

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

ROMANS 13-14

The *Jaycees*, *The Kiwanis*, *The Toastmasters*, even *The Booster Club* are fine organizations. But none of them are divinely inspired. They're human inventions.

There are only three God-ordained institutions. In Genesis 2 God established **marriage and family**. In Acts 2 He birthed **the church**. And in Genesis 9 He originated **government**. Before the global flood, God saw enough anarchy and unbridled evil to decide that humans needed a form of self-rule. As soon as Noah walked off the Ark, God instituted human government.

Later, Jesus affirmed the role of government. In Matthew 22:21 our Lord made the most remarkable and influential political statement in all of history. Jesus declared, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." He reiterated our dual responsibility. Our lives belong *to God*, but we also have a duty *to earthly government*.

And now 25 years after Jesus' statement, Paul is still chewing on its ramifications. In fact, his phrasing in verse 7 even sounds like Jesus. In Romans 13 Paul explains the Christian's duty to both *God and country*.

Verse 1, "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." And the key word is "*the authorities that exist.*"

It's not just that ideal government is God's idea, but the rulers that currently "*exist*" are there as a result of God's determination. You thought the president, and governor, and congressman were elected, but God is sovereign. He is behind the scenes pulling the strings.

God is the one who ultimately *sets up* and *brings down* administrations. This means that though He disapproves of their evil, God allows the *Hitlers*, and *Stalins*, and *Saddams*, as well as the *Obamas*, *Trumps* and *Bidens* to rise to power. God has His reasons.

After Babylon's wicked despot, Nebuchadnezzar, sacked the holy city of Jerusalem, the Prophet Jeremiah still called him, "*God's Servant.*" God manipulates the political stage for His eternal purpose.

God knows that human government is imperfect, but apparently even a flawed government is better than no government at all. God sees the big picture... "*Both democracy AND dictatorship are better than anarchy.*"

Judges 21:25 describes the darkest time in Israel's history, "*In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*"

Certainly, the best form of government is a *theocracy*. A government where the true God sits on the throne. The Bible prophesies that one day the earth will be ruled by Jesus. But until then, **any form of government is better than no government at all.**

Remember who was on the throne in Rome when Paul wrote this letter - *just down the street from the Romans...* Caesar Nero was a certifiable nut job!

Nero set himself up as a god. He killed his wife and son to consolidate his power. He threw the Christians to the lions and burned them at the stake to light his drunken orgies. Nero set fire to downtown Rome to make room for his expansive building projects. “Nero fiddled while Rome burned.” Caesar was a madman.

Yet Paul is clear concerning God’s will, despite the character of the man holding the office, Christians need to respect and obey the governing authorities.

Paul continues his instructions, “Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.”

Building Code Inspectors and Fire Marshals can seem tedious, and bothersome... Once, a Gwinnett County Code Enforcement Official wrote me a ticket for parking two of my cars in pine straw beside my house.

I was livid. *It’s my pine straw!* But I ended up moving the cars, for as long as a law isn’t unbiblical or immoral, *even if it’s just really stupid*, I need to submit.

In those rare cases where *the law of the land* conflicts with *the laws of God*, the Bible teaches that we must obey God rather than man. But that’s a rarity!

Generally speaking, God uses government *to keep civilization civil*. And that’s a good thing. He writes, “For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil.”

I remind myself of this whenever I'm cruising down the interstate. As long as I'm driving the speed limit I've got nothing to worry about. My driving is "*terror*" free. You become *terrified* only when you break the law!

"Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For 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." Generally, the legislators who make laws, and the police who enforce them don't relish picking on good, law-abiding citizens. Laws are written to restrain bad guys, not hassle good guys.

Notice in verse 4 Paul calls the police officer, "*God's minister.*" He "*bears the sword*" or in our day that might read, "*packs a Glock.*" God sanctions the police to carry a weapon... One day Jesus will return to Earth to visibly rule the world and right all wrongs; but until then God restrains evil, punishes evildoers, and maintains an orderly society - through the means of government.

Verse 5, "*Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake.*"

Our motivation for observing the Law shouldn't be to just avoid punishment. The issue is us respecting the God-given authority the Law represents - whether that Law is a speed limit, or a building code, or a *lamebrain prohibition about parking in your own pine straw!*

If believers can't submit to the authorities **we do see**, how can we tell others to submit to God's authority - an authority **we don't see**? Trust me, when a "Praise the Lord" bumper sticker goes sailing down the interstate at 90 mph *it's a sorry witness*.

Once a policeman was making extra money after hours by enforcing the dress code at a ritzy restaurant.

A man walked in with a jacket, but no necktie. The policeman denied him entrance. The rebellious patron goes out to his car, wraps his jumper cables around his neck, comes in, and shouts, "*There! I'm wearing a tie!*"

The cop glares at him and says, "Ok, but you better not start anything!" Here, Paul is saying, "Just obey the governing authorities and you'll avoid a lot of trouble."

"For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing."

Not only does Paul consider a police officer "*God's minister*" - believe it or not, he uses the same term for a tax collector. Imagine, an IRS agent, "*God's minister.*"

In a free country like America, can the government and police be improved? Certainly. But both are not only God's idea - it's God's will that we fund them...

Trust me, I hate paying taxes, but I do it; for God has commanded me to pay all the taxes that I owe.

Paul writes, "**Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.**" Notice, the two terms:

"taxes" and *"customs."* The word translated *"taxes"* referred to an annual tax - similar to an income or real estate tax. While *"customs"* refer to a tax on goods - like a sales tax. **Paul says pay them both!**

“But Pastor Sandy, what if the government spends our tax money foolishly or immorally... are we still suppose to pay the taxes?” And the answer is **YES!**

Don't think for a moment the taxes paid to Nero were used to open Christian schools and old folks' homes! *You're dreaming!* Paul knew at least a portion of Rome's tax base was spent on wild orgies and pagan idolatry. Paul knew their taxes paid for *circuses and carnivals* - yet he told them to pay the taxes anyway!

Hey, I sign my 1040, seal the envelope, and drop it in the mailbox... *from then on God holds the politicians responsible for how that money is spent.* I've done my duty. My God-given responsibility is to pay my taxes.

Historians tell us Roman taxes were more exorbitant than what Americans pay today - yet early Christians paid every single dime. Second Century church leader, Tertullian, wrote, *"What Romans lost by the Christians refusing to bestow gifts on their pagan temples, they gained by their conscientious payment of taxes.* Government is ***ordained by God*** and ***funded by us!***

Verse 8, *"Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law."*

Some Christians see this verse as a blanket prohibition against all borrowing. Yet the context of verse 8 is about

paying taxes, not avoiding debt. Taxes are a debt we're all obligated to pay... **As is love!**

If we love people the way Jesus loved us; we'll never exhaust our duty to love, even til the end of the age.

“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.” Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”

Here, Paul lists the second tablet of the Ten Commandments - *how we're to treat our fellow man.*

The Law and Commandments were given because God wanted the Jews to know what love looked like. But once Jesus put His love in our hearts the written rules were obsolete. Love fulfilled the Law. Real love won't lust after a neighbor's wife, or kill another person, or steal from someone, or lie. It'll always give not take.

Verse 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.”*

God intends for His Church - both in the first century and 21st century - to live in light of an overarching truth, **Jesus is coming back!** This is what Paul and his peers trusted in. This is what we should also believe.

Once a little boy heard the grandfather clock malfunction. It chimed fifteen times. The boy shouted, "**Mommy, mommy, it's later than it's ever been before.**" And that's certainly a truth we can say today!

We see signs of the end times all around us: *a proliferation of natural disasters, the rebirth of Israel, globalism, Russian aggression, hostility toward Jews, a desire to build a third Temple in Jerusalem, etc. etc...*

But wherever we are on God's timeline, there's one certainty - ***it is later than it's ever been before.*** Our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. If you're going to make a splash for Jesus you had better start right now! Wait much longer and it'll be too late!

Verse 12, **"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. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy."**

When Jesus returns, do you want to be blowing a 2.2 on the breathalyzer?... Or when the last trumpet sounds do you want to be found flirting with a woman who's not your wife?... Or when Jesus appears do you want to be on the phone stirring up juicy gossip? Hey, it's way past time to get serious about living for Jesus!

"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts." To ***"put on Jesus"*** is to develop a new identity - a new mind-set. And we're to ***"make no provision for the flesh"*** Have zero tolerance for bad habits and

sinful influences. This is how you live a life dead to sin and alive to God.

Let me begin Chapter 14 with an old Southern expression of which I'm fond. Here it is, "A bulldog can whip a skunk, but is it really worth the effort?" In other words, there are some battles not worth fighting!

And such was the case in the church at Rome. Believers in Jesus were embroiled in conflicts over nonessential, supplemental issues. **They were minoring on the majors and majoring on the minors.** They had lost focus of what really mattered!

In Romans 14 Paul speaks to two types of believers.

The **weaker brother** is self-righteous and strait laced. He works hard at measuring up. He believes in Jesus, but takes pride in his discipline and abstinence. He's into keeping the rules and following tradition.

Whereas the **stronger brother** is free from law. He knows he's right with God by faith alone. In Christ compliance to custom is no longer required. He's free to break from tradition at the leading of God's Spirit.

And it's ironic, look at these two brothers and you might get confused. One brother is more lax compared to the Spartan discipline of the other brother. Yet from Paul's perspective the brother trusting in God's grace is stronger in his faith than the guy who's trying to build up a religious resume that he thinks earns God's favor.

In Paul's mind real strength is based on *faith*, not *fortitude* - its *reliance on Christ*, not *compliance to the rules*. The pride of the weaker brother needs to point out reasons God should love him. While the stronger brother buries his pride, and rests in God's grace.

And here's what's sure to happen... The conformist sees her nonconformist sister and wonders why she's so lax? While the nonconformist accuses her weaker sister of legalism... This was happening in the church at Rome. And Paul douses the fire in Chapter 14...

Verse 1, "Receive one who is weak in the faith, *but not to disputes over doubtful things. For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.*" The city of Rome had a wholesale grocery known as "[The Shambles](#)." There you could purchase quality meat at a cut-rate price. And church members were shopping the shambles.

The shambles though, got its meat from pagan temples. Idolaters made their sacrifices, then sold the extra cuts *to turn a profit* for their *false prophets*.

Stronger believers weren't bothered by tainted meat. Meat was just meat. Their standing with God was based on *the faith they put in Christ* not *the food they put on their plate*. The libertarians felt free to cook-out.

But the weaker believers - those who trusted in the dos and don'ts - were appalled at the thought of eating desecrated meat. This was guilt-by-association. To them eating meat was equal to worshipping idols. To the vegetarians - *the ground round was out of bounds*.

Obviously, most of us have never agonized over the spiritual implications of what we purchase from the Meat Market. This seems like an irrelevant issue. But how we handle nonessentials in church life is critically important. Usually Christians divide and fellowships fracture not over the major issues. Rather they split over minor concerns. We tend to agree on the essentials, but it's the nonessentials that cause us to polarize. We get petty and picky with each other.

Our judgmental spirit spoils the sweetness of our unity and fellowship. As Paul puts it in verse 1, we tend to get distracted in *"disputes over doubtful things."* *That's why we shouldn't entertain such squabbles...*

Verse 3, *"Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls."* I'm not your Lord, and you're not mine.

When it comes to nonessentials we answer to Jesus, not each other. We're all at different stages of spiritual maturity. There may be valid reasons a weaker brother holds on to convictions that you felt free to lay aside.

Maybe you feel free to drink a glass of wine with your meal. But the weaker brother could be an alcoholic. He may never be free to drink. *The guy who can, shouldn't look down his nose at the guy who can't. And the guy who can't shouldn't feel superior to the guy who can.*

I love the very end of verse 4, *"Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand."*

When CC started I was 22 years-old. I sported a grungy beard and wore flip flops. My only collared shirt was black with pink flamingos. I'm sure visitors to CC took one look at me, and figured he'll never make it.

*And though the verdict is still out - I'm 42 years in, and **God has made me stand!** Never judge a guy based on nonessentials. No matter how different he might be from you - Almighty God can make him stand!*

Verse 5, *“One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.”* It wasn't just *diet*, but *days* that troubled the believers in the Roman church. Do we worship on Saturday or on Sunday? Do we keep the OT feasts or have they become obsolete?

Paul is saying when it comes to nonessentials there is no right or wrong - no black or white - **it's a gray matter**. It boils down to personal preference. As Paul pens, *“Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.”*

Here's a list of **gray matters**... *Can a Christian enjoy a glass of wine at dinner, or drink a beer after mowing the lawn, or chew tobacco, or smoke a cigar?...*

Can a godly woman wear a two piece swimsuit?...

Can a man grow long hair - or sport an ear-ring and still be pleasing to God?... And what about tattoos?...

Gray matters also appear in **family life**... *Is it more spiritual to breast feed or bottle feed your baby?...*

How should a Christian educate their kids - home school? or Christian school? or public school?...

Is it right or wrong to put your elderly parents in a nursing home, or does God want you to bring them home with you to live out their days?...

And what about Santa Claus?...

These too, are all gray matters!

Worship styles and church etiquette are also subject to personal preference - more gray matters!

Is it pleasing to God to play rock-and-roll music on a Sunday AM or should we be singing hymns?...

Can a person wear shorts to church?...

Should communion be taken weekly or quarterly?...

Can we play cards at the church retreat?...

And gray matters even appear in **doctrine**.

Baptism by immersion or baptism by sprinkling...

Will the rapture occur before or after the Tribulation?

Good Christians line up on both sides of these issues...

And of course, the granddaddy of all church splitters: *is a believer truly once saved always saved?*

These are all gray matters, **yet to some people gray matters really matter!** Paul says that peace is found in the Lordship of Jesus. Rather than *me telling you what to do*, or *you telling me what to do*. It's up to each of us to report directly to Jesus. The Holy Spirit leads each believer at his or her own pace and own discretion.

Of course if an issue is squarely addressed in Scripture our position is clear - **stick to the Script.**

Black-and-white is easy. But with gray matters we need to leave some latitude. Don't be dogmatic. Let's leave each other room to grow - even to disagree.

Paul continues in verse 6, “He who observes the day, observes *it* to the Lord;-and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe *it*.” One man worships on Sunday - another man worships on Saturday. If their worship is sincere God is pleased. What matters to God is not the day, but the worship.

“He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.” One man is grateful to God for the burger he eats. Another man thinks that by abstaining from meat he's bringing glory to God. What matters in both cases is that God gets glorified.

“For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.” We'll all answer to the Lord, not to each other. He gets *the final say*. The Lord is our judge.

“For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.”

Jesus paid the price to be Lord of His Church. He “*died and rose and lives again...*” Thus to judge a brother in a gray matter you are usurping the Lord's authority. *Beware, are you trying to take Jesus' place?*

My fourth born child was a late walker. Thankfully, he caught up. But the reason he crawled for so long is he lived in a house with three older siblings. When the little guy tried to walk he would get knocked down.

And this is what keeps a lot of babes in Christ from learning to walk. We don't give them room to grow!

They don't feel the freedom to make a mistake. They're afraid if they mess up they'll get knocked down so they just crawl. Real spiritual growth involves some risk. It's easier to *sit back* and be told what to do - than it is to *step out* and learn to follow Jesus for yourself.

Verse 10, “But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: “As I live, says the LORD, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.”

Everyone of us is accountable to God. Jesus is the Judge of us all. That's why it's foolish for us to judge another believer. Remember the motto, "In essentials, unity. In nonessentials, liberty. In all things, charity."

“Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in *our brother's way*.” A man is talking on the phone. We're listening in, hearing only one side of his conversation, "Yes, Gladys is difficult. I know I ought to be more firm, but it's hard. You know how she is... Yes, I know you warned me. You told me she was a hard woman who would make my life

miserable. Yes, you begged me not to marry her. You were right... *You want to talk to her? Ok.*” The man calls into the other room, “Gladys, **your mother** wants to talk to you.”

Poor Gladys, its tough enough to get shot down by an enemy, *but to be zinged by your own mom!* But the same is true in the church. We expect the world to be against us and try to destroy us, but when the stumbling block originates from our own family it’s terrible. Paul warns us not to participate in an activity that will tempt or mislead a brother or sister in Christ.

Verse 14, “**I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that *there is nothing* unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him *it is unclean.*” Take music for example. Most churches once complained about rock music. They called it evil.**

But what's the difference between a "C" note played on a grand piano, and a "C" note played on an electric guitar? There’s no difference. What makes one form of music good or evil is the message it communicates, and the spirit in which it’s played. Paul says “***nothing***” is intrinsically evil. It becomes good or bad by how its used. It’s use determines whether it’s moral or immoral.

One man can use an object to the glory of God. Another man can become ensnared by that same object. The problem is not the object, but the man.

“**Yet if your brother is grieved because of *your* food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.**” A thing becomes sinful when it

causes another brother to get distracted, and **fumble** away his faith. Or when my example causes that brother to **stumble** in his faith. If it causes a **fumble** or a **stumble** I'm not free to do it.

Listen to the following paraphrase of verses 20-21, "All food is good, but it can turn bad if you use it badly, if you use it to trip others up and send them sprawling. When you sit down to a meal, your primary concern should not be to feed your own face but to share the life of Jesus... don't you dare let a piece of God-blessed food become an occasion of soul-poisoning!"

Listen to it again, "Don't you dare let a piece of God-blessed food become an occasion of soul-poisoning."

There was a man who always had a bottle of wine with his Thanksgiving dinner. One year he was bone dry, so he put on his coat and headed to the corner liquor store. But as he walked down the street he heard someone following. It was his little boy. It hit him where he was leading his son. He turned and headed home.

Friends, it's possible to destroy with food or drink, a person for whom Christ died. Your liberty can sabotage his faith. Instead of being a *brother* you become a *stumbling block* - a *real blockhead*. Was exercising your freedom worth it? If you're truly free it's as easy to *restrain* as to *indulge*. It's been said, "The shepherd paces the flock to accommodate the weakest lamb."

Verse 16, "Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." The

Romans were upset over **diet** and **days**, but both issues were of little consequence in the big scheme of things. What matters in the Kingdom of God are *matters of the heart* - *“right living, peaceful relationships, and a joy inspired by God’s Spirit.”*

Phil Taylor grew up in the 1960s, in an all-white church in the Deep South. *I can identify.* Phil writes of his experience, “I don’t know how we missed it. While King marched on Selma and an entire race cried out for justice, I heard sermons against rock and roll, the Beatles, mini-skirts, and long hair - but I never heard them mention racism, injustice, intolerance, hatred, and bigotry. Those are the things God hates.”

Churches have always had a penchant *for missing the forest for the trees.* We fail to see the obvious. As Jesus said “(we) **strain at a gnat and swallow a camel.**” *God, please open our eyes to what really matters!*

Verse 18 tells us, **“For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.”**

You’ve confused your priorities if you **hurt a brother** just to *flaunt a freedom or make a statement.* Building up one other should be our top concern. Hey, *loving a brother is always more important than proving a point.*

Verse 20, **“Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food.”** God’s mission in the world is to save souls and grow faith, not indulge the whims of selfish Christians. *Our fellowship is as vital as our freedom.*

The great preacher, Charles Spurgeon, had the habit of enjoying a good cigar. For a time he was quite proud of the fact he smoked cigars. Once, he was questioned about his smoking. He replied, "I never smoke in excess." When asked what constituted "excess," he facetiously replied, "Never more than two at a time."

Spurgeon felt at liberty to light up a stogy, until one day he saw a billboard ad for cigars. It read, "*Smoke the brand that Spurgeon smokes.*" He was appalled. From that day onward he laid down his cigars and never smoked again. He didn't want another saint to become addicted to a vice because of his example.

Paul sums it up in vs 20, "All things indeed are pure, but *it is evil for the man who eats with offense. It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God.*" If because of your faith you feel free to do a thing that causes a brother to stumble; then keep it to yourself. You're not free to flaunt that freedom.

"Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves." A believer's freedom can become a sin if he or she doesn't exercise it lovingly and responsibly.

"But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.*" If your freedom causes someone else to violate his or her conscience then it becomes a sin.

Don't be proud or cavalier, and exercise a freedom without being sensitive to the people you could effect. If the brother's

conscience is going to condemn him respect his conscience above your own freedom.

Again, two rules apply to our participation in a gray matter: **First**, does it cause me to **fumble away my faith?** If I can't do it in faith to God's glory, I'm not free to participate... **Second**, will it cause another Christian to violate their conscience and **stumble in their faith?**

If it causes a **fumble** or a **stumble** don't go there.

Rather than *fumble* or *stumble*, let's be *humble!* We all need to grow... The weaker brother should *grow in His understanding* of God's grace. While the stronger brother should *grow in His love* for God's people.