**CLOTHE YOURSELF WITH CHRIST**

***Romans 13:1-14***

***“Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh” (v. 14).***

In last week’s passage, we learned that we must no longer conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing our minds. In today’s passage, we will be dealing with three types relationships. The first relationship is with our government and its officials. The second deals with our relationships with others. And thirdly, it deals with our relationship with Christ. All these relationships are ultimately related to God. May the Spirit guide us to grow in our right relationships with our governing authorities, neighbors, and Christ; as a result, to grow in a relationship with God.

1. **Our relationship with the governing authorities (vs. 1-7)**

The beginning of this chapter turns to the subject of government. Look at verse 1, ***“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.”*** When Paul refers to governing authorities, he is not just talking about heads of state; rather, he is talking about all levels of authority, all the way down to the local building inspector. Apostle Paul reveals that these governmental offices are, in some way, established by God Himself.

While I studied at UW-Milwaukee, I majored in History and studied Political Science. In those courses, there was much focus on governments. Of course, there is debate about which government are better, and which ones were worse. For Christians, the debate could be which government does God want us to have. We Americans would love to think that democracy is the most God-honored form of government. But I don't think you can establish that from the Scriptures. In fact, the Scriptures reflect various forms of government. So, when you ask, "Which government is the best? Is it a monarchy? An oligarchy (i.e., ruled by a few)? Is it a republic? A democracy?" The answer of Scripture is not necessarily any of these. In fact, it is whatever God has established. That is best for that particular time and place in history. God’s sovereignty established it, for His great purpose of bring about His world salvation plan.

Now, 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. Paul urges that a Christian’s relationship to the government should 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. ***“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.”*** By repetition, Paul nails down the imperative of Christian submission. Christians must submit to the governing authorities.

Why? It is because God established it. Even pagan rulers have been established by God. For example, in 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, being 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.

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. For 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,” he said, “and tell the people all about 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 human beings” (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.

Another reason why we should submit to the authorities is because they are God’s servants to exercise God’s justice. Look at verses 4 and 5, ***“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 wrong doer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.”***  Paul does say that the 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 a form of God’s judgement; it is just punishment. But, when we do what is right, we have no fear of authorities (3). We submit to authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. As we respect and honor the authorities, we honor God’s authority, reflecting our right relationship with God in our clear consciences. In doing so, we can be really happy and live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness (1Ti 2:2b).

1. **Our relationship with others (vs. 8-10)**

Now Paul returns to loving our neighbors. Look at verse 8, ***“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.”*** I think the English Standard Version is most clear for it says, *“Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.”* Let’s think about the time that Paul wrote this letter. He wrote this letter to the Roman Christians. Rome was the capital of the entire Roman world. The people were under the subjugation of a military machine and a cruel, relentless emperor. And they were heavily oppressed. Not only Rome was an issue, but Corinth too. Corinth sought immoral sexual practices and pleasure. In both cities, the Christians must have struggled with their ungodly neighbors, seeing all the anger, hatred, oppression and sexual immorality. Unfortunately, America is no different than Rome or Corinth. In the news, there seems to be more killings, more crimes, more lustful images and advertising. And worse yet, it seems as more peoples’ hearts are becoming cold and ruthless. But, Paul reminds the Christians to love, and continue to love. What Christians needs most is to learn the secret of how to love. Paul explains this secret by using the term “debt.”

Unfortunately, we have debts to pay such as school loans and house mortgages. We must pay all off our debts, being fiscally responsible. 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, 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, God’s love has the power to radically change the world. What Paul is saying that we have continuing debt to love one another. implies that this love has to start with us. If we are Christians, if we know Christ, we have the power to love through Jesus’ love. There is no doubt about that. If you have Christ, you have the ability to act in love, even though you are tempted not to.

Therefore, we must practice the love of Christ toward others. This as our obligation to everyone, all the time. That’s why we should owe no one anything, except to love each other. How can we show love? Look at verse 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.’”*** To show our love, 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 the world. 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. Another way to show love is, comes from 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a, *“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”* We must show and practice love no matter the circumstance. It is a debt you owe that person, no matter what. Let every obligation, every duty, every job be an act of love. If you really love the way Christ loves, you fulfill the whole law. The law is summed up in this: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Loving our neighbors reflect our right relationship with God. May the Spirit strengthen us to put it into practice that love to our neighbors.

1. **Our relationship with Christ (vs. 11-12)**

Apostle Paul closes this chapter with why we need to love our neighbors more urgently. Look at verse 11, ***“And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.”*** We need to love based on our understanding of the time. Knowing the time well helps you love people the way you should. What is this time?In brief, it’s the time between Christ’s first coming and his second coming. 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. 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. Therefore, this is not a time for glitzy sleepwalking. We must be careful. Everything in the world that does not waken more faith in Christ puts us to sleep. May the Spirit guide us to keep awake from spiritual slumber.

How should we live? And how to keep awake? First, we must put on the armor of light. 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 first must put aside the deeds of darkness. Meaning, we must repent for seeking pleasure in this world, secretly loving it in the darkness. Then, 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. I think we can look at this armor with the same visual Apostle Paul paints in Ephesians 6:13-17, *“Therefore put on the full armor 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.”* So, the armor of light is the truth of the gospel, the righteousness that comes through Christ, faith, salvation, and the power of the Holy Spirit. This armor can help us defend against and defeat the deeds of the darkness. Only this armor of light can break the power of the sleeping pills of the desire of this world, lust, hatred, self-glory seeking and love of money.

Second, we must clothe ourselves with Jesus. Look at verse 14, ***“Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.”*** Here the word for “clothe” also means to “put on”. So, putting on Christ each day doesn’t mean wearing him as an imposition, nuisance, or a burden. It means wearing him as protection, so as to trust in him, and wearing him as the supplier of all your future needs so as to put our hope in him, and wearing him as your supreme treasure, so as to love him above all else. Also, putting on Christ means to have a personal fellowship with Christ daily. Finally, it means that we become like a little Jesus and reveal his image in our lives.

So how can we clothe ourselves with Jesus? I think we can clothe ourselves with Jesus through faith in Christ. We must have faith in Christ who suffered, died and rose again to save us from the powers of darkness and death. This faith leads us to victory. We can also clothe ourselves in the hope of Christ. Hope comes from promises, so put on Christ by remembering the promises of Christ. The promises we have in Christ is the future hope in the kingdom of God.We also have hope that we will be made in his likeness. Jesus and the awaiting kingdom is our eternal hope. We can also clothe ourselves with Christ’s love. 1 Peter 4:8 says, *“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”* May the Spirit guide us to learn to clothe ourselves with Jesus daily.

Lastly, we should not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh. And the point of verse 14b is “Don’t let any thought in your head that gives rise to these sinful desires.” We can practically put it this way, If you are bored, or lonely, or tired, or discouraged, or feeling hopeless, don’t ponder the relief of alcohol or drugs. Or if you are single man or woman, who wonders why there is no woman or man to embrace do not let illicit thoughts enter your mind. Don’t put them there with your fantasy and don’t do it with your computer. 12% of all websites are pornographic. 25% of all search engine requests are related to pornography. Don’t be conformed to this darkness. The night is far gone. The day is at hand. Put on the armor of light. Clothe yourself with Christ. Don’t let thoughts into your mind that waken your sinful desires.

Clothing ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ is not just the alternative to gratify our flesh. It is the way we keep from gratifying the flesh. It’s the way we kill these sinful thoughts. It’s the way we keep them from even arising. When you put on the armor of light—daily (or hourly!) fresh faith in Christ, hope in Christ, love for Christ. Then, it is hard for the works of darkness to cling to you. They are pushed out by the light. If your eye is good (if you see Christ as your treasure) your whole body will be full of light.

Augustine (A.D. 354-430) was having a burning struggle within himself between his holy and sinful desire. He cried, “How long, how long? Tomorrow and tomorrow? Why not now? Why not this very hour make an end to my uncleanness?” In his desperation, one day while outdoors, he heard the voice of a child singing a song, “pick up and read, pick up and read.” He accepted this as divine guidance to open the Bible and read it. The passage he opened to, Romans 13:13-14, came to his heart with conviction: ***“Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing 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 flesh.”*** These words empowered him to break away from his old life and live a new life. The book of Romans became the foundation for Saint Augustine’s teaching and practice as a shepherd for the church of God in his time. His influence has extended down through the generations.

Through this passage, we learned that our relationship with the government should be a matter of submission because it is ordained by God. We then learned that we owe our neighbor, no matter what, our love because we owed to God. And that we must clothe ourselves with Jesus to protect us and build us up in Christ’s image as our expression of love for God in the last days. May the Spirit guide to grow in a right relationship with God concerning the relationships with governing authorities, neighbors and in Christ.