



## Be A Good Citizen Romans 13

### Introduction

After presenting the powerful doctrines of the gospel of God, Paul began the practical application of those doctrines by calling his readers to serve God as holy and acceptable living sacrifices. Christians are not to conform to worldly ways of thinking or be absorbed into the secular way of life. Instead, we are to be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit as we consistently immerse ourselves in God's word. With minds renewed by Godly ways of thinking, we are to humbly serve God and one another with the spiritual gifts we have so graciously been given. Our lives should reflect the sincere love of God as we live for good and overcome evil.

In chapter 13, Paul continues to apply the principles of the gospel to everyday life. Christians live in the world (although we are not "of" the world) and derive benefit from secular government. We interact daily with people in our neighborhoods and communities. Paul exhorts us, as Christians, to be good citizens. We are to submit to governing authorities, love our neighbors, and live like the new men and women God has called us to be.

Paul's thesis in this passage is that God is in control. Rulers rule only by the sovereign power and permission of God. Although Paul does not mention the subject, it should be noted that even tyrants cannot come to power without God's permission.

### Outline of Romans 13

- I. Submit to Civil Authority - Romans 13:1-7
- II. Love Your Neighbor - Romans 13:8-10
- III. Live the Christian Life- Romans 13:11-14

#### I. Submit to Civil Authority - Romans 13:1-7

Paul insists that everyone is to submit to governing authorities. All authority is established by God.

- A. *Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities* - Romans 13:1

*Every soul* means every living person, without exception. Every person is to recognize himself or herself as subordinate to civil authorities and be willingly subservient to their leadership. However, when Paul says *be subject to*, he is not referring to unquestioning obedience. Other places in Scripture, the Greek verb

translated *be subject* does not mean "to obey" but "to recognize a reciprocal obligation" (as in Ephesians 5:21) or "to recognize an obligation" to another as being greater than the obligation to oneself (as in Romans 10:12 and Philippians 2:3). "It seems virtually certain that in the present verse what Paul is enjoining is not uncritical obedience to whatever command the civil authority may decide to give but the recognition that one has been placed below the authority by God and that it therefore has a greater claim on one than one has on oneself, and such responsible conduct in relation to it as results from such a recognition" (Romans, A Shorter Commentary, C.E.B. Cranfield). Therefore, Paul is not implying that obedience to government should ever take precedence over obedience to God. The Scriptures clearly teach, *We ought to obey God rather than men* (Acts 5:29), when man's demands are contrary to the commands of God. Paul's emphasis in this passage is that obedience to government is to take precedence over our own personal desires.

At the time Paul wrote this letter, the Roman government was in power and exercised authority. Nero was emperor, and the early years of his reign were a time of relative peace and quiet. It was not until later that Nero began his notorious persecution of Christians. Paul was executed under the authority of the Roman government and Nero.

- B. *There is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God* - Romans 13:1-2

All human authority is God given. Authorities derive their position, rights, and power from God. See Proverbs 16:10 and 21:1.

- 1. *Whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God* - 13:2

R. C. Sproul notes, "The authority structure in the universe and ultimate authority is God. All other authority in the universe is delegated authority and the one who refuses to submit to civil authority is in defiance of God and a participant in lawlessness which is the spirit of the antichrist" (The Gospel of God, Romans) .

- 2. *Those who resist will bring judgment on themselves* - 13:2

Those who resist the authorities God has established

are in opposition to God and bring judgment upon themselves. The *judgment* Paul speaks of may refer to punishment from God or from the authorities. Perhaps both are in view.

C. Rulers are God's ministers for good- Romans 13:3-5

These verses have been difficult for many because Paul does not seem to take into account that rulers may be unjust and that good people may be treated in evil ways. C.E.B. Cranfield (Romans, A Shorter Commentary) gives a plausible explanation for this. "Paul means that consciously or unconsciously, willingly or unwillingly, in one way or another, the authority will praise the good work and punish the evil. The promise of verse 3 is absolute: the Christian, in so far as he is obeying the gospel, may be sure that the authority will honor him. It may indeed intend to punish him, but its intended punishment will then turn out to be praise. It may even take his life, but in so doing it will confer a crown of glory."

1. *For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil* - 13:3

As long as Christians continue to do good works, they have nothing to fear. God is in control, as Paul has already stated, and as has been explained in the previous paragraph. There are very few governments which will harm those who obey its laws. "Even the most wicked, godless governments act as a deterrent to crime" (The MacArthur Bible Commentary, John MacArthur).

2. *If you do evil, be afraid* - 13:4

Those who do evil are to fear. The purpose of the government authorities is to carry out justice. They are God's agents of wrath in punishing evildoers and they are entitled to use force to restrain evil. Furthermore, God will not allow evil to go unpunished. See Psalm 34:16 and Proverbs 24:20.

- a. *He does not bear the sword in vain* - 13:4

Beheading by the sword was the usual method of execution in first century Rome. Roman officials carried swords to signify their authority over life and death.

- b. *He is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil* - 13:4

Paul has already pointed out in Romans 12:19 that vengeance belongs to God, *Vengeance is Mine, I will repay*. But Paul explains that God delegates a measure

of vengeance to government authorities. The government is given authority by God to exercise His vengeance in punishing *him who practices evil*.

3. *Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake* - 13:5

The conclusion of Paul's argument is that we are to submit to governing authorities as ministers of good and avengers of evil for two reasons. First, we are to fear the punishment which will be inflicted due to wrath. Secondly, because of conscience, we know it is the right thing to do.

- D. *Because of this you also pay taxes* - Romans 13:6-7

In addition to submitting, a Christian is to support civil authority by paying taxes.

1. *For they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing* - 13:6

Government exists for the good of all people and taxes must be paid to support responsible government and governing officials who are God's servants. In the first century, the Roman empire levied a head-tax and a property tax. In addition to this, there were customs duties and taxes by local provinces.

2. *Render therefore to all their due* - 13:7

Verse 7 sums up what Paul has said. Whatever you owe to anyone, you are obligated to pay. This is reminiscent of Jesus' admonition, *Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's* (Luke 20:25). Paul includes not only the obligation to pay material debts like taxes and customs, but also respect and honor which include common courtesy.

## II. Love Your Neighbor - Romans 13:8-10

In these verses, Paul reduces all the precepts of the law to one: love.

- A. *Owe no one anything except to love one another* - Romans 13:8-9

Literally translated the passage reads, *don't keep owing anyone anything except loving one another*. In other words, debts should be paid promptly, and this includes taxes (13:7). However, love is a debt that we can never pay fully to anyone. It is an unlimited debt that is always accumulating. "So we must ever be trying our best to discharge it and yet always be owing it" (Romans, A Shorter Commentary, C.E.B. Cranfield).

1. *For he who loves another has fulfilled the law* - 13:8

Jesus told His disciples, *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another* (John 13:34). The apostle John repeated this commandment in his first epistle, *And this commandment we have from Him; that he who loves God must love his brother also* (1 John 4:21). The essence of the law is not merely obeying the rules, it is love.

2. All the commandments are summed up in the saying, *You shall love your neighbor as yourself* - 13:9

Paul lists the last five commandments, all of which deal with human relationships. They show that, "God's laws are...rules of love" (*The Gospel of God, Romans*, R.C. Sproul). Love does not express itself through adultery, murder, stealing, lying, or coveting. Love expresses itself by avoiding these things. If you *love your neighbor as yourself*, as Paul quotes from Leviticus 19:18, you will not hurt your neighbor through sexual sins, murder, stealing, lying, or coveting what is his. Love encompasses all the commandments.

- B. *Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law* - 13:10

Christians are to be neighborly. We are to care about our neighbors, both believers and unbelievers, and show it by our actions. We are to be sensitive and treat them with kindness and respect. When we show love to our neighbors in this way, we are showing our love for God and fulfilling the law.

### III. Live the Christian Life - Romans 13:11-14

Romans 13:11-14 is a call to vigilance and diligence. In Romans 12:2, Paul exhorted his readers not to be conformed to the ways of the age in which we live, but to be continually transformed by the renewing of our minds. Christians are *aliens and strangers* (1 Peter 2:11, NASB) in this world and our lives are to reflect that. We know what God has done for us by His grace (Romans 3:21-26) and we know what He is going to do in the future (Romans 8:17, 21, 29, 30 and 9:23). We are to live in the light of that knowledge.

- A. *Awake out of sleep* - Romans 13:11

Christians are not to be lazy or squander our thoughts on worthless things. We are to be awake and watchful, living in the light of what is to come. Paul gives two specific reasons for this.

1. *Knowing the time, that now it is high time* - 13:11

*The time* refers to a definite period of time in history, a season—this present age. The fact that *it is high time* denotes a sense of urgency. The hour is late and we are to redeem the time and make good use of it. In the light of Christ's saving work for us in the past, and in light of our future hope of glory when He comes again, this is definitely not the time to sleep!

2. *For now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed* - 13:11

Salvation may be thought of in three ways: Christ's saving work in the past (Hebrews 5:9), our present salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2), and the glorious completion of our salvation in the future when Christ comes again (Hebrews 9:28, 1 Peter 1:5). In this passage Paul is thinking of the eager expectation of the completion of our salvation. Christ has come and His work on earth is done. The kingdom of God has begun and we look forward to our full inheritance when Christ appears a second time. Every hour that we live brings us an hour nearer to that time.

#### B. Live in the light - Romans 13:12-13

Paul says, *the night is far spent, the day is at hand*. Elsewhere Paul wrote that believers have been delivered from *the power of darkness* (Colossians 1:13), that we are *sons of light and sons of the day*. *We are not of the night nor of darkness* (1 Thessalonians 5:5). The apostle John wrote, *the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining* (1 John 2:8b).

1. *Let us cast off works of darkness* - 13:12

Christians are to put off all evil ways, *works of darkness*, and live like those who belong to God's kingdom of light.

2. *Let us put on the armor of light* - 13:12

We are not to live as though Christ had never come. We are to live in the light. Paul calls us to *put on the armor of light* because the Christian life is a battle. Christians must *put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil... against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand*. Paul describes the Christian's armor as consisting of *truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the word of God, and prayer* (Ephesians 6:10-17).

### 3. *Let us walk properly, as in the day* - 13:13

Christians are to be *day* people who *walk properly*. The word *walk* refers to our behavior, our way of living. To *walk properly* means to live and act *in newness of life* (Romans 6:4), *in the good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them* (Ephesians 2:10). It means *to walk worthy of the calling with which you have been called* (Ephesians 4:1), *in love* (Ephesians 5:2), *as children of light* (Ephesians 5:8), *circumspectly* (Ephesians 5:15), according to Paul's example (Philippians 3:7), *worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God* (Colossians 1:10), *in Christ* (Colossians 2:6), *in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time* (Colossians 4:5), and *to please God* (1 Thessalonians 4:1).

Paul contrasts *day* people with *night deeds*, naming some specific sins, both thoughts and actions, which belong to darkness: *revelry or carousing, drunkenness, lewdness, licentiousness, strife, and envy*. The Christian's life should be in stark contrast to the old sinful ways.

C. *Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts* - Romans 13:14

Christ Himself is the armor that the Christian is to wear. "To put on the Lord Jesus Christ means here to embrace again and again, in faith and confidence, in grateful loyalty and obedience, Him to whom we already belong" (*Romans, A Shorter Commentary*, C.E.B. Cranfield). We rely upon Christ, *our armor of light*, because we are in a battle in which *fleshly lusts...wage war against the soul* (1 Peter 2:11, NASB). A Christian must not make

provision for the flesh or plan ways to gratify the lusts of the flesh. We owe nothing to the flesh (Romans 8:12), there is nothing good in the flesh (Romans 7:18), and the flesh serves only the law of sin (Romans 7:25). The flesh belongs to the old way of living, *we all once lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the body and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind* (Ephesians 2:3, ESV). Christians live by the Spirit and are to put to death the deeds of the body (Romans 8:13). Christians are not to allow sin to reign in our mortal bodies so that we carry out its lusts (Romans 6:12).

Augustine, a brilliant rhetorician of the late 4th and early 5th centuries, was convicted of his sin by the power of the Holy Spirit as he read Romans 13:13-14 and turned by faith to the Lord Jesus Christ. Augustine is best remembered as the Bishop of Hippo in North Africa and for his many theological writings such as Confessions, On Christian Doctrine, and The City of God to name a few.

### Applications

1. Do your actions reflect a commitment to civil authority or a commitment to yourself? Is it your intent to obey all laws? Do you make it a point to be informed on political issues and to vote for the people who will uphold godly values and justice? Do you give due respect to the leaders God has put in office?
2. Do you show love or indifference to your neighbor? What are some ways you can show love to your neighbor?
3. Do you remember daily, and moment by moment, to *put on the armor of light*, the Lord Jesus Christ, so you may stand firm against the devil and render obedience to God who bought you at so great a price?

---

## QUESTIONS

All questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

**Day One: Read all notes and references.**

1. What did you learn that was new or interesting concerning a Christian's obedience to the government and leaders?
2. a. What is the one thing every person owes every other person? How do God's commandments show this?  
  
b. Why is it not good for Christians to be lazy and apathetic?  
  
c. What kind of people should Christians be?

**Day Two: Read Romans 14:1-4.**

3. What exhortation does Paul give in verse 1?
4. a. What was the issue that was causing problems among some believers? Explain what the differences were between the weaker and the stronger believers.  
  
b. How are those on each side of the issue to treat those on the other side? Why?
5. a. What question does Paul put forth in verse 4?  
  
b. Who is the only one who may rightfully judge a servant?  
  
c. Who is the master of both those who are weak in the faith and those who are strong? What is He able to do for both the weak and the strong?

**Day Three: Read Romans 14:5-9.**

6. a. What is the second issue Paul confronts?  
  
b. From Colossians 2:16, what were the *days* Paul probably had in mind?
7. According to Romans 14:6, what is more important than observing certain days or eating certain foods? Why is this?
8. a. According to this passage, who is Lord of all believers, both the living and the dead? Why?



- b. How do Romans 6:9 and 1 Timothy 6:15 help explain this?

**Day Four: Read Romans 14:10-12.**

9. For what good reason should Christians never judge or show contempt for one another?

10. From the following verses, what do you learn about the judgment Paul is referring to?  
John 5:26-27

Romans 2:16

2 Corinthians 5:10

11. a. From what Old Testament passage does Paul quote to confirm Christ as judge? See references in the margin of your Bible.
- b. According to the Old Testament passage, what will every person who stands before *the judgment seat of Christ* do on that day?

12. a. What else will *each of us* do?

- b. What more do you learn about the judgment from the following Scripture passages?  
Matthew 12:36

2 Timothy 4:8

Revelation 11:18

**Day Five: Read Romans 14:13-18.**

13. a. In light of the judgment to come, what two things are believers not to do?

- b. In Matthew 18:7 and Mark 9:42, who else had warned against stumbling blocks?  
What were the warnings?

14. a. What did Paul know that he was fully convinced of? By whom was he convinced?

- b. How would Jesus' words in Mark 7:15a be a confirmation of this?

15. a. What does Paul say about a Christian who would eat meat in defiance of another believer who is convinced it is the wrong thing to do?
- b. Can you think of some other instances besides food where this would apply?
- c. Why, according to Romans 14:15, should Christians be very careful about how they act toward fellow Christians?
- d. What does this mean to you?
16. a. What is far more important in the kingdom of God than what a person eats or drinks?
- b. What does Paul say about a believer who has these right priorities? Give verse.

**Day Six: Read Romans 14:19-23.**

17. a. What are Christians to pursue? Give verse.
- b. Give some practical examples of ways you can do this.
18. a. What does Paul say about a Christian who deliberately offends another for the sake of food?
- b. What is Paul's advice to those who may be tempted to do something that offends a Christian brother or sister?
19. The word *faith* in Romans 14 does not refer to the Christian faith. All Paul's readers are assumed to have faith. *Faith* here is assurance concerning Christian liberties such as eating certain foods and observing certain days. What does Paul teach about this *faith* in relation to one's actions?
20. a. Can you think of any issues today, similar to those Paul wrote about, which cause controversy between Christians?
- b. What have you learned about the best way to handle such issues?