

# *THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST*

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

## **ROMANS LESSON 7 (Chapters 13-14)**

### **Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

*THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.* Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities” (Rom. 13:1). Welcome to our study of the Book of Romans. In chapters 13 and 14 Paul shows that Christians must submit to the civil government as well as to each other in optional matters. These chapters deal with our obeying the government, and about how we should not force on one another our opinions dealing with optional matters. In Romans 13:1 Paul begins by stating that Christians must obey the civil government because it is a necessity. Remember that the Jews, as well as Jews who had become Christians, were living under what was in some ways an evil government—the rule of Rome. Thus, some of them might have been having difficulty submitting to an evil Roman government whose principles were not aligned with God or Christianity. What does Paul say that Christians must do in such situations? Romans 13:1 says, “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.” Our responsibility is to be subject to governmental authority. If the government makes laws, and those laws are not in conflict with the laws of Christ, regardless of whether we may or may not agree, our responsibility is to obey the government.

In Matthew 5:16 Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” Our obedience to the government is part of allowing our lights to shine. If we are going to be a good light to the world, how can we then be a lawbreaker who is known for disobeying the civil law while trying to bring people of the world into the body of Christ? That is a direct conflict. In Matthew 22:19-21 Jesus taught us that we have to pay taxes. The people had asked Him about paying taxes to Caesar. The Lord said, “Show me the tax money.” He then asked, “Whose image and inscription is this?” They said to Him, “Caesar’s,” and He said to them, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” Jesus and His disciples paid their taxes. Even though we may despise paying taxes, and may even be passionately opposed to the government taking our money, if such a thing is not in conflict with the laws of Christ (and it is not), then we are responsible for submitting to that. In 1 Peter 2:13-15 we told to honor the king and obey the government. In 1 Timothy 4:12 we learn that we are to be a good example not only to the world, but also to believers “in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” In every way we are to obey governmental laws. This applies to things such as driving a car, taxes, or whatever laws have been put in place as laws to which we must submit as citizens. However, when governments contradict God’s laws, then we are not bound to obey governments over God. In Acts 5:29 Peter said, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” In this context, Peter realized that some of the commands of the established government were in conflict with the law of God. The rulers had told Peter and the other apostles not to preach any more about Christ. Yet God had told the apostles to preach about Christ and His principles. Peter’s attitude, then, was, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” Anytime the government’s rules are in conflict with God’s laws, we must put the emphasis on obedience to God and His commands.

Consider, for example, the issue of homosexuality. In Leviticus 18, Leviticus 20, and Romans 1:26-29 we learn that homosexuality is a sin against God and against nature, and is something that God condemns. Let's say, then, that a government legalizes homosexual marriages. Do we have to support such a law? No. Instead, we obey God. God says that homosexuality is a sin against God and is against nature. Although we are not trying to be disobedient to the government, when the laws of men contradict the laws of God, we must place the emphasis on being obedient to God so that we can do right, be obedient to God, and then "let the chips fall where they may." That is the principle being taught in Romans 13.

In the context of Romans 13, in verse 2 we learn that even governmental rulers who are in places of authority have been appointed by God. Paul wrote, "Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves." We may not understand why God placed a certain president or world leader in a certain position, but we do know that "God rules in the kingdoms of men" (Dan. 5:21). God is still at work, and is still in control. Although we may not be able to see the end from the beginning, but we need to respect a governmental office as much as possible because God has placed the holder of that office in a position of authority. We also need to realize that Romans 13 teaches us that it is a very serious thing to disobey the government (when governmental laws do not violate God's laws). God equates disobeying the government with disobeying Him. In Romans 13:2 we are told, "Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves." If we as Christians willingly choose to disobey the good and noble laws of the land, then we are disobeying God because God says, "Whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God." That is a very serious thing. Those who do such a thing will "bring judgment on themselves." We will be judged by the law of Christ (Jn. 12:48). We are going to be judged by our deeds and actions (2 Cor. 5:10-11). We will all stand before God and give an account of the things we have done in this life. Thus, if the Scriptures say that we must obey the government, and we choose not to do that, then we have already brought judgment upon ourselves by not obeying the will of God. This is a very serious matter.

Oftentimes we can turn on the television and see people who are protesting the government's right to execute criminals. I do not know why people do this, but I suspect it is because they have not read their Bibles. Some of these people—under the cloak of religion—are holding picket signs that say, "God does not approve of capital punishment!" However, Romans 13:3-4 and other passages clearly teach that the government has the God-given right to bear the sword.

"Rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. 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."

Notice the words that Paul used in his phrase—"he does not bear the sword in vain." For what is a sword used? It is not used to tickle someone's ribs, is it? A sword is a tool of execution. The government is God's avenger to execute wrath on those who do evil. The Greek word for "sword" is defined by Vincent in his *Word Studies* as "the symbol of a magistrate; a governmental ruler's right to inflict capital punishment." Vine says that the word is used "of him to whom the sword has been committed; used when a criminal is to be punished." Thus, the government has the right to take the power of life and death into its hands. The sword is both a symbol of execution and a symbol of the government's right to put to death certain people if they disobey the laws of the land.

There is another passage that speaks to our failure to put this practice into place. The failure to use capital punishment to execute those who have done evil things has caused many of the problems that we have today. In Ecclesiastes 8:11 we read, "Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." When a person commits a crime, and sits on death row for twenty years, what good does that do? That person gets three meals a day while watching color television or engaging in recreational activities. The Bible says, "Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." The government has the right to execute people. And the Bible says that ought to be carried out in timely matter so that it becomes a preventative for those who want to do wrong. So, yes, in spite of what many today are saying (even under the cloak of religion), not only is capital punishment right, but God has given the government the authority to carry it out. A government's failure to do so will very likely result in crime rates going up over the years.

Notice also in Romans 13:9-10 that there is a principle here about love being the center of the law.

"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."

After discussing the government's right to punish evildoers, Paul now moves on to the idea of love. We should not harm our neighbors, but instead should love them. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," and "You shall not steal," were to be motivated by love for God and love for neighbor. So, in a sense, love is the fulfillment of the law. If we have love for God, will that love motivate me to be obedient to the law of God? Absolutely! Jesus said in John 14:15, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." In John 15:14 He said, "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you." True love will naturally motivate us to fulfill the rest of the law. Love is to be the starting point and motivating factor in all that we do. If we do not have love for God and for our neighbor, there is no way that we as Christians can be pleasing and acceptable to God.

In Romans 13 Paul mentions several other things that are related to Christian character. He stresses to the Christians to whom he is writing that the time of their death may not be very far away. Paul also noted that the time of the Lord's Second Coming could be at any moment. Thus, those Christians needed to wake up, realize that eternity is growing ever closer, that it is time to remove sin from their lives, and that they must clothe themselves with Christ. In Romans 13:12-14 Paul wrote,

"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. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts."

Paul is saying basically, "Wake up! Every moment that you live, you are that much closer to entering eternity." This is the essence of Paul's comments, "The night is far spent, and the day is at hand." The idea is that time is of the essence. We must realize that the time we spend here on Earth is very, very short. Hebrews 9:27 says, "It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment." The Bible makes it clear that our lives are like a vapor (Jas. 4:14). Scripture says that if we are fortunate we will have 70 or possibly 80 years here on Earth (Ps. 90:10). Job said, "Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble" (Job 14:1). We must realize that every day puts us one day closer to eternity.

What does that mean? It means that our time is running out, and that it is time to make sure that we have put off sin so that we do not get involved in lewdness, drunkenness, or reveling. We must put our old lives behind us because we have put on Jesus Christ. Every day when we awake, we need to remember that we are Christians, that we have clothed ourselves with Christ in baptism (Gal. 3:27), and that we must put on the garment of Christianity and leave it on so that we can live for Jesus. We must have the “mind of Christ” (Phil. 2:5). We must have the attitude of Christ and do what Jesus did. We must walk in Christ’s footsteps throughout our lives. Paul therefore stresses in Romans 13 that Christians must obey the government, must obey God, and must live the Christian life every day, lest they fall short of God’s commands.

In Romans 14:2-4 Paul now shows that in matters of opinion we need to be submission to one another so that we do not end up binding our opinions on someone else.

“For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. 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. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.”

The context of Romans 14 is not dealing with matters of doctrine. We are not talking about God’s plan of pardoning mankind. We are not talking about God’s plan for worship. We are not talking about Christian doctrine regarding how to live for Jesus. Romans 14 (plus part of Romans 15) is dealing with optional matters. What clothes do we wear on Friday? How do we fix our hair? These are optional matters on which God has given us no commands. It is up to the individual to decide on such matters. It is true that certain things that Paul discussed were steeped in paganism (such as the offering of meats to pagan gods and then selling the meat in the marketplace). Or, some of the meat may have been used in Jewish worship and then taken to be sold as well. But the context here is that there is nothing wrong with the eating of meat. Just because a person eats meat from the marketplace—regardless of what had been done before with that meat—does not make that person sinful. However, Paul also makes the point that in matters of opinion, we are not someone else’s master. **God is our** master. Suppose I do not like the way you do things in matters of opinion. I am not your master, and you are not mine. In matters of opinion, each individual is left to describe what is right for him. In matters that are an option, the thing that is important is that we must be convinced in our own minds as to whether or not what we are doing is right. When it comes to turning something optional into something sinful, Romans 14:23 comes into play. Paul wrote, “Whatever is not from faith is sin.” If we eat meat, but we cannot do that in a good conscience (knowing that there is nothing wrong with it), then it is sinful for us to do that. But if in our own minds we understand that such a thing is acceptable to God and that there is nothing wrong with it, then it is not sinful. We must realize that in matters of opinion you may have your opinion and I may have my opinion, but we must not bind our opinions on others. And, in fact, at times we need to submit to one another. In Romans 14:9-12 Paul makes the point that in these optional matters (such as the eating of meats) we are not the final judge. God is. In Romans 14:9-12 we read,

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

I am not your judge, and you are not my judge. On **all** matters, **God** is the Judge. In optional matters, I cannot say to you, “That is not right!” Nor can you say to me, “That is not right!” In reality, each of us will stand before God and be judged on those things. If we are

dealing with optional matters, and we are convinced in our own minds that there is nothing wrong with doing something (like eating of meat), then it is all right, and God has no problem with our decision. But I need not try to bind how I feel on someone else. In 2 Corinthians 5:10 Paul wrote, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." Jesus will judge us by His words (Jn. 12:48). We all will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account for the things we have done in this body. We need to stop acting people like other people's judges in matters that are up to them to choose. Again, we are not talking about matters of doctrine such as salvation, worship, or Christian living. Rather, we are talking about matters of opinion in which each person must be allowed to decide what he does.

There is a "catch" to this, however, as we learn from Romans 14:13-15. The catch is that if the things we do in matters of option become stumbling blocks to someone or causes a weaker Christian to sin, then we need to stop doing those things.

"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. 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. 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."

If something we do as a matter of opinion causes a Christian to stumble, or causes a weaker Christian to sin, they we need to stop doing what we have been doing. In the context, Paul is basically making the following point. Suppose we know that there are no unclean things any more. "What God has called clean, you must not call unclean" (Acts 10:15). Suppose that Paul decided to eat a ham sandwich, but the pig from which the ham was taken had formerly been considered to Jews as unclean. Paul then realizes that he has a Christian brother who only recently came out of Judaism, and who has not fully grasped the concept that nothing is now unclean to him. Should Paul, before he bites into that ham sandwich, consider the possibility that his action might cause his new brother in Christ to stumble, or that it might even cause that man to sin? If Paul were to offer his Christian brother a ham sandwich, and the man wasn't convinced that he could eat it and be right before God, yet he ate it anyway, that would be sinful. Thus, the principle is that if an action we take might cause a Christian to stumble, or if our action might cause a weaker Christian to sin, then we need to stop and think about what we are doing—not because our action is wrong in and of itself, but because of the effect that it could have on someone else's life. We must be careful not to cause other people who might be weaker, and who might not yet understand all they need to understand, to stumble.

I want you to understand today that Jesus died for all mankind. In 1 Timothy 2:4 we are told that God wants "all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." Jesus tasted of death "for every person" (Heb. 2:9). Christ is the propitiation for our sins, but not just for our sins alone, but for the sins of the whole world. People are important to God, which means that we must be careful how we act. God's Son died for sinners so that all of us could have the hope of eternal life. From the very beginning of time, God had been working out a way to bring Jesus into the world through the seed of woman so that mankind could have salvation. Jesus came to live a perfect life, and to be tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin. He gave Himself as a sacrifice on the cruel cross of Calvary to bear our sins in His own body upon the tree (1 Pet. 2:24). Having died for the sins of mankind, Jesus became "the author of eternal life" (Heb. 5:8-9). Have you taken advantage of the gift of salvation that God has provided? Look at what God did to make salvation available to you. Look at what sin will ultimately lead to if you remain in it. The Bible

teaches that sin is something with which we all must deal. In Romans 3:23 we are told, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." In Ecclesiastes 7:20 we are told, "There is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin." There is none righteous, no not one. Sin is what causes us to be separated from God. Isaiah 59:1-2 says, "The Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear." Sin is the dividing line in the relationship between God and man. Jesus is the only way to reconcile us to God.

The Bible makes it abundantly clear what a person must do to become a Christian. Have you heard the Word of God? Romans 10:17 teaches that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Have you recognized that God's Word is the final authority on all matters pertaining to salvation? In Mark 9, on the mount of transfiguration, God's voice spoke, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" Today we must hear what Jesus has to say on salvation. Once we have heard God's Word, we then must be willing to believe that Jesus is God's Son. In Acts 8 as Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch were traveling down the road, they came to a certain water. The eunuch said, "Here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" (vs. 36). The condition that Philip set was, "If you believe with all your heart, you may" (vs. 37). We must hear God's Word and must believe in Jesus. But we also must be willing to repent of sin in our lives. In Acts 3:19 Peter preached, "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." Repentance is a 180-degree turn. We turn **from sin to God**. Then we must confess Jesus as God's Son. "With the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:10). Once we have confessed Jesus as the Son of God, then we must be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins. Listen to how simple Jesus made it. He said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mk. 16:16). When we believe and are baptized, then we are saved according to God's plan. Mark 16:16 is not the only passage that teaches the importance of baptism. Peter said in 1 Peter 3:21 that "baptism does also now save us." Baptism saves us? We do not earn our salvation, but baptism is something we must do in order to obey God. In John 3:3 Jesus told Nicodemus, "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." How clear Ananias was when he said to Saul in Acts 22:16, "Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Once you obey the Gospel and become a child of God, the Scriptures make it clear that you must live faithful before Jesus all the days of your life. Romans 6:4 says that we are "raised to walk in newness of life." Jesus said that we must be "faithful unto death" (Rev. 2:10). We must die every day in order to live for Jesus. I hope that today's lesson will encourage you to live correctly according to the laws of the government, and will help you understand that in optional matters we have no right to bind our views on other people. God has done everything possible to make salvation available. He so loved the world that He sent His own Son to die for us. Have you given your life to God?

**Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

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## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR ROMANS LESSON 7 (CHAPTERS 13-14)

1. According to Paul's comments in Romans 13:1, what is a Christian's responsibility when it comes to civil governments?
2. According to Paul's comments in Romans 13:1, from whom is a civil government's power to govern derived?
3. What lesson did Christ teach people in Matthew 22:19-21 that had to do with civil governments?
4. What instructions for Christians are given in 1 Peter 2:13?
5. What instructions for Christians are given in 1 Timothy 4:12?
6. What important point did Peter make in Acts 5:29?
7. What important point is found in Daniel 5:21?
8. What important point is found in Romans 13:2?
9. What important point is found in 2 Corinthians 5:1?
10. What was Paul's point in Romans 13:3 when he said, "He does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister"?
11. What point was Paul making in Romans 13:9-10?
12. Is Romans 14 dealing with matters of doctrine or matters of opinion?
13. What did Paul mean when he said in Romans 14:23, "Whatever is not from faith is sin."
14. According to Paul's comments in Romans 14:9-12, who will be the final judge on matters related to how we have acted toward others?
15. According to Christ's comments in John 12:48, what will be the standard by which we one day will be judged?
16. What important point was Paul making in Romans 14:13-15?
17. What important point is found in Hebrews 9:27?
18. What, according to Paul's comments in Philippians 2:5, are we to possess while here on Earth?
19. According to 1 Timothy 2:4, what does God want for all humankind?
20. For whom, according to Hebrews 5:9, is Jesus the author of eternal salvation?