

Practical Christianity

Part 3

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[00:00:01] The Epistle to the Romans, chapter 13, verses 1 to 14.

This is now the third of four addresses on some of the major practical issues that come to light in the later chapters of the Epistle to the Romans.

In the first of them, we looked at chapter 12, verses 1 and 2, and we concentrated then on considering together the total, irrevocable, once and for all commitment that is entered into as the only reasonable, intelligent response to the soul that rightly appreciates the movements of the mercy of God towards us.

[00:01:02] The phrase, the mercies of God, the compassions of God, chapter 12, verse 1, is undoubtedly a reference to the major treatise on the aspects of the salvation of God that are outlined in chapters 1 to 8, and then after that necessary dispensational study in chapters 9, 10, and 11, in view of all that is gone before, the Apostle says, I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God.

And we saw in verse 2 of chapter 12 that not taking our character from the fashions of this age in an outward way, but every department of our lives being transformed by that inner power, by the renewing of our mind, proving in our movements here in this world, experimentally, [00:02:04] what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. When Christ was here personally, the will of God was seen to come to light in him personally. He has gone on high by the Spirit.

We are enabled in our practical movements to demonstrate what is good and acceptable and perfect in accordance with the will of God. And the development of these things is seen in the major aspects of our life, selfward in chapter 12, towards others in chapter 13, and finally Godward in chapter 14.

And on this occasion, we are going to look at chapter 13. Again, by way of recapitulation, mention has been made that we do from time to time in [00:03:01] Scripture get summaries of these things.

For instance, Micah chapter 6 verse 8, giving us a good indication of what is required of us by our God, outlines these three aspects. And again, Titus 2 verse 12 tells us of the need.

In fact, it tells us of how the grace of God educates us, enabling us to live soberly as to ourselves, righteously as to others, and godly as before the Lord.

And in chapter 12, we looked at what it is to live soberly, as indeed verse 3 of chapter 12 states.

Now we look in chapter 13 as to what it is to live righteously as to others.

One of the special marks of those who trust in the living God is that their lives are [00:04:05] marked by practical righteousness. And in chapter 13, we see how, first of all, this is seen in our attitude to the higher powers, the powers that be, those who are in authority, and we'll be looking a little at that.

Then how we meet our commitments day by day, in civil terms, financial terms, social terms, how we are seen to live righteously before all.

And then, in view of the day that is at hand, the sense of urgency that this imparts to the lives that we live. If we want a verse as a heading, in chapter 13 it's given towards the end. If in chapter 12 the summary or title is given in verse 3 of that chapter, in verse 13 we [00:05:01] need to look at verse 13, where we are exhorted, let us walk honestly, that perhaps is as good a summary as any as to the content of chapter 13.

Let us walk honestly.

And then a final exhortation right at the end, put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof. So then, into the detail of the chapter.

This matter of being subject to the powers that be is something which is dealt with here and there in the New Testament, and consistently so. If we look first of all at 1 Timothy chapter 2, where we have the apostle writing to the younger man Timothy, he says, I exhort therefore that first of all, of first-ranking primary [00:06:06] importance, supplications, prayers, intercessions, giving of thanks, be made for all men, for kings, and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. It is a salutary lesson, indeed, that our prayers on behalf of all men, especially on behalf of kings and all who are in authority, is not that we might have an easy time, as a superficial reading of those verses might seem to indicate, but rather that we may lead a quiet, peaceable life in all godliness and honesty, free without fear of molestation, [00:07:01] to be able to get on with the job for which we have been left here, to preach the gospel, present God as Saviour, who will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. So, then, a prime responsibility of the Christian company, and we as individuals, is that we might continually be before the face of God, praying that there might be right conditions in which we can get on with our responsible job of presenting God as Saviour. If we turn to 1 Peter chapter 2, again after the most sublime truth concerning the church of God as a chosen generation, exhibiting a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, showing forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous [00:08:05] light, the need to walk as strangers in pilgrims, immediately afterwards we have this necessary exhortation, Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. Note again, in Peter, the link with submission to every ordinance of man to king and to governors is linked with the fulfilment on earth, the bringing to light of the will of God. Now those scriptures are very close indeed to what we have at the beginning of Romans [00:09:02] 13. Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers, for there is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God.

If we look a little further down the chapter, we note in verse 5, wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience's sake.

First of all, it is incumbent upon us as Christians to do the right thing. It is part of walking honestly, living righteously, that of all the people living on earth at any one time, surely if there be any company of people who are seen to do the right thing, keeping to the law of the land, complying with the requirements of the government of the day, it should be seen coming to light in the Christian. [00:10:03] Now there are two reasons given for this.

Ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience's sake. As to the wrath, Peter again decries the possibility.

He warns us that if we are to suffer, it is not to suffer as wrongdoers.

What a sad witness it would be if we were known in our locality as those who didn't comply with the righteous requirements of these powers that be. There may occasionally be occasions, and this perhaps is looked at more in chapter 14, where the lordship of Christ is the limiting factor.

But generally speaking, the requirement laid upon us is that we must needs be subject partly [00:11:01] for wrath in order that we do not fall foul of the law or the application of the law locally or regionally or nationally, otherwise, as the scripture says, wrath will come upon us.

The powers that be are there for the punishment of evildoers.

How sad again it would be if we Christians were deemed to be wrongdoers and for wrath we were brought before the powers that be. The second reason given, also for conscience's sake, it is given to us to appreciate intelligently that the powers that be, the authorities in power at any time, have been allowed to be put there by God himself.

They are his ministers.

He is the minister of God to thee for good, verse 4 says. [00:12:05] Indeed, they are put there by God in order that those who do wrong might be punished and that those who do well are commended. Of course, the powers that be are responsible to God for the way they use the power that is granted unto them and scripture abounds with witness to the fact that very often men given power, allowed as such by God, are taken to task responsible to God for exceeding the power that God has granted to them.

And so we turn to these verses in more particular.

The general statement then is given. The details follow it up.

Rulers are not a terror to good works but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? [00:13:02] Do that which is good and thou shalt have praise of the same. That as to wrath, but then the Christian has the intelligent conscience to realize that the powers that be are ordained of God and therefore the Christian conforming as far as his conscience allows is enabled to put into practice that which is a witness to all about that the powers that be are the ministers of God for the moment.

This involves not only the general scope of things, it also involves the detail. And so we turn to verse 7.

Render therefore to all their dues tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

The Christian meets his or her commitments as they fall due.

[00:14:01] I sometimes feel that time has been wasted in the past by discussing whether or not in the view of the coming of the Lord it is right or righteous for Christians as individuals to own their own homes, to have their own cars, to enter into major financial commitments which would be left unfulfilled at the coming of the Lord.

Over the years I've come to the conclusion that these verses are not speaking so much of major capital commitments, but what they do say is if we enter into any contracts, any bargains of any sort, that the Christian is known as one who meets his or her commitments as they become due.

Again, perhaps a measure of inconsistency has come into Christian witness whereby brethren [00:15:02] have felt free to own their own homes and yet as a matter of conscience have felt it improper to own the building in which we gather to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Well, I think these scriptures are quite clear that entering into commitments, meeting them as they fall due, whether it's the fuel bill, whether it's the rate, whether it's a mortgage payment, whether it's a bank loan, we meet our commitments as they fall due. Whether it's tribute, tax, inland revenue, whether it's the local rates, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour.

Now there's a positive note to concentrate on, isn't it? That while it may be that there are commitments that we would not meet at our peril, it may be that in a positive way we should be more assured in our witness of giving honour to [00:16:04] whom honour.

Perhaps we need to lose our reserve. Perhaps we need to give honour where it is due, more readily, more vocally than we have in the past. And moving on to verse 8, the apostle says to the Romans, Oh, no man anything, a grand summing up.

Perhaps if we want a simple heading over this part of the chapter, it could be contained in the two words, pay up, simple, direct, practical evidence of walking honestly, living righteously, paying up as our commitments become due.

But notice the lever, notice the background, notice what is given here to back up with force what the apostle says, Oh, no man anything but to love one another, for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. [00:17:02] Not a question here of slavishly meeting commitments, not a question of slavishly following a set of rules or regulations, but prompted by love, that wonderful divine quality which is the source of all, Oh, no man anything.

There are debts which we can discharge day by day. Let us see to it that we meet our commitments as they arise. But there is a debt which is indischageable, an indischageable debt, a debt of love.

Oh, again, how this flows out from and takes character from the first eight chapters, that wonderful account as to how all our needs have been met by the mercies, the compassions of God.

There is a debt we shall never be able to repay. [00:18:01] Perhaps we might regard that as a major capital commitment which we can never arrange to be diminished. We can do nothing about exhausting that. What we can do, perhaps, is pay a little bit of the interest as it becomes due, Oh, no man anything but to love one another.

Let us see to it that as well as meeting financial commitments and moral commitments, administrative commitments, family commitments, let us see that our relationships with others, we are known as those who exhibit love in a very practical way. He that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. I suppose they have fulfilled the righteous requirement and the spirit of the law. Interesting here that in verse 9 we get a recounting of five of the commandments delivered [00:19:03] to Moses for the people of God upon earth in his day, as is well known, five of those commandments concentrated on the responsibility of man Godward. The other five, the responsibility of man manward to others. And here in verse 9, in keeping with the setting of chapter 13, how to live honestly, righteously towards others, that there are five examples given and they are the five that describe our relationship to other men. Thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not covet. Summing them up, if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, Namely, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. [00:20:02] Simple, clear, practical exhortations that enable us to realise perhaps freshly, vividly, the need for practical righteousness in all our movements here in this world. Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, demonstrated in the way we act in this practical way. God works no ill to his neighbour, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. How fitting, how orderly, how right that in this chapter on walking honestly, that that responsibility to others given so early in the word of God is recalled for our reminder and instructions. And so the Apostle moves towards the end of his exhortations on this aspect of our life and from verses 11 and 12.

[00:21:03] If he has been speaking about an indischageable debt that we owe to God for all his wonderful compassions towards us, and in the light of that, that we must do all that we can within our power, day by day, to meet our practical righteous commitments as they fall due, after exhorting us in simple terms to pay up, we come to another character of exhortation in verses 11 and 12.

If verses 7 or perhaps 6 to 10 describe the meeting of our commitments, the debts that have arisen, in verse 11 and 12 we speak not here of an indischageable debt, we speak of a known time, that, knowing the time, this practical section of the epistle started [00:22:06] with what is described as a reasonable, intelligent, climactic conclusion that we came to, a crisis in the history of our soul, and all that flows out from that takes character from that. So here again it is a matter of some intelligence, it is a matter of something that we know, knowing the time, that the night is far spent, the day is at hand, there is a day coming, God has indeed appointed a day, when he will rule, administer the world in righteousness by that man whom he has ordained, whereof he has given assurance unto all, in that he has raised him from the dead. God's man, Christ, has been appointed, that when the time comes, [00:23:04] and only the Father knows the moment when that has arrived, but we know, if not the date, we know that there is a time which has been declared, Acts 17 verse 31 reminds it, as we've quoted, God has appointed that day, when his man, God's man, will be in full command, universal sway, and things will be conducted in a righteous fashion, because the Lord, the righteous judge, will be in full command. And, knowing that there is such a time as that, we live in the light of that day, even now, we anticipate the righteous living, the righteous administration, that shall be extant in that day, knowing that this present dispensation is drawing towards its close, knowing the time, it is high time [00:24:01] to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. Scriptures abound with references to the fact that the knowledge of the coming of the Lord

in power and great glory to set up his kingdom is a salutary lesson to the Christian, that in the light of that day, when everything shall be seen in proper perspective, when everything shall be governed, administered in a way that is in accordance with the will of God, that we now, in the light of information we've been given about the future, have an extra incentive to bring into effect in a practical way the will of God upon earth, even now, knowing the time, it is now high time to awake out of sleep. If the major exhortation in verse 8 was pay up, the major exhortation in verse 11 is wake up! We are children of the day, [00:25:09] not children of the night. We are children of light, not the children of darkness. Again, the implied challenge comes home to us, how sad it would be if we, the children of day, were involved in the activities more appropriate to the night. How sad it would be if we, the children of light, were marked by the features of moral darkness, and the demonstration that we give in our lives is inconsistent with the gospel that we carry and seek to preach. And so the exhortation comes, let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, let us put on the armour of light. A practical preservative against darkness and the works of darkness.

[00:26:05] A practical preservative against the things of moral night, or to wear the garments of practical righteousness, quite simply doing the right thing, because we know it is the right thing to do, because it is the will of God for us. See how these things are bound together in this chapter. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, let us put on the armour of light, let it be seen that we are children of the day. Let it be seen that what we do is consistent with what we say and the gospel that we have believed. Let us bear in mind again what chapter 12 says in this overall heading to the practical section of this epistle, that we are exhorted to walk honestly, so that we might prove experimentally in our lives what [00:27:05] is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. The exhortations close by a tremendous contrast, let us walk honestly as in the day, we are children of day, let us comport ourselves, let us behave in a way that is appropriate to that which falls under the scrutiny of the living God. Let us walk honestly as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. These things are traced to their source in the last verse. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, how well we recognize that in the Gospels and the things that are added in the New Testament epistles tell us in that one what perfect way the Lord Jesus Christ in all that [00:28:04] he did as he moved here in the days of his flesh, acted, spoke, moved and lived in such a way as was well pleasing to God and brought to light here upon earth that which was well pleasing to the God who had sent him and that which was that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Here we are then faced with this overall exhortation, put on in a practical way by the way that we live righteously before the world, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof. Earlier chapters in the epistle go into the necessary study that while our sins have been dealt with once and for all, while sin has been judged in the cross of our Lord [00:29:07] Jesus Christ, God has pronounced his judgment upon sin as such. God has seen fit to allow us to continue here in this world, the flesh still in us, the root still there, but under the grace of God. We have been endowed with the capacity transformed by the renewing of our mind. We've been endowed with the capacity to put on in a practical way the features of our Lord Jesus Christ and we are enabled to make no provision of the flesh, not allowing the features of the flesh to show themselves in the way that we live, making a tremendous victory for the grace of God, giving us the power, giving us the incentive, and here we are with our responsible lives to live in the [00:30:05] light of the coming of the Lord, knowing the time that it is high time to awake out of sleep, our salvation nearer than when we believed. How sad it would be if in the closing days immediately before he comes that we were to give up, that we were to become weary, that we were ceasing to put on the features of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we got so weary that we began to make allowances for the flesh to show itself in a way that we wouldn't have dreamed of doing when first we trusted the Savior. And as the chapter ends, let us accept the exhortation to ourselves. Let us walk honestly as in the

day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, but let us see to it, [00:31:03] not in strife and envying, but in this basic overall way, putting on the Lord Jesus Christ, making no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof. Let us see to it then that while this is indeed a separate section, something that we need to consider itself, that it fits in with living soberly in chapter 12, and as we hope to see on another occasion, everything done as unto the Lordship of Christ, living godly here in this world, that there is this wonderful balance between what we are in ourselves, in our basic attitude selfward, what we are in our relationship to others, walking honestly as in the day, and then as that overall consideration in chapter 14, whether we live. We live unto the Lord, whether we die, we die unto the Lord. Whether we live [00:32:01] therefore or die, we are the Lord's, but as to the detail of that, we must leave that for another occasion.