



Romans - Chapter Thirteen

VI Romans 12:1-15:13 - God's righteousness in everyday life (continues)

VI.a Romans 12:1-13:14 - Marks of the Christian community
(continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Thirteen

God wants his created world to be well ordered and managed. He doesn't want it to be chaotic, shambolic or run by the rule of the jungle. Therefore, Paul sees the rule of civil law as essential in the fulfilment of God's laws and plans for mankind. He is also of the firm conviction that all civil authorities generally are an implementation of God's will. He has set them up for the good of his creation and this applies equally whether they work for the good of the people they serve or not. After all, they, like everyone else, will one day be judged by God for what they have and have not done according to their calling.

Paul further advocates Christian compliance with the rule of civil law, in as far as it does not directly oppose the rule of God. This is in order that Christians may lead, not so much a peaceful life for themselves, but that they are not seen as trouble-makers by the civil authorities, and are then left to share the Gospel in their communities. Although Paul's imprisonment and sufferings did so much to advance the Gospel, as did of course the sufferings of Jesus himself, it would serve little purpose for all Christians to be locked up, as there would then be no one to spread the Gospel of Christ for one thing! Also, it would do no good at all to attract the wrong sort of attention as that would deflect from the message of the Gospel that they would want to be heard and seen in action.

Paul expands further on the issue of civil obedience by clearly stating that Christians should pay any taxes that are due, whether they consider them to be fair or not, and to ensure that all their financial debts are cleared.

The one debt Paul acknowledges that will not be paid is the debt of love. The whole Christian life can be summed up in the way believers love one another and those around them. Just as Jesus had done in his time, Paul sums up the fulfilment of the law in the ancient commandment to: <<love your neighbour as yourself>> (Leviticus 19:18).

Paul then continues with an exhortation to show what Christian living should be like in the dawn of a new era, which was brought in with the death and resurrection of Christ. The rest of the world were and are still living in the old era of darkness, sin and death; whereas the Christian should be living in the light that can only be obtained by putting on Christ Jesus as Lord.

VI.a.iii [Romans 13:1-7 - Submission to the authorities](#)

This passage addresses the responsibility that Christians have towards the civil governing authorities. They are to be subject to the government, which generally means to obey them in the way Sarah did to her husband, who ruled her: <<For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear>> (1 Peter 3:5-6), because it has been ordained by God. Paul is speaking here of the general principle of submission to government. Several other passages show that God approves of Christians disobeying government, but only when obedience to that government would mean disobeying God or bringing disrepute to his name: <<The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live>> (Exodus 1:17), <<And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own>> (Exodus 1:21), <<While Jezebel was killing off the Lord's prophets, Obadiah had taken a hundred prophets and hidden them in two caves, fifty in each, and had supplied them with food and water. Ahab had said to Obadiah, "Go through the land to all the springs and valleys. Maybe we can find some grass to keep the horses and mules alive so we will not have to kill any of our animals." So they divided the land they were to cover, Ahab going in one direction and Obadiah in another. As Obadiah was walking along, Elijah met him. Obadiah recognised him, bowed down to the ground, and said, "Is it really you, my lord Elijah?" "Yes," he replied. "Go tell your master, 'Elijah is here.'" "What have I done wrong," asked Obadiah, "that you are handing your servant over to Ahab to be put to death? As surely as the Lord your God lives, there is not a nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to look for you. And whenever a nation or kingdom claimed you were not there, he made them swear they could not find you. But now you tell me to go to my master and say, 'Elijah is here.' I don't know where the Spirit of the Lord may carry you when I leave you. If I go and tell Ahab and he doesn't find you, he will kill me. Yet I your servant have worshipped the Lord since my youth. Haven't you heard, my lord, what I did while Jezebel was killing the prophets of the Lord? I hid a hundred of the Lord's prophets in two caves, fifty in each, and supplied them with food and water. And now you tell me to go to my master and say, 'Elijah is here.' He will kill me!" Elijah said, "As the Lord Almighty lives, whom I serve, I will surely present myself to Ahab today." So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah>> (1 Kings 18:4-16), <<"Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish" >> (Esther 4:16), <<But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego – who pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up." Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?" Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" >> (Daniel 3:12-18), and again in Daniel when the king set up a decree not to bow down to other gods than his, we read of Daniel's response: <<Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his

God, just as he had done before>> (Daniel 6:10), when the wise men were instructed by King Herod that they must tell him where Jesus was: <<And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route>> (Matthew 2:12), before the Sanhedrin: <<Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!>> (Acts 5:29), and: <<By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict>> (Hebrews 11:23). There were even times when God raised up leaders to rebel against the government and deliver his people from evil rulers: <<Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders>> (Judges 2:16), and: <<And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies>> (Hebrews 11:32-34).

¹ Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

Romans 13:1

Everyone must submit. This sudden transition of both thought and tone is a reflection of Paul's realisation that, in dramatically redrawing the boundaries for the people of God, he had removed some of the protection that had been afforded to them when God's family was purely recognised in terms of ethnic Israel. Even Diaspora Jews had privileges such as paying the annual temple tax rather than local taxation, and large Jewish groups such as those in Alexandria were, in fact, a society within a society with their own governing body, laws and judicial system. By casting off Judaism and extending membership of the family of God to the wider, Gentile world, the privileges that were previously recognised in the Roman Empire from the time of Julius Cæsar were gone, and the church had to fully submit to all aspects of the civil law that now governed them.

Paul reminds the Roman believers that it is God who sets up the office of the civil governing authorities and that generally, it is for the good of mankind to have the rule of civil law. This would be nothing new to those who had a good understanding of OT scriptures and the Jewish way of thinking especially when faced with political tyrants like Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, and in Paul's day, Emperor Nero: <<'The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men'>> (Daniel 4:17). Followers of Jesus should submit to such authority, no matter who the individual political leader may be or what their politics are: <<Do not revile the king even in your thoughts>> (Ecclesiastes 10:20a), and: <<Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honour the king>> (1 Peter 2:17), although believers must not do so at the expense of God's sovereign rule or when such authority is directly opposed to God's will.

It is true that those governing authorities that exist have been instituted by God, but sometimes God gives mankind good authorities as a blessing, and sometimes he institutes evil rulers as a means of trial or judgment: <<Amaziah, however, would not listen, for God so worked that he might hand them over to Jehoash, because they sought the gods of Edom>> (2 Chronicles 25:20), and: <<In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. He prayed to the Lord, who answered him and gave him a miraculous sign. But Hezekiah's heart was proud and he did not respond to the kindness shown him; therefore the Lord's wrath was on him and on Judah and Jerusalem>> (2 Chronicles 32:24-25). On God's rule over earthly authorities: <<But it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another>> (Psalm 75:7), and: <<He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and

deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning>> (Daniel 2:21). These earthly authorities will ultimately be superseded by the rule of Christ: <<In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever>> (Daniel 2:44), and: <<Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever>> (Revelation 22:1-5). What had always given the Jews hope, and is now extended to the Christian believer, is that the rulers who have power, although they may not act in the way they should, and some in fact have been extremely ruthless, will ultimately face God's judgement and will have to answer to him for their deeds.

Established by God. It is interesting to see that Paul thought of the civil leaders as being put in authority by God. It seems unlikely that men like Nero would see it that way when they considered themselves to have divine authority! Herod Agrippa I had received accolades from the crowd, he did not refute them and faced immediate divine judgement as a consequence: <<They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died>> (Acts 12:22-23).

Politics and power were the privilege of a few in the Roman Empire, which was afforded to them either by birthright, their wealth or through ruthless power struggles. Paul is advising his Roman readers to avoid giving offence just for the sake of it. Their recent history with the expulsion of the Jews from Rome, and remember that the Christian church was seen just as an extension of Judaism at that time, made the church groups very vulnerable to the arbitrary whims of the state and those who wielded authority.

² Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

Romans 13:2

Believers should remember that Paul is also speaking from the perspective where the Romans viewed the Jews as a seditious people. Jerusalem itself had the reputation from of old as being rebellious against authority: <<Now since we are under obligation to the palace and it is not proper for us to see the king dishonoured, we are sending this message to inform the king, so that a search may be made in the archives of your predecessors. In these records you will find that this city is a rebellious city, troublesome to kings and provinces, a place of rebellion from ancient times. That is why this city was destroyed>> (Ezra 4:14-15). Therefore, it was important to show that the Christian faith was not in opposition to the rule of civil law in Rome, which, in effect, was what the Lord had said to Pilate: <<Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place" >> (John 18:36). Believers are to show themselves to be good citizens of this kingdom and of the one to come. Anyone who opposes civil authority with no good purpose may be opposing the very God they wish to serve and will only bring judgement on themselves, whether from those who rule or from divine wrath.

God has said: <<By me kings reign and rulers make laws that are just>> (Proverbs 8:15), and therefore believers are to submit to that rule. However, the abuse of the power they are given is not of God and that can be opposed by all Christians, but should, wherever possible, be done by peaceable means, i.e. sharing the Gospel with those in authority so that they will learn to

serve God through the authority he has given them. The only power they have is given to them by God anyway: <<Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin">> (John 19:11). Peter, not always known for his tact and diplomacy in his younger days, in later life writes: <<Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right>> (1 Peter 2:13-14).

It would be naive of anyone living in a modern democratic state to think that Paul was giving ill-advised counsel to the Roman congregations. The Roman governors ruled with supreme power in Paul's day and people opposed the rule of law at their own peril. However, Paul gives an important qualification that threat of judgement was a constraint on ruler as well as ruled, i.e. they will bring judgement on themselves. Paul is probably also indicating he has little time for the Zealot movement that was gaining popularity in Palestine around this time and that would have devastating consequences for the Jewish nation within a generation.

³ For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you.

Romans 13:3

Rulers hold no terror for those who do right, means that civil government in general is a great blessing from God for which we should be thankful. Without civil government there would be total anarchy, a horrible alternative in which evil runs rampant.

For anyone who reads of Paul's life, especially the account given by Luke in the Book of Acts, can see that Paul frequently fell foul of the authorities, who so often made mistakes in their dealings with Paul, and did not act justly for, although Paul was innocent, he remained in prison for many years. On such occasions that Paul had to directly address Roman leaders he was never shy in telling them just where they were going wrong and how they should be doing things. His actions there are in no way contradictory to what he is advising the Roman congregations to do. It is clear that the Roman authorities held no terror for him.

⁴ For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.

Romans 13:4

Governing authorities are God's servants and carry out his wrath on the wrongdoers, and they do so to do you good. Even though Christians must not take or even consider personal revenge: <<Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head">> (Romans 12:17-20), it is right for them to turn punishment over to the civil authorities, who have the responsibility to punish evil.

To ensure that those in authority carry out their work in accordance with God's will, believers are called to pray for them and indeed on their behalf: <<I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness>> (1 Timothy 2:1-2), for that is to the benefit of the believer as well as the

authorities. It is interesting to note that Paul views the magistrates and similar civil officials as being ministers of God, i.e. God's servants, in the same way as he might describe those serving in the church, for good law keeping in the land is in keeping with the Gospel message. Acts 21:32 <<He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul>>, is a good example of civil law that led to Paul being arrested by the Romans rather than being beaten to death by the Jewish mob. Although it did not provide Paul with justice, for he was innocent, it did allow him to continue to proclaim the Gospel at every level of government up to the emperor himself, something that would have been more difficult to do if he were dead! It is better to have a corrupt government than none at all, such as the situation once was; <<In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit>> (Judges 21:25).

The reference to the sword most likely refers to the penalty of capital punishment: <<Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man>> (Genesis 9:6). This passage is one of several that show that God would approve of such punishment if the crime merited it and therefore he does not bear the sword for nothing.

⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.

Romans 13:5

Submit to the authorities. Paul is not indicating a specifically Christian line of reasoning. There is no implication here that Christ has overcome the authorities or anything like that. The argument does not depend on the assumption that a new state of affairs exists by virtue of Christ's ministry. The conditions outlined so far are rather those under which the people of God have operated for centuries.

Christians should obey the civil authorities not only to avoid God's wrath, i.e. possible punishment coming through those authorities (v.4), but also because their conscience tells them that submitting to the government is right. This passage does not mean, however, that the authorities cannot be resisted and punishment, even death, accepted in appropriate defence of the Gospel. If believers do find themselves in a position where: <<The wicked freely strut about when what is vile is honoured among men>> (Psalm 12:8), they are called to suffer the persecution with patient endurance, knowing that God is sovereign and that he will deal with the wicked in his own time and according to his own infallible will.

⁶ This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷ Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honour, then honour.

Romans 13:6-7

Nowhere else does Paul address the issue of taxation, i.e. why you pay taxes, and he would have been well aware of the political situation in Rome at that time, where the population generally were starting to become agitated by the increasing and unfair burden being placed upon them, particularly with regard to indirect taxation. What Paul wants to ensure is that Christians do not become embroiled in any political unrest that may result and thus become easy targets for the authorities to clamp down on. However, Paul is also able to underpin his political assertions with sound theological ones. The authorities are God's servants, i.e. set up by God, and are, at least theoretically, acting for the good of the population as a whole. Therefore, by honouring the rule of law, the Christian is bringing honour to God, even if the implementation of the law is done unfairly or in a discriminatory fashion.

Just as Christian believers are required to give to God what he is due, which is everything they have and are, they must also give to others what they are due, which is natural justice. This may have come as a hard message for those living under the yoke of Rome, where taxation was a heavy burden but required to keep such a vast empire running. However, this command of Paul goes beyond material wealth, for believers are to honour all those in authority whether government, church, owners, employers or our parents, in line with the 5th Commandment.

Christians must not refuse to pay taxes simply because they think some of the money is used unjustly, for the Roman Empire surely did not use all of its money for godly purposes! So, too, believers are to respect and honour their leaders, even if they are not fully admirable. Jesus speaks quite plainly on the issue of taxation: <<They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay taxes to Cæsar or not? Should we pay or shouldn't we?" But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. "Why are you trying to trap me?" he asked. "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." They brought the coin, and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" "Cæsar's," they replied. Then Jesus said to them, "Give to Cæsar what is Cæsar's and to God what is God's." And they were amazed at him>> (Mark 12:14-17).

As previously discussed, under Emperor Nero, indirect taxes became so unpopular that it led to public riots that were so serious for the authorities that Nero promised the population that he would scrap all indirect taxation. Political cynics will not find it surprising that he went back on his word once public order was restored, although it was not just Nero's decision but that of other senior figures and advisors, who pointed out the potential problems this could cause in sustaining the empire, not to mention their own luxurious lifestyles.

Paul was not stating anything new in many ways for, although Jews had very strong opinions against the pagan nations, particularly the idea of being ruled by them and paying taxes to their governments, it was also a long held belief, spelled out by the OT prophets that God was working through the nations for Israel's long-term good, e.g. Assyria in Isaiah Chapter 10, Cyrus in Isaiah Chapter 45, and Babylon itself in Jeremiah Chapter 29. The long centuries before Jesus' coming saw many Jewish attempts to hold together the firm belief that their creator God was in fact sovereign over all the nations with the equally firm belief that the pagan nations, and often enough their rulers, were wicked, idolatrous, immoral and dangerous for Israel. It was precisely this tension which came to its head when, in John's account, Jesus stood before the Roman governor and declared that, even though he was about to execute Jesus, the power by which he did it had come from God in the first place.

In countries like the UK, where democracy is so dramatically declining in modern times, with shockingly low turnouts of voters at elections, and the results of elections almost being determined by budget and media support, Christians today need urgently to consider what it means when God wants his world to be governed under the rule of appropriate civil law, and, at the same time, that Jesus is already installed as the supreme Lord of both heaven and earth.

VI.a.iv Romans 13:8-14 - Love, for the Day Is near

In this second section of the chapter, Paul goes on to instruct the way in which Christians are expected to live their lives in a way that would honour God. At the heart of all they do and their motivating force should always be love. Since God is love then, for the Christian believer, to live a life motivated by love is a fulfilment of God's law. Paul makes it clear that it is not just love for each other but love for the neighbour and, indeed for the enemy as well. Paul also makes it clear the lifestyle activities that a believer would not and must not choose.

⁸ Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.

Romans 13:8

Verses 8-10 focus on the Christian's relationship to the Mosaic Law. Let no debt remain links back to v.7, and thus the command does not prohibit all borrowing but means that one should always pay what is owed (see v.7), fulfilling whatever repayment agreements have been made. The repayment of debts can be difficult for some who are in dire financial straits and there is a case for debts being written off, but it should not be so for people who owe others and then spend what they have on themselves with regard to non-essentials. A good guideline comes from David: <<The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously>> (Psalm 37:21). Sadly, there are many Christians who would not even consider an un-serviced debt as being an obligation, let alone a sin.

The debt one never ceases paying is the call to love one another. Indeed, love fulfils what the Mosaic Law demands. It is a debt always owed and should always be repaid. The law of God and the interests of all mankind make it so: <<If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen>> (1 John 4:20), which again leads us back to the commandment of Jesus: <<"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another">> (John 13:34-35), and it is a command, not a request or a suggestion. It is also a debt that we owe, as he first loved us. Such is charity that we are commanded: <<Freely you have received, freely give>> (Matthew 10:8b), and: <<This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins>> (1 John 4:10).

⁹ The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbour as yourself."

Romans 13:9

Paul cites several OT commandments regarding responsibility to others, all of which are summed up in the call from Leviticus 19:18 to love your neighbour: <<Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord>>. The command love your neighbour as yourself has two limiting factors built in to it. The first is that it does not state 'love everyone' for your neighbour is just those people who are encountered in the course of daily life, and who have a perceived need that the Christian can help them to meet. The second restriction is as yourself, which implies that the believer does not have to go beyond providing for their neighbour that which they might expect to receive in their own lives but that they should give up to the level that they would expect and hope to receive.

Jesus held a similar view to that of Paul which was recorded in the following dialogue Jesus had with a Jewish leader: <<One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." When Jesus saw that he had answered

wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions>> (Mark 12:28-34).

It is interesting that in v.9 Paul places adultery before murder, the reverse order of the commandments as given by God: <<You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery>> (Exodus 20:13-14). This is not a simple error on Paul's part for he would have known the scriptures by heart, memorised from childhood and from his strict Pharisaic study. Adultery is sometimes seen, at least by those involved trying to justify it, as a product of love, such as: <<Come, let's drink deep of love till morning; let's enjoy ourselves with love!>> (Proverbs 7:18), but Paul knew that it has nothing to do with love, for adultery is as destructive as murder, and offenders will be cast off from God: <<If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels>> (Mark 8:38), and: <<You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God>> (James 4:4), although the adultery spoken of here is within our relationship to God.

There are so many things that are harmful to others in the world and believers are forbidden from even contemplating them: <<Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your neighbour, "Come back later; I'll give it tomorrow" — when you now have it with you. Do not plot harm against your neighbour, who lives trustfully near you>> (Proverbs 3:27-29). Love is the answer, for love can do no harm to anyone, except perhaps the one that gives it and is abused for doing so. However, even that should not be a barrier to us loving. Love is a living, active principle of obedience to the whole law of God; for it is written in the heart, if the law of love is there.

¹⁰ Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.

Romans 13:10

Love does no harm to its neighbour, and includes the neighbour that is an enemy and indeed where the neighbour is a state official engaged in ruling the population. Jesus tells a parable where state officials, portrayed by a priest and then by a Levite, do not fulfil God's command to love their neighbour: <<In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have'>> (Luke 10:30-35). Had the priest or Levite responded in the way the Samaritan had, they would have acted in a way that was the fulfilment of the law.

These passages are the first references to the law since the somewhat dismissive statements: <<Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things will live by them">> (Romans 10:4-5); and indeed, as his readers would soon realise, these are the last references to the law in the letter as a whole. They therefore fulfil a crucial role: they would reassure readers that Paul's Gospel was not antinomian; on the contrary, he counts fulfilment of the law as something very important. Equally important, he reasserts the continuity with the revelation previously given to Israel, not least in the law, that the fulfilment is a fulfilment of God's purpose in giving the law to Israel in the first place. For those who had been attracted to Judaism by its strong moral

structure, this would be of crucial importance. It would provide vital confirmation that Paul was not so much in the business of abandoning the firm guidelines of the Torah, as of transforming and transposing them by freeing them from their specifically ethnic context.

¹¹ And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light.

Romans 13:11-12

In this section, Romans 12:3-13:14, the final verses call Christians to action, given the shortness of the time before Jesus returns. Slumber here is a metaphor for a life of moral carelessness and laxity.

Salvation is viewed as a future reality here, and it draws nearer every day. This is a theme that could easily be dismissed after mankind has waited expectantly for almost 2,000 years. Some commentators believe that God's delay in implementing the final phase of his plan has weakened and not strengthened the need for people to turn to him. However, this attitude is relatively new as even as late as Victorian times, when infant mortality rates were particularly high, life expectancy was a lot lower and the idea of being cut off in one's prime was quite a common thought and, indeed, a common reality. People feel generally more secure in their earthly lives these days, at least in western society, and it is in those societies where people have turned less toward God than in other parts of the world. Yet in a strange way, living in a nuclear age, having experienced global conflicts that have killed off millions of people, the world is in a much more precarious state than it has ever been, and it is a certainty that salvation is nearer now than when anyone first believed. That is a simple fact. Are we approaching the end? When Jesus was asked a similar question by his disciples: <<He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority">> (Acts 1:7). Believers are simply expected to be ready in each generation for the coming of Christ and know for certain that he will come.

The day is almost here. The nearness of the end summons Christians to put off all evil works and to live in the light. Jesus speaks in a similar vein during his ministry on earth: <<Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. The crowd spoke up, "We have heard from the Law that the Christ will remain forever, so how can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this 'Son of Man'?" Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light." When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them">> (John 12:31-36).

Put on the armour of light. This is again in keeping with the day/night analogy; while the world is still sleeping the Christian is or at least should be awake, putting on their Christian clothing, their Armour of light, perhaps the armour that Paul refers to elsewhere: <<Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil

one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints>> (Ephesians 6:10-18).

¹³ Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.

Romans 13:13

Things not fitting for those who belong to the light include:

1. sins of addiction in drinking and partying;
2. sexual sins; and
3. social sins.

All of these are seen as activities that would normally take place during the hours of darkness.

For the Christian, emotions like anger and bitterness are just as inappropriate as sexual immorality and debauchery. By his death and resurrection, Christ has implemented a new dawn, a fresh hope, a new way of living, and Christians are to live the new life in the dawning of a new daytime, while the rest of the world sleeps in the night time of the old era.

Paul's comments on a new salvation dawning, i.e. daytime, were probably not so much his expectation that the world was about to end and the Day of the Lord was imminent. In line with his earlier comments: <<I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will>> (Romans 8:18-27), where his view seems more of a new world coming in terms of the liberation of the present world; not its abolition. As a Christian, of course, Paul would have been living his life in expectation of Christ's return within his lifetime, but he would also have an extensive enough knowledge of scripture to understand that he was to plan out his life as if Jesus would not return until after his death. Although it was after Paul's time, Jesus has said: <<I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown>> (Revelation 3:11), and Peter explains: <<But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day>> (2 Peter 3:8), so on that reckoning, it is as if the Lord has only been away for a weekend. He could return at any time, or it may yet be two thousand more years. No human being knows but all Christians are called to be ready and to also live out their lives in full service to God until their time comes to then hand the baton on to the next generation. Such is the hope that Paul speaks of.

What is interesting in support of Paul's argument is that right through the next century and beyond, Christian teachers went on telling people that God's new world was dawning. It didn't matter to them that it hadn't happened within Paul's lifetime or even shortly afterwards. Nor did the manner of Paul's death deter them from God's promises. In fact, the point Paul and other early Christians were making was not that the Lord's Day, the final day

of Salvation, was bound to happen within a short time, for the event that was expected to happen within a generation, as predicted by Jesus and taught certainly by Paul, Peter, James and Jude, was the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70. This was the outcome of the Jewish Roman war but is also widely recognised and predicted as a punishment on the Jewish nation for their general rejection of the Gospel and in their part in handing Jesus over to be crucified. The point being emphasised was that the Day of the Lord might come at any time.

Its preparation, the death and resurrection of Jesus, was complete; the day has dawned and, at some point, this new light will penetrate throughout the entire world. In the meantime, Paul shows that Christians are to live their lives as citizens of the present world but in a way that prepares them for the one to come. The final fulfilment of God's promises to do so in love, with believers living the way of life that always reflects God's own character; loving it, indeed, in a way in which those who have not known God's love and saving grace cannot understand or appreciate: <<The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God>> (Romans 8:6-8).

Paul not only tells people what to avoid, but in v.14 he actually tells them how to do it; that is, to put on Christ Jesus as Lord.

¹⁴ Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Romans 13:14

Paul's exhortations can be summed up in the call clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ. The metaphor of putting on clothing implies not just imitating Christ's character but also living in close personal fellowship with him. Even though believers have new life, they still must constantly renounce the sinful nature and refuse to gratify the desires of the flesh. Believers can use the same advice for v.14 as Paul gives to the Galatian churches: <<So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature>> (Galatians 5:16).

The combined effect of vv.10-14 is powerful. The readers are left in no doubt that there is a sharp 'either-or' confronting them, not only in their original decision to accept the Gospel, but precisely as a result of their decision to accept the Gospel. A choice, once made, has to be confirmed and lived out in a whole sequence of repeated decisions.

The use of the Greek word agape for love and the use of 'put on' or clothe yourselves with respect to the character of Christ, leaves no room for misinterpreting Paul's intention to live with this self-giving love and not some form of self-promoting, lustful living, in particular with the thoughts of adultery or sexual immorality that are given as an example.

Paul's readers, even those who have taken the decisive step of faith, can be described as asleep (v.11), the circumstances in which they live as night still prevailing (v.12); there are deeds of darkness which they must yet put aside (v.12); the desires of the flesh are still strong and to be contested (v.14). The sequence of unsavoury couplets, orgies and drunkenness, sexual immorality and debauchery, and dissension and jealousy (v.13), may simply be a way of characterising the conduct of the night in the extreme terms, which most inhabitants of Rome would know about, at least from the gossip and rumour of the marketplace. But since some members of the church in Corinth had to be rebuked for similar licentiousness and not dissimilar disorder, the possibility cannot be excluded that Paul saw these as real temptations and threats to his Roman readers. Either way, the sequence of Paul's imagery and the intensity of his concern underline the extent to which Paul saw the circumstances and character of the old age of Adam: <<Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through

sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned – for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come. But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord>> (Romans 5:12-21), as still a powerful factor influencing the conduct of these first generation Christians. To their still belonging to the old unredeemed era, both in their own natural appetites and in their social context, there are forces to be reckoned with and guarded against lest the darkness closes in again and once more shuts out the light.

In the closing passages of this chapter, believers are given four directives for themselves:

1. They are told to be awake and remain watchful; not to become complacent but to be ready at all times for the coming of our Lord: <<You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled>> (1 Thessalonians 5:5-6), and: <<For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do – living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry>> (1 Peter 4:3).
2. They are told that their salvation is ever closer. There is a need to hasten their actions; not to relax in the knowledge that they are secure.
3. They need to be dressed appropriately for the night is nearly over. They must cast off anything that is of their sinful nature (v.13) in order to be spotless before Christ: <<So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him>> (2 Peter 3:14). Believers need to be dressed in the armour of light (v.12), in the graces of the Spirit, and to put on the Lord Jesus (v.14): <<and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith>> (Philippians 3:9), i.e. to put on the new man: <<and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness>> (Ephesians 4:24). By putting on Christ, believers are replacing their inadequate fig leaves: <<Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves>> (Genesis 3:7), with garments of skin: <<The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them>> (Genesis 3:21), made for our protection by the hand of God.
4. Believers are instructed as to how they should walk. The eyes of the world are always on followers of Jesus and they are ready to condemn them every time they do something that remotely looks like hypocrisy. Believers are to walk as children of the light: <<For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as

children of light>> (Ephesians 5:8); they are to abstain from excesses of food, drink and anything else that is harmful to them or causes them to lose full control of their senses. They are called to be good witnesses to Christ and every mistake they make is magnified before the world, especially so to those in the community who want to put down the faith they have. Followers of Jesus must avoid doing Satan's work for him. They are also called to walk and not just sit around; they are required to move among those they are called on to serve in order for the world to see what type of people they really are or, at least, should be in Christ, in order for the world to realise there is something they have that the world too so desperately needs and which is there for all to share in for free.