

In View of God's Mercy - Week 14

Romans 13

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Context – *The Church, now a new humanity in Christ by grace through faith in Jesus, is to live in view of God's mercy. To understand what sin truly is and how people exchange the truth of God for lies, to recognize God's holy disposition against sin and why the death of Jesus was necessary, and why faith in Jesus Christ is the exclusive and only way we can be made right with God – this is God's offer of grace extended to us.*

With God's mercy in mind – we are to offer our lives as a living sacrifice unto God, in the context of the gathered church and in relationship with other believers. This community of faith is to be marked by genuine love for one another, a commitment to do what is right and good, to rejoice in hope, to be patient in tribulation, to be constant in prayer, to show honor towards one another and be humble with and before one another.

This foundation of understanding sin, salvation, God's sovereignty, our new identity in Christ, our unshakable security in Christ, our freedom in Christ, our fellowship with God and one another – these are foundational for what it means to be alive and to know where life is truly found.

In view of God's mercy – we are now to offer our lives to God, we are now to push back against the ways of this world, and renew our minds through the truth of God, and to reframe our relationships with one another, as the Church, and to reframe our relationship with the world.

In a series of practical application points, Paul is offering encouragement to the Church when it comes to seeing God's gifts of grace in the lives of other believers (12:3-8) and how we as Christians are to relate to one another (12:9-13), and how we are to be different in this world (12:14-21) by overcoming evil with good.

This week there are two more major application points:

- *What does it look like for Christians to honor governing authorities?*
- *How are we to live with eternity in mind?*

Submission to the Authorities

13 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ²Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. ⁵Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.

⁶For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

>> Paul is saying that everyone is to submit to governing leadership – in submitting to the government we are ultimately submitting to God.

I think it's important to acknowledge the context and complexity of this, one commentary helps us here: *"Paul is writing to Christians at the epicenter of Roman rule... He stresses the need to avoid political extremism The Apostle Paul corrects two extremes: an over realized eschatology which says "The kingdom is here so ignore Caesar." and an under realized eschatology which says, "The kingdom is not here so pick up your sword against Caesar and let's bring it" Paul is trying to avoid the "ignore Caesar" or "fight Caesar" positions."*

Paul is reminding these Christians, "Since there is no authority except from God and the authorities that exist are instituted by God" Romans 12:1b – we submit to governing authority ultimately out of reverence for God.

John Piper writes, *"This means that the Roman Christians and we today should learn that it is God's will to govern the world of mankind through human civil authorities. This is God's plan. Man did not create government. God did. Man does not sustain it. God does. Civil authority is God's idea in this age."*²

Our charge: be a good citizen in Jesus name, and with God as your ultimate King in mind.

RC Sproul: *The universal call to submit to authority touches the root of our corruption. Everyone is a sinner, and every sin is an act of revolt against authority. If we respected the authority of God perfectly, we would never sin. Sin is a refusal to submit to the governing authority of God Himself, and God knows that about us. IF we are not willing to submit to God, it is more difficult to submit to the police department, the government, and other authorities that rule over us. It is the duty of every Christian to be in subjection to the authorities."*³

I was thinking about our congregation specifically. In our church, we have people employed by the federal, state, and local governments. We have people in law enforcement and family members with governmental leadership responsibilities, including the military. There are people employed by agencies that support the government. We also have people in our church family who are from outside of the USA, who have lived under communist rule, or the rule of a monarchy. We have people whose family members back in their home country are presently suffering under the leadership of cruel oppression. There are members of this church presently called and serving in places abroad with very limited freedoms.

The world is a complicated place. My family has lived under four forms of government: democracy, communism, a once self governing global city, and a constitutional monarchy. I, along with some others in our church, know what it's like to not have freedom of speech and what it feels like to have very real limits and surveillance imposed on our lives – it's likely that ALL of us understand what it's like to be frustrated or disappointed with the government.

There are no perfect governments nor are there perfect people leading governments around the world – and yet somehow – God uses governments – the good ones and the bad ones – to bring about His ultimate purposes. Let me be clear – we don't always know how He does this or what His timelines are - but we have to trust He is sovereign and good.

So what do we do if or when the governments over us lead in a way that conflicts with what it means to follow Jesus?

¹ Christ Centered Exposition, Merida - Romans, (citing Bird 442-3)

² John Piper, "Subjection to God and Subjection to the State"

³ RC Sproul, The Righteous Shall Live By Faith, Romans Expository Commentary p 404

In Acts 5 – the Apostles were asked not to teach about Jesus by the leading council of Jerusalem and this is how they handled it... ²⁷ And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, ²⁸ saying, “We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” ²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men. ³⁰ The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³² And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

³³ When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. ³⁴ But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. ³⁵ And he said to them, “Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. ³⁶ For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. ³⁷ After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. ³⁸ So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; ³⁹ but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!” So they took his advice, ⁴⁰ and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹ Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. ⁴² And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus. (Ac 5:27–42)

My point: There may be moments of civil disobedience because following Jesus may mean at times people cannot submit to the authorities, specifically because to submit would be in conflict with the Word of God and the way of Jesus. In this example, they counted the cost and faced the consequences and kept on speaking of Jesus. *In Romans, Paul is not dealing with the circumstances where civil disobedience based on unjust leadership is in place, but the greater idea of authority in society.*

John Stott - *“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, no to submit, to disobey the state in order to obey God... wherever laws are passed which contradict God’s law, civil disobedience becomes a Christian duty.”⁴*

What happens if or when the elected officials are not your first choice or what happens if you live in a county where you have no political voice or constitutional rights?

¹³ Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. ¹⁵ For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. ¹⁶ Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. ¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. (1 Pe 2:13–17)

⁴ John Stott, The Message of Romans - The Bible Speaks Today p 344

*Be humble. Do good. Live as people who ARE free. Put your hope in God. He is your ultimate King. Submission to government does not mean full agreement or approval of every policy or politician. Submission to government authority must be in light of your relationship with Jesus. Remember what he says in **Mark 12:17**, “Jesus said to them, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”*

What belongs to Caesar? Give it to him.

What belongs to God? You do.

In view of God’s mercy. Offer your lives as a living sacrifice to Him.

As a matter of history – and in an effort to remember God’s faithfulness, when Christians have faced governmental oppression and persecution, the Church has not only survived, but in fact has often multiplied and emerged stronger:

- During China’s cultural revolution the church grew from around 1M in 1966 to around 40M believers over the span of 40 years despite persecution and oppression.
- In 1900 there were no Protestant churches in Korea - after WW2 when N/S Korea split, S Korea is 30% Christian and N Korea is home to an unknown number of underground churches. 4000+ churches in Seoul⁵⁶
- As of 1979, there were about five hundred known Christians from a Muslim background in Iran. In 2005, it was estimated that there were 40,000 ethnic Iranian Christians (not including ethnic minority Christians who live in Iran). That number grew to about 175,000 Christians in 2010, according to the Joshua Project. Today, the average estimates of Christians within Iran range from 300,000 to upwards of one million, according to some missions experts. Operation World, a missions research organization, continues to list Iran as having the fastest-growing evangelical church in the world. In fact, more Iranians have become Christians in the last twenty years than in the previous 1,300 years, since Islam came to Iran.⁷

This is a complicated issue that requires maturity in Christ, wisdom, discernment and humility – but if this burdens you - remember who is your King, remember your primary identity, remember that all of Romans is intended to help you see God’s goodness and grace to you – so let the burden or confusion lead you to Jesus. Bring your heart to Him.

Paul continues to speak into the Church on what life together looks like... Romans 13:8-14

Fulfilling the Law Through Love

⁸ Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹ For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

¹¹ Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

⁵ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/you-have-filled-jerusalem-with-your-teaching>

⁶ Joshua Project

⁷ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/worth-a-thousand-years-of-waiting>

Love does NO wrong to a neighbor.
 Love is fulfilling the law.
 The night is gone. The day is here.
 Cast of works of darkness and put on the armor of light.
 Walk properly – not in the way of life before Jesus. Put on the way of Jesus.
 Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires.
 Remember sin lives in you but it is not you.
 Remember you have a new way to live.
 Remember you have new life in Christ.
 Remember your primary identity in Christ.
 Paul's words to the Colossians church help us:

¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.
 (Col 3:12–17)

Put on compassionate hearts. (without understanding our compassion is limited)
 Put on kindness (remember God's kindness to you)
 Put on humility (remember God's mercy to you)
 Put on meekness (remember Jesus submitted to the Roman government)
 Bear with. Forgive.
 Put on love – this holds us together.
 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts (not your pain, fear, or anxiety)
 Put on thankfulness.
 Put on the word of God. Let it dwell in you richly.

In View of God's Mercy –

Because we have one true King – we can honor authority over us to the best of our ability as we increasingly align our lives with Jesus.

Because we have one true King – we are called to walk as God's chosen ones – holy and beloved. How we live truly matters - how we love one another truly matters - and with eternity in mind – in word or deed – we are to live in Jesus name with thankfulness to Him.