



Lesson 18 ~ Wake up and Smell the Coffee!

Romans 13

Discussion Starter

- When was the last time you got a traffic ticket? How did you feel toward the police officer? ☺

Introduction

Politics! A good topic to avoid discussing if you want to keep your friends! Who, today, regardless of political persuasion, would not agree that all governments contain a lot of corruption? Sometimes the political news is so bad that we seriously wonder if "burying our head in the sand" is not the wise thing to do. What is a responsible Christian to do in this environment? Does God care about governments and politics? How are we to relate to these everyday realities?

In **Romans 12**, Paul gave guidance and instruction to Christians about four basic relationships – to **God**, to **ourselves**, to **one another** and to our **enemies**. In **Chapter 13** he continues this theme as he gives us guidance about how Christians should relate to the **state** and its **official representatives (13:1-6)**, to the **debt of love** that is owed (**13:7-10**) and to the **day of Christ's return (13:11-14)**. We will see in this lesson that God does have some very definite ideas about governments and what we owe them as well as the "debt" we owe other people.

Preparation

1. Before you read **Romans 13**, ask God to open your eyes so that you may see wonderful truths in his Word (**Psalm 119:18**). You may want to make the following prayer your own:

Triune God – Father, Son and Spirit,

I admit that I cannot understand the truth found in God's Word with only my mind.

I agree that spiritual truth has to be understood with my heart as well as my head.

So I ask You to give me spiritual understanding as I do this lesson.

*I pray that You would enable me to see, hear and understand,
with my spirit, all that You want to teach me.*

I ask this in the powerful name of Father, Son and Spirit.

Amen

2. Read **Romans 13** slowly and thoughtfully. As you read and reread, **underline or highlight** any verses, phrases or words that are meaningful to you. Put a **question mark** beside anything you don't understand. Put a ✓ beside anything you would like more information about.

You may also want to read the Scripture in another translation. The Scripture handouts for these lessons contain the *New International Version (NIV)* and the *New Living Translation (NLT)*. The questions are phrased to be answered from **either** of these versions. Other translations and paraphrases should only be used as supplementary texts to help your understanding.

3. Sum up the Scripture passage for this lesson in a short sentence, phrase or title.

Questions

Read **Romans 13:1-7**.

1. What is your initial reaction to what Paul says in **Romans 13:1-6** about Christians and government? What questions do these verses raise in your mind?

It is important to understand that Paul is not trying to address **every** situation concerning Christians and existing governments. He is **not** addressing the problem of unjust rulers or rulers who abuse their authority. Nor is he speaking of the problem of governments that persecute Christians or command them to do something that God forbids or forbids them to do what God commands. Rather, he is simply addressing the issue of whether the state has any legitimate authority over a Christian. If any of the Roman Christians were wondering if submission to the state was incompatible with the Lordship of Christ and their freedom in Christ, Paul had a very definite answer!

2. What are the reasons Paul gives as to why it is right to submit to governing authorities (**13:1-2, 5**)?
 - ♥ Do the words *governing* and *authority* have a positive or negative connotation for you? Why? Who are the authorities in your life? How well have you related to them? How can you do better?
 - ♥ How do you react to the words **obey** and **submit**? In what ways do you struggle to obey and submit?
 - ♥ What was the attitude toward government in the home where you grew up? Has your attitude changed? Why or why not?
3. What is God's view of governing authorities and how does he use them (**13:4,6**)?
 - ♥ Even though God has established governmental authorities, does this mean that everything a ruler or government does is what God desires? Why or why not?
 - ♥ How do you think God views wicked and evil rulers like Nero and Hitler? Is bad government better than no government at all? Why or why not?
 - ♥ Do you agree to Paul's statement in **13:3**? Why or why not? What is Paul's point?
4. Why is rebelling against governing authorities a serious matter and what are the consequences (**13:1, 2, 4**)?
 - ♥ Are there ways you try to get around your obligation to submit to authority? How so? What effect do these actions have on your conscience toward God?
 - ♥ What attitude do you think Christians should have if they think they are being punished for what is right? What action should they take?
 - ♥ Have you ever rebelled against or disobeyed civil authority? What were your reasons? Would you do it again? Why or why not?

5. Summarize the main ideas concerning governing authorities in each of the scriptures listed below.

Titus 3:1-2	
1 Peter 2:13-17	
Mark 12:13-17	
Acts 5:27-32	
Hebrews 11:31	

- ♥ Based on the above verses, what are some general principles that can help you when dealing with the power of governing authorities?
- ♥ Which do you have most trouble with – submitting to authority or serving God rather than men?
- ♥ Is there any situation in which God excuses a Christian from paying taxes (13:6-7)? Why or why not?
- ♥ Is paying the debt of *respect* and *honor* just as important to you as paying your taxes? Why or why not?

Read **Romans 13:8-10**

6. The idea of owing taxes reminds Paul that there is another debt we owe which can never be paid. What is this debt and why can't it ever be paid in full (13:8)?

- ♥ Why is love a debt (something owed) and why do we owe this debt (John 13:12-17)?
- ♥ Why can't love be withheld until later? Why is it always due?
- ♥ Is Paul saying we are to have no outstanding debts of any kind in 13:8? Why or why not?

7. To whom, specifically, does Paul say the debt of love is to be paid (13:8-9)?

From the story Jesus told in **Luke 10:25-37**, write a definition for the term *neighbor*.

- ♥ What kind of actions communicate love to you? How can you do these things for others?
 - ♥ Who, this week, is someone brought into your life by God with needs that you can meet? Are you willing to meet these needs? How will you do this?
 - ♥ What debt of love in your life is past due? When and how will you settle this account?
8. How does Paul explain the debt of love both *positively* and *negatively* in 13:9-10?

Why are both statements needed?

- ♥ Is there a difference between “loving your neighbor” and “loving our neighbor *as yourself*?” Why or why not? If love is demonstrated by meeting the needs of others, what does *as yourself* imply?
- ♥ Can we ever say, “I have loved you enough. My debt is paid.” Why or why not?
- ♥ Is “love your neighbor as yourself” also a command to love yourself? Why or why not?
- ♥ How is our neighbor harmed (13:10) if we *don't* keep the commands that Paul lists in 13:9?

9. The first four commandments in the *Ten Commandments (Exodus 20)* have to do with our actions and attitudes toward God. The last six commandments have to do with our actions and attitudes towards others. Paul mentions four of these six commandments in **13:9** as examples of loving your neighbor as yourself. How is keeping each of these commandments a way of loving your neighbor as yourself?

Honor you father and your mother -

Do not murder -

Do not commit adultery -

Do not steal -

Do not give false testimony against your neighbor -

Do not covet -

- ♥ Why do we not need to be concerned about keeping the law if we are careful to love our neighbors as ourselves?
- ♥ How can loving others as ourselves be the solution for low self-esteem?

Read **Romans 13:11-14**.

10. Why must we be careful to live right and obey all we have been taught (**13:11-12a**)?

The Bible divides history into "**this age**" and "**the age to come**." We know from the New Testament that "the age to come" (known as the Kingdom of God) commenced with the ministry of Jesus. This means that **at present**, the ages *overlap*. We are waiting expectantly for the second coming of Jesus to earth when the old age will be completely over and new age of God's Kingdom will be a complete reality. In these verses, Paul is saying that the new age is closer than we think, so we must be alert and ready. Our *salvation* (which won't be **completed** until Jesus comes) is near!

- ♥ In what ways are you "sleepy" spiritually? How will you "wake up"?
- ♥ What are some of the consequences if we are complacent and not ready when Jesus returns?
- ♥ Do you think Jesus could return in your lifetime? Why or why not? Are you "ready" if he came today? Spiritually, what are some things you need to do before Jesus comes back (or before you die)?

11. With each new day, the new age is getting closer. As we wait, what are we **to do** and **not do**?

	Do		Don't
13:12b		13:13	
13:12b			
13:13		13:14	
13:14			

- ♥ What does the word armor (**13:12**) imply about this present age? How do we live in light and not darkness? What effect does light have on darkness? Where do you live?
- ♥ Do you think of dissensions and jealousy in the same category as orgies, drunkenness, and sexual immorality (**13:13**)? Why or why not? Why are all of these serious sins to be avoided? What effect do they have on us and others?
- ♥ What do you personally do to "clothe yourself" with the Lord Jesus Christ (**13:14 NIV**)? How is this process like getting up every morning and putting on your clothes? If you don't clothe yourself with Jesus, what do you wear?

Response

Read the Parable of the Ten Virgins in **Matthew 25:1-13**.

- ♥ What does Jesus expect you to do with your life in anticipation of his return?
- ♥ In what ways does Jesus' second coming affect the way you live? How are you staying prepared?