

# 1 Romans 13

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 09 January 2022

Preacher: Paul Levy

[ 0 : 00 ] Do sit. Do sit and turn to Romans 13. We're back in Romans 13. Which if you've got a church Bible, it's page 948. Page 948.

Some of you will know the Monty Python skit, The Jewish Rebels, Plotting to Overthrow the Romans. If you don't know it, you can Google it when you get home. And the sketch is this. What have the Romans ever done for us? Asks the Jewish leader. What have the Romans ever done for us? Someone in the crowd pipes up, well there's the aqueduct. And then someone else says, there's the roads. And someone else shouts out, sanitation. So it goes on. Someone says, irrigation, medicine, education, public baths, law and order, peace, someone says.

All right, all right, says the leader. Apart from the aqueduct and the roads and the sanitation and the irrigation and medicine and education and public baths and law and order and peace. What have the Romans ever done for us?

[ 1 : 09 ] What have the Romans ever done for us? Well, quite a lot, actually. If you add up all of that. It was those things, wasn't it, that humanly speaking led rapidly to the spread of the gospel around the world in the first three centuries.

Safe travel. Roman roads. Roads that people can still travel on today. The crisscross Europe. Law. The rule of law.

Order. Pax Romana. People still talk about it, don't they? And somebody's got to pay for that. Who's going to pay for all of that? Well, you are.

The taxpayer. The taxpayer has to pay for those things. And there's nothing more certain, said Benjamin Franklin, in this life. There are two things that are certain.

Death and taxes. And you can no more avoid the tax man than you can avoid the Grim Reaper. The Beatles wrote a song about it. If you drive a car, I'll tax the streets.

[ 2 : 14 ] If you try to sit, I'll tax your seat. If you get too cold, I'll tax the heat. If you take a war, I'll tax your feet. Because I'm the tax man.

Hey, hey. I'm the tax man. So what has the Bible got to say about that? What has the Gospel got to say to you and I about our civic responsibilities?

About how we live out our lives? The Bible teaches we're citizens of two worlds. According to the Bible, there are two ages. There's the present evil age, which is passing away.

But there's also the age to come, which has already begun. And a lot of Christians don't understand that. But the age to come has already begun in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eternity has broken in. And we live between those two worlds with a foot in both camps as Christians. And the question is, how do I navigate that?

[ 3 : 15 ] How do I live in the now, but also the not yet? We're in this world. We've got to pay our taxes.

You've got to feed your children if you've got them. You've got to go to work. We live in this world, but we are looking and longing for the world to come.

And the question is, how do you do that? How do we live in the here and now, waiting for the not yet? And Paul in Romans 13 gives us three brilliantly clear directives.

To help you keep your foot on the ground, but your head in the clouds. You know, people say, isn't it? He's so heavenly minded, he's of no earthly use. That's rubbish.

Anyone who I've ever met who is heavenly minded has been incredibly useful on this earth. And the more that you are looking and longing for the Lord Jesus to return, the more you will live usefully in this world.

[ 4 : 20 ] And so how do we live between the two worlds? Three directives. First of all, that you should look up in verses 1 to 7. And verses 8 to 10, you should pay up. And then in verses 11 to 14, you should wake up.

That's how you're to live. In the present world, looking for the life to come. So first of all, pay up. No, first of all, look up.

And then pay up. And then wake up. So look up. Where do you find that? Well, just look at the way that Paul talks about government in the first seven verses. Can you see that? Look at how the chapter opens.

He says, doesn't he, the authorities that exist have been established by God. And then he says in verse 1, everyone, every person should be subject to them.

To those governing authorities. Because God has placed them there. The powers that be. The authorities that exist. God has put them there.

[ 5 : 19 ] And I need to remind you that Paul is writing to Christians in Rome. Where the governing authority is none other than the Emperor Nero. Who would certainly know Mother Teresa.

He was the man who fiddled while Rome burned. And then blamed it on the Christians. That's the context here. This isn't Romans 13 a lecture in a university about politics.

It isn't an academic treatise on the relationship between church and state. You don't find that in Romans 13. It's not a lecture on jurisprudence.

Paul isn't comparing political systems in Romans 13. If you're interested. In that, you've got to go somewhere else. Because that isn't what Romans 13 is about. What you've got in Romans 13 is a pastoral letter.

To Christians living under a totalitarian regime. That's every bit as bad as anything the world has seen. And it's interesting. He says to these people, doesn't he?

[ 6 : 24 ] He doesn't say rebel. He says submit. He knows exactly the situation. He knows the dark side of what these people are in.

But he doesn't say rebel. He says submit. He doesn't say run away as fast as your little legs will carry you. He says stay where you are. He says stay put.

He says you are in the capital city of the world. And God has placed you there under this government. And he has a purpose for you. So do not run away. Stay where you are.

He doesn't say resist. Resist those authorities. He says no respect them. And you might not like them very much. You might not like Nero's personality.

But respect the office. Respect the government that God has placed over you. And as I said the apostle Paul is not naive. He is not naive. He is not naive about Roman corruption.

[ 7 : 26 ] He is very well aware of that. So just a few years before in AD 49. Emperor Claudius who is Nero's predecessor. Has booted out all the Jews out of Rome.

And by doing that of course he has decimated the Christian church in Rome. Most of the early Christians were Jews. They had probably been converted on the day of Pentecost. And had gone back to Rome. And so just imagine you turned up next Sunday.

And half the congregation is missing. It would be pretty demoralizing for the church. And that's the context. That is the situation that Paul is addressing here.

And yet he insists as a matter of conscience. That we should submit to the government. It may not be a government you voted for. But thank God you've got to vote.

Most people don't have a vote. It may not be the government that you want. But it is the government that God has put in place. And bad government is better than no government at all.

[ 8 : 31 ] Because otherwise we'd have anarchy. Now for us it's not Emperor Nero. That we have to worry about. But it's Boris.

It's the police. It's the local authority. Notice just how Paul describes them here. Can you see that? He describes them as God's ministers. God's servants actually.

He's using religious language. He uses two words to describe the religious authorities. He talks about them as deacons. And he talks about them as kind of liturgists. Or priests.

He uses two religious words. He says they are God's ministers. God's servants. Our local authorities.

[ 9 : 31 ] Our MPs. Our police. Our teachers. God's ministers. Have you ever thought of it like that? They are God's servants for your good, Paul says.

So too is the tax man. He says you ought to give them proper respect. When you give them the honor and respect they are due. You worship God who put them there.  
So look up. Whatever regime you live under. Look up and see that the powers that be have been put there by God. He is the absolute sovereign.  
He has the affairs of men and nations in his hands. So look up. And that is how we are to respond to what God has done for us in Christ. We are to be model citizens.  
I can imagine you have got all sorts of questions. Does this mean I can't criticize the government? Does this mean I can't protest against some of the laws that the government has passed?  
[ 10 : 37 ] Does it mean that there is no room for civil disobedience? What about if the state misuses its God-given authority?

And instead of using that authority to promote good and punish evil. Actually punishes good and promotes evil. What then? What if the state forbids what God commands?  
And commands what God forbids? And you might say, well that's hypothetical. I want to say to you it's not hypothetical at all. It's where we are. It's sad isn't it when you see no respect for teachers. No respect for parents. No respect for police officers. Give them Their respect.  
You see it's where the gospel cuts across our culture isn't it? Our culture is very anti-establishment. We love to poke fun at our politicians. It's a kind of national pastime.  
[ 11 : 44 ] We call them names. We ridicule them. But Romans 13 is saying that is an ungodly thing to do. It is an unchristian thing to do. Do you remember Paul is in this section of Romans telling us how we worship?

He's telling us how we live lives of worship. So worship isn't just coming on a Sunday, doing your little religious bit once a week. We worship as all of our lives.  
And so you worship God by filling in your tax return. As well as singing your hymns. By keeping the speed limit. By fastening on your seatbelt.  
And by not rubbishing your elected leaders. And so what are we to do when the commands of the government cut across the commands of God? On abortion.  
On the legalizing of same-sex marriage. Do we just go along with that? Well of course not. What has happened there is that the government has overstepped its authority in passing that kind of legislation.  
[ 12 : 53 ] The government exists as a delegated authority. And so if the government forbids what God commands and commands what God forbids.

We must obey God rather than man. You see Romans 13 isn't all there is to say about the state and our relationship to the state.  
If the government forbids what God commands and commands what God forbids. Then you've moved out of Romans 13 into Revelation 13. And the government is no longer a minister of God for our good.  
It's a minister of Satan and you've got to resist it. Because that principle in the Bible of we must obey God rather than men. And we must be willing then and ready and prepared to suffer the consequences.  
As hard as that may be. That would mean for some of you you might lose your job. I'm not talking about ministers who refuse to kind of do same-sex weddings.  
[ 13 : 56 ] I'm talking about teachers. Nurses possibly. Doctors. So Paul says recognize that the powers that be have been put there by God.

And look to him because he is the ultimate authority. So look up. Recognize the powers that be have been put there by God. But then in verse 8 to 10. Do you notice he turns from the state to society.  
And society he turns from the institution of government to the individuals. To individuals we're surrounded by every day. So can you see that?  
In verse 8 he moves from rulers to neighbors. Do you see what he says from verse 8? Owe no one anything.  
Let no debt remain outstanding. Except the continuing debt to love one another. In other words pay up. Look up. Whatever regime you're living under.  
[ 14 : 57 ] Or suffering under look up. Because God is the ultimate governor of the universe. Look up prayerfully and respectfully to him. Don't run. Don't resist. Don't rebel. Look up.

Put God first. But then secondly pay up. And that's his second directive. Be a contributor. In other words to society. Don't be on the take.

Don't be sponging. The world doesn't owe you a living. Society does not owe you a living. We owe society something as Christian people.

And so he says. Isn't he? Let no debt remain outstanding. Except the continuing debt to love one another. There's one debt you'll never pay off.

Hopefully one day you'll pay off your student loan. There will be a day if you're a homeowner. When hopefully you will pay off your mortgage. It'll be a great day, won't it?

[16:00] Maybe this year you'll pay off your credit card loan. Or your car loan. And you'll be able to pay your debts off. But there'll be one debt that remains outstanding.

That you'll never be able to pay off. And that is the continuing debt to love one another. A number of years ago.

The social critic Dennis Prager. Was debating the Oxford atheist. The philosopher Jonathan Glover. And this happened in the debate. He said.

If you, Professor Glover. Were standing at the midnight hour. In a desolate Los Angeles street. And if as you stepped out of your car. With fear and trembling.

You were suddenly to hear the weight. Of pounding footsteps behind you. And you saw ten burly young men. Who had just stepped out of a dwelling. Coming towards you.

[16:59] Would it. Or would it not. Make a difference to you. To know that they were coming from a Bible study. And of course.

In midst howls of laughter from the auditorium. Glover conceded it would make a huge difference. You bet it would make a difference. And that is kind of Paul's point here isn't it. Our beliefs control our behaviour.

And if we've received mercy. And oh how we've received mercy. From God. First 11 chapters of Romans. Have poured that out upon us. If we've received mercy from God.

Then we will be merciful. Won't we? If we've been on the receiving end. Of God's generosity. Then we will be generous to others. If we've known the love of God.

Shed abroad in our hearts. Then we will have a love for others. And the gospel will. Make us not only good citizens. Paying our taxes. Working for the common good of society.

[18:01] The gospel will not only make us good citizens. But it will make us good neighbours as well. And what will that look like? Let me try and give you an illustration.

In Ealing. The first exclusion zone in the country. Was put around the Mary Stopes abortion clinic. So you're not allowed.

To protest within 500 metres. Of the Mary Stopes abortion clinic. How are we to respond to that? As Christian people living in Ealing.

Does that mean we go out with our placards? And our protests? I'm not saying that's necessarily wrong. To do that. I personally don't think it's wise to do that.

I don't necessarily think that's the loving way to respond. How should we respond? How should we respond to an exclusion zone around an abortion clinic? What should we do?

[19:05] Well we need to make sure that IPC Ealing is. Has an inclusive zone. That we are inclusive as a body of believers.

That we are a community of Christians who are welcoming. Who are welcoming and struggling with that issue of abortion. That the single parent.

The young mum. Who doesn't know what to do. Who wants to save their unborn child. But it's so costly. So what are we to do?

We are to be inclusive and welcome. And to do that is costly for ourselves. To set up a meaningful pregnancy advice centre. Which sees people coming in. Includes a great deal of money.

An enormous amount of thought and planning. It is slow and it is hard work. And to hope pregnancy centre. Has got the potential to be enormously effective.

[20:07] And yet it will be very very costly. It has been costly already. But that is what the early Christians did. It's how Christians have always behaved in an anti-Christian world.

You see it in Romans 12. You overcome evil with good Romans 12 tells us. We must out love the enemy. And that is why the Christian gospel spread so rapidly in the early centuries before Constantine.

Justin Martyr. He wrote in the second century. Let me read you what he wrote. He said. We who used to value the acquisition of wealth and possessions more than anything else. Now bring what we have to a common fund. We share it with anyone who needs it.

We used to hate and destroy you one another. And refuse to associate with people of another race or country. Now because of Christ we live together with such people. And pray for our enemies. That's radical.

That's where we're heading isn't it? Heading out of Christendom. Into the time before Constantine. Back into the early centuries. Before Christianity became the established religion.

[ 21 : 17 ] Going back to those early Christians. Let me read to you another one. Clement. One of the church fathers. He puts it like this. He describes the person who's come to know God. And he says. He impoverishes himself.

Out of love. So that he is certain. He may never overlook a brother in need. Especially if he knows he can bear poverty better than his brother. He likewise considers the pain of another as his own pain.

And he suffers any hardship. Because of having given out of his own poverty. He doesn't complain. That is radical. Radical Christianity. That's what Jesus means isn't he?

When he says. If you want to come after me. If you want to follow me. You must be willing to take up your cross and follow me. You must be prepared to die for self. And we live in a me society. Don't we? Me, me, me, me. And Jesus says. If you want to follow me. If you want to be part of my kingdom. If you want to have anything to do with me. Then you've got to live and die for others.

[ 22 : 24 ] Many years ago. The founder of the Saliars. You know the Salvation Army. William Booth. He was a really old man. He was preparing his annual message for Salvationists.

To go all around the world. And in those days. Communication was by way of telegraph. You paid for every word you sent. Times were tough for the Salvation Army. In those days.

They were short of money. So William Booth sent a one word telegram. To all the officers in the Salvation Army. And the word he sent around the world was. Others.

Others. And that's the message that Paul is spelling out for us here. Look at verse 8. Whoever loves others.

Another. Has fulfilled the law. I think verses 8 and 9. Are some of the most vital verses.

[ 23 : 25 ] For the Christian church. In the UK today. Because there is huge confusion about the law of God. But can you notice in verses 8 and 9.

He brings the law of God and love together. Do you notice. That he quotes from the Ten Commandments. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not murder. You shall not steal.

You shall not covet. And he says all of this means. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. He's saying that the law of God. Actually gives us content for love.

We can get really sentimental. Really subjective. About the subject of love. I love the human race. It's just people that I can't stand. Love is too nebulous.

You can't get your hands routed. It becomes a touchy feely sort of thing. Something subjective and sentimental. But the law saves us from that. One of the old Puritans put it like this.

[ 24 : 24 ] He talks about hitting a target. And he says. In order to hit the target. You need gunpowder to fire the gun. But you need a barrel to direct the bullet.

And if love is the gunpowder. The law is the barrel. Love propels the bullet. The law directs it.

And what are we aiming at? It's here in verse 10. Love does no harm to a neighbor. How do I know that I'm not doing any harm to our neighbor? Because the law shows me.

So if you're sleeping around. You've broken your marriage vows. Is that loving? Someone says. Well I'm not doing anyone harm.

You are. You're harming yourself. You're harming your partner. You're harming society. You're harming your children. Love doesn't do that. Love does no harm.

[ 25 : 25 ] Think how harmful. This kind of social engineering going on is. Messing about with sex and gender. Redefining marriage and family.

God's law protects us from all of that. The ten commandments. They are given to us to protect us. God isn't putting little rules on the wall for you and I.

That are far too difficult for us. No it's our protection. It's the glue that holds society together. It's what saves us from anarchy do you see. Love and law are not in opposition to each other.

Society doesn't owe us anything. On the contrary. We owe it to those around us. To speak the truth in love. And to suffer for it. We owe it to our friends and our neighbors.

And our fellow citizens. To show what does the love of God and Jesus really look like. So you will not bring in God's kingdom by the ballot box or by bullets.

[ 26 : 26 ] My kingdom is none of this world Jesus says. My followers do not take up swords. No if you want to bring in my kingdom. How do you do it? It's through the preaching and living out of the gospel.

That's what you owe to your city. That's what we owe to the UK. That's what we owe to our neighbors and our enemies. To speak it and live it out clearly. That is the outstanding debt we still have.

So look up. Whatever regime you're living under. Look up. Don't run away. Don't look for some other place to live. God's placed you there under that regime. Look up. Trust in God.

Faithful and loyal to him and his word. Look up. And pay up. Be a contributing member of your society. Meet the obligations that you have to fellow human beings.

And then finally wake up. Look at verses 11 to 14. Paul says, don't you know what time it is?

[ 27 : 32 ] It's high time you woke up from your sleep. What are you doing? Running around in your pajamas at this time of day. You can picture the scene in houses all over the country.

There's a child or a teenager in bed. Kind of inert lump under the bedclothes. The alarm that they got for Christmas has gone off 14 times and been put on snooze.

Mum has shouted up the stairs a number of times. It's time to get up. It's time to get up. Dad in the end takes things into his own hands with a jug of water. And in the midst of shouting, what did you do that for?

The teenager stirs. And you open up one eye. And you say, is that the time? Perhaps you're absorbed by some kind of project.

You're absorbed in doing something. You're totally absorbed in what you're doing. And suddenly someone interrupts you. And you say, I didn't realize the time. Well, that's the picture. That's what Paul is warning us about.

[ 28 : 37 ] He's saying you can be so absorbed with life in this world. You can be so absorbed with legitimate things. That you don't realize the time. You don't realize the time.

It's 2022. I've been the minister of this church 18 years. 18 years. It's interesting to look at this picture at the end of chapter 13.

There's two pictures. In verses 9 to 13, you've got a picture that you want to put on the piano. It's a beautiful picture. It's a picture of the Christian who's a glow full of the spirit.

Rejoicing in hope. Practicing hospitality. It's your profile picture on Facebook. That's what you want people to see. It's how you want people to know you. But then there's another picture at the end of chapter 13, isn't there?

Another picture that you don't want anyone to see. Because it doesn't bear the light of day. So he says in verse 13, don't walk about in orgies and drunkenness.

[ 29 : 45 ] Not in sexual immorality and sensuality. Not in quarreling or jealousy. Is that a Christian? Is it talking about the same group of people in these verses? Can they be Christians at all?

Of course they must be. But you see what Paul says? Paul says, wake up. Your salvation is nearer to you than when you first believed. Jesus is coming back.

And are you living a life which is becoming of a Christian? Are you living a life that is attractive and Christ-like and drawing people into the light? Do you want Jesus to come back?

To come back and find you in your night clothes? It's ironic, isn't it? That people often think of Christianity as really old-fashioned. And out of date.

But it's sin that is old-fashioned. It is sin that is passing away. Sin is so yesterday. That's what Paul is saying. The sinful lifestyle, the partying, all the things.

[ 30 : 43 ] They are passing away but Jesus is coming back. The time is coming when righteousness and love and integrity and faithfulness will be all the rage and all the fashion.

So take off the dowdy old clothes. That's what convinced and convicted the great Saint Augustine. Do you know the great Saint Augustine?

He was a great waster. He had a praying mother, Monica. And she prayed for him. But as a teenager, as a young man, he lived a very moral life.

He had a praying mother. But he was a waster in his teens and twenties. And he listened. He sat under the ministry of the great Saint Ambrose, who was the Bishop of Milan.

He heard the most powerful preaching of the day. But he was a loser. He says that in his confessions, he prayed, Lord, give me chastity, but not yet.

[ 31 : 41 ] I'll be a Christian, but not yet, Lord. I want to enjoy life too much. He had an illegitimate son. He had numerous affairs with different women. And then one day, he's sitting in a garden in Milan and there's kids playing next door.

And the kids are singing a song to themselves, which they'd learnt in Latin. Tolle legge, tolle legge. It means take up and read. Take up and read.

And those words come across the fence to Augustine as a word from God. And he goes to look for a Bible. He opens up the Bible at random to Romans chapter 13.

And the first words he sees are the words at the end of chapter 13. Can you see them? Let us walk properly.

As in the daytime. Not in orgies and drunkenness. Not in sexual immorality and sensuality. Not in quarreling and jealousy.

[ 32 : 42 ] But put on the Lord Jesus Christ. He heard the message, don't be found dead without Jesus. Because he's coming back.

And he'll soon be here. Do you want him to find you? Living that sort of lifestyle? This morning when you came to church, you had a choice to make.

You had to decide what clothes to wear. You had to decide how you were going to dress to come to church. Most of you did. But one day you're not going to go to church.

You're going to go into eternity. And the days of going to church will be over. But one day the trumpet will sound. And the dead will rise.

And you will find yourself going into eternity. And Jesus will return. What will you wear then? Can you see what Paul says?

[ 33 : 42 ] Clothe yourself with him. Identify yourself with him. Let people know whose you are. And to whom you belong.

So that when Jesus returns. You won't be found doing anything. That will not bear the light of day. Let's pray.

Let's pray.