

Living in View of that Day  
Romans 12:17-13:14

David Helm: “H. C. Morrison gave his best years to Christian missionary service in China at the turn of the twentieth century.

- Returning to the States, he happened to be traveling on the same ship that carried President Teddy Roosevelt.
- The adventuring Commander-in-Chief was coming back from a safari on the continent of Africa.
- Arriving in the harbor of New York City, Morrison was leaning on the deck rail just taking in the sights.
- Signs of welcome were everywhere for the President.
- Bands were playing. Flags were flying. Banners were displaying kind words of reception. Firefighting boats were spraying their greetings to the sky.
- Looking at it all, Morrison began to feel a rush of self-pity, for no one was there to meet him.
- Sulking on the deck, he suddenly sensed the words that God would have spoken to him at that moment, “H. C., you’re not home yet!”

Christians are strangers and sojourners in this world.

- We will never be fully home in this country or another country.
- The author of Hebrews puts it well: “For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.” (13:14)
- We are pilgrims on our way to heaven, where our true citizenship lies.

But we’re right here on American soil now, so how do we live?

Here in Romans 12:17-13:14, Paul tackles a number of subjects on how Christians relate to the present world: (1) our **enemies**, (2) the **government**, (3) our **neighbors**, and (4) the **temptations** of this world.

**How we relate to the outside world is fundamental to our witness in the world.**

Christians should care about how they live in relation to each of these for the sake of our witness, and for the glory of God.

Paul views these things in light of the “**already-not-yet**” dynamic of the gospel.

- There’s an eschatological emphasis throughout (13:11).
- We live in view of God’s mercy and in view of the coming day.

Since believers are already in Christ, but still await the final consummation:

- we can leave vengeance to God (for he will have the last word on our enemies);
- we should look at the government rightly (letting go of political extremism);
- we should love our neighbor (as the basic Christian ethic in this life);
- we should live in the light (resisting the dark temptations of the world).

Martin Luther, “I have two days on my calendar, *this day and that day*”

In view of God's mercy displayed in Christ (Rom 12:1), and in view of the coming day of Christ (13:12), believers' ethical/civil lives should be driven and shaped by the realities of the gospel. What does this look like practically?

- I. Leave Vengeance to God (12:17-21)
- II. Look at the State Rightly (13:1-7)
- III. Love Your Neighbor (3:8-10)
- IV. Live in the Light (13:11-14)

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### #1: Leave Vengeance to God (12:17-21)

In v17, Paul shifts subjects to address how the Christian relates to the outside world.

- He picks up the previous point about “persecution” in v 14.
- This is drawing on Jesus' teaching in a various places.

<sup>43</sup>“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ <sup>44</sup>But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup>so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven (Mt 5:43–45)... “even the Gentiles love their friends” (47)

It's a needed word today.

Paul emphasizes **non-retaliation** and **peacemaking...**

- Paul's exposition is rooted in Old Testament teachings, which are clear about not seeking revenge (cf., Lev 19:18; Prov 20:22; 24:29).

We're all susceptible to **vengeance**.

- Maybe not the Wyatt Earp, *Tombstone* type of vengeance: “You tell ‘em I'm comin' and hell's comin' with me!”.
- But you find love for your enemy and trust in God's judgment very difficult.
- We need to rely on God's grace and power to leave vengeance to him.
- Otherwise the experiences of pain and loss are only intensified.
- You don't win when you retaliate; you lose; everyone loses.

**17:** Another emphasis on “**honor**” 17.(cf., 12:10b; 13:1-7).

- Instead of responding with dishonorable retaliation; that is, repaying evil for evil, believers are to live honorable in the sight of everyone.

**18: Peace.** Christians are to seek to live at **peace** with everyone.

- This verse relates to the outside world. “**All men**”
- **14:19** deals more with peace within the **fellowship**.

All believers are to be peacemakers.

- Jesus said they will be called “**sons of God**” — that is we reflect the nature of our God when we seek to make peace with others.
- After all, our God is called “**the God of peace**” (Rom 16:20).
- As it relates to the wider society, **we're not to be marked by meddling and quarreling; agitating people, or sowing seeds of division.**

The **qualifiers** are important: “**if possible**” and “**so far as it depends on you**”

- It's not always possible, but do everything you can to be a peacemaker.
- If there's no peace, make sure it's not because you haven't made every effort to keep it. (Heb 12.14)
- Don't start conflicts and seek to be a positive peacemaker.
- **Mark 9:50** - “Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.” Don't cave into compromise, but also seek to preserve peace.

**19-20:** Paul returns to the issue of revenge, quoting Deut 32:35 and Proverbs 25:21:

- **If you do not truly believe in *the wrath of God*, you can never do verses 17-18!**
- You will always want to take vengeance into your own hands.

So notice how **practical** the doctrine of the wrath of God is for everyday life.

- Believing this, you can say, “I'll leave vengeance to God.” (2 Tim 4:14)
- **You do not have to become a vigilante.**
- **You can be a saint who humbly trusts in the God of justice, and who actually blesses those who persecute you (12:14a).**
- **You can give your thirsty enemies “something to drink” (12:20) in hopes that such an act of grace may cause them to change.**

**21:** To summarize, Paul says, “Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good” (12:21; cf., 1 Thess 5:15).

- Nikao - Nike, overcome
- **The way you deal with your enemy is not by vengeance and vitriol, but by grace and goodness.**
- This kind of life is motivated by Christ's work for us on the cross in the past, and it is motivated by our belief about the coming day in the future.
- **At the cross, Christ loved his enemies.**
- He has made us, former enemies, his friends (Rom 5:10).
  - **Col 1** - reconciling sinners & the world through his peacemaking work on the cross.
- He overcame our evil with his goodness.
- And one day, he will have the final word on all those who oppose him and his people.
- So we can focus on **blessing not vengeance** now.
- We can be people of **grace, peace, and honor** until the final day.

Of course, on a civil level, we need **courts and law enforcement.**

- This passage is **not** saying there are no earthly consequences for evil.
- Paul isn't teaching that you let abuse or violence go unchecked.
- The **very next passage** is about how the state has the right to bear the sword, how God has appointed government as the institution to carry out judgment on earth...

- We need to promote biblical justice as good citizens now, but ultimately, we trust in the Lord's final judgment in the future.

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## #2: Look at the State Rightly (13:1-7)

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The main point of 13:1-7 is clear: *submit to the governing authorities* (13:1, 5).

- Paul is writing to Christians in the epicenter of Roman rule; therefore, this topic was important. (Jewish believers had also been expelled previously, and soon Nero would put Christians to death - as early as six years after the writing of the letter)
- There's an apologetic concern - our witness in the world.

Paul stresses the need to **avoid political extremism**. He corrects two extremes:

1. **An over-realized eschatology**, "the kingdom is here, so ignore Caesar"
2. **An under-realized eschatology**, "The kingdom is not here, so pick up your sword against Caesar and usher in the kingdom!"

Paul is trying to avoid the "ignore Caesar" or "fight Caesar" options.

The appropriate option is: *Submit to the governing authorities, but give ultimate allegiance to Christ and his kingdom.*

**1:** "Let everyone be subject (submit) to the governing authorities" (Rom 13:1a).

- Paul includes "everyone" in this command.
- Paul is not making a distinction between Christian and non-Christian; nor is he making a distinction between Christian and non-Christian *rulers* either.
- "**Authorities**" means any person that represents the authority of the state: from local bureaucrats all the way up (eg., **Prime Minister, President, Emperor**)

To "**submit**" is broader than "obey."

- It conveys the idea of **standing under the government in recognition that this is how God has ordered the world.**
- The authorities exist under the authority of God. (cf., **John 19:11**).
- But we are to obey the civil authorities ultimately "**for the Lord's sake**" as Peter says (1 Pet 2:13) — that submit unless we're forced violate the Lord's will.

Government is one expression of God's common grace; it is here for our good.

- **It is designed to provide justice, order and civility.**
- **It is like the gift of marriage, and family, in the sense that it is given to preserve and enrich humanity.**
- Paul is **not** dealing with exceptions in this passage.
- He does not address when it is right to rebel against unjust rulers.
- His concern is with authority and order.

Paul was not naïve about the government's role and its relationship to God.

- He had a somewhat mixed experience with Roman authorities.
- Sometimes he was protected.
- But he also dealt with various afflictions in the empire.
- He knew that rulers could be unjust, but still gives this instruction.

Paul also knew redemptive (biblical) history.

- The Bible clearly teaches that God is sovereign over the authorities (cf., **Dan 2:21**; **Ps 75:7**; **Isa 40:23-24**; **Isa 45:1-7**).
- Paul's heritage also taught him that evil rulers must be resisted at times (cf., **Dan 3:12-18**; **Ex 1:17**, 21; **Heb 11:23**).
- Yet he still penned these words about submitting to the governing authorities.

### *Why?*

The reason is clear: "since there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are instituted by God" (**13:1b**).

- We submit to the state because God has instituted governing authorities.
- Sometimes God gives authorities as a blessing to a people, and sometimes he institutes them as a means of trial of judgment.
- God has His own purposes.

Unfortunately, many Christians cannot see past the earthly government, to the government of God.

- They do not trust in the providence of God.
- Christians lose their minds when it comes to politics.
- Should we engage in the process? Yes, of course. Speak truth to power? Yes, when possible.
- But freak out or make an idol of out a party or a system? No way.
- In fact the reason so many demonize others is because they idolize politics.
- Cravings underlie conflicts, and the craving for power, control is a powerful craving. And when it's not met it leads to relational conflicts.

**2:** So Paul points out that the authorities are working out some of the purposes of God. Consequently, if we rebel against the authorities, we are rebelling against God's order and it will bring judgment as a result.

**3:** Further, the authorities act as "God's servants," punishing evil and rewarding good:

- If believers want to be free from fear of the authorities, then they should be people who do "good" (**13:3**).
- Often Christians complain about their current situation, but spend no time trying to bless their towns, cities, and nation.
- Jeremiah's word to Israelites living in Babylon serve the king of Babylon and "work for the welfare of the city" (**Jer 29:4-7**).

- Similarly Paul did not say, “Go fight Nero back” but “Go do good.”

**4a:** Next, Paul dignifies the civil office, but also puts the leader under God.

- Usually “**servant**” (*diakonos*) occasionally it denotes a public official.
- These civil servants are intended for our “good” (13:4a).

Paul adds in **13:4b** that the authorities have the right to **punish** wrongdoers.

- They “do not bear the sword in vain.”
- The government has the right to punish those who violate its laws.

**5:** Paul adds “you must submit, not only because of wrath but also because of your conscience” (Rom 13:5).

- “**for the sake of conscious**” refers to our moral responsibility to do what’s required.
- It is right and good to submit to the state.

### How?

**6-7:** Paul gives some practical ways to live out this ethic saying (read)

#### 1. Pay taxes (13:6-7a).

- Nero’s taxes were highly unpopular but Paul says Christians should not get tangled up in the backlash against them
- In **13:7**, generally: “pay your obligations,”
  - **more specifically:** “taxes to those you owe taxes” and “tolls to those you owe tolls,” referring to both direct and indirect taxes.
- Recall Jesus’ words, “Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mk 12:17). **Give you tax to Caesar; give your worship to God!**
- Jesus legitimized government, but put it in proper perspective.

#### 2. Honor leaders (13:7b).

- Respect the office, even when you disagree with leaders.
- Honor them, for the Lord’s sake.

So then, how do citizens of heaven live as citizens of Rome/America?

- **Submit to governing authorities, acknowledging God’s design for them, and thank God for all the good that is done through them.** We have some in our church and we should express our thanks to them for doing their work well.
- **Pray for those in leadership (cf., 1 Tim 2:1-4).** Avoid being the kind of Christian that spends more time criticizing than praying.
- **Be a good citizen.** Pay taxes. Obey the law. Be respectful. Pour yourself out for the needy. Live with a clear conscious before God. Serve the city and your country for the common good.
- **Engage the political process with truth and justice and the common good in mind.**
  - o If you are a civil leader, lead with biblical values (cf., Prov 8:15; **16:10**, 12; 29:4; **31:8-9**), and bring your convictions into the public arena (cf., Prov 14:34).



- **Rest in the providence of God.** Calm down. God is sovereign. No matter the circumstances, our testimony is “Our God reigns.”
- **Make your ultimate allegiance to King Jesus.** Soon, Jesus will return and he will rule with perfect peace of justice forever. Kings and kingdoms fade away, but the kingdom of Christ endures forever. “My kingdom is not of this world” Jesus said. That’s the kingdom we get most excited about!

### #3: Love Your Neighbor (13:8-10)

The most frequented theme in Romans chapters 12-14 is *love*.

**Brian Lowe:** “We have to love each other after the Election Day.”

Here in Romans 13, Paul shows **the relationship between love and law.**

God’s law **condemns, restrains and guides.**

- The first two speak of the reality of the fallen world.
  - The exposes are need for Christ.
  - The law restrains evil (as we just saw).
- But there’s a more sanctifying function of the law, namely it **guides** us into love.
  - Without the law of God, **love is directionless.**

**8a.** The only thing we should “owe” is “to love one another.”

- This is not a proof text for never taking out a loan
- **The point here is that there is a debt that we will never be settled: the debt of love for others.**
- We do not have a choice in this; **we are obligated to love.**
- The **debt of love is permanent.**

**8b:** He adds, “for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law” (13:8b).

- What does he have in mind? Notice the next verse (**v. 9**).

Paul quotes four commands in v 9 (re **adultery, murder, stealing and coveting**), and says they’re summed up in **Leviticus 19:18**, “Love your neighbor as yourself”

- **Adultery** is not love because it violates Gods’ commandments.
  - It is an expression of **rebellion, lust, and selfishness, not love.**
- **Murder:** you obviously are not showing love if murder a person!
- Likewise, you do not love a person if you **steal** from them!
- So love is about faithfulness (not **adultery**), about wanting to see others flourish (not **murdering** them), and about blessing others (not **stealing** from them).
- Regarding **coveting**, Paul moves from actions to a “desire.”
  - Coveting is **not** an expression love for neighbor either.
  - If you want another person’s wife, life, car, house, reputation, gifts, or something else, then that is not love.

- Paul adds the phrase, “and any other commandment” to say that all of God’s commands reveal what love is.
  - God’s law reflects God’s own character.

- 10:** “Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Love, therefore, is the fulfillment of the law” (13:10).
- Love fulfills the moral norms of the law; norms that transcend time and are fulfilled in Christ.
  - When we love, we fulfill the law of Christ (Gal 6:2); we do this by the enablement of the Spirit.

#### #4: Live in the Light (13:11-14)

##### Augustine’s story

**11:** “Besides this” heightens what has just been said.

**11a:** Paul urges the Romans to **wake up** saying (read).

He does not want the church to be **spiritually asleep, but rather wide-awake, ready for action, awake to what matters, because the end is near.** (1 Thess 5:5-8).

**11b:** He adds, “For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed” (13:11b).

- This refers to the **consummation** of our salvation.
- As Christians, we are saved (Eph 2:8), are being saved (1 Cor 1:18), and we will be saved (Rom 5:9).
- Final salvation and judgment are coming, so we should not be asleep to these realities (cf., Matt 24:42-44; Lk 12:35-36; 1 Thes 5:1-2).

**12:** Paul goes on to use darkness and night as metaphors for sin (read).

- Currently it is the nighttime, but soon the morning will dawn for the saints.
- Our Savior will soon dispel the darkness, and a new age will dawn.

**12b:** The “armor of light” is what we must put on (12b).

- wake up and get dressed with **battle gear!**
- In verse **14**, he adds, “put on the Lord Jesus Christ.”
- We must put on the armor of light, and live with an awareness of our identity in Christ because the darkness still threatens us.

**13:** Paul mentions some of the **works of darkness** (read) here in Romans saying:

- Many of these Christians were saved from these very lifestyles, and so Paul warns them about relapsing.
- He urges them to throw off the sins that characterized the outside world: **wild partying, sexual sin.**
- But he also highlights the sins that are often “more acceptable” to professing Christians: **quarreling** and **jealousy** (cf., Gal 5:19-21; Prov 26).



- “Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know they breed quarrels” (2 Tim 2:23)
- Proverbs speaks of the person who kindles strife by quarreling (Pr 26:20-22)

**14:** Instead of engaging in sins of the flesh and of this age, Paul says (read) That is, **put on the character of the Lord Jesus.**

- Let Christ be “the clothes,” or the armor that you wear. **Your drip**
- We realize that all who are baptized already have put on Christ (Gal 3:27).
- But Romans 13:14 is an exhortation to “put on Christ.”
- We are clothed in Christ, and we need to put him on.
- **Put on not only his character but live in personal fellowship with Him.**
- **Live in the power and hope and joy of your new identity.**

**“make no plans to gratify the desires of the flesh”** meaning to say “no” any thought that may lead you to sin; avoid even the desire for it.

- Do not plan to sin.
- Do not daydream about sin.
- Do not seek comfort in sin.
- Do not flirt with sin.

**Specifically, in light of this passage, do not entertain the idea that a wild night of drunkenness and partying will cure your loneliness, sadness or boredom.**

- Do not entertain the idea that committing adultery will satisfy your unfulfilled romantic desires.
- As person frustrated with your current situation, do not entertain the thought of growing jealous of others.
- As a bitter person, do not begin quarreling with others.

Do not make any provision for flesh.

Instead, direct your mind to the promises of God in Scripture.

- Direct your mind to the beauty of Christ!
- Direct your mind to the glory that is to come.
- Jesus is better than sin – the sin of retaliation, the sin of dishonoring the government, the sin of failing to love our neighbor, and the sins of the flesh.
- One day soon, he will come and eradicate the world of sin once and for all.
- And we will no longer wrestle in this body of flesh.
- Live *this day* in view of *that day*!
- We’re not home yet, but we will be soon.