

1. **Introduction**: In Romans 12 Paul discussed four basic Christian relationships. They are a believer's relationship to God, to self, to one another, and to enemies. In chapter 13 he explores three additional relationships. They are a believer's relationship to the civil state, to the Law, and to the day of the Lord's return. Both Paul and Peter make comments on believers' obligation to civil authorities.
2. **Romans 13:1-2**: *"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God." ² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment."*
3. **1 Peter 2:13-15**: *"Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. ¹⁵ For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people."*
 - Believers should be conscientious citizens.
 - God is sovereign in all things, but He delegates authority to civil authorities to discourage anarchy, encourage the good, and punish evil.
 - Paying attention to civil authorities will quickly reveal that some civil authorities tend to allow evil and even suppress the good.
 - That should not surprise anyone since fallen human nature is as active in people who constitute civil government as it is in everyone else.
 - Caution and common sense are needed to properly interpret Paul and Peter's remarks about obeying civil authorities.
 - (1.) They did not say nor believe that men like Caligula, Herod, and Domitian of NT times, or rulers like Hitler, Stalin, ¹⁴ and other dictators of our time were personally chosen, appointed, and approved by God.
 - (2.) In no way did they imply that God approves of bad rulers' behavior.
 - (3.) Neither did they say nor imply that resisting civil authority is against God's will in all circumstances.

- In the world the roles of civil governments and their representatives are different from that of the church and individual believers.
- When Jesus says, ***“Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's,”*** He implies believers have obligations to both God and the civil state, but not the same obligation to both.
- Totalitarian governments have often quoted Romans 13:2 which says, ***“Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment”*** to prove the Bible authorizes governments to demand unconditional obedience for everything they do.
- That is a false conclusion. Unconditional and uncritical subjection to demands of civil governments is nowhere intended or commended in Scripture.
- The general principle in Scripture is, believers should obey civil authority up to the point where such obedience requires disobeying God.
- Believers are to always obey God even if it means disobeying civil authority.
- There are a number of Scriptural examples of proper disobedience of civil authority. One well-known one is the disciples continuing to preach Christ though ordered to cease.
- Believers are obligated to obey civil authority if the authority is following God’s purpose for civil authority, i.e. encouraging good and punishing evil.
- Believers and civil authorities have mutual obligations. Under God, believers have a conditional obligation to obey civil authority. Civil authorities have an obligation to govern citizens in a manner pleasing to God.
- Revelation 13, written years later at a time when believers were being systematically persecuted, presents a different view of believers and the state.
- In Revelation 13, Satan is depicted as a red dragon, and the wicked civil state is depicted as a monster rising out of the sea.
- The wicked state is a persecuting monster which follows Satan and derives its authority from him.
- If Romans 13 and Revelation 13 are considered together, they show that when civil government uses its authority within the bounds and in the manner appointed by God, believers are to see it as a servant of God to be obeyed.

- But if the state uses its delegated power to promote evil, believers should view the state as an instrument of Satan. If its directives conflict with obedience to God, it is to be disobeyed.
- To avoid anarchy, believers are never to attempt to be a law unto themselves. Civil governments are needed and were instituted by God. They are to be obeyed unless their demands mean disobeying God.
- Obeying God is a believer's highest priority. Civil governments are intended to benefit the good and suppress the evil.

4. **Romans 13:3-7**: *“For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴ for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. ⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷ Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.”*

- As Paul well knows, rulers can be a terror to good conduct. Dictatorial states have always been a source of terror for good people as the 20th century abuses have once again proved.
- Pilate had civil power under Rome to execute offenders. He abused that authority by condemning Jesus even though he had admitted that Jesus was innocent. Pilate knowingly condemned an innocent man to death.
- As God's delegated servant, the civil state is given the power of the “sword” to punish evil. The civil state's authority includes punishing evil doers to the extent of a death sentence.
- When the state punishes wrongdoers, it is functioning as the servant of God executing His wrath upon the wrongdoers. Private individuals are not authorized to take the law into their own hands and punish offenders.

- If the state misuses the power of the sword and punishes good while ignoring or promoting evil, the state does evil which nullifies God's delegated authority. That has many times in the past and specifically in the past century.
- If a state fails to promote good and/or fails to punish evil and/or restrains or punishes good, it fails in its function as God's servant and believers are not required to be subject to it.
- Paul closes with an admonition to pay taxes owed. Good people disagree on the right size of government and the extent of services it should provide, but everyone will agree some services should be supplied by the civil government. Such services must be paid for, hence taxes.
- Believers should submit to proper authority, give honor where it is due, pray for government authorities, and encourage the state to fulfill its God-appointed role of promoting and rewarding good and punishing evil.
- In 13:1-7 Paul has discussed the proper ministry of the state to its citizens through its official representatives.
- In 13:8-10 he returns to expounding the duties of individual believers with special emphasis on their obligation to love.

5. **Romans 13:8-10**: *“Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹ For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”*

- God's love for us is demonstrated by His gift of salvation and His mercies to us moment-by-moment. We have an obligation or debt to Him to be faithful in carrying out His command to love our neighbor.
- As God's love to us is ongoing, so is our love to others to be ongoing.
- Paul says believers should pay their debts and obligations. He has mentioned believers' debt to the unbelieving world to share the gospel with it (1:14), our debt to the Holy Spirit to live a holy life (8:12f), and our debt to pay our taxes.

- Each debt mentioned is a lifelong debt. Many debts can and should be paid, but there is no end to the obligation to love. Paul says, ***“Owe no one anything, except to love each other.”***
 - Genuine Biblical love fulfills the Law. ***“For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”***
 - At first it may seem that “love” is a way to perfectly fulfill the Law without having to bother with all the details. But the sad truth is that no one can perfectly love another person much less perfectly love God.
- 6. Romans 13:11-14: *“Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”***
- In 12:2 Paul said believers should not ***“be conformed to this world.”*** There is constant and enormous pressure from the world to conform to its principles.
 - In these verses, Paul is emphasizing resisting being molded into the world’s pattern. His reason is that the return of Christ is nearer every day that passes. Jesus return is nearer today than when we first believed.
 - Jesus return will change everything. Believers’ salvation currently has “already” components but also “not yet” components. At His return believers’ salvation will be completed.
 - Because of faith, we belong to Christ, have been justified, and are being sanctified, but what we will be when we are glorified is not yet fully known.
 - Looking to the future and realizing everyone must ultimately stand before Christ makes clear the importance of obeying Christ (Jesus said if you love me, you will obey me).

- Today is not a time to relax or sleep, not a time to say I am safe in Christ so there is nothing else I need do. Rather it is a time to be vigilant and active.
 - The appointed time for salvation is now! The field of unredeemed people is ready for harvest. Those who have received the blessing of faith have the obligation, opportunity and blessing of spreading the gospel.
 - With the help of the Holy Spirit, believers are to persevere in living a godly life. They are to lift and share the burdens of other believers.
 - They are to reach out to the ungodly with the blessed message that God gives salvation to everyone who believes.
 - Believers are in all things to be obedient to Christ. Therefore, each one should rid themselves of the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.
 - They should clothe themselves with Christ, putting on the characteristics of His teaching and His example.
 - Paul summarizes those characteristics in **Colossians 3:12-17**: *“Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Walk properly – not in orgies, drunkenness, sexual immorality, quarreling, or jealousy. Don't be deluded that self-control is optional. Behavior for believers must have self-control that results in good works and does not surrender to immoral desires.”*
 - How should a believer strong in faith deal with a believer weak in faith?
7. **Romans 14:1-4**: *“As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. ² One person believes he may eat anything, while the*

weak person eats only vegetables. ³ Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. ⁴ Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.”

- Chapter 14 begins a section that continues to 15:13 where Paul considers how a believer with strong faith should relate to believers whose faith is weak.
- The whole section is a lengthy example of what it means to “walk in love.”
- Believers with strong faith are to have an attitude toward those of weaker faith that is welcoming, never despising them, never judging them, and never offending them by arrogantly asserting superior knowledge and/or practice.
- Paul’s point is that both those who appear to be strong in faith and those who appear to be weak in faith have problems. Both are tempted to respond to others in inappropriate ways.
- God has accepted every believer, redeemed and justified them. God accepts each one who believes though He knows in detail what they are truly like.
- What God has accepted, believers are to accept.
- The church in Rome seems to have been split between two groups which Paul identifies as the “weak” and the “strong.”
- By “weak” and “strong” Paul does not refer to character or will power. The weakness he has in mind is a weakness in assurance, a lack of confidence in what is permitted and forbidden – what might be called the freedom of faith.
- Paul is speaking, not of vulnerable believers easily overcome by temptation. His concern is for sensitive believers whose scruples make them indecisive.
- The weak person Paul has in mind does not lack strength of self-control but lacks liberty of conscience.
- Can we know more about the “weak” believers in Rome?
- Several possible groups come to mind including: (1.) Recently converted pagan idolaters (see 1 Corinthians 8). (2.) Legalists who had not fully grasped the truth that people are justified and reconciled before God by faith alone.

- But most likely the “weak in faith” Paul has in mind are (3.) Jewish believers whose weakness is a continuing conscientious commitment to Jewish regulations regarding diet and days (eating only clean Kosher items, observing the sabbath and Jewish festivals).
- Paul’s comments are intended to enable the “weak” and the “strong” in faith to coexist in Christian fellowship.
- Church congregations frequently seem to have unity problems.
- Consider the early NT churches. From Scripture, most if not all of them had to contend with disunity. The Corinthians were divided over human leaders and some members were suing each other (1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 6:1-8).
- The Galatian congregation was described as “biting and devouring” one another (Galatians 5:15).
- Paul told believers in Ephesus and Colossae to work at preserving unity.
- In the church at Philippi, Euodia and Syntyche, both of whom had been active in working with Paul were later at odds with one another and Paul asks that they be helped to agree in the Lord (Philippians 4:1-3).
- Today is no different. Believers disagree on the relative importance of issues.
- Disagreements can be over differences on important things such as the controversy over Christ’s divinity.
- The issue of the divinity of Christ was argued for many years, but finally settled with ample proofs from Scripture at The Council of Nicaea (AD 325).
- The divinity of the Holy Spirit and that Jesus is fully divine and fully human are among other things that required careful proof from Scripture.
- These successful proofs are enshrined in Christian creeds and confessions
- Scripture clearly identifies and condemns some things as being definitely wrong and some other things as being right.
- But many things are neither specifically condemned or commanded. They fall into gray areas. Most disagreements in a body of believers arise in gray areas.
- Some examples are mode of baptism, how to celebrate the Lord’s Supper, dance or not, consume alcohol or not (Scripture condemns drunkenness), principal day of worship (Sunday or Sabbath), and celebration of special days.

- Even disagreement over nonessentials can cause troublesome divisions.
- Paul’s principles are intended as guidance for making decisions on contentious gray-area issues.
- His goal is for believers to realize that within the faith, individuals can disagree (especially on nonessentials) and still be true to the faith.
- Believers who disagree on nonessentials, but agree on essentials, can easily maintain unity in the church. A difficulty is who decides what is essential?
- Paul gives two examples of gray areas – whether to eat meat sacrificed to idols and whether to celebrate special days (most likely Jewish festival days).
- Paul’s general principle can be summarized by a quote often attributed, but apparently incorrectly, to Augustine. Whatever its source, it is a powerful truth. *“In essentials, unity. In nonessentials, liberty. In all things charity.”*
- Essential issues are just that. Things essential to the faith which must be preserved at all costs.
- Justification by faith alone, the divinity of Christ and the Holy Spirit, the fully divine and human natures of Jesus, and God’s Trinitarian nature are some of the essentials.
- The validity of each essential must be clearly supported with proofs traced directly to Scripture.
- Christian creeds and confessions place essentials before us in a form that can be easily remembered and understood.
- It is true that congregations sometimes do split over differences on essential issues, but most splits seem to be over disagreements on nonessentials.

8. **What is Next:** Romans 14:1-12.