

Romans Part 2

How to be a Christian without Being Religious!

Lesson 8: Christian Citizenship! Romans 13:1-14

As mentioned in the previous lesson, Romans 1-11, the apostle Paul provides a theological treatise for the Christian faith and offers a systematic theological set of biblical truths and doctrines. In the remaining chapters (Romans 12-16), Paul provides a picture of how the Christian life should look. In other words, once a man has been born again and becomes a true follower of Jesus Christ (1-11), how should his life reflect his changed nature (12-16)? How should he live and act in a world that is full of evil? How should he view himself? How should he relate to other believers? How should he treat his enemies? How should he respond to the civil laws of his government? What should be his attitude toward civil rulers and authorities? These and many other questions concerning the Christian life are dealt with in the final chapters of Romans.

Here is another way to look at Romans:

Chapters 1-11 deal with issues such as sin, repentance, salvation, redemption, justification, and the atoning sacrifice of Christ. All of these theological terms have to do with man's relationship to God. These chapters deal with our *vertical relationship* with God and our personal *salvation*.

Chapters 12-16 deal with a believer's relationship to others, to his enemies, to government officials, and to those who are both weak and strong in their faith. All of these issues have to do with the believer's relationship to mankind. These chapters deal with our *horizontal relationship* with man and our personal *sanctification*.

Chapter 12 ends with this command: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (verse 21). In chapter 12, Paul declares that believers are to show preference to other believers, even to their enemies. Love is to be the undergirding motive in all of his actions. By showing preference to others, the believer can overcome evil by doing good. Now in chapter 13, Paul is going to show how ruling authorities, including governments, are to be instruments in the hand of God to overcome evil by doing good to those who submit and obey, and by meting out justice and punishment to those who refuse to submit, and instead, carry out acts of evil and injustice.

It is important to note that when Paul wrote this letter to the church in Rome, the people of Israel lived under Roman rule, as did the Jews and Gentiles who were followers of Jesus (the early Christians). Dr. John MacArthur describes what those living conditions were like in his commentary on Romans and offers some interesting thoughts regarding the manner in which Jesus lived under the rule of a pagan government. McArthur writes,

Like the other conquered peoples, the Jews of Palestine were little more than Roman chattel (personal property), an underprivileged and oppressed minority. They had no voice at any level of government and little legal recourse for injustices. Consequently, many reactionary Jews were in constant rebellion against Rome, some outwardly and some only inwardly...

Despite heavy restrictions, Rome permitted Jews a remarkable degree of religious freedom. At the time of Christ, they were not required to worship Caesar or any pagan deity...Because the Romans generally considered Christianity to be a sect of Judaism, the early church was able to share many of the Jews' religious freedoms.

Most Jews, however, chafed under Roman domination, and fanatical nationalists, called Zealots, refused to pay taxes and engaged in terrorist attacks against their rulers...Even as the church was just getting started, Jewish insurrection was rapidly expanding and eventuated in the Jerusalem holocaust of A.D. 70, in which the city and its temple were utterly destroyed and some 1,100,000 inhabitants—including women, children, and priests—were massacred without mercy by the retaliating Romans.

Because most Jews of that day believed the Messiah would come as a political deliverer, many of Jesus' disciples expected Him to free them from the Roman yoke. But He made no call for political or social reform, even by peaceful means. He never attempted to capture the culture for biblical morality or to gain greater freedom. To the contrary, He declared unambiguously, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21)...

When He was not preaching, He was demonstrating His great compassion for the pain and hardships of men in their personal lives. Even the most casual reading of the gospels reveals that His compassion was not merely emotional or idealistic. He not only empathized with sinners but healed countless thousands of every sort of disease and affliction, often at great personal sacrifice. Social morality and structure were never His concern.

But even meeting physical needs was not the goal of His life and ministry. Above all else, He came to meet a need that far surpasses all other needs, a need that only He could satisfy. He therefore spoke to the hearts and souls of individual men and women—never to their political, social, economic, or racial rights or physical pain and plights. He taught the saving gospel that had power to make their souls right with His Father and to grant them eternal life—in light of which, temporal rights and morals pale in importance. He did not come to proclaim or establish a new social or moral order but a new spiritual order, His church. He did not seek to make the old creation moral but to make the new creations holy.

And he mandated His church to perpetuate His ministry in that same way and toward that same end, to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:15)...

What, then, is the Christian’s responsibility to society, and to government in particular, if we are to remain “aliens and strangers” in this world (1 Peter 2:11) who have a platform to call people to salvation? How are we to live in the world but not be of it (John 17:11, 16)? In the present text, Paul presents the two basic principles that answer those questions. First: Be subject to government (v. 1); and second: Pay taxes (v. 6). Those commands summarize the Christian’s civic duty. It is through fulfilling those two obligations that we “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s” (Matt. 22:21).²³

Paul begins chapter 13 as follows:

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God’s servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. (Verses 1-5)

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul conveys several truths from the heart of God that explain how the Lord expects his children to respond to rulers and government officials of the territory (city, state, nation) in which they live. Here are those truths:

1. Every believer must submit to civil rulers who have authority over them.
2. Those authorities exist only because God has established them.
3. To disobey laws imposed by these rulers is to disobey God and invite judgment.
4. The civil rulers who have been established by God have two roles:
 - a. To be God’s servants in carrying out good for the people over which they rule.
 - b. To be God’s servants in carrying out justice and punishment when people under their rule disobey the laws of the land.

²³ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Romans 9-16* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1994), 209-211.

According to Keller, Paul gives three reasons why every believer is to submit to the authority of civil government. First, because it is *right*. From the Bible, we learn that God has established three institutions: marriage or the family (Genesis 2:24); government (Instituted by God after the flood; Genesis 9:6); and the church (Matthew 16:18; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 2:19-22). These are God's institutions! Thus, as God's children, believers should submit to them as instruments of God established to bring peace, joy, safety and order into the world that He created. Think about this carefully:

- The family serves as a shelter in which God can work to provide safety, health, peace and joy for those who live within this divine design—the family structure!
- The government serves as an instrument of God to bring peace, order and protection for all of the families that live under its authority.
- The church serves as the body of Christ to bring instruction, wisdom, help and eternal life for all of its members.

These institutions have been established by God. Thus, it is only right that believers submit to the design which God has ordained in and through them. Daniel 4:17 says that God rules over all governments (good and evil) and “gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men.” Daniel 2:21 states, “He sets up kings and deposes them.” God is the sovereign ruler of the universe, and as his children, we must submit to the ruling authorities he places over us. Why? Because it is the right thing to do!

Second, we should submit to the ruling authorities because it is *wise*. It is wise to submit to the ruling authorities that have been established by God because without them the world would become chaotic. There would be no law and order. Survival of the fittest would become the only law of the land! God in His wisdom instituted government to wield the sword for the purpose of law and order. There should be a healthy fear of ‘the sword’ in order to deter evil. When fear of “the sword” declines, evil always rises! Paul writes, “For he (the ruling authority) is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer” (v. 4).

Third, we should submit to the ruling authorities because it is *fair*. According to Keller, Paul seems to be saying that governing is hard work. Paul writes, “This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor” (vv. 6-7). Government rulers are supposed to be hard at work for us. They give their time to serve us. Thus, we should submit to them! Why? Because it is fair. It is right. And God commands us to do so! Remember, two things about this command:

1. When Paul wrote chapter 13, he wrote it under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and “All Scripture is God breathed,” according to 2 Timothy 3:16.
2. When Paul wrote chapter 13, he lived under an evil government—the Roman Empire.

WHAT ABOUT CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE?

Let's consider Stott's response:

How, then, can it be shown that Paul's demand for submission is not absolute? Granted that the authority of rulers is derived from God, what happens if they abuse it, if they reverse their God-given duty, commending those who do evil and punishing those who do good? Does the requirement to submit still stand in such a morally perverse situation? No. The principle is clear. We are to submit right up to the point where obedience to the state would entail disobedience to God. But if the state commands what God forbids, or forbids what God commands, then our plain Christian duty is to resist, not to submit, to disobey the state in order to obey God. As Peter and the other apostles put it to the Sanhedrin: 'We must obey God rather than men' (Acts 5:29)! This is the strict meaning of civil disobedience, namely disobeying a particular human law because it is contrary to God's law. To trespass and organize a sit-in, or to obstruct the police in their duties, may also in some circumstances be justified, but it should be called 'civil protest' rather than 'civil disobedience,' since in this case the laws which are being broken in order to publicize the protest are not themselves intrinsically evil.

Whenever laws are enacted which contradict God's law, civil disobedience becomes a Christian duty. There are notable examples of it in Scripture. When Pharaoh ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill the newborn boys, they refused to obey. 'The midwives...feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do: they let the boys live' (Ex. 1:17). When King Nebuchadnezzar issued an edict that all his subjects must fall down and worship his golden image, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to obey (Dn. 3). When King Darius made a decree that for thirty days nobody should pray 'to any god or man' except himself, Daniel refused to obey (Dn. 6). And when the Sanhedrin banned preaching in the name of Jesus, the apostles refused to obey (Acts 4:18ff). All these were heroic refusals, in spite of the threats which accompanied the edicts. In each case civil disobedience involved great personal risk, including possible loss of life.²⁴

²⁴ Stott, 342.

We live in a time of ever-increasing evil just as Jesus predicted. Jesus said that one of the signs of the end-times will be the rise of evil: “Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm will be saved” (Matthew 24:12). Likewise, 2 Timothy 3:13 states, “While evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.” If you want to be a follower of Jesus, you should count the cost. The Christian life is not a joy-ride! It is a war! Be prepared! Jesus said, “And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27). Christians all over the world are willingly giving their lives for a cause greater than their own—the gospel of Jesus Christ. Are you willing to truly be one of his followers? In the west, we have lived in an environment that has never really been hostile to Christianity, but that world is vanishing. In the coming days, true followers of Christ in America will have to choose between obeying laws contrary to God’s law, or obeying the laws of God.

LOVE, FOR THE DAY IS NEAR!

Paul writes in verses 8-10,

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” “Do not covet,” and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

There is one debt that can never be fully paid. Verse 7 states, “Give everyone what you owe him.” The believer is never to live in debt to another. Give to people, including the rulers of the land, what you owe them. However, you can never give too much love to anyone. Believers must keep on loving no matter how evil society becomes. Believers are even to love their enemies. If we love others more than ourselves, then we will not commit adultery, murder, theft, or even covetousness. We will not do harm to anyone, including harm with our tongues. Paul writes in Ephesians 4:29, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” We all love ourselves. We don’t desire anyone to treat us wrongly. So, how should we treat others? The same way we desire for them to treat us! Love is the fulfillment of the law in that if one truly loves others, then all of the commands of the law will be met. If everyone truly loved everyone else, there would be no need for laws. Unfortunately, we do not live in a world like that. That world will only be discovered in heaven! Stott writes, “That is why Paul wrote not that ‘love is the end of law’ but that ‘love is the fulfillment of the law.’ For love and law need each other. Love needs law for its direction, while law needs love for its inspiration.”²⁵

²⁵ Ibid., 349-350.

Paul continues in verses 11-14,

And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

As stated above, we live in the midst of very evil days. In essence, Paul warned of this in chapter 1:18-32. In these verses Paul explains that as people turn away from God and begin to worship created things, He gives “them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another” (verse 24). Can anyone really say they do not see this happening in our own society? Three times in this passage Paul writes that God gives us over: first, to natural sin (vv. 24-25), second, to unnatural sin (vv. 26-27), and finally, to a depraved mind (v. 28). With the passage of time, our society has become more and more evil until we can no longer discern between good and evil. That is the definition of a depraved mind—a mind that cannot distinguish between right and wrong! Welcome to America! In this downward spiral of sin, society becomes more arrogant, more perverted, and more and more wicked. Verse 29 states, “They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice.” And perhaps, the ultimate evidence of depravity is when people celebrate all of this depravity, even when deep down inside they know that certain things must be wrong. Paul concludes his diatribe with verse 32: “Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.”

We now live in a country that calls murder, choice, and sodomy, an alternative lifestyle. We have a government passing laws that clearly violate God’s Word—even the Ten Commandments. And we have a Supreme Court that stands as judge and jury over moral issues that were, long ago, settled in the heart and mind of God.

So, what is a believer to do? Paul gives us wise instructions:

1. Wake up from your slumber. Ask God to give you “spiritual eyes” to discern good from evil (verse 11).
2. Be prepared, for the world is coming to an end. Jesus is coming back again to judge the world and to destroy evil (verse 12; Revelation 19:15-16; 20:11-20).

3. Turn away from evil and live under the protection of God's armor (verses 12-13; Ephesians 6:10-18).
4. Live for Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Ask Jesus to give you the strength to turn away from the pull of the world, the evil desires of the flesh, and to live for Him (verse 14; Romans 8:5-17; 1 John 2:15-17).

THE ONLY LAW YOU NEED!

DAY 1 Read chapter 11 pages 115-122 from *How to Be a Christian without Being Religious*.

1. According to Ridenour, and according to the Bible, why are all governments in power?
2. According to Ridenour, "Without the organization and protection of the state, we would all be forced to live by the law of the jungle—survival of the strong and the vicious" (118). Explain.
3. To love your neighbor as yourself is to keep the whole law. Explain.

DAY 2 Read Romans 13:1-7

4. Why must everyone submit to governing authorities?

5. Read the following and tell what you learn from each:

Daniel 2:21

Daniel 4:17

John 19:11

Romans 13:1

Titus 3:1

1 Peter 2:13-14

6. Verse 2-3 state, “Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority?” To whose judgment do these verses refer? God’s or man’s? Support your answer.

DAY 3 Read Romans 13:1-7 again.

7. Paul speaks of the ruling authority as *God’s servant*.
- How should this affect the way civil authorities and governments view their role?
 - How should this affect the way citizens view civil authorities and governments?

DAYS 4 and 5 Read Romans 13:8-10

11. Read 1 Chronicles 12:32. How should believers be like the men of Issachar? What should we understand about the times in which we live (v. 11)?

12. Read 2 Timothy 3:1-5. How are our times similar to the description given in this passage? Give specific examples.

13. What does Paul mean by the following?

The hour has come

Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed

The night is nearly over; the day is almost here

14. Read Colossians 3:1-17.

a. How does a believer rid himself of such things as: anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language?

b. How does a believer clothe himself in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience?

15. Paul writes in verses 13 and 14, “Let us behave decently, as in the daytime...Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”

- a. How is a believer to do this?

- b. Understand this truth: When a man is truly born again, he stands righteous before God. He has been justified. Thus, God sees him as holy! He may not act holy, but in God’s sight, he is holy. That is who a believer is in Christ—a saint! Sanctification is the process all believers must go through in this life. It is on this path of sanctification where the Holy Spirit does the work of convicting us of sin and giving us the desire to live more like Christ—holy living. Do you see progress in your own personal sanctification? If yes, will you share one or two areas of improvement?

16. Application questions:

- a. Are there some attitudes in your heart that you should change regarding any civil/government leaders?

- b. Are there any laws you regularly break that you need to stop breaking?

- c. Have any of your views regarding civil laws and the role of a believer as citizen changed? If so, will you share which views have changed?