

## Obeying the Authorities Romans 13:1-14

How would you expect someone to complete the following sentence:

**“I had a great time of worship today because...”**

What would you expect them to say next?

**Probably something like this.** The music was emotionally engaging. The preaching was challenging and comforting. And the praying was heart felt. I left with a greater joy in God and with an increased love for him.

**But what if someone replied by saying,** “I had a great time of worship today because I filled in my tax return accurately. I paid my monthly rent bill. And all day long I kept to the speed limit.”

**Which response is a description of worship?** The first with its focus on music or the second with its focus on paying our debts and obeying the government?

The Bible says both. **Following Jesus means 24/7 worship.** This certainly includes times of corporate worship, when God’s people gather to hear his Word, sing his praises, pray to him and encourage each other. These are special times not to be missed. However, after our gatherings we are scattered to go into the world to continue our worship of God.

Some of you may remember a song called **“Come, now is the time of worship”**. When is the best time to sing this? At the start of the service or at the end? Both are good!

**Romans 12-16** is a great section of the Bible that explains in more detail what it means to be engaged in 24/7 worship.

And today, as we gaze at **Romans chapter 13**, I want to show you **three** more ways to worship God.

- Be submissive (Vs 1-7)
- Be loving (Vs 8-10)
- Be properly dressed (Vs 11-14)

### **First, be submissive (Vs 1-7)**

Look at verse 1. **Read verse 1a.**

This is simple but challenging. God is commanding us to be **good citizens of the nations** in which we live. We are to submit to their governance. Not like one of those wrestlers who is pinned down by someone stronger and who submits against their will. No, we are to actively and positively seek to obey the authority structures in our country.

We can’t assume everyone will just agree that this is the right course of action. Rebellion against authority is rife in our nation. So it’s vital we know the reason.

This is given to us plainly in these verses. Let me read on in verse 1. **Read verse 1b.**

We can't miss this clear statement from God's Word. **The authorities that exist have been established by God.**

If you think this is a controversial statement, let me show you something even more explosive.

Look at verse 4. **Read verses 4 and 5.**

Servant = deacon. State authorities serve God's purposes in the world.

There are **three** things I'd like us to notice.

**First**, governments are a great gift from God. Human beings need organisation.

What happens is that we give up some of our individual rights like the right to punishment and the right to protect our property and hand these over to the state to enforce.

**Second**, this truth is not simply applied to the kind of governments we approve of, but to all governments. This applies to Boris Johnson and Donald Trump.

And it even applies to regimes like North Korea.

When Paul was writing this letter, it's likely that Emperor Nero was on the throne/.

We need to remember that any government is better than anarchy.

**Can you imagine living in a country where your call to the emergency services was never answered?** There was no first responder. No blue lights speeding past on their way to an emergency call.

**Third**, these verses help to shape why we obey the authorities. Our motivation is not the fear of getting caught and punished but because of love for God.

Think about the **speed you drive** on an A Road or a Motorway. Should it make any difference if you know about the presence of a speed camera? Depends on your motivation!

### **What does this mean in practice?**

We have a few examples listed for us in verses 6 and 7. **Read verses 6 and 7.**

- Pay taxes
- Pay your debts

It's not wrong to have debts but we must ensure that we fulfil our part of the contract.

- Give respect

How do we speak about those in positions of authority over us? Be respectful.

This doesn't mean we never challenge someone in authority but when we do we must always respect their office. We must seek change via non-violent means

You will be aware that a **General Election** is coming up fast. How are you feeling about this?

- Make sure we get informed.

The Christian institute have a website – I'll email you through their Election Briefing.

- Make sure we vote

At this point it's natural we ask whether we always obey the authorities or whether there are limits of our obedience.

You may remember in Acts 4 that Peter and John are required by the Jewish authorities to stop telling people about the risen Jesus and persuading others to become Christians. How do they respond? We must obey God not men.

There are exceptions to our obedience.

However, disobeying a clear command to stop preaching the gospel is different from driving too fast because you don't happen to like the national speed limit that has been decided by others.

**In summary:** We are to be great citizens of our nations as we live respectfully and submissively. In time, this may help us if we need to disobey the authorities when it comes to matters of our faith.

That's the first way that we're told from **Romans 13** on how to worship God. We are to be submissive.

### **Second, be loving (Vs 8-10)**

We worship God as we love others.

Look at verse 8. **Read verse 8.**

One debt that is not like how a Christian should view their mortgage or their credit card bill, and that's the debt to love one another.

This all flows out of a heart that has been touched by the love of Jesus.

The inexhaustible and continuing love of Jesus continually propels us to love others.

Which means that when we are struggling to love other people what we need is a fresh appreciation of the love of Jesus.

What will this look like in practice? Look at what Paul writes next in verse 9. **Read verses 9 and 10.**

There is **no contradiction between law and love**. God's law is an expression of the character and desires of the God of love. This means that God's instructions for how we are to live flow from love and allow us to love.

Isn't this so helpful to know? It means that **teaching these commands** is always a loving thing to do even if the people hearing them think it is outrageous and restrictive. And it means that **obeying these commands** will be **good for us** and **others**.

Some of them are obvious aren't they? Don't commit adultery. How many children would be much happier if one of their parents obeyed this one? Or don't covet? How many relationships would be in better shape if people don't get consumed with work in order to get money to buy stuff that they don't need but they feel they need it because they see it in the lives of others?

A number of years ago, the social critic, Denis Prager was debating the Oxford atheist philosopher Jonathan Glover. He said, 'If you Professor Glover, were stranded at the midnight hour in a desolate Los Angeles street and if, as you stepped out of your car with fear and trembling, you were suddenly to hear the weight of pounding footsteps behind you, and you saw ten young men who had just stepped out of a dwelling coming toward you, would it or would it not make a difference to you to know that they were coming from a Bible study?' Amidst howls of laughter from the auditorium, Glover conceded it would make a huge difference! You bet!

**In summary:** we are to be loving as we keep God's commands. This is good for us, good for others, and is one of the ways we worship God.

### **Third, be properly dressed (Vs 11-14)**

We worship God by being properly dressed.

This is mentioned twice in these verses.

Look at verse 12. **Read verse 12.**

And look at verse 14. **Read verse 14.**

This is talking about our moral character. Now we are following of Christ we are to become like him.

**Armour of light** – this is battle language.

Our battle to witness to Jesus. We need a character to match our message if we are to be taken serious.

In the early days of dating Vicky, I asked her to take me shopping. I think I embarrass you in public.

Could the same be said of us and Jesus?

Let this not be the case but get dressed properly for the days we live in.

If we do, this is one more way that we worship God 24/7.

**Let's pray.**