

## Difficult Relationships

Romans 12:17-13:14

(Lesson #22)



**12:17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." 20 To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."**

Paul now lumps together six additional principles that seem to apply when people mistreat you, when people do not like you. **These are practical instructions on what it means to bless those who curse you.**

**Point #1 - Vs 17 -** Do not **repay evil for evil**. Put simply, when people treat us with evil, we are not to pay them back with evil.

*Pr 20:22 ¶ Do not say, "I will recompense evil"; Wait for the LORD, and He will save you.*

*Mt 5:39 "But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.*

**Point #2 - Vs 17b -** Give thought, to act above reproach, even when responding to evil.

*"Abstain from every form of evil." (1Th 5:22 ESV)*

**Point #3 - Vs 18 - As far as possible, live peaceably with all.** Again, this means people we do not agree with, people we do not get along with. Live peaceably with all!

You may find yourself with a neighbor whose lifestyle you find repulsive. As far as it depends on you. As much as you have control, make sure you are not the rift maker... **Live peaceably with all.**

*Mt 5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

**Point #4 - Vs 19 – Never avenge yourself,** then Paul provides for us the main reason: for vengeance does not belong to us, it belongs to God. Let God settle the account how He sees fit!

Then Paul quotes part of **Deut 32:35**, or **Ps 94:1**, or **Na 1:2**:

*"Vengeance is mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and their doom comes swiftly." (De 32:35 ESV)*

**Point #5 - Vs 20 –** Rather than vengeance, **show kindness, do good**, and then Paul quotes another proverb.

**APPLICATION:** Now before we look at the proverb, let's be honest this is **extremely difficult**. This is Christian living as difficult as it gets. Love your enemy, if he is hungry, give him food, if he is thirsty give him drink.

**Is this difficult? Absolutely!** I often tell Sandy that Jesus has called us into the upside-down kingdom. Not that it is upside-down, but we have lived so long in the upside-down world, that when we come into the right-side up kingdom, everything seems upside-down.

*"21 If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink, 22 for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you." (Pr 25:21-22 ESV)*

So love your enemy, that is the obvious point. But what does the second part of this Proverb mean?

There are two reasonable explanations about the heaping of coals upon the heads of our enemies and what that means. I will explain each and leave it you to decide:

- 1) The burning shame the person who is mistreating you feels when you love them. Here the idea is that as you do good to the person doing evil to you, that person's own conscience condemns them, their own conscience shames them. I would say, to some degree this is true.
- 2) In doing good to those who are doing evil to you, all the while they keep doing evil to you, you are, in responding kind to their evil, heaping up coals of God's judgment on them. You're continuing to do good, and the other person's continuing to do evil, results in God's judgment accumulating. You are not settling the score; they keep doing evil and coals of God's judgment are accumulating.

**This then would be explaining and amplifying that God will settle the account.** God is keeping an account and why you and I should not settle it ourselves.

Now we are hoping that they repent and God dumps the coals on the ground. But if they do not, God judgment against their activity is piling up!

**Vs 21 - Paul's last point**, for the moment. **DO NOT RESPOND TO EVIL WITH EVIL.** Rather overcome evil by responding with GOOD! Do not be overpowered by evil. It will try, greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world.

**Instead conquer evil with good! Turn the other cheek, go the extra mile, bless those who curse you, and give to those who ask of you!**

Here we find how to behave in our first "difficult relationship" the relationship with those who hate us, with those who persecute us.

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*13:1 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 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.*

As we come to Romans 13, we shift from the pithy maxims, the short and proverbial like truth claims, to Paul's longer instructions that are accompanied by argumentation and reason. We shift from rapid fire imperatives to long instructions that include metaphors to help make the point. **So let's get at it!**

Paul's next topic is **governmental authorities**. Those who have rule over us and those who have the authority to levy taxes.

**Point #1 - Vs 1a - Let every person be in subjection to governing authorities.** This is clear, straightforward and in all honesty, and this point in the development of the argument needs little explanation.

The Holman gets at the Greek: **"Everyone Must submit to governing authorities."**

The term **authority** was a natural term for “office” or “magistracy” that carried with it **political** or **judicial power**.

So, on the face, Paul is calling “every person” to be in subjection to **governing authorities**.

The word translated “**subjection**” is the Greek word: **ὑποτάσσω** (**hupotasso**). It is a **military term**, and it means to **subordinate under**, to **arrange under**, to **submit**.

It is **present tense, imperative mood**. So, it brings with it the idea of continual action. We could translate this that each person is to submit and keep submitting to governmental authorities.

Three other verses where this same Greek word **ὑποτάσσω** (**hupotasso**) is used:

*“And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.” (Lu 2:51 ESV)*

*“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.” (Eph 5:22 ESV)*

*“20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 ¶ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (Eph 5:20-21 ESV)*

Now, I want to pause here and provide you with a quick opportunity to process what Paul is saying in context, yet fit it within the grander scope of the Bible, and make sense of the word and Paul’s point.

**Douglas Moo:** *“To submit is to recognize one’s subordinate place in a hierarchy, to acknowledge as a general rule that certain people or institutions have authority over us.”*

Can a wife be submitted to her husband, understanding that God is the ultimate king and disobey her husband because his request violates God’s laws, all the while being submissive to her husband?

Paul is calling for a general posture towards government (submission), that will usually result in our (obedience) to government and governing authorities.

**Point #2 – Vs 1b - For there is no authority except from God**, All authorities are “**from God**”, thus, at a minimum, God has allowed them to come into being, and in a more direct and involved way, God has brought them into power, Paul goes on to say “**there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.**”

As you consider this Paul is writing to a people who live under and are submitted to, a **very aggressive, very powerful**, and often **very evil government**.

God is sovereign, this is not only His world, but the authorities that exists have been “instituted” by God. They are “appointed” by God!

This is clearly Biblical, remember Daniel:

*“The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, the decision by the word of the holy ones, to the end that the living may know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men.” (Da 4:17 ESV)*

**Point #3 - Looking at verse 2**, Therefore, to resist governmental authorities, to actively rebel against them, is to resist what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

Let what Paul is saying sink in, we are so prone to look for ways out, please do not look for the exceptions, follow Paul's argument and his logic. God has established governments, we are to submit to them, and those who **rebel against** are provided with a clear warning. Those who resist "**will incur judgment.**"

**Phillips translation nails it here:**

*"To oppose authority then is to oppose God, and such opposition is bound to be punished." (Ro 13:2 Philips)*

**Point #4 – Vs 3a For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad.**

A good kind and benevolent God, set up rulers not for a terror against good conduct, but a terror against bad conduct.

These rulers are a threat, they are a terror to the **evil doers**. Now of course this is not always the case, but Paul is describing a **general principle** that answers the question why God has established governments.

This is Paul's point, governmental authorities are meant to punish illegal and even evil behavior. For God's glory and the good of His people!

The Paul makes a **sub-point to point #4**: in 3b The honest citizen has **no need to fear**, while the **dishonest citizen should always be afraid**. So, **do what is good** and you will receive the **governing authority's approval**, rather than his anger and judgment.

**Point #5 in verse 4** - First notice how Paul personifies the government, in this case the Roman government, and in our cases the various layers of government in our life.

Paul personifies this government to a **sword carrying servant, or minister of God, for the good of the people**.

Now, the Greek word here is not the word for slave, but instead the word for minister: **διάκονος** (**diakonos**), this word literally means **one who serves for and executes the commands of another**.

Even if they do not realize or acknowledge it, they are God's servants for good. Our God is in the heavens, and does as he pleases (Ps 135:6), the King's heart is in the hand of the Lord (Pro 21:1)!

If you are exercising willful disobedience against the governing authorities, you should be "afraid" for this servant has the sword.

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*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. 8 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.*

**Point #6 – Vs 5a - Therefore you must be in subjection, to arrange up under, to be in subordination.**  
**Vs 5b** - Paul provides two reasons why we must be in subjection:

- A) Vs 5b - **To avoid God's wrath.**
- B) Vs 5b – **Also for conscience's sake.**

(A). To avoid the **anger, wrath, indignation, or displeasure of God** in that you are not submitting to something He established. The anger from God that you are shaking your fist at His institution.

(B). **For conscience's sake.** The conscience is that **internal awareness** that what you are doing, your actions are morally right or wrong, that God approves or He disproves.

*“14 For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. 15 They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them” (Ro 2:14-15 ESV)*

**Paul's points then are twofold.** You should be in subjection so that you **do not find Roman soldiers kicking down your door and dragging you off** or **you do not incur God's eschatological judgment** and you should be in subsection, **because you know you should,** and your own conscience will be bearing witness against you.

**Vs 6** - Paul's point, as he writes to the Christians in Rome, I know that you agree with my logic **for you pay taxes.**

In fact, failing to pay taxes to Rome could result in severe punishment, while according to Josephus, if a large number of citizens in an area stopped paying taxes it was viewed by Rome as an act of war.

The governmental authorities, that Paul has been talking about, **are God's ministers** (here Paul uses a different word). It is a word that means **public servant**, they are God's **mayors, governors, senators, and presidents.**

**Vs 7** - **Here we find a principle that is the bedrock of all Paul has to say** and then Paul outlined four obligations that Christians have to “everyone.”

**Pay to all, fulfill your obligations to all,** give to all what is rightly owed or rightly due to them. There is the principle. Now four areas:

- 1) **Taxes to whom taxes are due**
- 2) **Revenue, tolls, or customs to whom that is due (indirect tax)**
- 3) **Respect to whom respect is due**
- 4) **Honor to whom honor is due**

This is a **clear principle** that defines how we should behave in society. **It is not based on how others behave,** but rather what our Master, King Jesus tells us and who we are in Him.

**Vs 8** - **Paul's advice is simple** if someone has a legitimate claim on a believer, the believer should promptly and properly fulfill that obligation.

**Due not withhold from anyone what is rightfully due them.** Settle your debts swiftly. Do not owe anyone, anything....

With one exception: **The debt to love is never fully discharged.**

You and I have a debt, that carries over **day-to-day** and that is to love those around us. Not just the lovely or those who look like us, but in particular those who are not like us, in particular those who spitefully use us, those who would slander and mistreat us.

*“43 You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,” (Mt 5:43-44 ESV)*

*“9 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. 10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.” (Ro 12:9-10 ESV)*

**Vs 8b - for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.**

*“For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”” (Ga 5:14 ESV)*

*“The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” (1Ti 1:5 ESV)*

*“If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well.” (Jas 2:8 ESV)*

When believers love other people, they “fulfill” the **righteous requirements of the law**.

What Paul is saying: **All the laws given about our relationships with one another can be summed up and indeed are fulfilled in loving one another.**

Now Paul explains that is exactly what he means, so let’s follow it.

**Vs 9 - Paul quotes only those second tablet commands** that have to do with how we treat one another.

**The simple act of loving others fulfills all the complex demands of the law.** Now likely Paul is referring to the **Mosaic law**, for he quotes from the **Mosaic law**:

*“37 And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”” (Mt 22:37-40 ESV)*

**Paul’s summary of the second part of the decalogue being summed up and fulfilled in loving others is likely a reflection of Jesus’ teaching on this very point.**

**Vs 10 - So in summation**, we might say that loving others accomplishes the intent of the **Mosaic law** as it relates to **the treatment of others**.

Let’s be honest, if you love others, you are not going to **cheat with their spouse, steal their stuff, or lie to them**. Loving others means we seek their good and not their harm.

**We love others because God has loved us in Christ, and we respond to others the way He responded to us.** But it is more than that, God commands us to love others. But we do so, not to be saved, that has already been taken care of, and not to obtain righteousness, that has already been taken care of.

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*11 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.”*

All of a sudden, there is an abrupt shift, a metaphor is introduced, and the intention of the metaphor is clear.

**Vs 11** – Besides this... In the Greek it is the word (kai) **and, also, even, or indeed**. This you know, the hour is come for you to wake up! **Salvation has drawn much closer than when you first believed.**

**Vs 12 - The night is far gone**, many hours have passed, **the day is at hand**, the day is close, in fact the day is dawning, the sun is rising.

So then, cast off the works of darkness, the imagery is the way one would cast off the blankets. Quick, out of bed, and once out of bed, like you would put on your tunic to go outside.

**Let's walk through his meaning of this metaphor:** God has called you and I to a task, there is only a limited amount of time we have to do that task. The **day is dawning**, the time is limited, quick... Wake up, jump out of bed, and get dressed. It is still dark, but the day is GETTING READY to explode on the scene!

You and I live in a **critical moment in salvific history**. Just moments before our God comes to restore justice and peace on earth, just moments before our God comes to make all things right. You have been chosen for such a moment as this.

**Vs 12b - and put on the armor of light** - Get out of bed, get on your clothes, and put on the armor of light!

All of a sudden, Paul **shifts the metaphor**, and he says to put on the **armor of light**. The Greek word translated armor is ὅπλον (*hoplon*). It literally means arms that are used in warfare.

What “**armor**” is Paul talking about? Of course, he is talking about the **armor of God!**

This idea of armor was not birthed in the mind of Paul, his **illusion** and even possible **reference** goes all the way back to the Old Testament: **The illusion is likely from Isaiah 59:17-18.**

The set time in the context of this prophecy is **before the redeemer comes** (verse 20). So, before the redeemer comes, **God's people will refuse to obey him**, they will **act evil towards one another**, they will **not pursue what is right, no one will act for the good, on the behalf of his brother:**

*“16 He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede; then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him. 17 He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak. 18 According to their deeds, so will he repay, wrath to his adversaries, repayment to his enemies; to the coastlands he will render repayment.” (Isa 59:16-18 ESV)*

What Paul is saying is twofold:

- 1) This is what Christ did for you, He took up his armor on your behalf.
- 2) Therefore, we are to take up **his armor** (the armor of light) or as you are probably thinking the (armor of God) and act in ways consistent with how Christ acted, in your behalf!

Paul provides an expanded discussion of the armor of God in Ephesians 6:

*13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. 14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. 16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the helmet of salvation,*

*and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, 18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,*

Pastor taught through these and a fantastic job, so I will just remind you of his points here:

1. The Belt of Truth = Personal Authenticity
2. The Breastplate of Righteousness = Life Integration
3. The Shoes of Peace = Healthy Relationships
4. The Shield of Faith = Good Decisions in Moment of Crisis (MOC)
5. The Helmet of Salvation = Gospel Confidence
6. The Sword of the Spirit = The Holy Spirit Directed Word
7. Prayer = Divine Trust

**Vs 13** - The church in Rome in 62AD and you and I today, **live in a critical time in Slavic history. We need to have donned the armor of God.** Although it is the last part of the last watch of the night, you and I need to live properly as in the daytime.

Not in this list of vices the world is absorbed in:

- 1) **Orgies** – the word here translated orgies, is probably not meant to be that specific, but rather is broader meaning **riotous, nocturnal** activities, that would go from house to house.
- 2) **Drunkenness** – Yep, you know what that means.
- 3) **Sexual Immorality** – lewdness and all forms of sexual immorality.
- 4) **Sensuality** – Unbridled lust, shamelessness, or excess.
- 5) **Quarreling** – Contention or strife.
- 6) **Jealousy** – envy or covetousness.

Now this list is not exhaustive, but representative of how the world walks. Paul is going to remind us of how we should walk.

**Vs 14** - You and I live in the Romans 7 reality. We are born again, but we have not been completely delivered from the old nature, not yet.

Therefore, each and every day, like we would put on a jacket to head out on a cool morning, we must **“put on” the Lord Jesus!**

**Put on His excellence, put on his moral virtue, put on His holiness, put on His righteousness, put on his loveliness, put on his lowliness.** Put on the Lord Jesus...

And make no **provision for the flesh, allow no quarter, do not give the flesh any space.** Do not allow the flesh even one chance to gratify its lusts:

Paul provides an expanded discussion of the works of the flesh to the church in Galatia:

*“19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” (Ga 5:19-21 ESV)*

The night is almost over, the final day is dawning, get out of bed, quit messing around, put on Christ, put on the armor of Christ, do not give any space to your flesh.

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