

Romans Chapter 13 v 1 - 7

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: 10 May 2015

Preacher: Peter Robinson

[0 : 00] It's always important when we read part of the Bible that we always understand the context it's in, in other words the setting it's in. Sometimes people can take a verse here or there and misquote it or misuse it and it's always important that when we read the Bible that we take into account where it is and what it truly means, not just what we'd like it to mean or think it would mean.

So Romans 12 and beginning at verse 1 and reading through into chapter 13 and verse 7. We will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you, do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the measure of faith God has given to you.

Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body. Each member belongs to all the others.

We have different gifts according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve. If it is teaching, let him teach.

[1 : 39] If it is encouraging, let him encourage. If it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously. If it is leadership, let him govern diligently. If it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves.

Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour. Serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope. Patient in affliction. Faithful in prayer.

Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Mourn with those who mourn.

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil.

[2 : 41] Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends upon you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written, it is mine to avenge.

I will repay, says the Lord. On the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you'll heap burning coals on his head.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.

The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted. And those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right, and he will commend you.

[3 : 46] 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.

Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment, but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants who give their full time to governing.

Give everyone what you owe him. If you owe taxes, pay taxes. If revenue, then revenue. If respect, then respect. If honor, then honor.

May God help us and bring to us understanding in his word. So we're taking a break from Exodus. We've been in Exodus for the last little while, and we're now just in Romans, and particularly chapter 13 of Romans.

But if you have in your Bible 12 and 13 open, that will be a help to you. Now, I'm sure it's not escaped your notice that the theme so far this morning with the children, and even in our hymns, has been concerning our nation and our government.

[5 : 03] And, of course, you're all very aware, unless you've been on the moon for the last several weeks, that there has been a general election. We've been inundated, haven't we, really, for months after months with election fever.

I'm sure, like most of the politicians, we're just glad it's over and it's finished with, and we don't have to keep on about it at least quite as much as we did. Every newspaper, every item on the TV news was led with stories involving political warfare leading up to the election.

Even the terrible loss of life in Nepal was overshadowed by which politician was verbally jousting with the other and what the outcome would be and the possibility and so on.

And I'm sure that for those of us who are Christians and those of us who are not, there may have come a point where we feel just somewhat indifferent to the whole thing. We've got sort of cheesed off with it, and we're not really all that bothered anymore about the government.

Perhaps, particularly as Christians, we may think, well, it's all to do with the world. It's all outside of the church. It's not really, doesn't touch our lives.

[6 : 12] It doesn't really have much to do with us following Christ. So insignificant, really, apart from where, from time to time, it may occasionally touch upon biblical teaching.

But if we have that viewpoint, or if we have that attitude, then really we have a very unbiblical attitude and a non-Christian attitude to these things.

You see, how we follow the Lord Jesus Christ is not restricted to a few compartments of our lives. Being a Christian is not simply about those things just to do with church, or to do with evangelism, or to do with our personal faith and religion.

Everything that we are involved with carries the very flavor of Jesus. King Midas was a mythical king who apparently, wherever he went, whatever he touched, turned to gold.

And so it is, wherever we go, whatever we touch, is changed by the effect that we have belonging to Christ. Everything where we go, every sphere of our lives, is influenced by the fact that we are Christ, and we're following him.

[7 : 20] There's nothing, there's no area, there's no compartment of our lives where Christ is not actively involved, and we are not actively following him and serving him.

Jesus Christ is Lord of every part. Now Paul has described the Christian life in chapter 12, beginning with verse 1.

He sees the Christian life, as we should see it, as a response to what God has done for us and in us. Therefore, he says, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.

Because God, through Christ, has forgiven us our sins, because he has reconciled us to himself into this living relationship, because he has worked in us a new creation so that we are now people who have received new birth by the Holy Spirit, we are new people, there's only one response, there's only one right and proper reaction to the work of God's mercy in us, and that is to give ourselves wholeheartedly to God, to live for him.

What does it mean to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God? It means simply this, making God, God. Making God, God of our lives.

[8 : 45] It's the joyful acceptance of his rule and his government in my life. Paul sets that out in chapter 12, what that means.

He shows how living a sacrificial life, a life unto Christ, a life unto God, impacts upon every one of our relationships. He talks particularly there about in the church, from verses 3 through to verse 13, about our love for one another and service of one another.

He talks about how beyond that our lives are to, beyond the church and beyond Christian relationships, our lives are changed because we follow Christ. Particularly how that changes our relationship with those who oppose us or even persecute us, who are unpleasant to us.

And then into chapter 13, we find that here is not a break in the sense that he's changed his tact. He's not talking about something different. He's still talking about living the Christian life.

He's still talking about sacrificial living and in this area of practical Christian living in regard to those who have authority over us. Most obviously, as we see here, he's talking about those who govern our society, those who make laws, those who restrict and govern civil obedience and so on.

[10 : 08] Now we live in an age, I believe, where respect and obedience towards civic authority is at the lowest it's ever been. Ever since the Second World War, particularly through, of course, late 50s and into the 60s, their attitude towards authority has been eroded.

The most popular view of government is an antagonistic view of government. Whether it's national, whether it's local government, whether it's authority exercised in almost every sphere or area, any authority in public service, whether it be teachers or police officers or traffic wardens, all of these things have been eroded.

There has been this scorn and this rejection and this attitude of ridicule, of mockery, of rebellion. In one sense, it's a folk hero sort of thing.

It's a cool thing to be rebellious against the authority of the day. That's the spirit of our age. What is so particularly worrying, in one sense, and should be troubling to us, is that many of us and many aspects and areas of the church of Christians, we've imbibed that same spirit of rebellion against authority.

Not just in this area of government and towards the government, but towards all authority. As in several other areas of living, instead of leading the way in the United Kingdom, as Christians, sadly, we've simply yielded to the majority position.

[11 : 48] We've simply just gone along with the flow. If that's the popular way of thinking about things, then that's affected us and we've taken some of it on board, whether we realize it or not. Now, since that is so, and I believe it is so, then Paul's direction here is what we need to hear.

It's what we need to take on board. And it's not just Paul who has to say these things about government. Peter has to say something similar in his first letter in 1 Peter in chapter 2.

He says exactly the same. Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men, whether to the king as a supreme authority, to governors who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong, commend those who do right.

In fact, all through the Old Testament, that theme is pervasive. And it's especially so because it's the very attitude of the Lord Jesus Christ himself, who as we've been reminded is king of kings and lord of lords, God, who rules over all.

And yet his attitude when questioned was this, give to Caesar what is Caesar's, give to God what is God's. Give to Caesar what is Caesar's.

[12 : 58] He's talking about taxes, but he goes on to talk about other things as well. And remember this, Paul, Peter, Jesus were all giving these commands, giving these instructions whilst living under the power and the authority of Rome, the most totalitarian society and empire that there was under the dictatorship of the Roman Empire.

they weren't living in some sort of euphoric sort of society where there was a wonderful godly king and the country was godly and the rules that were made were godly. It's under a world system, a government which was opposed to everything that God stood for.

The emperor called himself God and was worshipped as God. So though we are ruled, dear friends, we are ruled by a government which is far from Christian.

And at times we grieve over the legislation that our government passes. There is no excuse for us living in any other way apart from the way that Paul sets out here.

In submission to the government. Submission to the laws of this land. Obedience to all those who have authority over us. Now we hate that.

[14 : 16] As I'm saying it, I can feel within my own heart and within yours there's that sense of why should we? Why should we? When they are so sinful in the way they speak.

So unchristian in the way they act. When their laws are so bad. There is one exception to this command and we'll think about that a little later.

But every law that is set out by the government of our country is to be obeyed by the Christian believer. It's not unthinking submission. And that's the reason we rebel against it.

We think that if we submit to the authorities, if we submit to laws, if we are law keeping people and in that say goody people, we think that somehow we've lost our personality, we've lost our identity, we've lost our individuality.

But it's not that at all. It's not unthinking but it's the reasonable expression of our faith and belief that all governments are given by God.

[15 : 20] That's what Paul has to say here. Everyone must submit himself to governing authorities. Why? For there's no authority except that which God established. To live in an ordered society, a governed society and not in anarchy is actually a gift of God to this world.

He's the creator of this world, the sustainer of this world. And a government is an expression of God's common grace to all humanity. To have a government to rule over us, whatever their state is, is actually a blessing and not a curse.

See, the curse that would come upon humanity is if we had anarchy and no government. If you get a chance and you haven't eaten recently, read Judges.

I say don't eat recently because it turned your stomach if you read the awful atrocities that take place in the book of Judges. And the conclusion to the book of Judges and the reason that there was such terrible, awful things done between people was this.

In those days, Israel had no king. Everyone did as he saw fit. Everyone did as he saw fit. That's anarchy. That's doing exactly what we please.

[16 : 37] It's doing what we think is right. But it leads to absolute terror and awfulness. Now, whatever your thoughts about the new government that's being formed at the moment and whatever you think about the laws that it will pass, the alternative is all too terrible for us.

Just look at those places in the world even today where the government has failed to govern. Think of Iraq where IS has taken control. Is that what you want?

Think about the situation in northern Nigeria where Boko Haram has taken control. Is that what we want? Think about in our own lifetimes how governments have been overturned.

Rwanda and Burundi. Yugoslavia, that was. What did that lead to? Ethnic slaughter. God has given government for good.

That's what he says here. He is God's servant to do you good. We may not like what, and we'll come to those things, what the government does, but we need to accept that God has given government for our good.

[17 : 48] And we're to thank him for that. Particularly, dear friends, when we have the freedom we have to have a democracy. But as Christians, there's further reasons why we're to submit to those authorities over us, why we're to submit to the laws that are passed.

You see, because if we rebel against those laws, if we become lawbreakers, then ultimately we are rebelling against God himself. Consequently, notice this, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted.

The chief authority in this world is God himself. He establishes and he deposes human rulers. We've seen that. Most of us have lived through the time when the Berlin Wall fell and the great USSR collapsed.

We've seen that again and again where authorities and rulers and powers that have set themselves up have been destroyed. We've just been celebrating just this week, VE Day, when the awfulness of Nazism reared up to rule and to control and God brought it crashing down.

And God sets up a government and we act against it. We are acting against God himself. Do you notice as we read through those seven verses, three occasions Paul calls the government God's servant.

[19 : 17] That's the sort of language that's used in the Old Testament for a prophet or for a king. It's a language that's used for somebody who is a servant of God, a man of God. Not that these people who are in government choosing or even thinking that they're serving God.

They're doing it ignorantly, even unwillingly, but ultimately behind their throne, the great power is God himself. Now that doesn't mean that we must never criticize a government.

It doesn't mean we must never use political means to oppose the present government when it acts a contrary. But it does mean that whatever laws this government passes, we're to keep even if we don't like them, even if they go against our personal preference.

Perhaps we were somebody who enjoyed fox hunting and now that's banned. Or somebody who enjoyed a cigarette in a public place and now that's banned. Whatever our personal preference, those laws are to be kept.

And they're to be kept not only because we recognize we rebel against God, but they're to be kept because otherwise we should be punished for breaking them. Verse 3, rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong.

[20 : 34] Do you want to be free from the fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will command you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid.

He does not bear the sword for nothing. He's God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. I was driving up the road from, I don't even know the name of most of the road still, yeah.

But anyway, I was driving up the road and there was, of course, what we used to call a kojak with a Kodak, a policeman with a camera. Didn't you ever say that?

Kojak with a Kodak. All right, we did. That's, anyway, so there he was and I was looking at my speedo, oh, 33 miles an hour. Afraid, you see, expecting maybe in the post I'll get a fine.

Well, it's been about two weeks, I haven't had one so I'm quite relieved. But, you see, if I was doing 29 or 28 miles an hour, I wouldn't be afraid, would I? What Paul is saying here is this, if you want to be unworried about the government or about the laws, just keep the laws.

[21 : 36] Then you won't be worried about the policeman with his camera, you won't be worried about whether you're going to get done because of your taxes or because you're going to get arrested for this or you're going to get into trouble for that. Now, the government is here and in one sense one of the blessings of having government is that it holds back evil, doesn't it?

We have laws in our land that hold back evil and punish wrong and that's, thank God for that we do. Without law there's no restraint. Without government there's no restraint against theft, there's no restraint against murder and the like.

But if we break the law, even as Christians, we put ourselves in a place where we will receive punishment, we will be fined, we will be imprisoned. So fear of punishment is a good regulator but for the Christian there must be more reason than that, must be better reason than that and Paul says it here at the end of verse 5.

It's necessary to submit to the authorities not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. As Christians it's our conscience that ultimately is that which governs and directs us by the help of the Holy Spirit.

Now we agree if we're Christians I'm sure this morning we agree with what Paul has said that we're to live our lives for Christ. The chief desire of the Christian is not to keep the law of the land, the chief desire of the Christian is to please God, isn't it?

[23 : 08] That's the chief desire, that's the one thing we want, we want to please the Lord, we want to live for him, we want to do his will. So ultimately that means that when we break his law and do what we know displeases him, our conscience is affected, isn't it?

It's pricked, it's harmed. The Holy Spirit is there within us, he raises awareness of sin. One of the worst things we can ever do, whether we're Christian or not, is to keep on ignoring our conscience.

Elsewhere in the Bible it talks about people who seared their conscience, in other words with a hot iron they've put it to death because they just continue to ignore and continue to reject what their conscience is saying to them about the way they're living their lives, particularly in relationship to God.

No, dear friends, we long to live in step with God, we long to live in step with the Holy Spirit, we long to be led by him in the way we act and behave and in doing so we're always going to be seeking to have a clear conscience.

Paul himself was able to speak about the fact that he had a clear conscience. 2 Corinthians in chapter 1, this is our boast, our conscience testifies that we've conducted ourselves in the world and especially in our relations with you in the holiness and sincerity that are from God.

[24 : 33] It's a wonderful thing to have a clear conscience, it's an awful thing isn't it, to have a guilty conscience. We've all had that at times, some of us still have it but we hope that if we just ignore it it will go away but it won't go away.

The only place to have a clear conscience ultimately is to come and have it washed, come and have it cleansed by Christ, come and know the forgiveness that he brings, otherwise it will continue to haunt us and be the shadow following our steps.

Now as Christians we keep the law because we want to please God, not because we simply want to be goody two-shoes, not simply because we want to keep out of trouble from the law but because we please him and we long to live for him.

And there's another reason, it's not quite raised here by Paul but it's raised by Peter. As Christians, dear friends, when we break the law and get in trouble in that sense, then ultimately we damage our Christian witness.

Peter writes this in 1 Peter 4, chapter 4 verse 15. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed for the spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

[25 : 43] If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or a thief or any other kind of criminal or even a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, don't be ashamed. praise God that you bear that name.

It should never be the case and of course this is exactly what we see, don't we, again and again and how the world and the media loves a Christian to fall, loves a Christian to break a law, loves a Christian to make a mistake and to get it wrong and to get into trouble with the police or whatever because then they can point and say, ha ha, we know that this Christianity is a load of old rubbish, we know that it's not real, we know that it doesn't change your life, immediately people have given the excuse and the reason not to yield to the Lord Jesus as they should.

This is ultimately the reason why we are to keep the law, why we are to live in a life which is different, an attitude which is different. We are to be those whose lives shine.

But it does raise that question, the question right at the beginning, the question that we all struggle with, is there ever a right time for us as Christians to break the law of the land, to rebel against the government?

Well to answer that question we simply need to understand the limitations of any human government, need to understand what it is that God has given them authority over.

[27 : 10] Look there in verse 3 of Romans 13, rulers do not hold terror for those who do right but for those who do wrong. A government makes laws to regulate and direct what we might think of as the outward lives of its citizens.

The laws that are given and the authority that God gives them is to control what we do, not what we think or believe. When a government begins to exercise authority over what we think or believe, it has overstepped its God-given place of authority.

authority. If you've ever read the book by George Orwell, 1984, there is a totalitarian government which controls its subjects not just by their actions but by their very thoughts.

And there is the thought police. And we have to be very concerned. When a government imposes regulations which are contrary to a Christian's faith and life, then and only then, it's not only do we have reason to stand against and reject those laws, but it's our duty to stand against and reject those laws and to be lawbreakers.

That's the way that God's people have always had to be from the very beginning of the church in Acts all through history. And for many of them, it meant the loss of their lives.

[28 : 37] It meant the loss of their goods. And many, many suffered. In Acts chapter 5, we have the example of those first apostles. The religious leaders, the rulers of their day, said to them, We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood.

Peter and the other apostles replied, We must obey God rather than men. We must obey God rather than men. That's the exception.

That's when, as Christians, we have to be different and we have to stand against the laws of our land and a government which is godless. But apart from that exception, apart from that exception, dear friends, we are to pay our taxes fully, properly, as they are commanded of us.

Peter tells us there in verse 6, Because the authorities, the government, give their time to that work. It's right that they should be recompensed. We can't keep back our taxes and say, Well, they give themselves too many bonuses or they misuse the money because they use it in warfare.

We must pay the taxes that we are called upon to give as we seek to obey God. this government that we have, this new government that's come into power, will no doubt do things contrary to what we wish as Christians and personally as well.

[30 : 06] it will make laws which we believe are wrong. Just as it's always done in every government, in every time.

But dear friends, we are to pray for them. 1 Timothy chapter 2, I instruct that everybody prays for those in government.

Pray for David Cameron. Pray for the new government he's forming. Pray for those in opposition. Pray for those who are taking their seats. Pray that God would not only save them, which is their greatest need, but that he would govern through them for the blessing of this nation, for the good of its citizens.

Pray for them. Pray when there's laws that are brought up which are not right or we believe are contrary to the scriptures. Pray. If need be, act.

But most of all, dear friends, let's carry on following the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's continue to fulfill God's will for our lives.

[31 : 09] That's what we read there in verse 12. Then you'll be able to test and approve what God's will is. This is God's will for you and for me. We're not certain of many things, but we know his will is this, that our constant living, that our lifelong mission is to live such lives in this world that we stand out for Christ, that we make the gospel of our God attractive, and we do nothing to place a stumbling block before those who are seeking to know the truth.

Close with these words of Jesus in Matthew in chapter 5. Speaking to us, speaking to us believers, speaking to the church, you are the light of the world.

A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand and it gives light to everyone in the house.

In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. Well, let's sing together as we close a hymn which is really a prayer as well.

Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided. 470. Again, we do extend a welcome to those who are here. If you haven't come prepared for lunch, please do stay.

[32 : 30] I'm sure there will be plenty to share around. 470. 470. 470. 470. 470. 470. 470.

470. 470. 470. 470. 470. 470.

470. 470. 470. 570. 570.

570. 600. 770. 960. I am Lord of the years, we bring our thanks to him.

I am Lord of the years, we bring our thanks to him.

[33 : 57] I am Lord of the years, we bring our thanks to him.

To whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.