

PUT ON THE ARMOR OF LIGHT

Romans 13:1-14
Key Verse: 13:14

Lesson 13

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

Paul was writing to Christians living under an anti-Christian, totalitarian regime. The Roman Christians were aware that they were living in a war zone. The pressures of the corrupt and pagan Roman culture were very great. So it was not without reason that Paul said, 'Your faith is being reported all over the world.' (1:8) How easy it would be to compromise with Roman culture and be melted into life in the political and cultural hub of the world. Furthermore, any deviation from the norms of the Roman way of life invited persecution. So it would seem that the enemy of Christians, and of all freedom-loving people was the oppressive Roman government. So, resisting this pagan government in every possible way seemed to be the task of Christians. Some Christians probably thought that to rebel against the government and strive to change the structures of society was a task that they should actively pursue. It was a dangerous and heroic way of life. But Paul points out that the front line is somewhere else. The real battle is spiritual; it is not against the Roman Empire; the real battle is against Satan. For this reason, God's people must put on the armor of light.

1. Submit to authorities (1-7)

What should a Christian do when he lives under a freedom suppressing, totalitarian government? Paul's surprising answer is in 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." God is the sovereign ruler of history. He knows how corrupt man's nature is. He established governments to bring order to human society and to maintain that order.

Some governments are better than others; some allow more personal freedom; some maintain tight control of people's lives. A benevolent dictator maintains order while seeking to help his subjects live in peace and harmony, with justice. A cruel dictator doesn't care about the people--he exercises his authority arbitrarily, and people suffer under his rule. But they would suffer more in a chaotic anarchy. Perhaps a democracy based on constitutional law is the best form of government--but evil and corrupt men can always find a way to twist even good laws to their own advantage. A socialist form of government seeks to establish economic justice, but it cannot deal with problems of morality, or with the sinful human natures of those who control the system.

This chapter teaches us clearly that the Christians' task is not to change the structures of government by rebelling against those in authority. Nor may Christians

excuse themselves from obeying distasteful and burdensome laws, such as paying taxes or serving in the army, on the grounds that Christians don't have to support pagan governments.

Verse 2 says that those who rebel against the authority are rebelling against what God has instituted.

Verse 3 says, "...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..." Basically, the Roman government promoted peace and order. Those who were a part of the empire were protected by the Roman army. But surely Paul knew that the Roman government also persecuted Christians, even though Christians did what was right. Christians who did not worship the Emperor or honor the pantheon of gods were called atheists. Paul himself was later martyred in Rome because of his Christian faith. However, it is true that even though we may suffer, if we live before God and seek to do what is right, we do not need to fear. If we suffer for doing right, God will reward us. We should not suffer for doing wrong. A Christian who lives by faith does not have to fear, for his life and his death are in the hands of God.

We should regard the ruler, whether king or dictator, policeman or judge as God's servant, put in power to do us good. He has the right to use the sword to establish and keep order. We should pay our taxes and respect our rulers for 2 reasons: first, so that we will not be punished; second, because of conscience--for it is right to do these things.

2. Put on the armor of light (8-14)

We are fighting a war, however. It is a spiritual war. In it we have weapons and armor. The main weapon is love. It is not easy to fight with love, because overcoming ourselves to love others is difficult. According to verses 8-10, if we love our fellowman, we fulfill the law. God gave the law so that sinful people might be restrained from hurting one another; more than this, he desires that we positively build up one another and help one another. We must love others with the love of Jesus; this is love which seeks the highest good of another; it is love that builds up. Christian love does not tear down or plant doubt and fear; it builds up and plants hope and faith.

The best defense against our enemy Satan is light. When we lived in the dark, we enjoyed dark pleasures. Some of the deeds of darkness are listed in verse 13: orgies, drunkenness, sexual immorality, debauchery, dissension and jealousy. Each of us can add to the list. They are the deeds of darkness because they are things of which we are ashamed, things which we don't want to be brought into the light. They are the things that we would not like to be doing when Jesus comes again. Jesus told Nicodemus, 'Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. (in 3:19-20)

So, we must put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. This means that we must repent. We must let the light of God's word and Spirit shine into every corner of our lives and expose all the things that need cleaning up. We must make a decision of the heart to give up all the things that do not please God. We must repent. We must not put off doing this, for Jesus may come anytime. The hour has come to wake up. Our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.

We cannot fight the devil in our own strength. If we try to do so, we will surely be defeated. This is why many people would rather rebel against the government or participate in some 'anti-' this or that activity. It's too hard to fight the devil. But we don't have to fight the devil in our own strength. And we must go one step beyond repenting. Verse 14 says, "rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." We must invite Jesus to come in and rule our hearts and lives. We must put on Jesus every morning and go out to the front lines of the world to do battle against Satan. We must not spend our time thinking about how to please ourselves or how to provide for our flesh desires. We must think about how to please God, and how to obey Jesus our Lord in every situation. He will be with us to crush the head of Satan.

So God's people are free to submit to the governing authorities. We are free to love and serve one another. We have the assurance of victory when we put aside the deeds of darkness, put on the armor of light and clothe ourselves with Jesus.

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