

# Timeless Truth



## ROMANS: CHAPTER THIRTEEN

WEEK THIRTEEN | JUNE DIXON

### TIMELESS TEACHING |

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#### Romans 13

#### GOVERNMENT, LOVE, AND LIVING IN THE LIGHT OF THE COMING DAY

#### SETTING

I want to start with a mini-history review so I can introduce you to a name you may or may not have heard—Tacitus.

#### THE CONNECTION

Again, a small reiteration of Casey's presentation last week. Paul shifts from theology of 1-11 to application in Chapter 12. We must see that Chapter 13 is not a new subject—it is a continuation of 12. If we miss that flow, chapter 13 can seem like a stand-alone teaching about government. Paul is actually showing **how transformed Christians live in every sphere of life**. Paul commands never take revenge (12:19); leave that to the righteous anger of God. So, If Christians are forbidden from executing personal vengeance, then who does? Chapter 13 answers that question continuing Paul's description of what a transformed life looks like.

#### I. LET'S LOOK FIRST AT GOD'S ORDER IN CIVIL AUTHORITY (v. 1)

##### A. We see that all *authority originates with God*.

- Authority is God's Idea. Every governing authority exists with God's sovereign permission; everyone must submit. Christians are not exempt from civil order.

##### B. Authority originates with God *to maintain order and restrain evil*. (v. 2-3)

- Without authority, societies collapse into disorder and lawlessness. V2 tells us that resisting authority means resisting God's order. The keyword is **resists**. In God's design, government should cause

wrongdoers to fear consequences.

- Paul ends this (v3) with a very practical instruction. He says that Christians should normally live in such a way that government has no reason to oppose them.

**C. Finally, Government administers justice. (v.4)**

1. Government acts as God's servant. Government may not know it, but it is performing a function within God's plan for society.
2. Government is meant for your good. When government functions properly, it creates an environment where society can flourish. Even unbelievers can benefit from this.
3. Authorities 'bear the sword' (NKJV), meaning they enforce justice and punish wrongdoing.

**II. OUR SECOND MOTIVATION SHARES THE CHRISTIANS RESPONSIBILITY TOWARD GOVERNMENT.**

After explaining government's purpose, Paul explains the believer's response. Christians should be the most responsible and honorable citizens in society. He gives four responses Christians should have toward governing authorities.

**A. We submit for the Sake of Conscience. (v.5)**

- A Christian should obey laws even when no one is watching, because they answer to God.

**B. We submit because it is our civic responsibility. (v. 6-7)**

- When Paul wrote this, taxes were collected by the Roman government under rulers like Nero, whose administration was far from righteous. Yet Paul still instructs believers to pay them. That does not mean agreeing with every policy or decision. It means refusing to embrace contempt or rebellion as a mindset.
- Notice the balance. Christians fear God, but they respect rulers. Honor the Position Even When the Person Is Imperfect. Paul tells believers to show honor to authorities. Christians should be the best citizens in society, not because government is perfect, but because God values order and peace in the world.

We've said that God set up the authority structure and we are to submit peacefully to it. Now we come to the bridge in the chapter—

**III. OUR THIRD MOTIVATION TO LIVE A TRANSFORMED LIFE: LOVE.**

At this point Paul shifts topics, but it's not random. He moves from external

obedience to authority to the deeper internal principle that governs Christian behavior: Love. Essentially, Paul is saying that submission to authority is one expression of a much larger principle--love for others. (v.8-10)

Paul moves from civil responsibility (v.1–7) to moral responsibility toward others (v.8–10). This shift is not random—it shows the deeper principle behind Christian behavior in society: love. Unlike taxes or debts, that can be paid off, the debt of love is never finished.

The key conclusion comes in verse 10. The Christian life is not merely about obeying rules. We live from a heart transformed by love. Paul is showing that love governs both private and public life. Love prevents social harm as Paul explains Romans 13:9–10

So how does the government section connect to love? Paul’s logic works like this and the key word is ‘**owe**’: You have fulfilled your civic debts, but there is one debt that is never paid off--The debt of love.

Why This Bridge Matters. Paul is teaching a profound truth about the Christian life: The believer does not merely obey laws to avoid punishment. They live out love for others, which naturally fulfills the law’s intent. So the Christian ethic moves from fear of consequences to love of neighbor.

God sets up governments and we are to obey motivated by love. Paul now introduces the final motivation to live the transformed life—

#### **IV. THE FINAL MOTIVATION TO LIVE THE TRANSFORMED LIFE: THE NEARNESS OF FINAL SALVATION. (v. 16-29)**

This refers not to initial salvation, but to final salvation—the completion of redemption when Christ returns. We are to live with urgency because Christ is returning. (v. 11-14)

Scripture often describes salvation in three stages:

- Past — we have been saved from sin’s penalty
- Present — we are being saved from sin’s power
- Future — we will be saved from sin’s presence

Paul is pointing to that future completion. The closer believers get to Christ’s return, the more seriously they should live.

Because the day is approaching. Believers must:

- A. Wake up spiritually (v. 11).** The Christian life must not drift into complacency.
- B. Put aside sinful behavior (v. 12-13).**

**C. Put on Christ (v.14).** Paul concludes with one of the most powerful instructions in the New Testament: “Instead, clothe yourself with the presence (the armor) of the Lord Jesus Christ. And don’t let yourself think about ways to indulge your evil desires.”

Romans 13 teaches that Christians honor authority, love their neighbors, and live holy lives because we know Christ’s kingdom is coming.

WEEK THIRTEEN

# ROMANS: CHAPTER THIRTEEN

LOVE DOES NO WRONG TO OTHERS, SO  
LOVE FULFILLS THE REQUIREMENTS OF  
GOD'S LAW.

ROMANS 13:10 NLT



# DAY ONE

## ROMANS 13:1-2 | Honoring Authority



### TIMELESS TRUTH |

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EVERYONE MUST SUBMIT TO GOVERNING AUTHORITIES. FOR ALL AUTHORITY COMES FROM GOD, AND THOSE IN POSITIONS OF AUTHORITY HAVE BEEN PLACED THERE BY GOD. ANYONE WHO REBELS AGAINST AUTHORITY IS REBELLING AGAINST WHAT GOD HAS INSTITUTED, AND THEY WILL BE PUNISHED.

ROMANS 13:1-2 NLT

#### *Read Romans 13:1-2*

One of the challenges for believers is learning how to respect authority even when those in authority do not share our faith. Paul wrote these words while living under the Roman Empire, where rulers did not worship Christ and often pursued selfish agendas. Yet Paul still taught that government authority exists because God allows it as part of His ordering of society.

This does not mean every government decision is righteous. It means that order itself is a gift from God in a fallen world. Without authority structures, society would quickly descend into chaos where the strong dominate the weak.

Christians therefore honor authority not because rulers are perfect, but because God is sovereign over human institutions. When believers obey laws, pay taxes, and show respect, they demonstrate trust that God is still working—even through imperfect systems. Honoring authority becomes an act of faith. It reflects the belief that God ultimately rules over all earthly powers.

1. Why does Paul say believers should submit to governing authorities?

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2. Does honoring authority mean agreeing with every policy or leader?

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3. Why is order in society important from a biblical perspective?

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4. What are practical ways Christians honor governing authorities today?

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5. What attitude should believers guard against when thinking about political leaders?

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6. Read the three additional readings in the *Further Reading* section below. What else do these passages tell us about honoring authority?

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## PRAYER MOMENT |

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Lord, you are the true ruler over all nations. Help me show respect for the authorities you have allowed to exist. Guard my heart from anger and contempt. Teach me to live as a faithful citizen who reflects your character in the world. Amen

## DAILY REMINDER |

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God's authority is above every earthly authority. When we honor rightful authority, we acknowledge His sovereignty.

## FURTHER READING |

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1 Peter 2:13-17

1 Timothy 2:1-2

Matthew 22:21

*Christians are called to be conscientious citizens, recognizing that behind the authority of the state stands the authority of God.*

John Stott



# DAY TWO

ROMANS 13:1-7 | Obedience to God comes First



## TIMELESS TRUTH |

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BUT PETER AND THE APOSTLES REPLIED, “WE MUST OBEY GOD RATHER THAN ANY HUMAN AUTHORITY.”

ACTS 5:29 NLT

### *Read Romans 13:1-7*

While Scripture calls believers to respect government, it also teaches that human authority has limits. When rulers command something that contradicts God’s will, believers must follow God.

The apostles faced this challenge when they were ordered to stop preaching about Jesus. Instead of rebelling violently, they calmly replied that they could not obey that command because their loyalty to God came first.

Other biblical examples reinforce this truth. Daniel continued praying despite a royal decree. Hebrew midwives refused to kill infants when Pharaoh commanded it. In each case, believers honored authority but refused to violate God’s commands.

These examples show the Christian balance: Respect authority, but worship and obey God alone.

1. When should a Christian disobey government authority?

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2. What example did the apostles give in Acts 5?

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3. How did Daniel demonstrate faithfulness to God?

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4. What attitude should Christians have when resisting unjust commands?

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5. What does this teach about ultimate authority?

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### PRAYER MOMENT |

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Father, give me wisdom to know when to submit and when to stand firm for your truth. Strengthen my faith so that I will always obey you above all others. Help me show courage with humility and trust your sovereignty in every circumstance. Amen.

### DAILY REMINDER |

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Respect authority, but remember: Your highest allegiance belongs to God.

### FURTHER READING |

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Daniel 6:10

Exodus 1:17  
Acts 4:18-20

*We must obey God rather than men when the  
commands of men contradict the word of God.*

Martin Luther



# DAY THREE

## ROMANS 13:5-7 | Conscience and Responsibility



### TIMELESS TRUTH |

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SO YOU MUST SUBMIT TO THEM, NOT ONLY TO AVOID PUNISHMENT, BUT ALSO TO KEEP A CLEAR CONSCIENCE.  
ROMANS 13:5 NLT

#### **Read Romans 13:5-7**

Romans 13:5 captures the heart of Paul's argument: Obedience motivated by conscience before God, not just fear of punishment. Paul moves from the role of government to the heart of the believer. Christians obey laws not merely to avoid punishment, but because they recognize God's authority behind them.

Earlier, Paul explained that authorities restrain evil and punish wrongdoing. That is external pressure. Laws and penalties exist to maintain order. But Christians should operate at a higher level. Paul says believers submit not only to avoid punishment, but also to keep a clear conscience. This means the Christian's obedience is not merely legal, it is spiritual. A person without faith obeys laws mainly because they fear punishment. They want to avoid consequences. But Christians obey because they recognize God's sovereignty. They desire to honor God in their conduct, and they want a clear conscience before him. So the motivation shifts from fear of authority to reverence to God.

The word conscience refers to an inner moral awareness that we answer to God. A Christian's conscience reminds them that God stands behind every authority structure he allows. Even when rulers are imperfect, believers act responsibly because their ultimate accountability is to God. Practical expressions of a God-governed conscience are paying taxes, showing respect, and giving honor. Believers are not simply law-abiding citizens because of rules. They are responsible citizens because their conscience is shaped by God's authority. When our conscience is guided by God, even ordinary responsibilities like taxes, respect, and civic duties become acts of worship and obedience. A Christian obeys authority not merely because the law requires it, but because the conscience recognizes God behind the law.

1. What does Paul mean by conscience in this passage?

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2. Why does Paul mention paying taxes?

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3. What four responsibilities toward authority does Paul list?

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4. Does honoring authority mean agreeing to everything leaders do?

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5. What is the Christian take away from this passage?

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6. Is my attitude toward authority shaped more by frustration or by a desire to honor God with a clear conscience?

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## PRAYER MOMENT |

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“Father, give me wisdom to know when to submit and when to stand firm for your truth. Strengthen my faith so that I will always obey you above all others. Help me show courage with humility and trust your sovereignty in every circumstance. Amen.”

## DAILY REMINDER |

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Respect authority, but remember: Your highest allegiance belongs to God.

## FURTHER READING |

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Daniel 6:10

Exodus 1:17

Acts 4:18-20

*The fear of punishment may restrain the bad, but  
conscience toward God should guide the good.*

Matthew Henry



# DAY FOUR

## ROMANS 13:8-10 | Love Fulfills the Law



### TIMELESS TRUTH |

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LOVE DOES NO WRONG TO OTHERS, SO LOVE FULFILLS  
THE REQUIREMENTS OF GOD'S LAW.

ROMANS 13:10 NLT

#### *Read Romans 13:8-10*

Romans 13 begins with Paul teaching believers about their relationship to governing authorities (13:1–7). Then in verse 8, Paul makes a powerful transition: after speaking about paying taxes and giving honor where it is due, he says the one debt that should never be fully paid off is the debt of love.

Pay your Obligations. Paul writes: “Owe nothing to anyone—except for your obligation to love one another.” (Rom. 13:8). Paul is not forbidding all borrowing; rather, he is saying believers should live responsibly and not remain in unpaid obligations. But there is one debt that is permanent—love. Christians never reach the point where they can say, “I have loved enough.”

Love as the Fulfillment of the Law. Paul then connects love directly to the Ten Commandments, particularly the commands that govern how we treat others: Do not commit adultery; Do not murder; Do not steal; Do not covet. All of these commands are summarized in one principle: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Rom. 13:9)

If someone truly loves others, they will not harm them. Love naturally produces obedience to God’s moral law. This echoes what Jesus taught when He summarized the law into two commandments: love for God and love for neighbor (Matthew 22:37–40).

The Christian does not obey God’s law merely out of duty or fear. Instead, obedience flows out of a transformed heart. When the Holy Spirit produces love within us, our actions toward others reflect God’s character. Love is not simply emotion—it is a commitment to seek the good of another person. When believers love as Christ loves, they protect others instead of harming them, give to others instead of taking, and serve instead of using people. In this way, love becomes the practical expression of righteousness.

1. What does Paul mean by “owe nothing to anyone except love?” What example did the apostles give in Acts 5? Also look at John 13:34.

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2. How does love fulfill the law? Also read Galatians 5:14.

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3. Is love merely a feeling? Also read 1 John 3:18.

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4. Why is love central to the Christian life? Also read John 13:35.

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## PRAYER MOMENT |

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Thank You, Lord, for showing us true love through Jesus Christ. Teach me to love others as You have loved me. Help me not only to speak love but to live it through my actions, attitudes, and words. Let my life reflect Your character so that others may see Your grace through me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## DAILY REMINDER |

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Today I will seek to love others the way Christ loves me—through kindness, patience, and selfless action.

## EXTRA TIME |

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Matthew 22:37-40

Galatians 5:13-14

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

1 John 4:7-12

*The believer's only perpetual debt is the debt to love others, a debt that is never fully paid.*

John MacArthur



# DAY FIVE

ROMANS 13:11-14 | Living in the light of Christ's return



## TIMELESS TRUTH |

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THE NIGHT IS ALMOST GONE; THE DAY OF SALVATION WILL SOON BE HERE. SO REMOVE YOUR DARK DEEDS LIKE DIRTY CLOTHES, AND PUT ON THE SHINING ARMOR OF RIGHT LIVING.

ROMANS 13:12 NLT

### *Read Romans 13:11-14*

Paul shifts from government and love to Christian urgency.

He reminds believers that salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. This refers not to initial salvation, but to the final completion of salvation when Christ returns. Paul uses two powerful images:

1. Night and day. Night represents the present age of sin and darkness. Day represents Christ's coming kingdom
2. Clothing imagery. Take off the deeds of darkness, put on the armor of light, and clothe yourselves with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

To put on Christ means allowing His character to shape our lives: our attitudes, desires, and actions. The motivation for holy living is not fear but hope. Because Christ is returning, believers live differently now.

1. In verse 11 Paul says "wake up" What does he mean?

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2. What does Paul mean that the night is almost gone?

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3. What are Deeds of Darkness we are taught to remove?

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4. What does it mean to put on the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ?

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5. What is the armor of light? Where have you seen the expression about putting on the armor elsewhere in scripture?

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### PRAYER MOMENT |

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Father, help me live with an awareness that Christ could return at any time. Give me strength to turn away from darkness and clothe myself with the character of Jesus. Let my life reflect the light of your kingdom. Amen.

### DAILY REMINDER |

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Live today as someone who belongs to the coming kingdom of Christ.

### EXTRA TIME |

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First Thessalonians 5:4-8.

Ephesians 5:8-11.

1 John 3:2-3

Matthew 24:42-44.

*Believers live in the present with the certainty that  
the future glory of Christ's return is approaching.*

John MacArthur