

THE VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN LIFE

Romans 13:1-14

Key Verse: 13:14

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

In the last passage, Paul urged us to offer our bodies as living sacrifices to God. When we do so, we can escape from the pattern of this world, which is corrupting and deadly. We can be transformed by the renewing of our minds. We can grow in the shepherd mind of Jesus. During the summer, the world teases us to enjoy vacations and pursue fun. This appeals to the sinful nature, but easygoing mentality badly damages our spirit. On the other hand, living as shepherds means that we must work hard for the glory of God. This sounds challenging. Yet it leads us to true joy and spiritual growth. May God help us to offer our bodies to God during this summer. May God help us to be transformed into Jesus' shepherd image by the renewing of our minds.

In today's passage Paul teaches us how to live a victorious Christian life in this real world. Actually, everyone wants to be a victor; no one wants to be a loser. Today let's learn from Paul's teaching how to be victorious in our Christian lives.

First, submit to the authorities (1-7).

In the context of Romans, Paul had just finished exhorting believers to bless those who persecute them. We should not repay anyone evil with evil. God is the Judge, not us. When we confront enemies who persecute, we must not fight out of natural passions and with worldly methods. We must not repay them with psychological torment, venomous words, legal harassment or violence. This is the way worldly people fight to intimidate and destroy enemies. Christians must be different; we must overcome evil with good. Especially, Christians must pray sincerely for those who persecute them.

Recently, we have heard about the awful beheadings of an American and a Korean in Iraq. These acts of terror are meant to plant fear in our hearts. Perhaps American and Korean Christians have prayed most for the evangelization of Muslim countries. Satan wants to stop this prayer, sensing that his kingdom is crumbling. We must not be overcome by evil people, driven by the devil. We must not hate them and decide to punish them as though we were in God's place. Instead, we must continue to pray for the gospel to spread throughout Muslim countries. We must remember Paul's words, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” We must win a true spiritual victory through prayer. In chapter 13, verses 1-7 are spoken in light of this teaching.

Look at verse 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.” Christians must acknowledge the governing authorities as God's instruments on earth. Christians must submit to their authority. However, there is a temptation for God's people to despise governing authorities, especially when they are unbelievers. For example, Jewish people did not want to acknowledge Roman rule and rebelled against it in many ways. One national symbol of Israel is the plateau fortress of Masada. When Jerusalem was laid waste by the Roman legions in A.D. 70, about 1,000 Jews retreated to Masada in a last ditch effort to preserve their nation. They fought fanatically, and repelled Roman attacks for two years. When it was obvious that the fortress would fall, they all committed suicide rather than submit to the Roman army. They were rebels with a cause. Yet their rebellion begat only death and destruction.

Paul urges Christians to be different. Christians are not to rebel against governing authorities. A Christian's basic attitude must be to submit to the authorities. This is difficult for sinful man, who has a rebellious spirit. Look at verse 1 again. “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.” By repetition, Paul nails down the imperative of Christian submission. Christians must submit to the governing authorities.

Why is it so? It is because they have been established by God. Even pagan rulers have been established by God. For example, God told Pharaoh, “I have raised you up for this very purpose...” (Ro 9:17). Pharaoh did not know God nor credit God with establishing him or the Egyptian Empire. But God plainly said that he did so. When God wanted to destroy the Egyptian Empire, he also did that very systematically.

The book of Daniel clearly reveals God's sovereign rule of nations and their rulers. One night God gave Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, a dream. It summarized the future rise and fall of world powers, symbolized by a statue of various materials (Dan 2). God held world history in his hand and he revealed his plan in advance. Surely, God is ruling history, especially the leaders of the nations. Therefore, we can say that the Roman Empire was established by God. After Roman military power conquered the world of the time, Roman law and Roman peace established an environment for worldwide travel and trade. God used the Empire to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth. Paul understood God's plan for world salvation through Roman roads. So Paul eagerly wanted to visit Rome and teach the Bible there. He strongly encouraged the Romans to fulfill God's purpose.

Peter had the same view as Paul. Peter said, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men..." (1Pe 2:13). As men of great spiritual influence, Peter and Paul could have led their followers to rebellion. Many would have supported them. But they did not. They taught God's people to submit to authority as their obedience to God. Peter and Paul practiced what they preached. According to tradition, they were both martyred in Rome by Emperor Nero. They did not resist. They submitted to martyrdom without stirring up a spirit of rebellion. Thus, they sealed their testimony about Jesus with their blood. They followed Jesus' example and sacrificed their lives for the sake of world mission. Their submission has born everlasting spiritual fruit and will continue to do so. Peter and Paul were true spiritual victors in the Christian faith. If we visit Rome today, there are so many statues of Peter and Paul. But Nero has become synonymous with tragic comedy; many people name their dogs after him.

The best example of submission is our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he is the Son of God and in very nature God, he submitted himself to the civil authorities as his submission to God. He accepted suffering and the most painful death by crucifixion because it was the will of God. When Jesus was on trial, the Roman governor Pilate thought he held Jesus' life in his hand. He said to Jesus, "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above" (Jn 19:10,11). Then Jesus went to the cross. As he breathed his last, he said, "Father, into your hand I commit my spirit" (Lk 23:46). Jesus' submission was not merely to governing authorities; Jesus submission was to the will of God for world salvation. Jesus' obedience brought eternal life to all who believe in him. Jesus' obedience destroyed the devil and established the kingdom of God. To sum up, we must submit to the authorities because they are God's servants. We must submit to the authorities as our submission to God to carry out his will for world salvation.

However, we must not submit to governing authorities blindly. We must do so prayerfully. There are times when Christians may be called to obey God, not the authorities. According to Exodus, Pharaoh king of Egypt—ruler of the world power nation of the time—wanted to control the Israelites, who were multiplying like rabbits. So he issued an edict that all the Israelite boy babies be killed at birth by being thrown into the Nile River. This edict carried a penalty of death for disobedience. Moses was born at this time, but his parents did not obey this edict. Hebrews 11:23 says, "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." Moses' parents did not obey Pharaoh. This did not come from a rebellious spirit, but from their faith. They wanted to obey God and carry out God's will on earth at the cost of their lives.

As another example, when the apostles preached the gospel in Jerusalem, they were arrested and put in prison. By the intervention of God's angel from heaven, they were freed. The angel instructed them, "Go, stand in the temple courts, and tell the people the full message of this new life" (Ac 5:20). When they did so, they were arrested again and commanded by the Jewish Sanhedrin not to speak in Jesus' name any longer. The apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than men" (Ac 5:29). They disobeyed Jewish leaders to obey the will of God. In this part we learn our basic Christian duty is to submit to authorities. But we must do so prayerfully. Our ultimate submission is to God.

Look at verse 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." Many think that rebellion is cool, like James Dean in "Rebel Without A Cause." But rebellion against the authorities is rebellion against God. It leads to God's judgment, including demon possession (Mk 5). When God establishes civil authorities he gives them power to reward and punish. This gives backbone to their authority. Look at verse 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.” The rebellious are always fearful. Fear drives them to panic from time to time, such as when they see a police car behind them, or when they suddenly and unexpectedly meet their parents, teachers or shepherd.

Look at verse 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.” Paul says that governing authorities have been endowed with power from God to punish wrongdoing. Law enforcement is not just a human matter. God intervenes to punish wrongdoers through his servants who bear the sword. Sometimes law enforcement officers use deadly force. As a general rule, this is God’s judgement; it is just punishment.

Look at verse 5. “Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.” When we submit to authorities we can be free from fear and our consciences are clear. We can be really happy.

Look at verses 6-7. “This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.” As part of our submission to authorities we must pay taxes. Paul strongly emphasizes that Christians practice a giving life. We must not have a welfare mentality, expecting all kinds of free handouts from the government at other taxpayers’ expense. We must be giving people. Still, it is easy to complain about paying taxes. But we must remember that we owe taxes. We receive many benefits from authorities. They provide garbage and water service, police and fire protection, air traffic control, and so on. This is a heavy burden of responsibility. It is proper to pay taxes for their support. In addition to taxes, we must show proper respect and give due honor. This creates a good atmosphere for the development of humanity and the establishment of decent relationships between people.

Second, love one another (8-10).

In verses 1-7 Paul taught us how to be decent citizens by submitting to the governing authorities. In verses 8-10, he urges us to practice the love of God as shepherds for our people. Look at verse 8. “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.” There are debts we can pay, such as school loans and house mortgages. We must pay all of our debts, being fiscally responsible. We Christians must keep our promises. But there is one debt we cannot pay back. It is the continuing debt to love one another. This debt is owed to our Lord Jesus Christ. While we were still sinners—unlovely, useless, harmful and weak—Christ died for us. Christ poured out his precious blood without holding anything back to purchase our redemption. God accepts his blood as the full payment for our sins. We are no longer under condemnation, nor tormented by guilt and shame because of our sins. God forgave us. God justified us to be righteous. God sees us with great affection through Jesus as his own precious children. God is working through the Holy Spirit to transform us into the image of Christ. God has made us his heirs and co-heirs with Christ, giving us the most glorious inheritance in the kingdom of God. This wonderful new life came to us by the one-sided love and grace of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, we must practice the love of Christ toward others. We can never pay this back as long as we live. But we must do our best to practice the love of God. In a dark world, this love of God reveals the glory of God to men. This love begins with the Ten Commandments. No one can love others if he is breaking the Ten Commandments. However, the love of Christ goes beyond this. The love of Christ is sacrificial and gives life to others. Jesus showed us this love. For example, Jesus healed a man with a shriveled hand at the risk of his life. We can practice this love when we take care of one person with Bible study and prayer from a shepherd’s heart. This love can change the world we live in.

Third, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ (11).

Look at verse 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.” There are many who do not understand the present time. Their motto is, “The world is going on, just like it always has” (2 Pe 3:4). They ignore the fact of death and the promise of God’s judgment and live at random. Their bad influence makes others spiritually dull. Christians who live in this unbelieving atmosphere are easily lulled into spiritual slumber and lose their spiritual fervor. They say habitually, “I will do it tomorrow.” But Paul admonishes us to understand the present time. We are

living in a time unlike any other in history. The Second Coming of Jesus Christ in power and glory is nearer now than it has ever been before. Jesus warned us that the day would come suddenly like a thief in the night when no one expected it. Jesus may come this afternoon. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 says, "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever."

Look at verse 12. "The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light." We must put aside the deeds of darkness. We must repent for seeking pleasure in this world, secretly loving it in the darkness. Instead, we must put on the armor of light. Armor is defensive gear that protects a soldier in the time of war. Usually it is made of tempered metal of some kind. But this armor is the armor of light. Simply speaking, it means to let Jesus dwell in our hearts through repentance and faith to guard us from the darkness of the world. Missionary Sarah Jun has held John 1:4 as her life key verse. It says, "In him was life, and that life was the light of men." Jesus has been her armor of light to guard her heart and soul to keep missionary calling. In Jesus, she has served as a sacrificial prayer mother for Chicago UBF ministry, doing all the unnoticed serving jobs and praying earnestly for others, for the last 26 years. In 1996, she came down with breast cancer. Her life was hanging in the balance. Following her shepherd's counsel, she began to read ten chapters of the Bible per day. As she did so, Jesus dwelt richly in her heart and soul. Jesus' promises shone like the sun within her. In the time of adversity she revealed the marvelous light of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now she is going to LeHigh to join Missionary Wesley. May God use her preciously.

Look at verses 13-14. "Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." We really want to live a victorious life of faith and render glory to God. But we are weak. Still, there is a way. It is to clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus rules our hearts and lives, he gives us victory. Augustine was an intellectual hedonist with many bad habits. He could not change himself. But when he repented his sins and accepted Jesus, heavenly sunlight came into his soul. He was changed completely into a good shepherd and man of godly influence who has been a blessing down through the generations.

Today we learn how to live a victorious Christian life. We must submit to the authorities with faith in God's sovereign rule. We must practice the love of God as shepherds for others. Jesus set the example by his humble submission and sacrificial shepherd life. Let's clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ and live as victors for his glory.