

ROMANS CHAPTER 13

Human Government and God's Reveille (God's Wake-up Call)

Introduction

One of the ways that God executes wrath and judgment and vengeance upon evildoers is by means of **human government** (thus we have the connection between the last part of Romans chapter 12 and the first part of chapter 13). God delegated authority to human governments following the Genesis Flood. This is especially seen in God granting man the right to punish evil doers, especially murderers (Genesis 9:6). This same truth is presented here in Romans chapter 13.

Romans 13:1

"Every soul"=every person.

"**Be subject**"--this is a military term meaning "to rank under, to take one's proper place under those who are in authority, to be in subjection, to submit, to be obedient." Compare the command found in Titus 3:1. "**Higher powers**"=authorities, governing authorities, further defined in verse 3 as rulers, civil authorities. Human government was instituted by God after the Genesis flood. The key verse is Genesis 9:6 which says that the person who sheds man's blood (violent murder), **by man** shall his blood be shed. God Himself could have decided to punish murderers directly, but instead He chose to delegate this responsibility to man. Human government is instituted and ordained by God, and whether saved or unsaved, all men benefit from government and all men ought to fear the government if they disobey its laws and rebel against its authority.

"**For there is no power but of God**"--God is the ultimate and the highest Authority. He is over every ruler. The Lord Jesus made this very clear in John 19:11. Compare also Daniel 4:17,25,32; 2 Chron. 20:6 and Psalm 75:7. "**Ordained**"=established, appointed, set in their place. No man or woman could be in any position of authority apart from the will and permission of the Sovereign God of heaven.

Romans 13:2

Since civil authorities have been ordained by God, don't resist them! It is not wise to fight against what God has established. "**Resist**"=stand against, oppose (opposite of "submit"). "**Damnation**"=judgment or punishment. To disobey the authorities is to disobey God (see 1 Pet.2:13-17).

Romans 13:3

"**Terror**"=fear, object of dread. Rulers are to praise good works and punish evil works. As a general rule governments reward the good and punish the evil. Usually if one obeys the laws and is a law-abiding citizen, then he has nothing to fear. The book of 1 Peter makes a clear distinction between those who suffer as a result of the wrong that they have done and those who suffer as a result of their Christian testimony (see 1 Pet. 2:14,19-20; 3:13-14; 4:14-16).

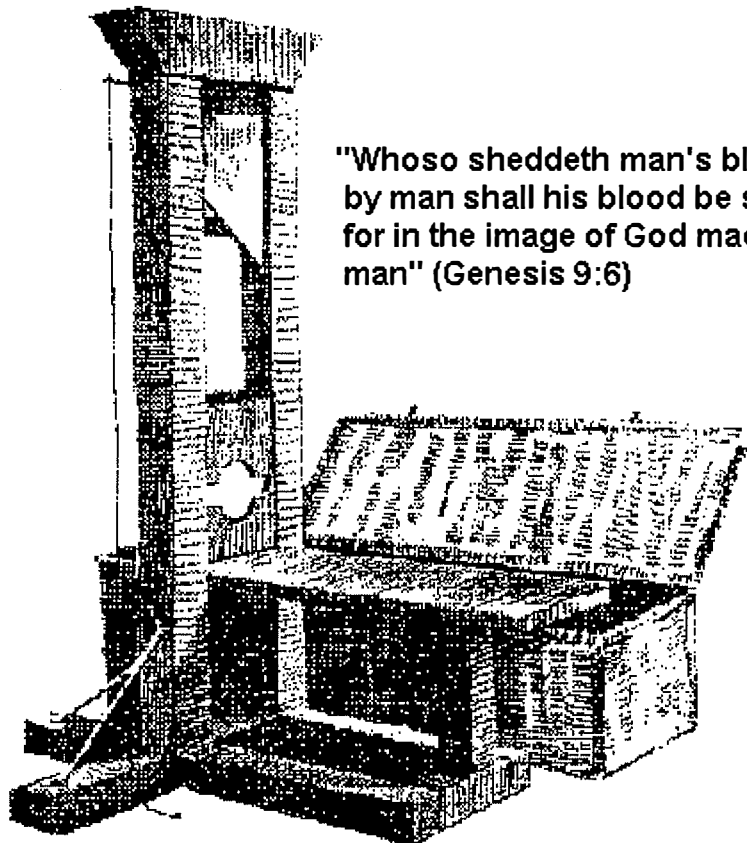
Romans 13:4

The ruler (the governmental authority) is God's servant! Today this would apply to our president, congressmen, governors, policemen, etc. Though most of these men are not saved, yet they are God's servants in the sense that they are carrying out God's will by punishing those who do evil. God has put these men in positions of authority for our good. Those who break the laws and do evil have reason to fear, because if they get caught they must pay the penalty which the authorities have determined. God could punish evildoers directly, but instead He has chosen to use human government to execute wrath on the person who does evil. This is why rulers are for good and for our advantage. The government protects us by punishing law breakers and by restraining and deterring potential law breakers. Those who fear the punishment and who think they might get caught are less likely to commit the crime. Vengeance belongs to God (Rom. 12:19), and the God of vengeance has allowed His governmental servants to execute wrath upon those who do evil (Rom. 13:4).

God has even given to government the power of life and death: the right to exercise capital punishment. They continuously bear the sword, and the sword is used to punish evildoers. The sword is not carried in vain, but it serves a very important purpose. In New Testament times the sword was an instrument of capital punishment. John the Baptist was executed by the sword. So was James the brother of John (Acts 12:2). Paul was executed by the sword in the days of Nero (since he was a Roman citizen, he could not be crucified). Crucifixion was the form of execution for the worst kind of criminals. The common method of inflicting capital punishment was decapitation with a sword.

It's important to see exactly what the Bible teaches about the important subject of capital punishment.

THE BIBLE'S TEACHING ON CAPITAL PUNISHMENT



**"Whoso sheddeth man's blood,
by man shall his blood be shed:
for in the image of God made He
man" (Genesis 9:6)**

**The guillotine was a method
of capital punishment once
used in France.**

Note: The above illustration is not given to suggest that the guillotine should be the preferred method of execution in our society today. However, it did have attractive features. It served as a deterrent to crime because of its fear factor. The prospect of having your head chopped off is something that most people would dread, in contrast to death by lethal injection which is relatively painless--somewhat like going to sleep and never waking up. Although frightening, the guillotine was not unusually cruel because before the victim could feel too much pain it would be over. It produced a speedy death. It is possible that death by the guillotine will be used again in the future by the forces of the Antichrist (see Revelation 13:4), although beheading can also be done with the sword or in other ways. The method of capital punishment endorsed by God in the days of Moses was death by stoning (Num. 15:36; Deut. 21:18-23). The Romans used death by crucifixion for non-citizens and they used the sword to behead criminals who were Roman citizens. The wild, wild West often used death by hanging. In other places firing squads have been used. In American society death by the electric chair and death by lethal injection have been used.

1. Instituted by God Himself

Capital punishment was instituted by God Himself after the worldwide flood. We learn of this in Genesis 9:6--"Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man." This verse speaks of a murderer, one who knowingly and violently sheds another man's blood, resulting in death. God here gives man the authority and the right and the duty to put to death the murderer: "by man shall his blood be shed." The reason given for this is based upon the value and sacredness of human life: "for in the image of God made he man." In this case we have justice being carried out according to the rule: "life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth" (Exodus 21:23-24). The penalty should fit the crime. In this case the crime is murder and the penalty is death. Notice that Genesis 9:6 was given to man even before the law of Moses was given.

2. "Thou Shalt Not Kill"?

Capital punishment is not a violation of the sixth commandment which says, "Thou shalt not kill" (Exodus 20:13). The proper translation of this verb is "Thou shalt not murder." See modern translations (such as the NASB, the NIV and the NKJV) and also see Matthew 19:18 in the KJV. All murder is killing but not all killing is murder. Some examples of killing that would not be considered as murder are as follows: a) killing the enemy in war (Bible examples: David killing Goliath, Joshua and the Israelites when they conquered the land); b) a husband, discovering a man about to kill his wife and/or children, protects and defends his family by having to kill the attacker; c) a policeman who kills in the line of duty in order to protect innocent life; d) the person carrying out capital punishment, such as the man who must pull the switch for the electric chair; e) accidental killing, when the killer never intended to take someone's life. We should also note that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself will "judge and make war" at His second coming resulting in countless numbers of deaths (Rev. 19:11-20).

3. Crimes Punishable By Death

We are assured that capital punishment is not a violation of the Ten Commandments. This is evident when one studies the chapter which immediately follows the ten commandments: Exodus chapter 21 (the Ten Commandments are found in chapter 20). In chapter 21 we learn that God in His law demanded the death penalty for a number of crimes such as murder, kidnapping, cursing parents, etc. See Exodus 21:12,15,16,17. See also Leviticus 20:10-17 for other crimes punishable by death in the law of Moses.

4. The Executioner As God's Servant

In New Testament times capital punishment was still being practiced. Romans 13:4 says that God has given human governments the authority to execute wrath upon evildoers by means of a sword (a common instrument of capital punishment in New Testament days). The Apostle Paul was living in a day when capital punishment was commonly practiced in the Roman empire (quite unlike our day), and yet he did not condemn this practice. On the contrary he described the person who bears the sword as being God's servant. Thus the one punishing the evildoer does so in the exercise of God's delegated authority.

5. An Effective Deterrent

Capital punishment, when consistently practiced, is a very effective deterrent to crime because the fear of death is the greatest fear that man has (see Hebrews 2:14-15). Since death is the king of fears, a man will think twice about committing a crime if he knows it will cost him his life. He will be less reluctant to murder someone if he knows that the worst that could happen to him is to stay in jail the rest of his life with meals provided, television to watch, etc. When swift justice is carried out then "those who remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil" (Deut.19:20). When the right penalty is not executed speedily, then this is an encouragement to crime (see Eccles. 8:11).

6. Cruel and Inhumane?

Is capital punishment cruel and inhumane? Death is usually not pleasant to witness, and certainly those responsible for putting a criminal to death do not have an enviable task. Nevertheless we need to be careful that we do not focus on the criminal and forget about the victim of the crime. Cold-blooded murder is very cruel and inhumane. Forcible rape is very cruel and inhumane. Hijacking an airplane and endangering the lives of many innocent people is very cruel and inhumane. Pushing life-destroying drugs is very cruel and inhumane. In our zeal to protect the criminal we can lose sight of the terribleness of the crime. Regardless of a person's position on capital punishment, all would have to agree that if a murderer is put to death, he will never murder again. It is remarkable that those people who decry capital punishment as being a cruel and inhumane method of destroying people's lives are often the same people who are strongly in favor of abortion rights. Why does a guilty murderer have a greater right to life than an unborn child?

7. Paul's Own Testimony

What did the Apostle Paul think of capital punishment? Did he consider it to be unfair and cruel and inhumane? We have already considered Paul's teaching in Romans 13, but we should also make note of what the Apostle said in Acts 25:11: "If I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die." Paul knew that there were certain crimes that were worthy of death, and he knew that those guilty of such crimes must be executed. If he was guilty of such, then he would not refuse to die. He would submit to capital punishment if he had done deeds worthy of such. Of course, Paul was innocent of any such crimes, and yet he was eventually executed under Nero. For what crime? For preaching the gospel of the grace of God!

8. Bright Barbarians

Even uncultured men know deep down in their hearts that certain crimes demand the death penalty. This is illustrated in Acts 28 when Paul was shipwrecked upon the island

of Melita (Malta) where he met a group of kindly barbarians (v.1-2). As Paul was gathering sticks for the fire, a deadly venomous snake bit him on the hand. Normally such a bite would be fatal in a matter of minutes. When the natives saw this they said, "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet justice alloweth not to live" (v.4). These natives saw what they thought was the penalty (death) and thus they assumed the crime (he must be a murderer). They soon learned that they were mistaken, but the point is that these barbarians had a built in sense of justice and they knew that murderers should pay for their crime by death.

9. The Testimony of a Thief (Robber)

In Luke chapter 23 we have the honest testimony of a man who was being put to death for crimes he had done. This was capital punishment by means of Roman crucifixion. This man was an evildoer, he was arrested, and he was found guilty of crimes worthy of death. Modern methods of execution are generally very mild and painless as compared to Roman crucifixion. What did this man think of capital punishment? Was he opposed to it? Did he consider it to be cruel and inhumane? Did he think it to be unfair and unjust? Here is his testimony (his words to the other condemned criminal): "Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds" (Luke 23:40-41). In other words, he was saying, "We are getting exactly what we deserve: death by crucifixion. What we have done is worthy of death!" Before men and before human government most of us are not guilty of crimes worthy of death. However, before a Holy God every one of us needs to recognize that we have done certain things that are worthy of death (see Romans 1:29-32; 6:23a). As the Old Testament says, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4). How thankful we should be that our Lord Jesus Christ suffered the death penalty for us: "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

10. The Death of an Innocent Man

If capital punishment is practiced, are there not times when an innocent man is pronounced guilty and put to death? Yes, sadly this is true. Our judicial system is far from perfect and there are times when the guilty are justified and the innocent are condemned (compare Deut. 25:1). Even without the death penalty, it is true that occasionally some innocent men are sent to prison even for life. We must remember that there is in heaven a true and righteous Judge who sees all and who knows all and who someday will make right all that is wrong and will straighten out all that is crooked. In eternity, all will be corrected (see Luke 16:25 for an example of this). The greatest example of an innocent man being put to death is that of the Lord Jesus Himself, "who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" (1 Pet. 2:22). The only sinless Man who ever lived was condemned to death by crucifixion! As we think about Christ's death, we must remember that it was for our sins that He suffered and bled and died (1 Cor. 15:3; Rom. 5:8). "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just (the Righteous One) for the unjust (the unrighteous ones), that he might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18). We are the guilty ones who deserved the death penalty (Rom. 6:23), but Jesus paid it all! He died so that we might live (John 5:24)!

Romans 13:5

Paul here teaches that SUBMISSION to civil authorities is **necessary**: "**ye must needs be subject.**" It is necessary! You must! He then gives two reasons why we must submit: **1) "wrath"**--we are afraid of not submitting; we are afraid of the "minister of God, an avenger to execute **wrath** upon him that doeth evil" (v.4). We have a healthy fear of the punishment that will be ours if we break the law. We fear that which happens to those who resist and rebel against and break the laws of the land. There must be a deterrent to crime. If the authorities take away the punishment, then they take away the fear, and there is no deterrent to crime. **2) "conscience"**--we must submit because of our conscience. We must have a clear conscience. The person with a clear conscience is able to say, "I know that I am a law-abiding citizen. I am keeping the laws of God and I am keeping the laws of the land. I do it because God says so." Many people submit for the first reason ("wrath") but not for the second reason ("conscience"). They reason, "as long as I can get away with it and avoid the punishment, then I have no problem breaking the law" (speeding, lying on income tax forms, etc.).

The Bible teaches elsewhere that there are times when we must not submit, when it is necessary to disobey those in authority over us. Two such examples are obvious: 1) the case of Daniel in Daniel Chapter 6 when he was told not to pray; 2) the case of the early Christians in Acts 5 when they were told by the religious authorities not to preach. In such cases the authorities have intruded into "God's turf" which is a violation of God's order. When there are conflicting commands then we are to follow the teaching of Acts 5:29--"Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, **We ought to obey God rather than men.**" Two other examples of disobedience to human authorities in order to obey God are: 1) the Hebrew midwives (Exodus 1:15-17); 2) the wise men who disobeyed a clear command from Herod (Matthew 2:8,12,16). For a fuller discussion of the subject of submission when there are conflicting commands, see our paper, "**Me Obey him?**"

For other passages which speak of the believer's responsibility to civil authorities, see 1 Peter 2:13-17; 3:13-14; 3:16-17.

Romans 13:6

We need to **PAY** (fulfill our obligations) **TRIBUTE** (taxes). Why? These people are God's ministers (servants, see 13:4) and we ought to support God's ministers. They are public servants who are carrying out God's will, especially as they execute wrath upon those who do evil. They continue steadfastly in their governmental service ("**attending continually upon this very thing**") and they need to be supported. How we should thank God for policemen, firemen, and other public servants who minister and serve on our behalf. They need to be paid.

Romans 13:7

"**Render their dues**"=give back what you owe, give what properly belongs to them. We owe something to our society. We are to discharge our obligation to all men. There are four things that we are to render: tribute, custom, fear and honor. "**Tribute**"=taxes, a tax levied on persons and property, especially to Caesar (to Rome); "**custom**"=taxes on imported and exported goods, tolls. There are some who deserve our **fear**, our respect. There are others who deserve our **honor**. Men such as police officers, judges, men holding office deserve our respect and honor. In 1 Peter 2:17 we are to "honor all men." Let us remember what our Lord taught about tribute and taxes: Matthew 17:24-27 and Luke 20:21-26.

Romans 13:8

"**Owe no man anything**"=Don't be owing any man anything. This important phrase has been understood in two ways: 1) I owe no man anything because I never incur any debts. I refuse to borrow money. I refuse to use credit cards. I refuse to buy anything unless I have money on hand. I will never owe anyone anything. I will never borrow anything and therefore I will never need to owe anyone anything. 2) I owe no man anything because I have paid all my debts. I have met all my obligations as they become due. I was a debtor to certain people but I have paid these debts on time and fulfilled my obligations. I have not let any debts remain outstanding (unpaid)--see NIV.

The first understanding of the phrase cannot be correct for many reasons. This understanding says, "I owe no man anything because I have never gotten into debt." This is contradictory to the preceding verse (v.7) which says that we are to render to all what we owe them (that is, we are indebted to people in our society and we need to pay them what is their due). Thus, the emphasis of verse seven is not that we have no debts, but that we are to take care of these debts and give back (pay) what we owe. Therefore we need to understand verse 8 as follows: "I owe no man anything because I have paid my debts and I have rendered to every man that which I have owed him." Thus we reject the view which says that verse 8 means "NEVER GO INTO DEBT." It should be understood to mean: "PAY YOUR DEBTS (pay what you owe) SO THAT YOU OWE NO MAN ANYTHING."

If the other view is correct ("NEVER GO INTO DEBT"), then all borrowing would be sinful, because you would then be putting yourself in debt and you would have an obligation to pay back or return what was borrowed. This would include not only money, but the borrowing of any object (such as a book from the library, a rake from your neighbor, etc.). This would also mean that lending would be wrong because by lending you would be encouraging sin (you would be encouraging someone to borrow, and thus you would be encouraging someone to owe someone something).

Thus we must ask this question: **Does the Scripture condemn borrowing and lending?** Although the Bible does warn us about some of the dangers of borrowing, it does not condemn this practice. Indeed, the Scriptures even encourage lending. Consider the following passages:

"A good man showeth favour, and LENDETH: he will guide his affairs with discretion" (Psalm 112:5). A good man is the man who LENDS.

"He that hath pity upon the poor LENDETH unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will He pay him again" (Proverbs 19:17). Lending to the poor is a losing venture because the poor are unable to pay back the debt. But GIVING to the poor (when done at the right time and in the right way) is here considered as LENDING to the LORD, because the LORD will pay back the one who gives to the poor.

"But as one was felling a beam, the ax head fell into the water: and he cried, and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed" (2 Kings 6:5). There was nothing wrong with borrowing this ax head. The problem here was that the item borrowed was lost in the water, thus making it impossible to return to the lender. What the Scripture condemns is not borrowing, but failure to return borrowed goods and failure to pay back what was lent.

"The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender" (Proverbs 22:7). The borrower becomes the lender's slave. This verse does not condemn borrowing but it does warn against the dangers of it. There is great danger in getting oneself in prolonged debt. We should pay our debts as soon as possible and be very careful not to borrow more than we are able to pay back. In our day it is very important to be careful with the use of credit cards. Banks and credit card companies act as LENDERS every time a credit card is used, and if the person does not pay back this debt quickly (at the first billing), then he will end up paying high rates of interest. Many have gotten themselves into financial trouble because of unwise use of credit cards.

"The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again: but the righteous showeth mercy, and giveth" (Psalm 37:21). Notice the first part of this verse. Why is this man considered "WICKED"? It is not because he borrowed, but because he did not pay back what he borrowed. Not paying back what you have borrowed is actually a form of stealing. It is holding on to something for too long of a time and using it as if it were yours, when it should have been returned to its rightful owner. What if you steal your neighbor's rake and it is sitting in your garage? What if you borrow your neighbor's rake and fail to return it and months later it is still sitting in your garage? In both cases you are wrongfully keeping what belongs to your neighbor and which should be in your neighbor's garage. You should not be acting as though you possess it, because it is not yours. We must respect the property of others. The difference between these two examples is seen by the way the rake got in your garage in the first place. In the first example it got there because of the sin of stealing. In the second example it got there because you borrowed it with your neighbor's permission. He said you could use it. But he did not say that you could use it and keep it for months!

Consider the public library. There is nothing wrong with borrowing books or tapes from a library. This is what the library is for and such is encouraged. What is wrong is when we do not bring the books back on time. This is when penalties and fines are given by the library.

"But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him [a poor man], and SHALT SURELY LEND him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth" (Deut. 15:8). Here LENDING is encouraged.

"And if ye LEND to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and LEND, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil" (Luke 6:34-35). If LENDING were inherently sinful, then the Lord Jesus would never have said this. The teaching here is that we are to love our enemies and do good to them even if they repay us with evil. The GOOD that we can do could involve LENDING, and the EVIL that they could do might involve not paying us back again.

"He is ever merciful, and LENDETH; and his seed is blessed" (Psalm 37:26). The righteous man is gracious and LENDS.

Remember, if it is sinful to borrow [as some people wrongly teach based on Romans 13:8], then it is also sinful to lend. Why? Because lending to someone would make that person a borrower and hence a sinner. If lending makes someone else SIN, then it would be wrong to lend. This is not what the above passages teach. Indeed, the Lord Jesus said, "from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away" (Matthew 5:42).

The true meaning of Romans 13:8 is that we are to PAY OUR DEBTS in a responsible manner with the result that we "owe no man anything." It does not mean that you can never go into debt, because if it meant that you could never borrow a library book, you could never borrow a pencil from a schoolmate and you could never borrow an egg or a quarter pound of butter from your neighbor.

The rest of the verse makes clear that this is the true meaning: "Owe no man any thing, **BUT TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER**: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law" (Rom. 13:8). The view which says that we should never go into debt is teaching that we should never have any obligations. Romans 13:8 does not teach that we should never have any obligations, but that we are to take care of our obligations by paying our debts. There is, however, one obligation which we will always have. There is one debt that we can never pay off, and this is THE DEBT OF LOVE. The more you pay that debt, the more you owe.

Suppose you owe someone \$10.00. One week later you pay back this person the full amount. You can then say, "I have fulfilled my obligation and my responsibility. I am no longer in debt. I am done with this. I don't have to pay any more." In contrast to this, when you show love toward someone and give of yourself for the sake of another person, you cannot then say, "I have fulfilled my responsibility. I have loved this person and now I am no more obligated. I never need to love this person again." No, love is an obligation which continues on and we need to keep on paying it.

Salvation application: Because of our sins we owed a great debt to God. Christ came to pay a debt He did not owe because we owed a debt we could not pay. "The wages of sin is DEATH" and the only way we could pay our debt would be to suffer eternal separation (DEATH) from God in the lake of fire. When the Lord Jesus took our place on the cross, He died as our SUBSTITUTE and He fully paid the debt we owed. The sinner could ask, "But God, am I not obligated to spend eternity in the lake of fire because of my sin?" God could answer, "I am completely satisfied that the debt has been paid. My beloved Son paid it all!" As the hymn says, "I will sing of my Redeemer, and His wondrous love to me; On the cruel cross He suffered, From the curse to set me free. Sing, oh, sing of my Redeemer, with His blood He purchased me, On the cross He sealed my pardon, **PAID THE DEBT** and made me free!" See also Robert McCheyne's famous poem entitled, "I am Debtor."

How can I fulfill my responsibility towards my neighbor? It is impossible to do this apart from love: "for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law" (Rom. 13:8). Galatians 5:14 teaches the same: "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

Romans 13:9-10

In this verse Paul quotes from the second table of the law which deals with our manward responsibilities, our

obligations toward our neighbor. He quotes from the 7th, 6th, 8th, 9th, and 10th commandments (see Exodus 20:13-17) and then he gives the summary commandment found in Leviticus 19:18, **thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself**, which the Lord Jesus called the second greatest commandment (Matthew 22:38-39). If we truly LOVE the Lord God with all our heart (the greatest commandment), then we will not bow down before an idol, we will not take His Name in vain, etc. **"Love worketh no ill to its neighbor"** (v.10). If we truly LOVE our neighbor, then we will not steal from him, will not commit adultery with his wife, will not murder him, will not covet what is his, etc. This is why LOVE is the fulfillment of the LAW. If you LOVE God and your neighbor properly, then you have performed and fulfilled the demands of the LAW. *Note*: The word "kill" in verse 9 should be translated "murder" (see Matthew 19:18 KJV). All murder is killing but not all killing is murder (as we discussed earlier in this chapter in the section on capital punishment). The word **"comprehended"** in verse 9 means "summed up."

Here is all the LAW summed up in a nutshell! The 613 commandments of the law can be summed up by the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. These Ten commandments can be summed up by the two commandments found in Matthew 22:36-40. These two commandments can be summed up by one word, "LOVE!"

But how can we LOVE? In and of ourselves it is impossible! The key is found in Galatians 5:16,22 and Romans 8:2-4.

GOD'S WAKE UP CALL! GOD'S REVEILLE!

ROMANS 13:11-14

As believers in Jesus Christ we are not to be found sleeping. We are to be wide awake and alert, serving the Lord. However, it is sadly and often true that believers are in a spiritual state of slumber and drowsiness, and because of this God must send forth a wake up call. There are four passages in the New Testament where God tells believers to WAKE UP!

1) Ephesians 5:14

AWAKE YOU SLEEPER! Arise! It is time to wake up! Rouse yourself! Believers need to be shocked out of their spiritual slumber.

There is an expression that we sometimes hear: RISE AND SHINE! Believers need to RISE AND SHINE for Christ! Why? Because we are children of light, not darkness (v.8). "ARISE FROM THE DEAD." The language used in this verse is that of resurrection. Believers need a spiritual reawakening and believers need to arise from spiritual deadness. We need to be spiritually AWAKE and we need to be spiritually ALIVE. Our very purpose for living on this earth is to MANIFEST the very LIFE of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:10-11), to express His LIFE. How is the world going to know that Jesus Christ is alive today? By seeing Him living in and through His believers: "Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). How can this be accomplished? Ephesians 5:18 is the key: "BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT!"

2) 1 Corinthians 15:32-34.

There was a serious doctrinal problem in the church at Corinth. There were some among the Corinthians who were saying that there is no resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15:12). According to this false teaching, people die and that's it! They will not be raised again.

A denial of correct doctrine is very serious because it leads to moral decay. What a person BELIEVES affects how the person BEHAVES. False doctrine will affect the way people live. If they do not believe right they will not live right.

If the dead rise not, then why not indulge yourself in the lusts of the flesh now? If you are going to die tomorrow, then why not live it up today? The Epicurean philosophy was that the goal of man should be a life of pleasure: "Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die!" Compare 1 Corinthians 15:32. There was an ancient fable

of an Epicurean fly who was drowning and dying in a pot of honey. The fly says, "I have eaten and drunk and bathed and I care nothing if I die."

"Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Cor. 15:33). "Evil communications" means "bad company, evil companionships." Do not associate with those who hold the wrong doctrine and who behave accordingly. If you do you will get corrupted. Bad company corrupts good morals (good character). It is very important to walk with and associate with the right kind of people (Proverbs 13:20; Psalm 119:63).

Paul's **WAKE UP CALL** is found in verse 34: "AWAKE to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame" (1 Cor. 15:34). "Righteousness" in this verse is actually an adverb: "Awake in a righteous manner, in a righteous fashion, in a right way." The word "AWAKE" means to awake sober following a drunken sleep, to come to your senses after having been drunk and asleep. Paul is saying, "Rouse up to soberness! Awake out of your moral intoxication! Don't be drunk any more with this corrupting, false doctrine. Don't be any longer under the terrible influence of this wrong doctrine."

3) 1 Thessalonians 5:4-9.

Because of God's Word of truth, believers are aware of what is going on in the world. Believers know God's prophetic program which He has revealed in Scripture. The unsaved will be totally caught by surprise by the events that are going to take place (1 Thess. 5:2-3).

See verses 4-5. Believers are not in darkness, though we once were (1 Peter 2:9; Col. 1:13). Believers are children of light. We are in the world but not of the world. We are in the world of darkness but we are not of the darkness. We belong to the light and to the day.

"Therefore let us not sleep, as do others" (1 Thess. 5:6). This is a different kind of WAKE UP CALL. The other passages said, "WAKE UP!" This passage is somewhat different in that it says, "DON'T GO TO SLEEP!" The "others" referred to in this verse are the UNSAVED people. The unsaved are the "sleepers." Believers need to stay awake. Those who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour are sleeping! Their spiritual eyes are closed. They are totally unaware of what is going on and the great danger that they are in.

In verse 7 we learn that sleeping belongs to the night. It is totally inappropriate for the day. When you go into a bank, you do not normally see the teller sleeping. You do not normally see the mail carrier lying down on the grass in front of your house sleeping. Such activity during the day is inappropriate and out of place.

Believers are day people. The unsaved are night people (see verse 8). Day people are those who are awake and alert and sober. A wonderful description of a sober believer who is awake and shining for Christ is found in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-19.

4) Romans 13:11-14

This is the fourth New Testament passage which gives us God's WAKE UP CALL. Let us consider each of these verses separately:

Romans 13:11

It is time to wake up! In fact, you should have already been awake! Think of a teen sleeping in and Mom and Dad say, "Hey, WAKE UP! What are you doing still in bed? Do you realize what time it is? The hour is late! You should have been up two hours ago!" Paul was saying, "DO YOU REALIZE WHAT TIME IT IS? It is not the time for sleeping! It is time to be awake and alert. Get up and serve the Lord!"

"OUR SALVATION" refers to our future and final salvation. This is also called the "day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30; Rom. 8:23). It is when our salvation will be completed and finalized, and what a day of rejoicing that will be! We shall then be in the presence of the Lord and free from the presence of sin forevermore! The day when our

salvation shall be completed is nearer today than it was when we first believed on Christ. You have been saved for how many years? _____ This means that you are now _____ years closer to that final day of salvation than when you first believed. The coming of the Lord is drawing near, the day of Christ is at hand and the God who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at that time (Phil. 1:6). The final day of our redemption and salvation is drawing nigh (compare Luke 21:28). That day is fast approaching (compare Heb. 10:25). Alford has written: "**A fair exegesis of this passage can hardly fail to recognize the fact that the Apostle here as well as elsewhere [1 Thess. 4:17; 1 Cor. 15:51] speaks of the coming of the Lord as rapidly approaching.**"

The time we have to serve the Lord now is limited. Our days are but few in number. How we need to stay awake and redeem the time, making the most of every opportunity our God should give us as we serve Him in time. When the day of our final salvation comes, we will no more be proclaiming the gospel. We will no more be winning souls to Christ. Such things are for us to do now here in time, for Christ's sake and for God's glory.

Romans 13:12

The night has advanced (is far gone, is almost over). It is still nighttime, but the night is almost over. It is not daytime yet, but almost. The day is "**at hand**." The day is approaching and drawing closer and closer (compare Heb. 10:25). The term "at hand" means "near" (same verb as in verse 11--"nearer"). It is used of the "kingdom" in Matthew 3:2 (the kingdom is "at hand") and of the Lord's return in James 5:8. The Lord's coming is so NEAR it is almost HERE! We are living in this dark world. It is still nighttime, but the day will soon be here. As believers we are looking for the day. We are looking for the day of Christ, the day of Christ's return (the day of the rapture). "Looking for that blessed hope" (Tit. 2:13). "Waiting [expectantly] for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:7 and see verse 8 where this coming is equated with "the day of Christ"). "**CAST OFF**" means to "put off, take off, rid oneself of something" as taking off clothes. "**PUT ON**" has the opposite meaning (thus it means to put on clothes, to be clothed, to wear something). "**ARMOUR**" indicates that we are in a battle. It is still nighttime! We are involved in a real battle. Soldiers must not be found sleeping. We need to be awake and alert so that we can fight and win! Rise and shine and fight! Wear the armour of light. For a full description of the armour which God has provided for the believer, see Ephesians 6:10-18 and 1 Thessalonians 5:8. It is interesting that both of these key passages dealing with the believer's armour are preceded by God's WAKE UP CALL (see Eph. 5:14 and 1 Thess. 5:6).

Romans 13:13

Believers are to walk "**honestly**" or DECENTLY (same word as in 1 Cor. 14:40). We are to walk properly as it is fitting for children of the light. Even though it is still night, we are not of the night, and we are to walk in a manner that is proper and decent for those who belong to the day and to the kingdom of light.

Some of the specific sins of darkness which we are to CAST OFF are listed in this verse:

PARTY SINS or TABLE SINS: RIOTING--excessive feasting, carousing, revelry (listed in Gal. 5:21 as one of the works of the flesh). See also this word in 1 Peter 4:3 ("banqueting") of our old life before we were saved. **DRUNKENNESS**--see Luke 21:34. We are to stay awake, alert and sober, filled with the Spirit, not drunk with wine (Eph. 5:18).

BEDROOM SINS: CHAMBERING--literally this word means "BEDS." It refers to sinful activity that takes place on beds. The marriage bed is holy and undefiled, but all other "beds" fall under the judgment of God (Heb. 13:4). Sexual immorality of any kind is an abomination to the Lord who established marriage as a holy institution for the good of mankind. **WANTONNESS**--this term is often translated in the KJV by the term "lasciviousness." It means licentiousness, having no sexual restraint, unbridled lust, debauchery, extreme indulgence in sensuality and could include orgies, wife-swapping and other sexual excesses. This term is used of the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19), of the walk of the unsaved (1 Pet. 4:3), of the condition of the heart (Mark 7:22) and of the conduct of the Sodomites (2 Pet. 2:7).

SATANIC SINS: STRIFE--discord, contention, quarreling (see Gal. 5:20 and 1 Cor. 1:11 and 3:3). **ENVYING**--jealousy, being envious of what another has or what another can do (see Gal. 5:20). The sins of STRIFE and ENVYING both have **PRIDE** at their root, the very sin which resulted in the fall of Satan (see 1 Tim. 3:6 and compare with 1 Timothy 6:4).

Romans 13:14

In sharp contrast to the works of darkness mentioned in verse 13, believers are to put on the armour of light, **EVEN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST**, the One who is our LIFE (Col. 3:3-4). The term "provision" means "foresight, care, forethought." For example, when a family takes a trip, they usually make provision for the trip. They plan it, they think it through, they get what they need for the trip, they see to it that the car is ready, they fill the car with gas, etc. Sin does its deadly work because we allow it to. We make provision for it. We plan it and think about it and we provide for it in a thousand different ways. We must not think about and plan how we are going to gratify our old, sinful nature. Remember, the flesh **CANNOT** be reformed, improved, transformed, beautified or bettered. The **CROSS (DEATH!)** is the only solution: "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5:24).

PUT ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST! The verb "PUT ON" means to put on clothes, to clothe oneself. We are to clothe ourselves with Christ. We are to **PUT ON** His character. Clothes are very visible. When people look at us they can easily see our clothes. Clothing is noticed. When people look at us, may Christ be seen. May He be seen in all our conduct. When people look at us, do they see the Lord Jesus, or do they see the ugliness of the flesh? Do they see a life that is being lived for self or a life being lived for the One who died and rose again for us (2 Cor. 5:15)?

To us it seems like an unusual expression to speak of **PUTTING ON A PERSON**, but the Greeks understood this language to mean "to imitate His example, to copy his spirit, to become like him." [Illustration: When a person puts on a gorilla costume he normally tries to act like a gorilla, walk like a gorilla, make noises like a gorilla, etc.]. We are to put on the lovely character of the Lord Jesus Christ so that He might be seen. Put on Christ! Become totally identified with Him. He is our LIFE, our CLOTHING!

Compare this verse with Galatians 3:27 which teaches that every believer has already put on Christ:

YOU HAVE PUT ON CHRIST (Gal. 3:27).
PUT ON CHRIST (Rom. 13:14).

One passage says that you have done it; the other passage says that you need to do it. The passage in Galatians is speaking of a believer's **STANDING** (position); the passage in Romans is speaking of a believer's **STATE**. We have a perfect standing **IN CHRIST**, and because of this we have **PUT ON CHRIST**. As God sees me **IN CHRIST**, I am just like Christ. I have His righteousness! I am perfect and complete in Him! I have no character flaws! But as to my actual state (my walk in time), when people see me, do they see Christ? Do they see His character? Do they see the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23)?

We see the same thing with respect to the putting on of the **NEW MAN**:

1. Colossians 3:9-10: **YOU HAVE PUT ON THE NEW MAN** (accomplished fact, not a command)
2. Ephesians 4:22-24: **PUT ON THE NEW MAN** (a command)

Colossians sets forth the **FACT**; Ephesians appeals to **FAITH**. We are told to do in **FAITH** what God has already done in **FACT**. Romans 13:14 is also an appeal to **FAITH** based upon the **FACT** of our position in Christ. By **FAITH** we are to **PUT ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST**, and let His life and character be seen in us. May we by faith "reckon [ourselves] dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:11). As the hymn writer says, "May His beauty rest upon me, as I seek the lost to win, and may they forget the channel, seeing **ONLY HIM**" (Kate Wilkinson).
