

Soul-Full: Living Out a Robust Faith

A Study in Romans

Week 9 – Romans 13-14 – Get Dressed!

Having set forth the doctrinal aspects in previous chapters, Paul continues his teaching on the practical side of being a follower of Christ. For the believer, Christ is the center of our being. We have been indwelt with the Spirit of the Living God. Every area of our life should be in subjection to the Word of God and the Spirit of God. Paul addresses the issue of personal convictions concerning those areas that are not specifically regulated by God in His Word.

I. The Christian's Proper Response to Authorities – Romans 13:1-14

In this passage, Paul discusses the divinely sanctioned role of government and the Christian's appropriate response. Romans 13:1 says, "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God." Our relationship with God does not negate responsibility to secular authorities, even those who are non-believers. God has established that He alone is the sole source of authority. It has pleased God to delegate authority to those in charge of the public well-being. "For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil" (Rom. 13:3-4).

The believer's ultimate allegiance is to God. In certain areas, the government may overstep its rightful place. In these rare cases, the believer will find it at odds with God's revelation and imprudent to obey. Civil disobedience is allowed if the law is in opposition to God's Word (see Act 4:19). In those cases "we must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

Our lifestyle (including social media) is to confirm the fact that we belong to Jesus. A changed heart will (or at least should) produce a transformed life. The process of being conformed into the image of Christ is progressive without a doubt, but the overall direction of our life should reflect our genuine conversion to Christ. Paul writes, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts" (Rom. 13:14 underline mine). Get dressed in the righteousness of Christ. "Lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit . . . and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth" (Eph. 4:22, 24). While the appetites of sin remain until we see Jesus face-to-face, we are to deny them any opportunity of expression. In Galatians 2:20 Paul wrote, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh

I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”
Crucified. Dead to sin. Alive to God.

II. The Christian’s Proper Response to Matters of Conscience – Romans 14:1-12

In Rome, the Jewish Christians were reluctant to give up certain ceremonial aspects of their Jewish heritage. They were uncertain about how their faith in Christ related to the Old Testament regulations. Paul instructs the church at Rome to welcome newly converted believers into their fellowship despite the fact they were having a difficult time letting go of their religious past because God has accepted them (See Rom. 14:3).

Paul warns the early church against judgmental attitudes concerning non-essentials of the faith such as acceptable foods and observance of certain days. In Romans 14:4 Paul questions the church, “Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.” If we busy ourselves in judging others in the family of faith, we are taking upon ourselves the prerogatives of God. He alone is their Master.

Paul identifies two classes of believers in Rome. The “strong” Christian’s convictions allowed them to eat whatever they chose while the “weak” ate nothing but vegetables. The tendency was for the “strong” believers to look down on those whose lifestyle was more restrictive. Paul reminds the believers in Rome that no believer is to treat with contempt those who are still working through their new faith convictions in Christ. “But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. . . . So then each one of us will give account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:10, 12). Every believer belongs to God. Therefore, it is not our place to judge their decisions in matters not central to the faith.

Paul makes mention of the judgment seat of God where our service to God will be judged and rewarded. Our sin debt was paid in full by Christ’s sacrifice. “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). We will never come under judgment for our sins. He paid our sin debt on the cross and His blood was applied to our account at the moment we received Him by grace through faith. However, **the good works** of all believers will be judged at the Bema Judgment of Christ. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). This is not to be confused with the Great White Throne Judgment which is where those outside a personal relationship with Christ will be judged (see Rev. 20:11-15).

III. The Christian's Proper Response to Our Liberty in Christ – Romans 14:13-23

In Christ we are free. “It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to the yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1). However, our liberty in Christ is often endangered by our natural tendency to fall into the ditch on either side of the road. On one side is the ditch of **legalism**. The legalist attempts to control the downward pull of the flesh by the strict adherence of external rules and regulations. The legalist judges all believers according to his/her list of right or wrong. The ditch on the other side of liberty in Christ is **license** which abandons moral convictions and believes we are free to behave in any way because we have been judicially forgiven in Christ. Paul teaches the proper response to the grace of God. “Let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this – not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way” (Rom. 14:13). Paul warns us not to allow our own freedom of conscience to destroy one who is weaker in the faith. “For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17). “So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another” (Rom. 14:19). For the sake of the new convert or immature believer, “it is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles” (Rom. 14:21). In the gray areas where the Bible is not definitive, at least part of our judgment of non-essentials must take into account how our actions will affect others in the faith. In 1 Corinthians 10:23-24 Paul writes, “All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor.”

The real question is this--are you a **stumbling stone** or a **stepping stone** in the lives of others for the cause of Christ? Does the activity of your lifestyle cause others to stumble? Or does your testimony cause others to desire a personal relationship with Christ? “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience” (1 Pet. 3:15-16).

“Whatever is not from faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23). In the final analysis, everyone will be held accountable before the Lord. However, Paul is pleading with us to live a life that honors and glorifies the Lord, lest we become entangled in anything that might hinder the progression of another for the Lord.

A life lived for the glory of God is one that is conscious of every decision and seeks to find ways to honor and glorify Him. Get your Soul-Full of Jesus and allow your robust faith to draw many unto Himself!