Lesson 13
November 29, 2026

Practical Christian Living:

Christians are accountable to God for their actions.

THE LESSON OVERVIEW

While the ultimate end of Christianity is to live with God forever in Heaven, Christianity is also down-to-earth. Its principles include respecting authority, living in love and light, and pursuing unity. Respecting authority begins with acknowledging it as ordained by God. Obedience should come not just from duty, but from conscience, recognizing the role of authority in upholding order and justice. Living in love and light means fulfilling moral duties in our interactions while reflecting integrity and alignment with God's standards. Pursuing unity is achieved through acceptance, understanding, and mutual support, thereby fostering peace and edifying one another.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the first century, the church in Roman society was emerging as a religious movement district from Judaism. At first, Rome tolerated Christianity as a minor sect of Judaism, but tensions gradually arose over Christians' refusal to participate in state-sanctioned rituals, such as emperor worship, which was seen as a demonstration of loyalty to Rome. This led to persecution. Still, due to the church's inclusive message of salvation and equality before God, the church grew by appealing to individuals across social classes, including slaves and women. By the end of the first century, Christianity had gained a foothold within the Roman Empire.

THE LESSON OUTLINE

1. **RESPECT AUTHORITY: Romans 13:1-6.**
    - A. Authority Is Ordained by God, (1-2)
    - B. Obedience as a Matter of Conscience, (3-6)
2. **LIVE IN LOVE AND LIGHT: Romans 13:7-14.**
    - A. Love as the Fulfillment of the Law, (7-10)
    - B. Living in Holiness, (11-14)
3. **PURSUE UNITY: Romans 14:1-13.**
    - A. Acceptance Without Judgment, (1-6)
    - B. Do Not Become Stumbling Blocks, (7-13)

DISCUSSING THE LESSON

1. RESPECT AUTHORITY: Romans 13:1-6.

A. Authority Is Ordained by God, Romans 13:1-2.

God ordains authority and governing powers, which derive their legitimacy from Him. Pual stated, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (v. 1). This indicates human governance is not merely a human invention, but a reflection of God’s sovereign will. By recognizing the divine origin of government, Christians are called to respect and submit to lawful authorities, understanding that such submission aligns with obedience to God’s overarching plan. However, this acknowledgment also places a responsibility on those in power to exercise their authority in a manner consistent with justice, morality, and the principles of God’s kingdom.

Verse 2 warns against resisting authority, bluntly stating, “Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.” This powerfully reinforces the idea that defiance against legitimate governance equates to opposing Gods established order. Yet, this perspective must be balance with discernment, particularly when authorities act contrary to God’s righteousness. While the passage calls for submission, it does not condone blind allegiance to unjust or oppressive systems. Instead, it challenges leaders and citizens to uphold diving values in their roles. Ultimately, this Biblical teaching calls for reflection on the interplay between faith, civic duty, and moral accountability within society.

B. Obedience as a Matter of Conscience, Romans 13:3-6.

Government leaders and what we would call “law enforcement” are “not a terror to good works, but to evil” (v. 3 NKJV). As such, Paul teaches that obedience to authority aligns with a moral commitment to uphold justice and order. By submitting to lawful authority, individuals acknowledge God’s sovereign design in establishing these structures for the common good. Therefore, obedience is not merely a legal obligation to avoid punishment, but a spiritual act of conscience. As law-abiding citizens, Christians show we trust in God’s providence and reveal our commitment to living righteously. Paying taxes, offering respect, and fulfilling duties to civil authorities become acts of faithfulness to God.

However, obedience as a matter of conscience must also be understood as an exercise of moral discernment. While Romans 13 encourages submission to authority, it does not condone blind allegiance to systems or leaders that demand actions contrary to God’s will or Biblical principles. Conscience, guided by Scripture and the Holy Spirit, serves as a safeguard against unjust or immoral governance. In such cases, the Christian’s ultimate allegiance remains with God, who is the highest authority. Balancing obedience to earthly rulers with faithfulness to God’s Word requires wisdom and courage, ensuring that our actions reflect both respect for established authority and uncompromising commitment to God’s righteousness. This tension highlights the profound integrity between faith, conscience, and societal responsibility.

Paul's teachings remind us of the delicate balance between faith, obedience, and discernment. We are challenged to honor and respect the governmental authorities that God has ordained, but also to resist submission to laws or leaders that deviate from God's moral principles. This requires us to live thoughtfully, balancing respect for earthly authority with unwavering commitment to God's ultimate rule. It's a call to embody wisdom, courage, and integrity in our daily lives, trusting that in navigating this tension, we live out God's kingdom values in society while honoring Him above all. Living as faithful Christians in a fallen world prompts us daily to depend on God's guidance and the power of the Holy Spirit.

2. LIVE IN LOVE AND LIGHT: Romans 13:7-14.

A. Love as the Fulfillment of the Law, Romans 13:7-10.

In verse 7, Paul exhorts the reader to pay their "tribute" (taxes) and "custom[s]" (indirect taxes such as tolls for transporting goods), as well as to "fear" (respect) and "honor" people in authority roles. In verse 8, he counsels against being indebted to anyone for anything, "except to love one another" (NKJV). Unlike taxes and customs, love is not something that can be satisfied with a single payment; it is an ongoing debt that Christians must repay throughout their lives. Furthermore, a follower of Christ fulfills five of the Ten Commandments that deal with one's relationship with others: "You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness.' 'You shall not covet'" (v. 9 NKJV). Indeed, Jesus said that all the Law and the Prophets hang on two commandments: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind," and "You shall love you neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 23:37, 39 NKJV).

In Romans 13:10, Paul said if we love our neighbor, we will never do anything to harm them, "therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (v. 10). While disciples of Christ are not under the letter of the Law of Moses, the spirit of the Law – love God and love others – remains in effect. Instead, of a checklist of "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not," the Christian only needs to remember to always and sincerely love God and others, for in so doing, the Law is fulfilled.

B. Living in Holiness, Romans 13:11-14.

Lest anyone claim that loving others, without regard to one's own behavior, is all God asks, Paul teaches that personal conduct as a follower of Christ does matter. Indeed, Paul calls for an intentional and urgent commitment to a life that reflects the character of Christ. He declares, "It is high time to awake out of sleep: for now, is our salvation nearer than when we believed" (v. 11), emphasizing the necessity of spiritual watchfulness and readiness. Holiness involves putting on the "armor of light" (v. 12) and casting aside behaviors and attitudes associated with darkness, such as revelry, drunkenness, lewdness, lust, strife, and envy (v. 13). People adorned in the armor of light walk honestly and enjoy the protective nature of righteousness, which equips us to navigate the moral challenges of a world that is often at odds with God's standards. Living in holiness is not passive; it is an active pursuit of aligning our thoughts, actions, and desires with God's will.

Furthermore, Paul's exhortation to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 14 NKJV) speaks to the essence of holiness, which is rooted in relationship and identity with Jesus. To live holy is to embody Christ's example and teachings, allowing His life to shape our conduct and choices. This passage challenges us to resist the temptations of the flesh and instead nurture a life marked by self-control, love, and obedience to God. Holiness is not primarily about religious activities or practices; it is a testimony to the power of grace and an invitation for others to see Christ through us. As we heed Paul's call to live as children of the day, we become participants in God's redemptive work, reflecting His light in a world yearning for hope and truth.

Love is not a debt we can settle; it's a lifelong commitment that fulfills God's commandments and reflects His heart. Paul encourages us to see love not as a fleeting emotion but as a way of life that honors both God and our neighbor. Yet, love doesn't stand alone; it's intertwined with holiness. It's humbling to know that through love and holiness, we participate in God's redemptive work, offering a glimpse of His kingdom here on earth. May we wake up each day with renewed purpose ready to love deeply and live boldly as reflections of His grace.

3. PURSUE UNITY: Romans 14:1-13.

A. Acceptance Without Judgment, Romans 14:1-6.

In chapter 14, Paul addressed disputes among the Christians in Rome, particularly focusing on non-essential matters such as dietary practices and the observance of holy days. One issue revolved around some Christians adopting a strict vegetarian diet, likely to avoid consuming meat that had been offered to idols in Roman markets. These individuals judged and likely criticized others who chose to eat this meat. The immature Christians failed to understand the spiritual insignificance of such rituals, as these pagan practices did not alter the nature of the meat itself. Paul emphasized that such differences were not matters of salvation and urged Christians to refrain form judging one another over personal convictions in these areas. Instead, he called for mutual respect and unity within the community, recognizing that these disputes should not divide the church.

In addition to the tendency for the Christians to judge one another over dietary practices, they also judged one another's slaves. In first-century Rome, slavery was a cultural practice that was not based on race. There were no explicit statements by Jesus or Paul to end slavery, but the seeds of abolition were sown when Christians were told to receive a servant as a brother in the Lord (see Philemon 1:16). Roman Christians likely differed in what demands or responsibilities they place on their slaves, which doubtfully resulted in criticism of one another.

In verses 5-6, Paul addressed the differences in personal convictions among Christians regarding the observance of specific days. He emphasized that each individual should be fully persuaded in their own mind, highlighting the importance of personal accountability before God. Those who observed certain days and those who did not should do so to honor the Lord. Our actions should stem from a sincere desire to glorify God. We should avoid judging others over matters unrelated to salvation, focusing instead on fostering harmony and recognizing the shared goal of living for God's glory.

B. Do Not Become Stumbling Blocks, Romans 14:7-13.

In the 16th century, the English poet John Donne wrote, "No man is an island entire of itself." Many centuries earlier, the Apostle Paul wrote, "We do not live for ourselves only, and we do not die for ourselves only" (v. 7 GNT). Christians are called to live in community. This means building up rather than tearing down each other, and it means finding our true identity in Christ instead of in secular culture, for "we are the Lord's" (v. 8). In the end, everyone will stand before Jesus, who is the only judge that will matter in the face of eternity (v. 9). Even though a tree is known by its fruit, no Christian can infallibly judge the heart of faith of another Christian, and certainly no one is empowered to determine the eternal fate of another (v. 10). The fact is that everyone will bow before Christ and confess to God (v. 11). "So, then every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (v. 12).

Therefore, Paul teaches that we should not judge or criticize one another, as doing so may cause a fellow Christian to stumble. Being constantly judged and condemned by so-called mature Christians can dishearten new Christians and could cause them to fall (v. 13). Instead, all followers of Christ are called to love one another and, by doing so, encourage one another to grow in God's grace.

We have studied the Christian's presence in the larger secular community, particularly, as it relates to the governing authorities that bring order and structure to society. We have also considered the interaction between Christians withing the faith community. At times, secular society and the Christian community are in conflict, yet everything exists under God's sovereign rule, and Christians should recognize and respect this fact. In this way, we can overcome evil with good and be a beacon of light in the darkness. However, when faced with laws and policies that contradict the ways of the Lord, we must always choose to obey God and walk in paths of righteousness. This is why Paul said in Romans 12:18, "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men" (NKJV).

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

As followers of Christ, our citizenship is in Heaven. Although we are not of this world, we are in this world. While we are here, we must faithfully represent Jesus as the world's only hope.

MINISTRY IN ACTION

While the church should encourage its members to engage in the democratic process, it should exhort them to prioritize Biblical values over blind allegiance to political parties.

Learning to Live for Christ

When, by faith in Jesus Christ to be our Savior and Lord, we are born again spiritually by the Holy Spirit (John3:3-8), we become "in Christ …a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17), and we receive a God-given desire to live for Christ. But this does not mean we automatically know how to live for Christ.

Learning how to live for Christ is a lifelong process of learning from the Bible, from other believers in Christ (parents, preachers, teachers, and advisors), and by prayer, sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, and experience.

Our most important source for learning how to live for Christ is the Bible, especially the New Testament. There are more than a thousand commandments in the New Testament that tell us how to live for Christ. These commandments are both mandatory (what we should do) and prohibitive (what we should not do).

Romans chapters 12 and 13 are practical, telling what we should do, and also what we should not do, in living for Christ. In these two chapters alone, there are 61 commands (exhortations, directives); 40 are mandatory, and 21 are prohibitive, telling us how to live for Christ.

Romans 12:6-8 has in it seven mandatory commandments: "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: [1] if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportions to our faith; [2] or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; [3] he who teaches, in teaching; [4] he who exhorts in exhortation; [5] he who gives, with liberality;]6] he who leads, with diligence; [7] he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness."

Romans 13:13 has in it six prohibitive commandments presented in couplets: "Let us walk [conduct our living] … not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy."

All the commandments in the New Testament are there to help us learn how to live for Christ; to know what we should and should not do as Christians.

WORKSHEET

Everyday Christianity

List truths from Romans 13 and 14 about…

Obeying government officials (13:1)

Paying taxes (13:6-7)

Debt (13:8)

Neighbors (13:10)

Personal convictions (14:12-13)

Christian unity (14:19)