



CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

BIBLE SURVEY

THE UN-DEVOTIONAL

ROMANS 9-16

Week 3

Respect for Civil Authority

Romans 13:1-5

OPENING
up to the Word

There have always been those who challenge the government, but do you believe there is a recent decline in respect for political and civil authority in general? Why or why not?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. How does Paul view governmental responsibility in this section (vs. 1-4)? Do you agree with this view?
2. What should the Christian attitude be toward civil servants?
3. Under the Roman empire, how did civil authority provide a benefit to law-abiding citizens (vs. 2-3)?
4. Compare this section with Acts 5:27-32 and Jesus' comments in Matthew 22:21. How is this view of government different from that found in Revelation 13? When might Paul say that civil authorities had overstepped their God-given authority?

LIVING
out the Word

1. List the benefits you receive by living in a country where individual freedoms are protected by a constitution that controls civil authority.
2. Make a list of government authorities that are relatively easy for you to obey. Which authorities are more difficult for you to respect?
3. How do you think that the poor and minorities who often face injustice, would feel upon reading these verses? Are they obligated to respect civil authority? Were Christians in Rome a mistreated minority?
4. To what degree do these words apply to Christians who live in countries where Christianity is officially oppressed? How is Paul's ideal to be balanced with actual circumstances?

WINDOW
on the Word

*This passage addresses **Roman Christians living under the authority of the Roman emperor** and his government. This passage does not address civil disobedience. When government intrudes into God's realm or oppresses its citizens, believers must obey God rather than human institutions. Note Acts 5:29; Daniel chapters 3 and 6.*

“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.”

Romans 13:4





“Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”

Romans 13:9-10

The Supremacy of Love

DAY 16

Romans 13:6-10

It was once said that “They are the true disciples of Christ, not who know most, but who love most.” Do you believe this?

1. How does Paul’s exhortation to Christians to submit to civil government apply to taxation (vs. 6-7)?
2. Do you think verse 8 is a statement about outstanding debts or something else?
3. What commandments are cited in this section? What is most important and why?
4. How does Paul rise above specific commandments to summarize the principle of law as fulfilled in Christ (vs. 9-10; see 10:4)?
5. Does Paul mean in verse 10 that if we obey the law, we have enough love? Or does he mean that if we love, then we have fulfilled our obligations to the law?

1. Do you have past due or delinquent debts to government, business, friends or family? What is your plan to reduce and ultimately eliminate those debts?
2. To whom are you indebted for their love? In what ways can you repay that debt—or should you even try?
3. In your life, how do you demonstrate that “love is the fulfillment of the law” (v. 10)?

*In this section, the apostle reminds us there is **one debt we must go on owing every day**. The early church scholar Origen built on the apostle’s words and taught: “The debt of love remains with us permanently and never leaves us; this is a debt that we both discharge every day and forever owe.”*

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Clothe Yourself With Christ

Romans 13:11-14

OPENING
up to the Word

Have you ever been to a costume party? What is your favorite costume? (a) knight's armor, (b) police, (c) monster, (d) hobo, (e) space alien, (f) celebrity, (g) politician.

DIGGING
into the Word

1. Paul has just stated that love fulfills the purpose of the law (v. 10). How does his prohibition of vices (v. 13) support this idea?

2. What does the need to wake from sleep have to do with Christian responsibility (vs. 11-12)? How does Paul use darkness as a metaphor?

3. How does Paul use the analogy of clothing (vs. 12, 14)? How does one's clothing reflect one's inner character?

LIVING
out the Word

1. How sensitive are you to sin and its painful consequences? Is it possible for a Christian to become too relaxed? Too legalistic? Too judgmental?

2. Which of the vices in verse 13 is a temptation for you? Why?

3. How do you clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ?

WINDOW
on the Word

*Biblical writers often used metaphors to express emotional qualities related to the point they were making. Paul's use of **darkness and night** is a good example. In the first century, dangers lurked at night. Cities had no street lamps, and bandits found little resistance.*

Respect for Other Viewpoints

DAY 18

Romans 14:1-4

What dietary restrictions limit you? (a) no red meat, (b) no shellfish, (c) no sweets, (d) no alcohol, (e) no fats or oils, (f) no fresh fruit or vegetables.

1. In these verses, how does Paul challenge people who are more spiritually mature to relate to people whose faith hasn't progressed that far (vs. 1-3)?

2. What warnings does Paul give to those "whose faith is weak" (v. 2) regarding their relationship with those who believed themselves to be free from the restrictions of old covenant laws (last part of v. 3)?

3. Who is to judge on matters of eating (v. 4)? How does a master judge a servant?

1. Have you ever been in a situation where you were under constant criticism?

2. How do you respond to people whose faith is weak? Are you irritated? Impatient? Judging? Or are you understanding? Patient? Kind?

3. What are good ways to nurture those whose faith places greater legalistic restrictions on them?

4. Describe a time when your faith was greatly tested by a Christian who disagreed with you. How did you resolve the issue?

"Accept him whose faith is weak" (v. 1) is the apostle's advice. This refers to a local Roman church issue where there appear to have been conflicting viewpoints. One group held that the old covenant food laws were now negated and they could eat anything they wanted. The other group believed that even though they were Christian, they should still abide by the Old Testament dietary laws. Paul calls for patience with the second group, as they did not yet fully appreciate Christian freedom and were still enslaved to legalistic thoughts.

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Are Sundays Special?

In the Old Testament, God commanded Israel to set aside the seventh day of the week as a holy Sabbath—a day of rest (Ex 20:8-11). But Paul does not seem to be enforcing this command in Romans 14:5. Can we conclude that God's people are no longer required to observe a Sabbath—either Saturday or Sunday?

Paul's point is that every day should be lived for God because we belong to him (14:8). Every minute is holy time for a Christian. Not just one, but all seven days of a Christian's week belong to the Lord.

But in light of God's command to Israel, should we devote one day a week to God in a special way?

Romans 14:5-6, 22 is clear when it says that Christians are responsible only to the Lord in this matter. Neither tradition nor the opinion of others should guide one's conscience in making a decision about the observance of a particular day. Rather, the careful study of God's word and prayer should inform your choices.

But remember—observance of any day gains you no merit in God's sight (Gal 4:10).

Dangers of Ecclesiastical Tyranny

DAY 19

Romans 14:5-6

“Of all plagues with which mankind are curst, Ecclesiastic tyranny’s the worst,” wrote Daniel Defoe (1660-1731). Reflect on his words as you read this passage.

1. Paul continues to deal with the tension between interpretation of the law and the gospel. What are the specific issues here (vs. 5-6)?
2. Compare these verses with Paul’s thinking in Galatians 4:10-11 and Colossians 2:16-17. What is Paul’s advice to gentile Christians regarding whether certain days should be considered holy?
3. Although Paul is spiritually stronger than the spiritually weak group, he pleads for understanding and harmony. Why?

1. Some Christian groups have disagreements about the day on which believers should worship: Saturday Sabbath or the Lord’s Day (Sunday). How does this issue relate to Paul’s words in this passage?

2. What kind of splits have you witnessed in your family? Church? Place of work? How could these divisions be eased or even prevented? Could Paul’s advice apply to disagreements about worship music styles?

3. What is the difference between being driven by *convention* and by *conviction*?

*Central to worship in the Old Testament was the establishment of Saturday as the **Sabbath, and seven festivals**, all holy to the Lord (Lev 23). Jewish Christians tended to maintain their adherence to these laws, some out of conviction that they were still required, others simply out of tradition. Gentile Christians had been assured by church leaders in Jerusalem that the laws of Moses were not requirements for salvation for Jews or gentiles. Salvation now lies in Christ’s grace (Ac 15).*

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*“For none of us lives to himself
alone and none of us dies to
himself alone. If we live, we live
to the Lord; and if we die, we
die to the Lord. So, whether we
live or die, we belong to the
Lord”*

Romans 14:7-8



A Red Flag For Christians

DAY 20

Romans 14:7-12

Critics of Christianity say the church tends to produce more narrow-minded, judgmental people than generous and accepting people. Is this a valid criticism? Why would it be made?

1. Paul declared that a servant is to be judged by his or her master (v. 4). How does he say Christians should live? Independent or united with Christ (vs. 7-9)?

2. The apostle issues a warning for Christians not to judge one another, in the sense of condemnation (v. 10). The New Testament consistently warns against this vice. See the following verses: Matthew 7:1; James 4:12; Galatians 6:1; 1 Peter 4:8.

3. Why are judgmental attitudes condemned?

1. What is the difference between condemning and evaluating? Are Christians to discern between good and evil (Ro 13:12-14)? Are they to be looking down on their brothers and sisters (14:10-12)?

2. Describe judgmental (condemning) attitudes you have seen among some Christians. What judgmental attitudes do you have?

3. Thomas Browne (1605-1682) noted: "No man can justly censure or condemn another because no man truly knows another." Do you agree? Is that good advice for Christians? Would this advice apply to police officers and judges?

4. Describe your personal style in terms of verse 7. Are you: (a) highly independent of anyone, (b) highly dependent—worried about what other people think and say, (c) dependent on the Lord, but not on other people, (d) interdependent—in healthy partnership with other people and dependent on the Lord?

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“As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.”

Romans 14:14-15



Photo by Miles Kelman

Roughriders Not Welcome

DAY 21

Romans 14:13-18

Has another Christian ever disregarded your feelings, or were they tactless and blunt in disagreeing with you? Do you think they were aware of the pain they were causing?

1. Christian freedom should never become license to ride rough-shod over the feelings and attitudes of other Christians with whom we may not agree. Rather than pass judgment, what does Paul urge us to do (v. 13)?

2. What is Paul's personal position on Old Testament dietary laws (v. 14)?

3. How can Christians please God and show love for all people (vs. 15-18)?

4. What are the essential values of the Kingdom of God (v. 17)? What values are *not* essential?

1. Are there certain foods you regard as *clean* or *unclean*? Why?

2. Are there things you do that distress people you are with? What can you do to lessen their stress?

3. What circumstances can you think of where you can display your willingness not to insist on your freedoms?

*This section of Scripture stresses that a Christian has to consider everything he or she does in terms of its **impact on other believers**. There is one distinction to be noted, however. The apostle is not saying that a Christian must always allow his or her conduct to be shaped by the views of others. This could result in the compromise of important principles. Rather, there are many things that are neutral. In those matters, Christians need to be flexible.*

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