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Introduction

Today we are looking at Romans chapter 13. Here Paul talked about how we act as responsible citizens as Christians and in doing so we engage with authority and other people around us. We are in God's kingdom and that should overflow into this earthly kingdom.

When Paul wrote this letter Nero had succeeded Claudius who had been poisoned. Nero had allowed Jews and Christians to return, because it was good for business. For the first three years of Nero's reign there were no major problem for Jews or Christians as this teenage emperor was too concerned with threats from within the Palace to worry about what was happening in Rome. Nero removed his threat by poisoning his own mother and then turned his attention to please the Roman citizens.

Romans 13:1-7 *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. ²Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. ³For 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. ⁴For 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. ⁵Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. ⁶For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. ⁷Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.*

The political climate quickly turned hostile towards both Jews and Christians. The Jewish community kept their distance from anything involving government, many became bitter and developed an anti governmental attitude. So Paul wrote to them to have a radical departure from first century Jewish policy, which had encouraged Jews to be separate and distinct people and now to engage in public affairs.

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Even though we are called to be different and distinct in this world we still need to engage in public affairs. It is time for the Christian voice to be heard in our nation. We cannot and must not be silent at this time. Some Christians don't want to get involved in governmental issues and some have an anti governmental attitude. Some Christians are indifferent because they believe that they are citizens' of Gods kingdom and don't need to get involved. The absence of Christians from public affairs causes a moral vacuum in government and while Christians remain silent immoral laws are passed. Christians need to engage in public affairs.

An important aspect of Christian living is responsible citizenship. Paul encouraged responsible citizenship by encouraging the church to subject themselves to the governing authorities. He used the word *hypotasso*; which is a military term describing **voluntary submissiveness to the wishes of another**. For us to understand this properly we need to recognise that God is in control and although earthly authorities frequently behave badly, God sovereignly uses them to accomplish His purposes. God will accomplish what He has set out to do.

When God created the world, He gave everything purpose. He established laws and justice. Anarchy is bad for everyone. Governments serve the purposes of God whether they intentionally mean to or not. Governments want their citizens to live peacefully, be productive, and cause no trouble. As responsible citizens we are to obey the laws of the land. The motivation for Christians to behave well and obey laws is not merely to avoid being caught and punished it is to submit to God and to satisfy our God given conscience.

Paul talked about paying taxes to the government. The Jews hated paying taxes. The Jewish Christians struggled with the issue of paying taxes to a pagan government, because they believed taxes paid to Caesar was money taken from God. They didn't want to do it. Jesus taught in Matthew 22:17-22 to give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God to what belongs to God. Paul regarded paying taxes to be a contribution to the common good. Sadly some Christians today don't want to pay their taxes or give what belongs to God.

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He encouraged the Christians in Rome and to obey those in authority and to live respectfully and honorably in the eyes of the government. Romans 12:18 *if it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.*

As we fulfill the requirements of good citizenship, we cast Jesus in a positive light and create opportunities to share the good news. When Paul wrote this letter he knew obedience to worldly authorities was extremely challenging and difficult for the Christians with Nero on the throne.

It can be extremely challenging and difficult for us too, as we seek to serve and obey our heavenly King, when most governments, our included, don't recognize Him and frequently oppose Him, but we are encouraged by Paul, *if it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men*, that includes those in authority, and as well we are to show them respect.

This is a delicate balance that can be difficult to maintain. We must remain meaningfully engaged with worldly authorities without losing our moral distinctiveness. We are to cooperate with the demands of the government while peacefully trying to infiltrate it with the good news. All governments do things that are immoral, but our first response should be to remain meaningfully engaged so our influence can change things for the better.

However, if they command us to do something immoral then we have a duty to our heavenly king first and to disobey the command. Acts 5:29 *But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: We ought to obey God rather than men.*

We should do this peacefully and respectfully, knowing full well that as we obey Jesus this may result in having to accept the consequences of our choice, imprisonment for example. In the days to come we may well need to be prepared for this. The most effective means of correcting wrongs is still in the courtrooms and peaceful demonstrations. We know that Jesus is returning soon and so we could easily withdraw because after all the government is going to cease when Jesus reigns over all nations – so what's the point!

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But as responsible citizens of God's kingdom, we are to peacefully engage in this world. Take every opportunity to do so.

Romans 13:8 *Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.* Paul does talk in this verse about debt and being wise and disciplined about debt but it is broader than money. Paul's point is simple. Be a person of honour. Fulfil your obligations. It means doing what we said we would do. Being a person of our word. A responsible citizen is being a person of our word. The command goes beyond merely loving fellow believers; Paul used the word **heteros**, which means one of a different kind; someone different to us, in beliefs and theology, personality and in politics. It extends to those who are not believers.

Romans 13:9-10 *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 neighbor as yourself."* ¹⁰*Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.* The Law is not only an expression of God's character; it points to its original created order. Sin and Love cannot co-exist. Love does not condone or commit adultery. Love cannot murder. Love cannot deprive someone of their possessions. These are the actions that serve **self** at the expense of a victim. A responsible citizen of God's kingdom does not do that. Would not consider doing that.

For Paul, love expresses the highest ideal of a new kingdom that Jesus will establish on His return. At that time God's created order will be restored. In the meantime we are to be living examples of what this new kingdom will bring. The world should be transformed, even a little, because of our influence, because of the way we conduct ourselves.

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.* There is an urgency in Paul's words here. We are to love people in light of the times we are living in:

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- ✚ We are to maintain a balanced view of ourselves (12:3)
- ✚ Utilize our gifts for the good of the body (12:4-8)
- ✚ Show honour to one another (12:9-14)
- ✚ Return good for evil and leave God to convict and redeem others (12:17-21)
- ✚ Meet our obligations to the government and give them the respect they are due (13:1-7)

These create a foundation of love on which we can build relationships and which we can extend the Kingdom of God before Christ returns. Jesus is coming back soon and we cannot afford to be sleeping right now. We need to be ready and awake!

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 armor of light.* ¹³ *Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.* Paul talked about the long dark night continuing before the dawning of Christ's return, some believers are sleeping and others are engaging in deeds of darkness. He lists these in three pairs:

revelry and drunkenness: There was in those days a festival in honour of Bacchus, the Greek god of wine, which began with drunken parade and ended in sexual immorality. Alcohol became an addiction, allowing a substance to control the person rather than the Holy Spirit.

Lewdness (sexual promiscuity) and lust: To treat biblical sexual norms with contempt.

strife and envy: This tears the community apart.

These are not the behaviour of responsible Christian citizens.

Romans 13:14 *But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.* The word for but use here by Paul is *alla*, which is reserved for being a stark and emphatic contrast to these acts of darkness. In absolute, unmistakable contrast to deeds of darkness we are to **put on Christ**.

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Galatians 3:27 says *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*. To put on something means to believe in a certain way and then to behave accordingly. What we put on reminds us of who we are.

The Police for example put on a uniform to remind them of their identity and the example they set, they put on a bullet proof vest to remind themselves to be careful, they put on their badge to remind them of their responsibility to represent their city and citizens.

Paul commands us to *make no provision for the flesh*. It refers to our old enslavement to sin and the corrupt world we live in. Although we are new creatures our transformation is not yet complete.

Paul exhorts the readers of this chapter to pursue love and avoid evil; to take deliberate action and to intentionally put on Christ. We are to love others by avoiding sin and to look for opportunities to do good.

Friends seek out ways to strengthen your Christian walk. Be a student of Scripture, build on our wisdom we gain through scripture. Putting on Christ is a purposeful decision - it will not happen automatically. Putting on Christ is like putting on a badge that reminds ourselves and everyone that observes us that we belong to Jesus. Putting on Christ establishes a standard of conduct by which we should live.