

Romans 17 - Our walk in the World (Part 2)

(Preached as a New Year's Message)

We have covered in Romans 13 our walk in the world system, or the government. There is another part of the secular world to consider as it is distinct from the spiritual world. Besides government, there are also our neighbors. In *general*, our neighbors are in government, in our neighborhoods, *and* in our churches. But, for a brief few minutes, they are also on the subway, at the supermarket, and at the hotel when we are on vacation. To be more specific in chapter 13, Paul is speaking of our neighbors in the secular world as opposed to our neighbors in the church. He will deal with our neighbors in the church later. We distinguish between our spiritual church neighbors and our secular neighbors because at the end of the previous section in vs. 7, Paul speaks about what we *owe* governmental powers. He then transitions in vs. 8 to what we *owe* our neighbors.

Rom 13:6-8 For for this cause pay ye tribute [**taxes**] also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.

7Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

8Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

The secular part of the kingdom of God is comprised of the government with its official rules, but there is also the social with its *unofficial* rules. Where the law is codified in relation to the secular government, it is less so in secular society. Our secular *social* relationships are governed according to informal *social* laws of *etiquette*.

1. Social law and the Golden Rule -

The informal social laws of etiquette are associated with what is called *gracious living*. Gracious living reflects an appreciation for the finer aspects of life, emphasizing balance, courtesy, and a genuine commitment to fostering positive relationships. However, gracious living can be perceived negatively. It may be seen as an elitist or pretentious approach to life. It could be viewed as an overly refined and artificial lifestyle. It can be driven by a desire to conform to societal expectations or maintain a façade of sophistication. It is funny how some people disdain the etiquette of others as being a snob while in their world they have their own social rules that you better not violate.

Paul describes true gracious living by what drives it. The one rule at the heart of gracious living and why we have the rules of polite etiquette is love. It is not snobbery to say please or send thank you notes. It is not putting on airs to dress appropriately, responding to phone calls and texts, or treating your server at a restaurant kindly. Etiquette is observed *not* to make you *look good*. Etiquette is about respecting others, which is at the root of Godly love. Although etiquette can vary in culture, the Biblical principle of love behind it is the spirit of the Law of God.

Rom 13:8 Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

All the social rules of etiquette are driven by this one concept: to love one another. It is sometimes hard to know what the laws of etiquette are because they can vary from culture to culture.

What we owe to others, or are obligated to do as a matter of etiquette, is founded on love, or wanting the best for others instead of self. With respect to the Biblical Law, Paul points this out in the next verses:

Rom 13:9-10 For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if *there be* any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

10Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love *is* the fulfilling of the law.

Jesus expressed this in what we call the Golden Rule.

Luke 6:31-35 And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.

32For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.

33And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same.

34And 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.

35But 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.

Frequently, theologically liberal critics and secular humanists attempt to explain away the uniqueness of the Golden Rule, saying it is a common ethic shared by all religions. This is not the case. Jesus' command has a subtle, but very important, difference. A quick survey of the sayings of Eastern religions will make this plain:

- Confucianism: "Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you" (Analects 15:23)
- Hinduism: "This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you" (Mahabharata 5:1517)
- Buddhism: "Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful" (Udanavarga 5:18)

These sayings are similar to the Golden Rule but are stated negatively and rely on passivity. Jesus' Golden Rule is a positive command to show love proactively. The Eastern religions say, "Refrain from doing"; Jesus says, "Do!" The Eastern religions say it is enough to hold your negative behavior in check; Jesus says to *look for ways* to act positively. Because of the "inverted" nature of the non-Christian sayings, they have been described as the "silver rule."

– <https://www.gotquestions.org/Golden-Rule.html>

The Golden Rule, love, respect, or gracious living is all about extending grace to others around us as God has been gracious to us. Studying and understanding the Bible is important for us to know God and be protected from the wolves that prey upon the flock. Apart from sharing the Gospel, to live the Christian life and apply it to our neighbors what we need is love.

2. Knowing the time -

The balance of Rom 13 could be covered in a separate study all by itself. Since the next verse, Rom 13:11, begins with "And," we are meant to connect it to what came before. It is connected to our walk in the service of the Lord (ch. 12), with our total commitment, and our spiritual gifts. It is connected to our walk in the world, with our formal obligations to government and our informal obligations towards our neighbors (ch. 13). We should take our walk seriously and wake up and get to work!

Rom 13:11 And that, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep: for now *is* our salvation nearer than when we believed.

This is so appropriate to preach as a New Year's message, but it can be preached at any time. What makes it so timely for New Year's message is because it is the perfect time to take advantage of the spirit of making resolution. Some people discount the idea of celebrating the New Year. There's nothing inappropriate about recognizing the New Year. In fact, the idea of the New Year is so good that God gave the Jews *two* New Year celebrations. One was civil in the Fall marking the final harvest and took *two* days to celebrate. The other was spiritual in the Spring marking the Exodus and Passover. If you are in Israel and want to celebrate in the Fall, that is pleasing to the Lord. If you are in church and want to commemorate the resurrection as a spiritual beginning, that is pleasing to the Lord, also. We should remember that according to the very next chapter, Rom 14, there is nothing wrong with treating each day alike or making any day special. The importance is not the day. What is important is the idea of what we are celebrating. The idea of marking the New Year is significant in a number of ways.

- Number your days

Ps 90:9-12 For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale *that is told*.

10The days of our years *are* threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength *they be* fourscore years, yet *is* their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

...

12So teach *us* to number our days, that we may apply *our* hearts unto wisdom.

We mark our years so that any given day is someone's New Year. I celebrate *my* personal New Year in August. August happens to have no other holiday in it so I believe a strong case could be made for moving the New Year to August! Each year that we mark in passing reminds us of the fact that we closer to our end than ever before. We need to wake up and be careful to use our time for Christ because our salvation (the resurrection) is nearer than ever.

- Perspective

Have you ever wakened up disoriented because you weren't sure what day it is? Am I supposed to work? Sleep? Get ready for an appointment? Being able to mark the passing of time is very important to us. In the creation, God gave us tools to be able to be mindful of the passing of time:

Gen 1:14 And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years:

The summer and winter solstices and the vernal and autumnal equinoxes mark the rhythms of the year. It helps us gain a perspective. The stars were given to help us determine the marking of time.

One of the terrors of being put in solitary confinement is due to being out of touch with time (among other factors). It can contribute greatly to a feeling of disorientation and hopelessness.

By recognizing the New Years, we gain the perspective of where we are in life. By about one year of life, children start to recognize the fear of strangers. They reach the *terrible twos*. In the teen years they prepare for separation. By age thirty, we feel like we are in full swing. At forty we finally feel competent. At fifty, we go through a time of reflection and reevaluation.

We have been given six days for our labors and one day to cease from our labors. Israel worshiped on the Sabbath Days and churches worship on the day of the Lord, Sunday. We not only give God glory in Sunday worship, but it puts our life into perspective and balance when it is a regular part of our lives.

- Marking time

Our discipleship is affected by marking time. When I used to run cross country and the mile in track, I would hum waltz music because it measured in 3/4 time, a very natural rhythm for our body. When playing music, you have to be able to keep time. Coaches will announce your "split" time so you can know if you are lagging behind or moving too fast during portions of a race so you can adjust your pace. Many believers are doing much the same thing when they set down their Bible reading schedule to read the Bible through in the year. This is what is suggested by Heb 12:1

Heb 12:1-2 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset *us*, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

2Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

We use the pacing of time to patiently move forward in a Christian marathon. When we lose sight of our goals and markers of time, we often get discouraged and feel that our lives are pointless. God is a God of order and gave us seasons, days, hours, and minutes to regulate achieving our goals.

3. Wake up -

As the New Year approaches, we will have had 365 days passed since we last heard the clarion call to set our hearts anew to wake up. We are now passing through the darkest time of the year with the longest nights. It is not surprising that we could be lulled into the complacency of spiritual slumber. But this is precisely what Paul is addressing.

Rom 13:11-12 And that, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep: for now *is* our salvation nearer than when we believed.

12The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.

The night is far spent, but the day is at hand. It is time to refresh ourselves to cast off the works of darkness. It might seem like we harp about the same old sins but that is because people are committing the same old sins.

Rom 13:13-14 Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

14But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to *fulfil* the lusts *thereof*.

It's time to take up the extra motivation of the season to throw out the alcohol. Now, we also have to admonish people to get rid of the marijuana. It's time to leave off fornication and setting our hearts to a righteous standard of purity. We need to show love and respect at home. It's time to cast off the old, but also time to put on the armor of light, to replace the old fleshly habits with new spiritual habits. For church the habits are very basic: come to the studies that have been prepared for you and get Biblically fortified; join in the prayer; get involved with soulwinning; strengthen the brethren. To our neighbors, reach out in numerous ways to show your love. It might be a special dish to share, sweeping a sidewalk, taking an interest in their prayer needs, lending a hand when they are struggling. The world is dark and appears to be getting darker. We must be that light in the world. All these things are challenges for those who are a child of God.

There is another challenge, though. If you are not a child of God, if you merely feel the challenge to change your lifestyle, you will actually face the biggest failure of all. Being right with God is not just a *lifestyle* issue. It all starts as a *life* issue. You need not just a new year to grow. You need *the* new life in Christ. You need to be born again. You don't need a new year, you need a new eternity. Before you can experience revival in the church, you have to have "vival," or life, in your heart.

John 3:5-7 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and *of* the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

6That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

Whether or not you are saved, 2024 can mark the next change in your life!

Rom 13:6-8

1. Social law and the Golden Rule - Rom 13:8-10, Luke 6:31-35
2. Knowing the time - Rom 13:11, Ps 90:9-12, Gen 1:14, Heb 12:1-2
3. Wake up - Rom 13:11-14, John 3:5-7