

# *Truth for Today*

## **The Bible Explained**

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**Broadcast :** 9/10 January 2021

**No.:** T1180

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## **The Epistle to the Romans - Duties**

### **Romans 13: How to live righteously**

*[Please note: sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.  
English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

#### **Introduction**

Today, we continue to consider the practical answers to the Gospel, which are incumbent upon us Christians – those who have believed it and have been saved by God’s grace. The titles for our talks on Romans chs.12-14 are derived from Titus 2:11-12 (KJV), where we’re told that the grace of God which has brought us salvation also teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts; and how to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world. *From the outset, we should note that God has always required this standard of behaviour from mankind:*

*“[God] has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to [live righteously], and to love kindness, and to walk humbly [before] your God?” (Micah 6:8, ESV).*

Last week, we learnt from Romans ch.12 (see v.3) how to live “soberly”, that is, to have a proper estimation of ourselves. Next week, God willing, we shall learn from ch.14 (see v.8) how to live “godly”, that is, to live openly and honestly before God. This talk, on ch.13, is about how to live “righteously”, that is, towards other people in the world. *We could say that God gave His moral Law for this very purpose. We’re all too aware of the tendency of our sinful nature, the flesh, to disobey it. How glad we are that:*

*“God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (8:3-4).*

Thank God! through the Gospel:

*“We are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code” (7:6).*

Using v.13, “Let us walk properly [or, decently]” as our text, I’ll divide the chapter into three sections:

1. vv.1-7: How to be righteous citizens.
2. vv.8-10: How to be righteous neighbours.
3. vv.11-14: Wake up to righteousness!

#### **Vv.1-7: How to be righteous citizens**

*“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore*

whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honour to whom honour is owed."

At a recent Truth for Today team prayer meeting, one of my colleagues prayed that, as speakers, we would provide something that was up to date, rather than what we'd heard or read from others in the past. I have no difficulty at all in doing just that with these opening verses of Romans 13. At present, I do personally have some concern with their application to myself during the current government's Covid-19 rules, which are sometimes rather confusing and contradictory! Am I truly being subject to the government as v.1 commands and demands? Or do I think that I know better on some of the issues and therefore there's no need for me to be fully compliant? We'll always face such challenges as these.

However, as this talk was recorded in October 2020, the start of 2021 may have seen an easing of the emergency pandemic regulations. Therefore, v.1 applies to properly established laws; and states believers must obey these. But do we, or do we even need to, exhibit this kind of attitude in our liberated and democratic 21<sup>st</sup> century western society, in which our opinions and human rights are so much insisted upon? The remainder of v.1 together with v.2, makes it clear that all governing authorities in our world have been set up by God and any opposition to them is equivalent to resisting the sovereign will of God. According to vv.3-4, they're responsible for the maintenance of good conduct from their citizens; and their law systems must ensure that any wrongdoing is suitably punished. So the answer to our question is "Yes", we'll only be righteous citizens if we obey our national and civic laws. If we don't, we'll incur God's wrath (v.5), because Paul has earlier stated God is against all sin (chs.1-3).

At this point in my talk, I must digress from these exhortations to consider some situations believers are confronted with in our post-Christian society. Namely, how believers are to react if laws are enacted, which change the law of God to defiantly violate His declared edicts. In such situations, believers must obey God rather than the government – in the same manner that Peter and John resisted the commands of the Sanhedrin in Acts 4:19; and to declare, as they did, that we'll continue to abide by God's word. For cultural reasons, immorality and unrighteousness may be permitted to be practised by official human laws. However, we must adhere to God's definitions of sin; and like those apostles, face the consequences - even if we are accused of being bigoted!

[Remember the prophet Isaiah's words:](#)

["Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" \(5:20\).](#)

So we must:

["Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good" \(Romans 12:9\).](#)

It seems increasingly likely that our good, that is, what we know is practical righteousness as defined by the word of God, will be blasphemously spoken of as evil. The apostle Peter majors on the issue of Christians suffering for righteousness in his first letter:

“For this is acceptable, if one, for conscience sake towards God, endure griefs, suffering unjustly” (1 Peter 2:19, Darby).

After the broadcast, read the following verses, vv.20-25, because Christ himself is the example for us to follow.

“But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil” (3:14-17, ESV).

But, again after the broadcast, read vv.9-21 and 5:10-11 for further help.

Now, the end of Romans 13:5 provides a further reason for believers to be law-abiding citizens – for the sake of your own conscience. Innately all mankind knows right from wrong - especially Christian believers, whose consciences are informed by the word of God and sensitised by the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. I'm sure that “for conscience sake” includes “for the sake of the Christian testimony.” How often do we hear the accusation made by unbelievers, “I wouldn't have expected Christians to do that?” And, as I stated earlier, we live in a society where some are openly aggressive towards Christianity. Every inconsistency is seized upon with relish!

V.6 continues with the specific activity of our conscience regarding paying taxes, both to national and local governments - whatever that taxation may be for “revenue” in v.7 is what we would call a toll or VAT. Again, the argument is that these authorities are acting as God's servants, administering earthly affairs on His behalf for the good of their citizens. The financial director of the company I worked for used to say that the taxman was a hard taskmaster, who always levied more than we would prefer. Nowadays the media frequently uses the expression ‘the taxpayers' money’ to suggest that the tax still belongs to the people. Both these statements indicate our natural reluctance to recognise that paying taxes are necessary for proper governance of national and civic affairs, whether or not we agree with how, and on what, the tax is spent! As believers, we must remember the admonition of the Lord Jesus, who when questioned over this very issue said: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's” (Luke 20:25).

V.7 concludes this first section of Romans 13. In practical terms, being subject to governing authorities means full acceptance of their rule over us. We must pay our taxes in full! We should give them the proper respect that their official position affords them, whether we think that they're good or bad administrative stewards. To be righteous citizens, we must give such authorities respect and honour even if we disagree with their politics! No matter what kind of power it is, democratic, autocratic, dictatorship, etc.!

#### **Vv.8-10: How to be righteous neighbours**

“Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”

These verses flow out of the previous exhortations in v.7; and expand the principle of showing respect to all people, irrespective of their position in society. V.8 could be rendered: “Stop owing to

even one person, even one thing, except to be loving one another.”<sup>1</sup> It certainly means that a Christian should pay his/her debts in a timely fashion. (For example, I had to stop writing these words and remind my Christian painter to send me his invoice for recent work done on my house. I told him that it was necessary so that I could, with all good conscience, continue to prepare this talk!) But it means even more – it means that believers should always carry the perpetual debt of love. As recipients of God’s love (5:5), our attitude should be one of love towards others. We’re able to love because we’re partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). God’s love permeates the practical exhortations of Romans chs.12-15, where love must govern and shape all our relationships.<sup>2</sup>

Here, in vv.8-9, it’s directed towards our neighbours. Paul says that this is the intent of the moral law. In doing so, he was repeating what the Lord Jesus had said in the ‘Parable of the Good Samaritan’,<sup>3</sup> where he answered the question “Who is my neighbour?” It’s any person we encounter in life who needs help in a practical way. Believers rightly interpret the parable as a description of the gospel of salvation - the Lord himself coming to where we were in our lost and helpless condition. We considered these truths in our studies on Romans chs.1-5. The Lord finished His explanation to the lawyer with the instruction for him to go and act in a similar manner to the Good Samaritan. In Romans chs.12-15, Paul is effectively saying the same thing: we must love others to the same extent that God loves us!

### **Vv.11-14: Wake up to righteousness!**

“Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies or drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarrelling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”

With the words “besides this”, Paul gives another and additional reason why these believers at Rome must live righteous lives, which are consistent with the gospel. In most earnest terms, Paul urges them to wake up and to act on the exhortations he’s brought before them in chs.12 & 13. He explains why: their salvation (that is, their deliverance out of this world at the Lord’s return<sup>4</sup>) is nearer than when they first believed. If that was true in A.D. 60, salvation must be imminent for us living in 21<sup>st</sup> century! And some translations insert the word “now” or “already” into v.11 after “the hour” to convey the supreme urgency for us to arouse from sleep. The poignancy of our present time is climaxed in three expressions:

1. “the time” - the present era during which the Gospel is preached. It’s also the season during which our hope is the second coming of Christ.
2. “the hour” is now: this very day, this very hour, this very minute. We mustn’t be deluded that some future occasion will suffice for us to wake up from sleep. No, we must do it now – at once!
3. “nearer” is obvious because we believed the Gospel some time ago.

If such a wakeup call was made to those early Christians, it certainly applies to us! Sleep in this context is spiritual sleep, the state in which believers are totally absorbed into the world and unconcerned about the things of the Lord. It’s so easy for believers to sleep spiritually and forget that the Lord is coming (cp. Luke 12:45-48). Both the Lord and Paul recognised it’s an ever-present danger for Christian believers. So they both exhorted believers to watch or stay awake.<sup>5</sup>  
For example:

“Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.”  
(Matthew 24:42).

“So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober” (1 Thessalonians 5:6).

V.12 considers the past, the present, and the future aspects our lives:

- What’s past – “The night is far gone.”
- What’s future – “The day is at hand.”
- What we’re to do in the present – “Cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light.”

“The night” is Paul’s assessment of the period of time from the Lord’s rejection until His appearing. His absence means that the world can’t benefit from the light of His presence. Believers should be aware of this present spiritual darkness and the spiritual forces of evil at work (Ephesians 6:12), throw off the works of darkness and wear the armour of light.

“The day” is the future coming day of glory when the Lord Jesus will reign in righteousness over this world.

“When [he] rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God, he dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth” (2 Samuel 23:3-4).

That “day”, says Paul, has drawn near<sup>6</sup> – it’s just about to happen! That is, the Christian’s hope in Christ’ coming. Therefore, immediate resolve and corrective actions are demanded of us.

First, we’re to wake up (v.11).

“Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God” (1 Corinthians 15:34, KJV).

Second, we must cast off the works of darkness (v.12) in the same way as we would discard our bedclothes when morning arrives and it’s time to get up and get on with the duties of the day. The works of darkness are listed in v.13: revelry fuelled by drugs and/or alcohol; all kinds of sexual immorality and debauchery; strife and jealousy. They described the social life in Rome in Paul’s day. And suffice to say, they’re very much alive in today’s pleasure-seeking society!

Third, in order that we might shine as lights in today’s dark world, we must put on the armour of light (v.12). You see, sin is the master who rules the hearts and minds of people in this world. There’s a spiritual battle going on for the hearts and minds of believers. To overcome this spiritual darkness, to go against the tide of evil, we must put on the armour of light. Ephesians 6:14-18 itemises the complete armour to wear: the belt of truth; the breastplate of righteousness; shoes of the gospel of peace; the shield of faith; the helmet of salvation; the sword of the Spirit, and all prayer. The armour is so necessary in this ongoing spiritual battle, enabling us to “be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom [we] shine” (Philippians 2:15).

Fourth, we must walk, that is, behave as those who are children of light and the day, not of the night or the darkness (see 1 Thessalonians 5:5). That is, we must live decent, honest, and righteous lives which befits those under the lordship of Christ.

Finally, we must “put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its [lusts]” (v.14). Ephesians 4:20-24 teaches that the latter action precedes the former:

“You learned Christ...and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires [of the flesh], and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

Galatians 5:24 states that, in principle, we crucified the flesh when we believed; and Romans 8:13 teaches that we make this a daily reality by the Holy Spirit's power. In 13:14, Paul implores us not to give as much as even a forethought for its lusts. Also, there's a real practical scriptural way of putting on the Lord Jesus Christ. Galatians 3:27 teaches that we put Him on when we're baptised unto Him. Romans ch.6 explains that our baptism signifies that our old lifestyle was crucified with Christ (vv.3-6). Therefore, we recognise ourselves as dead to sin, but alive to God in Him (v.11). This reasoning results in us offering ourselves to the service of God and using our bodies as weapons<sup>7</sup> of righteousness (v.13 cp. 12:1).

### Summing up

Our remaining time on earth is so truly short. It's time to wake up to righteous living, to become righteous citizens and neighbours by putting on the Lord Jesus Christ, to display true features of righteousness and holiness (see Ephesians 4:24). Let's remember that:

"We are children of light and...of the day. We are not children of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep [spiritually], as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober... **For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night.** But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation" (1 Thessalonians 5:5-8).

Let's continue to commit ourselves in true service to the One who judges righteously (see 1 Peter 2:23). **Notice, the night is almost over, the day is very near! Jesus is coming, shout the glad word!**

Thank you for listening to this *Truth for Today* talk, number T1180 on Romans 13, entitled 'How to live righteously.'

### Footnotes

1. P.227, *Word Studies from the Greek New testament, Volume One*, K.S. Wuest, Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids.
2. God's love is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (5:5, 8). We learnt the depths and extent of this love in 8:35, 37, 39. That love is the motive for all our practical responses to the Gospel, or "the mercies of God" (12:1). In 12:9-16, Paul requires its 12 qualities to be shown in church for in 12:10 he mentions the affections and the "brotherly love", which are proper to the family of God (cp.14:15). Then he writes about loving our enemies (12:17-21).
3. Luke 10:25-37.
4. See 1 Thess.5:9.
5. Others references: Matt.25:13; Mark 13:34, 35, 37; Luke 12:37, 39; Acts 20:31; 1 Cor.16:13; Col.4:2; 1 Peter 5:8; Rev.3:2, 3 & 16:15.
6. P.228, *Word Studies from the Greek New testament, Volume One*, K.S. Wuest, Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids.
7. The majority of translations use "instruments" but it is the same Greek word as "weapons" in Romans 13:12. In all other uses of the word, it's translated "weapons" (John 18:3; 2 Corinthians 6:7 & 10:4).

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