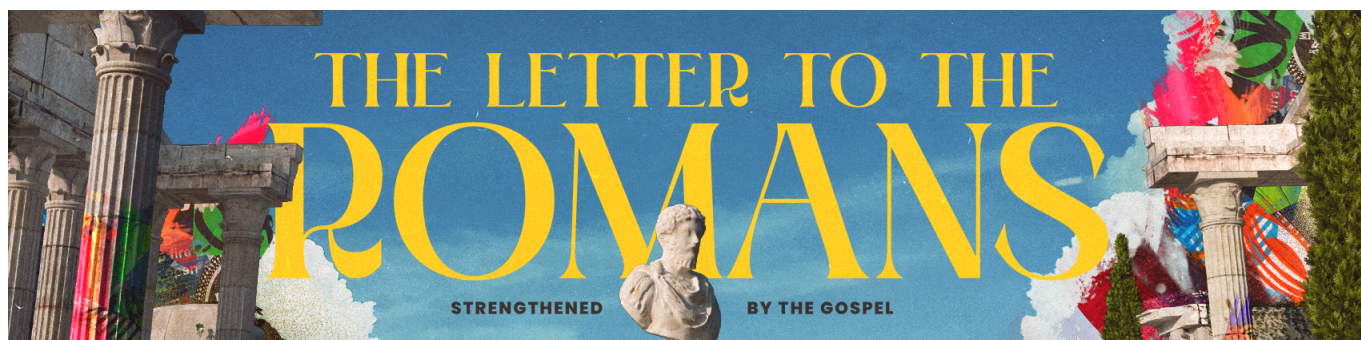




Romans (Strengthened by the Gospel) (Week 17/18) Gospel-Shaped Life in Society

Small Group Discussion Questions

Connect Ask God to show you how you might show your love for God and for other people through prayer.

Warm-Up

1. What was the attitude toward government in the context where you grew up?
2. What “non-essentials” have you seen Christians quibble about?

Read Romans 13

3. Paul calls us to submit to the governing authority; why? What purposes does God intend for the governing authorities to serve?
4. Government has real, but not ultimate, authority (cf. Dan 2:21; John 19:11). How does that distinction shape the way you think about submission and its limits? (cf. Acts 5:29)
5. How can you pray for believers living in places where authorities are abused? (*Can pray with group*)
6. How might remembering that Jesus, not any government, is our ultimate allegiance give us hope and free us to love our neighbours even in difficult political contexts?
7. How does love fulfil the laws? What relationship do we see between the laws and love?
8. What does it mean by “our salvation is near now”? And how are we to prepare for Christ’s return?
9. Share with the group some ways we can “clothe” ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.
10. Paul lists “quarreling” in the very same breath as sexual immorality (13:13). Does that surprise you? Why might God take relational discord among believers that seriously?

Read Romans 14

11. What are the disputable matters Paul mentions in verses 1-8?
12. What principles does Paul give here for us accepting other believers who disagree on non-essentials?
13. If all believers *belong* to Christ, how would this shape our handling of disagreements? (cf. vv.7-11, 17)
14. What does it mean to “destroy” God’s work (v.20)? How serious can spiritual or relational harm be?
15. How should we enjoy both freedom and faith (vv.22-23) in light of “mutual edification” (v.19)?
16. Have we ever found ourselves judging those we think are “weak”? Or has the Spirit reminded you of a sister or brother whom we need to say sorry to? How should we respond in view of God’s mercy (cf. 12:1)? (*Perhaps pray in silence*)

Apply We are called to live under Jesus’ lordship. Where might Jesus be calling you to change the way you respond to authority, disagreement, or other people for the sake of love?

Pray Lord Jesus, help us to live under your lordship, love others as you have loved us. Forgive our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. By your grace, help us to welcome one another for your glory. Amen.

GOING DEEPER

Romans (Strengthened by the Gospel) (Week 17/18) Gospel-Shaped Life in Society

Small Group Discussion Questions

On Your Frontline this Week

Who are three people you know, you are not yet following Jesus? Pray for them all week - for soft hearts, opportunities to hear the gospel, and courage for you to share the gospel.

For Families

- *Download:* some of the family resources to use at home: stbartskids.org

Listen, Watch, and Read

- *Listen (sermon):* “Marks of a Gospel Family (4) {Romans 13:1-7}” by Stephen Nichols:
https://www.allsouls.org/Media/AllMedia.aspx?show_media=157054&show_file=168630
- *Listen (sermon):* “Marks of a Gospel Family (5) {Romans 13:8-14}” by David Turner:
https://www.allsouls.org/Media/AllMedia.aspx?show_media=157367&show_file=168957
- *Listen (sermon):* “Marks of a Gospel Family (6) {Romans 14:1-12}” by Stephen Nichols:
https://www.allsouls.org/Media/AllMedia.aspx?show_media=157847&show_file=169445
- *Listen (sermon):* “How to handle diversity {Romans 14}” by Paul Enns:
https://www.allsouls.org/Media/AllMedia.aspx?show_media=175292&show_file=187382
- *Listen (sermon):* “Power and Love {Romans 14}” by Tim Keller:
<https://gospelinlife.com/sermon/love-and-power/>
- *Read (article):* “The Government Can’t Change the Heart, but Love Can” by Jeremy Treat:
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/government-cant-change-heart/>

Series Resources

- *Read:* “Strengthened by the Gospel” by Brian Rosner. 
- *Read:* “The Story of God Bible Commentary: Romans” by Michael Bird.
- *Read:* “Into the Heart of Romans” by N. T. Wright. 
- *Read:* “Epistle of Paul to the Romans” by F. F. Bruce. 
- *Read:* “The Message of Romans” by John Stott. 
- *Read:* “The Epistle to the Romans” by Leon Morris. 
- *Watch:* “Romans” by the Bible Project:
<https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-romans/>

 Available to borrow from the St Bart’s Library (Toowoomba): stbarts.com.au/library

For sermons and additional resources, visit stbarts.com.au

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ROMANS (STRENGTHENED BY THE GOSPEL)

Week 17/18 “Gospel-Shaped Life in Society”

by Justin Lai (06/09/2026, Toowoomba)

사회 속에서 복음적으로 살기 | Wēlpīēth Ayēē Pīir CōK-Pīiny |
福音塑造的群体生活 | சமுதாயத்தில், சுவிசேஷ-வடிவமைக்கப்பட்ட வாழ்க்கை

Bible Passage: Romans 13-14

*Merciful Father, as we hear your Word, renew our minds by your Holy Spirit.
Fix our eyes on Jesus, who died and rose again and is Lord of all.
Give us humble hearts and strengthen us by the gospel to live out your good will. Amen.*

Introduction

We're in the second last week of our Romans series - “*Strengthened by the Gospel*”.

Throughout this letter, Paul has been showing us what gospel strength really is.

- It's not the confidence to do God's will on our own strength; it's strength that comes from his.
- Last week, Paul told us to offer ourselves *in view of God's mercy* (12:1).
- Gospel strength flows from what God has mercifully done *for* us and *in* us.
 - *For* us, he has freed us from condemnation by Jesus' blood - so we do his will *not to earn his acceptance*, but because we already have it.
 - And *in* us, he has given us his Spirit to really enable us to live out his will, which the law could describe, but never truly produce.

That's the lens we bring to today's text (chap. 13-14).

- They are not just a list of Christian manners. They are what a gospel-shaped life looks like - our *responses* to God's mercy, lived out.
- And in society, it involves:
 - (1) Submit to authorities
 - (2) love our neighbour
 - (3) build up one another

Submitting to Authorities? (13:1–7)

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 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 you will be commended. 4 For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. [Romans 13:1-4]

- Paul opens with a command that may surprise us: *submit to the governing authorities*.
 - Some of us think of politicians we dislike. Others hear “government” and think of corruption, fear, even violence. “Is Paul being naive?!”
 - Paul’s own experience says no. His first reader knew Roman hostility firsthand, and Paul himself had been beaten and jailed on false charges.
- So, why submit?
 - Verse 1: “*for there is no authority except that which God has established.*”
 - Human authority comes from God, which means it’s under God and answerable to God. But that doesn’t mean every ruler is righteous.
 - In Creation, God delegated ruling authority to humanity. But *since* the Fall, sin has corrupted every human institution, including government. Government remains necessary, but it is not infallible.
 - We see this at the cross. Jesus told Pilate, “*You would have no authority over me if it were not given to you from above*” (John 19:11). His authority was real, but he was still guilty of the injustice he did with it.
 - Likewise in the OT, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar’s authority came from above (cf. Daniel 2:37, 4:17). But he got no free pass for his violence. *Human authorities remain responsible for the evil they do, even while God stays sovereign over history.*
- Verses 3-4 explain: governing authorities exist to *reward good* and *restrain evil*. Paul says they are “*God’s servants*,” whether or not they acknowledge God. That’s their God-given calling, but not a guarantee every government lives up to it.
 - That’s why verse 5 says, we submit “*not only because of possible punishment, but as a matter of conscience.*”
- So what does submission look like?
 - Ordinarily, in verses 6-7, that means honouring our responsibilities as citizens: “*If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.*”
 - Respect allows constructive criticism or calls for reform; it just doesn’t let us treat every inconvenience or political disagreement as persecution.
 - Submission is not blind obedience. When an authority commands what God forbids or forbids what God commands, allegiance to God comes first.
 - When Peter and John were ordered to stop preaching about Jesus, they said, “*We must obey God rather than men.*” (Acts 5:29).
 - As John Stott puts it: “*we are to submit right up to the point where obedience to the state [authority] would entail disobedience to God.*” [Stott, Romans, BST, 342.]
- So, to those *wounded* by authority, this passage does not ask us to call evil good, ignore injustice, or return to danger. And to those tempted toward *cynicism*, it does not permit contempt, casual law-breaking, or constant ridicule. Paul corrects both instincts. Government possess limited, but real, authority.

- **Ultimately, our allegiance belongs to Jesus.** And that's our hope!
 - It frees us from needing Caesar or any government to be our saviour;
 - And it frees us to focus on loving the people God puts in front of us,
Which takes us to the next point...

Loving Neighbour, Now (13:8–14)

8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. [Romans 13:8-10]

- Paul just told us what we owe: taxes, respect, and honour. Now he takes "owing" to another level: *"Let no debt remain outstanding, except to love one another."* (13:8)
 - Debt can be paid off and closed. But not love!
"We can never say 'I have done all the loving I need to.'
It's a permanent obligation, a debt impossible to discharge." [L. Morris, Romans, 467]
- Why? Because love is not just "one more" command alongside "do not murder" or "do not steal." It's what all those commands were always aiming at, fulfilling the law by seeking our neighbour's good and doing them no harm.
 - But this is not saying "just try harder."
 - It's a *response* to God's mercy - flowing from Christ's saving works, and enabled by his Spirit.
 - **Love grows when God's mercy is received and kept in view.**
- Then Paul turns from what we owe to what time it is.
 - Wake up! Paul says we are *"to wake up from slumber."* (13:11)
 - Because salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.
 - As we recited in the prayer book, "Christ is risen, *Christ will come again*" - that's the reality we live in. The night is nearly over, the day is near.
 - Christ's is returning. And that should transform how we live right now.
- So what does that daytime living look like? Verse 13 gives us a list: *"Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy."*
 - Notice the last item - *"not in dissension and jealousy."* Paul places quarrelling right alongside sins we're more readily condemn. It's a serious sin. It's on the same list - even when it happens inside the church. (We'll explore more later).
 - Then verse 14 tells us what to do in the meantime: ***"clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ"***. This is not self-improvement; it's who we already are in Christ! We would not leave home without getting dressed; Christ himself is that clothing.

- We are to “consciously embrace Christ” so his character is “manifested in all that we do and say.” [Moo, Romans, NICNT, 842], which includes how we treat our brothers and sisters in Christ. This takes us to the last point.

Edifying One Another (14:1–23)

Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. 2 One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. 3 The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. 4 Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand. [Romans 14:1-4]

Like today, the church back then had people with different convictions about how to honour God. So the gospel teaches us to: (1) **accept**; and (2) **build up one another**.

- The disputes in *chapter 14* are about food and special days.
 - The “weak” are likely some Christians with Jewish background, who still felt bound by food customs. They avoided meat rather than risking eating anything unclean. But the others understood they are free to eat anything.
 - To be clear: “weak in faith” does not mean less Christian or less accepted by God. It describes someone whose faith has not yet enabled them to embrace a particular Christian freedom. [cf. Morris, 477]
- But food is not the *deepest* problem.
 - It's when the meat-eater looks down on the one who abstains: “*How narrow-minded!*”; and when the one who abstains condemns the eaters: “*How can a serious Christian do that?*”
 - One turned freedom into superiority; the other turned a personal conviction into a rule for everybody. *Sadly, Christian freedom becomes grounds for judgement and disunity!*
- Now, we must be clear that Paul is NOT saying *all* biblical truth is negotiable.
 - He just named drunkenness, sexual immorality, and jealousy as deeds of darkness (13:13). And essential biblical truths like ‘salvation by faith, not by work’ MUST NOT be compromised.
 - But where Scripture leaves things genuinely open, believers seeking to honour God may come to different conclusions.
 - Some prefer old hymns, others newer songs. Some do the cross on their chest; some don't. Some value clear schedules and boundaries; others prefer relational flexibility and spontaneity.
 - None of these preferences determines our salvation. The question is never whether you do or not do these things - but *why* you do them, and whether you look down on the person who does otherwise.

- The command here is not to “win the argument,” but “**accept one another.**”
 - Because verse 3: “*for God has accepted them.*”
 - Not just tolerate, but welcome into *fellowship*.
We receive whom God has received.
 - *Look at their Lord.* Christ died and rose to be their Lord.
They answer to him, not us.
 - So, next time you’re in a disagreement with a brother or sister, think: “*we belong to the Lord*” (14:8), and “*we will each give account ourselves to God.*” (14:12)
- Now, love goes beyond just *accepting one another*; verse 13: “*make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.*”
 - A stumbling block is not just something another person dislikes. It’s using our *Christian freedom* in a way that *pressures* another believer to violate their conscience. [Moo, 342.]
 - That is serious. Because “*if your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died.*” (14:15) Do we value our freedom more highly than someone Jesus shed blood for?
 - This harm can be *unintentional*:
 - Casually urging someone who abstains from alcohol, “Come on, the Bible says it’s okay!” But if they drink while believing it’s wrong, we have wounded their faith.
 - Or it can be *deliberate*: “*I know better, I’ll prove it.*”
 - At a discussion on cross-cultural mission, I heard some suggest wearing shorts and slippers to challenge those who associate formal dress to reverence; after all, God sees the heart. But using freedom to provoke does not build up; it shifts attention from united worship to proving a point.
- Our priority is God’s kingdom, verse 17: “*The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit ... Let us therefore make **every effort** to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.*”
 - So, St Bart’s, our freedom should not just ask, “Am I allowed to do this?” but, “**Will this build Christ’s people?**”
 - At shared meals, love is not asking, “*Why isn’t there my favourite dish?*” but whether everyone can participate without mockery or pressure.
 - After service, does profession, dress, or age group quietly determine who we hang out with (we’re free to do so, of course!) But it’s always good to ask, “*Will this build Christ’s people?*”
- Finally, verses 22-23 say that if you enjoy freedom, enjoy it before God. That’s good! If you’re doubtful, do not violate your conscience under pressure.
The gospel reshapes our consciences, and love gives people time to grow.

- So remember the person in front of you:
 - God has **accepted** them.
 - Christ died for them. Jesus is their Lord - and yours.
 - Therefore, use your freedom not to judge, but **to build**.

Conclusion

So what does a gospel-shaped life in society look like?

- With authorities, we *submit*;
because **Christ** is a better King than Caesar ever was.
- With neighbour, we *keep paying the debt of love*;
because **Christ** has poured out his love on us at the cross.
- With church, we *accept* and *build up* one another,
because **Christ** has already died and risen to be *Lord* of us all!
A gospel-shaped church need not share one culture or one set of preferences -
but it's a church where Christ is exalted!

The night is nearly over; the day is near.

So, St Bart's, let us clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, together!

Father, thank you for the mercy you have shown us in Christ.

*By your Spirit, help us to honour earthly authorities while giving our highest allegiance to Jesus.
Teach us to keep paying the debt of love, and to welcome and build up those for whom Christ died;
as we await the coming day. In Jesus' name. Amen.*
