

Romans 13 — Living Awake in a Dark World

The Christian and Civil Authority

Paul begins with a clear and often challenging instruction:

“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.”

Christians are not called to rebellion, lawlessness, or contempt for civil order. Government, even when imperfect, exists by God’s allowance to restrain evil and preserve order. Paul wrote these words while Rome was ruled by Nero, reminding believers that submission is not based on admiration for leaders but trust in God’s sovereignty.

This does not mean blind obedience. Scripture consistently teaches that when human authority directly contradicts God’s commands, obedience to God must come first. When commanded to deny Christ, the early believers chose faithfulness over life itself. As Peter declared, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” Yet outside of such rare and direct conflicts, believers are called to be law-abiding, respectful citizens.

Authority as God’s Instrument

Paul explains why submission matters:

“For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil.”

Government functions as a deterrent to wrongdoing. Those who live uprightly have little reason to fear the law. Authority exists as a servant of God to administer justice, not as an enemy of righteousness.

“Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake.”

Obedience is not merely about avoiding punishment. It is a matter of conscience before God. This includes honoring civic responsibilities:

“For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing.”

Faith does not exempt believers from responsibility. Integrity in public life reflects the Lord we serve.

Love: The True Fulfillment of the Law

Paul shifts from civil responsibility to personal conduct:

“Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.”

Love is the moral center of Christian living. All commandments regarding human relationships are summed up in this truth:

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Love does no harm. Where love governs the heart, sin loses its grip. This is not sentimental affection, but active, self-giving concern shaped by the example of Christ.

Living with Spiritual Urgency

Paul calls believers to awareness:

“And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep.”

Spiritual lethargy dulls discernment. Paul warns that salvation’s fulfillment is drawing nearer. Darkness is deepening, but dawn is approaching:

“The night is far spent, the day is at hand.”

Believers are called to live as people of the coming day, not as those shaped by the fading night.

“Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.”

This means rejecting patterns of life that feed the flesh—drunkenness, immorality, strife, jealousy—and choosing conduct that reflects Christ.

Putting on Christ Daily

Paul concludes with a decisive command:

“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”

Victory over sin is not found in willpower alone, but in daily identification with Christ. When believers deliberately provide opportunities for temptation, defeat follows. When they choose dependence on Christ, freedom grows.

The world aggressively normalizes indulgence, especially in areas that enslave the heart and mind. Sin promises pleasure but delivers bondage. Many are held captive by habits they once considered harmless. Scripture reminds us that spiritual battles require spiritual weapons. Prayer, truth, and submission to Christ dismantle strongholds that human effort cannot.

Christ’s authority is complete. Through His death, He paid for sin. Through His resurrection, He triumphed over every power of darkness. In His name, captives can be set free.

Practical Application

- Respect for authority reflects trust in God’s rule.
- Integrity in public and private life honors Christ.
- Love is the highest expression of obedience.
- Spiritual alertness protects against moral drift.
- Freedom grows where Christ is deliberately embraced.

A Challenge for Believers

Wake up spiritually. Refuse complacency. Examine where compromise may be weakening your defenses. Choose obedience, purity, and love in a culture that celebrates self-indulgence. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ daily. Live as people of the light in a world growing darker.

An Invitation to Non-Believers

The darkness you feel is not the end of the story. Jesus Christ stepped into this broken world, shed His blood on the cross for your sins, and rose from the dead, declaring Himself to be God, Savior, and Lord.

Freedom does not come from indulging the flesh, but from surrendering to Christ.

If you will turn to Him, trust Him, and call upon His name, He will forgive you, break the chains that bind you, and give you new life.

“Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Today is the time to awaken. Come to Jesus.