do you treat your neighbor? Is there someone in your life that you “owe” some love? (Who is your neighbor?)

Leon Morris wrote, “We can never say ‘I have done all the loving I need to do.’ Love is the Christian’s way of life; we’re never done loving.” Robert Mounce said, “The obligation to love has no limit. We are to love not only those of the family of God but our ‘fellow man’ as well. As God’s love extended to all, so must our concern reach out to believer and nonbeliever alike. (Matthew 5:44-45)”

5. What does it mean to “love your neighbor as yourself?” What does this look like practically?

This text isn't teaching to you to love yourself, rather, it's assuming that you already do. Bruce Barton helps clarify the meaning of this verse: "Even if you have low self-esteem, you probably don't willingly let yourself go hungry. You clothe yourself reasonably well. You make sure there's a roof over your head if you can. You try not to let yourself be cheated or injured. And you get angry if someone tries to ruin your marriage. This is the kind of love we need to have for others. Do we see that others are fed, clothed, and housed as well as they can be? Are we concerned about issues of social justice? Loving others as ourselves means actively working to see that their needs are met. People who focus on others rather than themselves rarely suffer from low self-esteem."

6. Do you struggle in this area? How is the Lord speaking to your heart on this? Are there exceptions on WHO we are to love?
7. What does Jesus say about this in John 13:35? (How obvious is it that you are His disciple?)

8. Have you been showing love to your spouse lately? Your kids? Your siblings? (Read 1 Corinthians 13 for a reminder of what love “looks” like.)

Some scholars also take verse 8 to mean that believers should never borrow money for houses, cars, etc. But Jesus Himself condones loaning and borrowing in Matthew 5:42 for at least some situations. Some commentators don’t believe this is referring to money at all, while others believe it means to simply pay any debts you have on time. The point isn’t that we should never borrow, but we should never leave our debts unpaid.

9. Sadly, debt and debt financing can become a way of life. Often people borrow more than they are able to repay, or they live above their means. Are you guilty of this? How can credit cards promote this type of thinking?

10. What’s your biggest take-away from verses 8-10?

I REALLY love these verses. I pray that the Holy Spirit spoke to your heart in a significant way. Can’t wait for tomorrow!

Fourth Day

Don’t just memorize your verse, ponder it. Meditate on it. Act on it.

1. Today read Romans 13:1-14, paying particular attention to verses 11-14. Some say these verses offer the “incentive” to obey the previous verses. What are the incentives?
2. Why does Paul tell them to “wake up”? How can believers sometimes be considered “asleep”?

Ladies, the “darkness” is very dark right now, but let’s rejoice that there is an end to it! Sin and darkness will not always reign because the day is near! The hope of Christ’s return should give us boldness to share our faith as well as boldness to live our faith. I love what Joni Erickson Tada said regarding living in this world. She wrote, “This is the only time in history when I get to fight for God. This is the only part of my eternal story when I am actually in the battle. Once I die, I’ll be in celebration mode in a glorified body in a whole different set of circumstances. But this is my limited window of opportunity, and I’m going to fight the good fight for all I’m worth.”

We have a wonderful, glorious, amazing future ahead! As believers, we have the ultimate happy ending! We have a higher purpose to live for and fight for! Our purpose is much bigger than ourselves. This hope should motivate us to cast off anything that is remotely “dark” and charge forward in the light!

7. Notice the words “strife and envy” in verse 13. They seem a little out of place compared to the other sins listed. But ... are they? Why do you think Paul includes them?

8. How do we practically “put on” the Lord Jesus? What does that mean?

John Stott wrote, “Our calling is to live in the light of day, to behave in the continuing night as if the day has dawned, to enjoy the ‘now already’ of the inaugurated kingdom in the certain knowledge that what is still ‘not yet,’ namely the consummated kingdom, will soon arrive.”

9. How are you behaving in the “continuing dark” of this day? Are you clothing yourself with garments of light, living honorably and decently, fighting for the Kingdom of God? Have you grown lethargic or “fallen asleep” in some area? Ponder this question for a bit.

Tomorrow we’ll be doing a little review, but for now, meditate on the breathtaking truth that Christ is coming back soon! And ask the Holy Spirit to help keep you awake in light of that truth!

Fifth Day

Write out your verse from memory.

Paul's been discussing how we should be living in light of eternity. Bottom line, we are called to love our neighbor, thus, fulfilling the law. I've been pondering that all week. The thought of "owing" no one anything but love is a bit staggering. Honoring, giving respect to others, and never harming others, is a command, not an option.

1. When I think about loving our neighbors, I can't help but think about the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:29-37. Read this parable, but ask the Holy Spirit to help you hear it with "fresh ears." Write your comments on it, especially what the Holy Spirit is speaking to your heart. Who, my friend, is God calling you to "cross the street" and love?

Paul told us to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" in verse 14. In Galatians 3:27 and Romans 6:3, he also says in one sense we have already "put on Christ" in that we are legally righteous before God. We are legally "in Him." But in this context, Paul is telling his readers that we need to live as if we are clothed in Him. Chris Ash wrote, "For example, if a man is in a tuxedo and a woman is in a long gown and heels, it has an effect on their behavior. You look in a mirror and you see yourself dressed for an occasion of dignity and formality, so you behave accordingly. If you forget and move about as if you are in jogging clothes, you will look silly, and you will probably damage your clothes! Work the illustration out for Christian living!"

2. Write your thoughts on the paragraph above. As you walk through life, are you remembering "Who you are wearing?"
3. Are you making any "provisions for the flesh" and fulfilling its lusts? (What does that mean practically?)
4. Last question of the week. I was asked this, so I thought I'd ask you: "What would change in your day TODAY if you imagined that Jesus was right before you, and you clothed yourself with Christ?"

Have a great week!

