

Week of August 27 – September 2

Submitting to The Authorities (Romans 13:1-7)

Paul talks about how Christians should respond to the authorities, which, in his case, would be the Roman empire. He explains that the authorities are put in place by God to establish order and prevent evil. “Obey the government, since God is the one who has put it there. There’s no government anywhere that God hasn’t placed in power. So those who refuse to obey the laws of the land are refusing to obey God, and punishment follows. The policeman doesn’t frighten people who do right but frightens those doing evil. Obey the laws, then, for two reasons: first, to keep from being punished, and second, just because you know you should.”

So, when it comes to taxes or respect, we are to pay what is due.

Paul is telling us to obey the authorities, not because it would be a sin to disobey, but because obeying allows us to be a good witness to others. Evil is evil, and sin is sin. According to God, murder is evil, and stealing is evil. It doesn’t change based on human standards; God establishes it. Therefore, if a country’s laws say that spitting on the street is illegal (like in Singapore), that doesn’t make it a sin or evil, but Paul says we should obey anyway.

Another example is that most countries have speed limits for driving. Obeying or disobeying the speed limit, in and of itself, isn’t right or wrong. Paying taxes isn’t right or wrong. Or if you visit Singapore, spitting isn’t right or wrong. However, Paul is telling us to respond to these laws in obedience, so that we’re seen as law-abiding people by the authorities.

It’s important to note that Paul isn’t saying we should blindly obey all laws just because an “authority” says we should. God is our ultimate authority, and if obeying a law would be sinful or evil based on what is established as evil by God, then obviously it can’t be obeyed.

For example, if the law says that having faith in Jesus Christ is illegal, then it can’t be obeyed. If the authorities say to kill someone, just because of who they are or what they believe, it can’t be obeyed. An example from recent history would be Hitler and the Nazis, who demanded that people be killed simply because they were Jewish or Jehovah’s Witnesses or homosexual or Gypsies. Those are laws no Christian would be able to obey because of God’s law.

Love Fulfills God’s Commandments (Romans 13:8-14)

Next, Paul discusses love, explaining that loving others summarizes God’s law. “Pay all your debts except the debt of love for others-never finish paying that! If you love others, you’ll be obeying all of God’s laws, fulfilling all His requirements. If you love your neighbor as much as you love yourself, you won’t want to harm or cheat him or kill him or steal from him. And you won’t sin with his wife or covet what’s his, or do anything else the Ten Commandments say is wrong. All ten are wrapped up in this one, to love your neighbor as you love yourself. Love does no wrong to anyone. That’s why it fully satisfies all of God’s requirements.

He then urges his readers to “Wake up! The coming of the Lord is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is almost gone, and the day of his return will be soon. Quit the evil deeds of darkness and put on the armor of right living, as we who live in the daylight should! Be decent and honorable in everything you do so everyone will approve your behavior. Don’t spend your time in wild parties and getting drunk or in adultery and lust or fighting or jealousy. But ask the Lord to help you live as you should.

Don't Judge or Be a Stumbling Block (Romans 14:1-23)

Nearing the end of his letter, Paul continues to give instructions on how to behave, telling them not to judge each other *on things that are not sinful*. He gives the example of eating meat offered to idols, saying it's between them and God. God will decide whether their choice is right or wrong.

He tells them not to judge each other *on things that are not sinful* but that judging *something that is sinful* is not only okay; it's the right thing to do. "It's reported there is sexual immorality among you . . . I've already pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing."

Paul tells us not to judge believers on issues that are not right or wrong since it might cause a person to stumble. A classic example is drinking alcohol, which is not right or wrong by itself (Jesus drank wine at the last supper before He died), but we are told not to get drunk. Therefore, don't judge someone because he drinks alcohol or because he chooses not to drink alcohol. You may know there's nothing wrong with what you do, even from God's point of view, but keep it to yourself; don't flaunt your faith in front of others who might be hurt by it. In this situation, happy is the man who does not sin by doing what he knows is right. But anyone who believes that something he wants to do is wrong shouldn't do it. He sins if he does, since he thinks it's wrong, and so for him, it's wrong. Anything that is done apart from what he feels is right is sin.

Follow Christ's Example (Romans 15:1-13)

This chapter summarizes some of the major points Paul made earlier in his letter. It also includes his desire to visit the church in Rome.

Paul says, "Let's please the other person, not ourselves, and do what is for his good and build him up in the Lord. Christ came to suffer under the insults of those who were against Him.

"May God who gives patience, steadiness, and encouragement help you to live in complete harmony with each other, with the attitude of Christ toward the other. Then we can praise the Lord together with one voice, giving glory to God.

"Warmly welcome each other into the church, as Christ warmly welcomed you; then God will be glorified. Jesus came to show that God is true to His promises and to help the Jews. Remember that He also came that the Gentiles might be saved and give glory to God for His mercies to them."

Paul prayed that God, who gives hope, would keep the Gentiles happy and full of peace as they believe in Christ. He added that Christ had used him to win the Gentiles to God. "I've won them by my message and by the good way I've lived before them and by the miracles done through me as signs from God, all by the Holy Spirit's power. In this way, I've preached the full Gospel of Christ from Jerusalem clear over into Illyricum.

"My ambition has been to go still farther, preaching where the name of Christ has never been heard, rather than where a church has already been started by someone else. But now I'm through with my work here, and I'm ready to come after all these long years of waiting. I'm planning a trip to Spain, and when I do go, I'll stop off in Rome where we can have a good time together.

“But I have to go to Jerusalem first to take a gift to the Jewish Christians there. As soon as I’ve delivered the money, I’ll come to see you on my way to Spain.

“Pray that I will be protected in Jerusalem from those who are not Christians. Pray also that the Christians there will be willing to accept the money I’m bringing them. Then I’ll be able to come to you with a happy heart by the will of God, and we can refresh each other.

Personal Greetings (Romans 16:1-27)

He ends his letter to the Roman church with greetings and some final instructions. Twenty-nine people are mentioned here, including Timothy.

Paul winds up this theological letter by extending personal greetings and appreciation to some of the fellow servants of the Lord in Rome. Anyone who serves the Lord is valued. These twenty-nine are immortalized in God’s Word. We also see that many smaller house churches make up the church in Rome. He notes that even the churches in Rome had trouble-makers because he advises them to be alert to trouble makers and those opposing the correct doctrine they were taught, and not only to be alert but also to stay away from such people. His benediction gives thanks to God, who can establish and strengthen them based on Paul’s ministry and the Old Testament Scriptures.

Paul’s Journeys across Asia Minor Continue (Acts 20:4-36)

Paul left Ephesus for a final swing through Greece, back to Asia Minor, and finally to Jerusalem. He stopped in Troas to say farewell and preach a sermon on Sunday night at a Communion service. He talked until midnight, and as Paul preached on and on, a young man named Eutychus, sitting on the windowsill, dozed off and fell three stories to his death. Paul went down and took him into his arms. "Don't worry, "he said, "he's all right!" And he was. A wave of joy swept through the crowd, and they all went back upstairs and ate the Lord's Supper together. Then Paul preached another long sermon until it was dawn when he finally left them.

He wanted to bypass Ephesus to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost, but, on his way to Jerusalem, he meets with the church elders in Ephesus down by the shore and tells them that he had faithfully served God even when times were tough. He encourages them to stay strong after he's gone, remember everything he taught them about Jesus, and not to let anyone tell them otherwise. Paul explains that he never took charity and always supported himself because he was able to do so.

"I have never been hungry for money or fine clothing. You know these hands of mine worked to pay my way and even to supply the needs of those who were with me. And I was a constant example to you in helping the poor; for I remembered the words of the Lord Jesus, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

When he had finished speaking, he knelt and prayed with them, and they wept aloud as they embraced him as he was about to leave, grieving most of all because he said that he would never see them again. Then they accompanied him down to the ship.

Now he's on his way to Jerusalem, and the Ephesian Christians will never see him again.