

# CLOTHE YOURSELVES WITH THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

Romans 13:1-14

Key Verse: 13:14

*Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.*

Last week, we learned that it is God's will for us to be humble and love others sincerely as Jesus has loved us. In today's passage, Paul teaches us what should be our attitude toward the governing authorities. Let me ask you a question: What comes to your mind when you hear the word "authority"? Why? How about this one (a picture of a drill instructor and new recruits)? The young recruits in this picture probably by now has a very good idea about how military authority works and what would be the consequences when they anger those in charge. For many people, the word "authority" brings up images like the one I just described. Unfortunately, too often this impression is correct because people, at one time or another, have suffered under bad authority figures such as abusive parents, cranky bosses, and unfair teachers.

The first century Christians in Rome were no stranger to the abuses of authority. They were greatly persecuted by the Roman government because they refused to follow the corrupt and evil Roman culture. The top authority in Rome at that time was Emperor Nero, one of the worst rulers of all time. You probably learned from your World History class how cruel he was toward Christians, So, some Christians probably thought that rebelling against the evil emperor and trying to change the structures of corrupt society was a task that they should actively pursue. But Paul points out in today's passage that our battle is spiritual not physical; it is not against the Romans government or Emperor Nero, but against Satan. For this reason, Paul urges us in today's passage that we should put on the armor of light and clothe ourselves with Jesus.

## I. SUBJECT TO GOVERNIGN AUTHORITIES (1-7)

Look at verse 1. *“Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.”* Paul wants the Christians in Rome to be very clear on how they should relate to governing authorities. They very likely hated and despised those governing authorities at that time for the cruel mistreatments and persecutions that they had to face every day. Yet, Paul urged them that everyone should subject him or her to the governing authorities. And he gives us three reasons.

**First, we must subject to the governing authorities because these authorities have been established by God.** Look at verse 1 again. God has established many different forms of authorities such as government, family, church, or employment for our own good and protection. When there is no governing authority there to keep sin in check, anarchy, chaos and destruction rule the day. There is a saying that a corrupt government is still better than no government. If you don’t believe this, please take a look at what is currently happening in Yemen or Somalia: total economic collapse, constant fighting, and lack of basic food and goods. So let us be thankful that we have a stable and relatively democratic government in America. It is not a perfect government and I know that some of you definitely didn’t vote for President Obama. However, even though we disagree with him in many different issues, we have to submit to him because God put him in that position. Paul says in verse 2 that when we rebel against the authority, we are also rebelling against God who established such authority over us. We submit to theses authorities because we submit to God first.

Submission is not always easy, especially when those in authority are corrupt, immoral or abusive. How can we submit ourselves to unreasonable bosses, demanding parents, and unfair leaders? We don’t always have a choice of the people in our lives and

we often have to work with difficult people. Paul says that the secret is to focus our attention on God, rather than on the person over us. We submit not because those in authority are always right and perfect, but because we believe that God has put that person in our life for a reason and that God's will is somehow being done in us through that person even if we don't see it and don't understand it right away. King Saul relentlessly pursued and tried to kill David numerous times but David never retaliated. In fact, he had at least two opportunities to kill Saul and yet both times he refused to kill Saul himself and stopped others from killing him. Humanly speaking, killing Saul would have been a reasonable and quick solution for his problem. However, David didn't try to fix the problem by himself because he trusted God and was willing to wait for God's timing. He submitted to God's will and his lead, rather than to his own will and desires.

**Second, we submit because we don't want to be punished by doing wrong.**

Look at verses 3 and 4. *“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 you will be commended. For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.”* Rulers and officials are there to protect those who keep the law and punish those who break the law. Paul even goes so far as to call them God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, when you follow the law, you have nothing to fear. However, when you do wrong and break the law, you have much to fear. Have you ever experienced the surge of terror when you noticed too late a police vehicle hidden under a bridge while driving above speed limit? You then check your rear view mirror and wonder whether you would be pulled over or not. It's a dreadful thing and I myself have been there several times. Now if you don't speed, then you don't have nothing to fear whether there is a police vehicle or not. As Christians, we have to obey laws and be a good citizen because it is God who established them. It is Ok to suffer for doing right because God will eventually reward us. We shouldn't however, suffer for doing wrong.

Third, we submit and do right because we live before God and fear him. Look at verse 5. *“Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.”* Here Paul teaches us that we should submit to the authorities and do things right, not just because we fear possible punishment from the government, but because we fear God who sees our hearts. We should submit and live honest life whether others watch or not because we want to have a clear conscience before God. Pastor Herbert Vander Lugt shares the following illustration: “A boy whose friends urged him to experiment with illicit drugs told me he was afraid they would think of him as a coward, but he resisted because he was more frightened of the consequences. A young man who volunteered for dangerous military duty admitted he was scared of being wounded or killed, but he had a greater concern about what would happen if the enemy won the war. Both of these young men did what was right because they recognized the priority of certain fears. The Bible teaches that our greatest fear should be of displeasing God. A believer who is told that he must either commit evil or face the firing squad should be more concerned about disobeying the Lord than being shot.”

Look at verses 6 and 7. *“This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.”* No one likes to pay taxes. Early this year a Texas man was arrested after he refused to leave the county tax office while attempting to pay his \$600 property tax using tightly folded \$1 bills. The local paper reported that the bills were so tightly folded, it "required tax office personnel approximately six minutes to unfold each bill." Paul says we should pay our taxes – plain and simple. Jesus said the same thing – “give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s”. Paul says that one reason for paying taxes is that rulers are “God’s servants.” Many government officials may not realize it, but God has put them where they are to serve him. Civil servants, then, are

performing God-ordained functions full-time so we should pay our taxes to support their work. Paul also says that we should not only pay taxes but also show respect and honor to those authorities. So let's show our respect and honor to our president, governors, law makers or policemen, instead of saying mean things about them, regardless of their policies, party-affiliates, and the speeding ticket that you got.

So far we have talked about why we should submit ourselves to governing authorities. However, our submission to worldly authorities also has limitations. What should Christians do if the government orders us to do something that conflicts with our Christian faith? Peter and John gave us the answer in Acts 5:29 when they said, "We must obey God rather than man." This was their answer to the Jewish authorities' demand that they should stop preaching about Jesus. The highest authority is God himself. Like Daniel's three friends who refused to bow down before the golden image of King Nebuchadnezzar, we must take our stand for our faith. This is what they said to the king: "*King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.*" (Da 3:16-18) Pastor Kent Hughes gives us the following guidelines: A Christian must disobey his government when it asks him to 1) violate a commandment of God, 2) commit an immoral or unethical act, or 3) go against his Christian conscience

## II. LOVE FULFILLS THE LAW (8-10)

We are fighting a war; however, it is not a physical but a spiritual one. What is our main weapon? It is love. Let's read verse 8 together. "*Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.*" Here Paul is not saying that borrowing is bad. What he wants to say is this: borrowing is Ok but not paying back is not. So if you borrow, then you must pay it back.

However, what Paul really wants to talk about is not money but love. So far in this passage, we have been learning about our duty and responsibility as a member of society: Paul says that we need to submit to governing authorities, obey the law, pay taxes and respect authorities. However, even if we have done all those things and fulfill our civic duties and obligations to society, there is one debt we can never pay back – and that is the debt of love. We should never stop loving others. Recently, I got a letter from a bank telling me that my car loan is finally paid off. This means that I don't owe that bank anything. However, we can never say, "I have loved that person enough. I don't owe that person anything anymore." We must always remember Rom 5:8: "*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*" We must remember how God's love for us has been despite our rebellion and sins. His love for us has always been absolute and unconditional. So let us strive to love others remembering how God has loved us.

When we love our neighbors as ourselves, we fulfill the purpose of the law. Look at verse 9 and 10. Laws and regulations tell us what we shouldn't do, but these cannot make us love others, the ultimate law of God. You see, if we all followed the law of love, there would be no need for the laws against murder or stealing or coveting. In this way, loving others fulfills the law.

### III. PUT ON THE ARMOR OF LIGHT (11-14)

Look at verses 11. "*And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.*" Samson in the Old Testament was a man of supernatural power. Nobody could beat him including a lion and hundreds of men. However, what happened when he forgot his identity and his calling and allowed his lustful desire to control him? He lost his power, his eyes gouged out and he became the objects of ridicule. Have you ever heard about the boiling frog story? It goes like this: if a frog is

placed in boiling water, it will jump out, but if it is placed in cold water that is slowly heated, it will not perceive the danger and will be cooked to death. Likewise, we believers must be spiritually alert knowing that our time is short. Each day that passes brings us closer to the day when Jesus returns. So we must wake up from our spiritual slumber and be ready for his coming by doing we are told to do.

Look at verse 12. *“The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.”* When you start each day what do you do? You probably get in the shower and wash off all the sweat and dirt. And then you put on fresh clothes, comb your hair and put lotion on. Now you are ready all fresh and clean, physically. But what about spiritually? How about we start each day with prayer: repenting our sins and asking God to make us clean and new. How about we start each day with words of God which are like an armor that can protect our hearts from Satan’s attacks and worries of this world. We must let the light of God's word and Spirit shine into every corner of our lives and expose all the things that need cleaning up.

Look at verse 13 and 14. *“Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.”* If you are familiar with church history, you probably know that this verse led to the conversion of St. Augustine. Discouraged by his inability to overcome sexual sin, he one day heard a child at play call out, “Take up and read.” Picking up a copy of Romans, his eye fell on these verses. Reading this scripture, Augustine felt as if his heart were flooded with light. He turned totally from his life of sin and were converted. God’s words have power to set us free from our sins.

Look at verse 14 again. Here Paul urges us to clothe ourselves with Jesus. What does this mean? It means that we should "put on" godly characteristics that are a reflection of Christ himself. Isaiah 64:6 says, *“All of us have become like one who is*

*unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags...*” When we met Jesus, we were much like the Prodigal Son in Luke 15. After squandering all the money that he got from his father and going days without food, he finally came to his senses and decided to go back to his father. Amazingly, his father recognized him immediately even though he was dressed in rags, covered with filth, diseased, his shoes torn. He threw his arms around him and kissed him. And then he said to his servants, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet." This is what Jesus did to us. Jesus took all away all our filth and sins and clothed us in garments of righteousness, forgiveness and love. As you know, many occupations such as doctors, policemen, soldiers and athletes requires uniforms. So we can often guess the occupation of a person by looking at the clothes he or she is wearing. How about us? What would the world see in us? Would they recognize us as Christians? May God help us to be clothed in Jesus, covered in his grace and mercy, seeking his glory instead of our own sinful desires.

After much persecution from Roman government, Christianity became the sole authorized religion of Roman Empire in AD 380. So how was this possible? How could a nation which had so fiercely persecuted the church embrace it so readily? It wasn't done through swords or revolutions. Rather it was done through love and exemplary life of early Christians. For example, it was said that infanticide, the killing of unwanted babies, was common in Roman due to immoral life styles and values. It was Christians who condemned this practice and built orphanages to take care of these abandoned babies. They were the first who helped the poor and took care of the sick. When early Christians fought spiritual battle with love and changes lives, even the mighty Roman Empire fell.

In today's passage, we learned why we need to submit to governing authorities. We also learned that our battle is spiritual, not physical. Let us love each other as Jesus has loved us. Let us put on the armor of light and clothe ourselves with Jesus.