

Keeping the law

Romans 13:1-14 – Leaders version

For a one hour study, just do the starred * questions

Check in – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

1. What stood out to you when you studied Romans 12?

What does the passage say and mean?

90 minutes (do Q2 before reading the passage)

2. What do you think the Bible says about keeping the law of the land?

3. Look back to Romans 12:2. What is one of the major changes that happens in a believer?

Their mind is renewed – as this happens, we stop living the world's way and start to live Jesus' way. As our mind is renewed, we are able to discern God's will in situations, which affects our behaviour.

*4. Read Romans 13:1-5. What does God tell us about the origin of the authorities that we live under today?

All authorities are established by God – the police, the CJS, the courts, the law of the land, the government, the prison officers etc. – are set up by God. (Whether the individuals in authority know or love God doesn't change this statement).

*5. This being so, how should believers respond to the authorities?

We must submit to them.

Questions 6-8 are **SELF-DIRECTED QUESTIONS**. You need to write them on flip-chart sheets for the group to work on in pairs.

*6. **SDL** Do you think there is ever a situation in which you should not submit to the authorities?

Let the group brainstorm, and then look at Acts 5:28-29 – the apostles have been jailed for sharing the gospel, an angel of the Lord has released them and they're back in the Temple courts sharing the gospel. They answer the high priest 'We must obey God rather than men!' Romans 13 says we must submit to the governing authorities, but Acts 5 reminds us that we must first obey God. So, there are situations in which we do not submit to the authorities – when the authorities command something that God forbids (e.g. people who hid Jews in WW2), or forbids something that God commands (e.g. sharing the gospel). We should stand against the government in these situations in a respectful manner.

Explain to the group that there are countries where it is illegal to share the gospel, and that people go to prison or are killed when they do, but they continue to share the gospel – e.g. N Korea, Uzbekistan, China, Burma, N Nigeria etc – see www.barnabusfund.org .

*7. **SDL** What does Romans 13:2-5 tell us about breaking the law?

That breaking the law is rebelling against God and will bring judgment. This judgment most likely refers to the judgement of the governing authorities, not to God's judgment, although both are true. As believers, we know that Jesus has paid for our sin, but we still have to pay the debt to society for what we have done.

*8. **SDL** What does v5 add?

That we should submit to the governing authorities not simply in order to avoid punishment, but 'because of conscience', i.e. we know right from wrong and our desire to please God should be our motivation for keeping the law, not avoidance of punishment!

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Does this teaching challenge your attitude to the law of your land?

*9. What about paying tax? What do you think God's will is about this?

Let the group brainstorm without reading on in Romans 13.

*10. Read Romans 13:6-7. Why do you think God says this?

Taxes are a legal requirement, so in line with v1-5 we must pay them. Taxes are set for the benefit of society – healthcare, benefits system (UK), law enforcement, defence etc.

11. Read Matthew 22:17-21. What does Jesus say about paying tax to unbelieving authorities (the Romans)?

'Give to Caesar what is Caesars's, and to God what is God's.' i.e. pay taxes to the authorities and worship God. Caesar demanded taxes and worship.

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Does this teaching challenge your attitude to paying tax? How does God expect believers to behave in business?

*12. Read Romans 13:8-10. How does love fulfil the law of the land?

If we love our neighbour as ourselves, we treat them with respect, honesty and dignity and keep the law.

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Think about the thing that you are in prison for. In what way did this crime demonstrate a lack of love for others?

Ask everyone to think about their answer. If anyone is willing to share encourage them. Consider the victims – direct and indirect.

13. Read v11-14. What is our motivation for keeping the law of our land? What is our strength to do it?

The motivation is that Jesus is coming back – it relates to grace, we are saved from our sins by Jesus' death and our renewed minds result in changed behaviour that brings glory to him. Keeping the law of our land doesn't save us, but it does bring honour and glory to God.

The strength is 'the armour of light' i.e. Jesus. We can see, looking back, that in our own strength we flagrantly break the law or at least cut corners. Only with Jesus' strength in our lives will this change as a heart attitude because only he renews our minds. 'We are to imagine that Jesus is right before us and ask, Now how would I behave?' (Keller 2015, p142)

14. Read v13 again - what is it about the daytime that means we don't tend to do the things listed? What is the spiritual message?

We don't do these things in daylight because we don't want to get seen or get caught – we feel ashamed and know we are guilty. So they tend to be done under cover of darkness and behind closed doors. Spiritually, we sin when we think God's not looking, or other people aren't looking or even when we think our own conscience isn't looking (how many times have you done something that you managed to justify at the time, but immediately regretted?..).

*15. Read v14 again. How is 'clothing yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ' related to not thinking about 'how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature'?

We cannot serve two masters – we cannot obey Jesus and sin at the same time, the two are mutually exclusive. (Remember, sin is an offence against God. You can obey Jesus and commit a crime at the same time, if that crime is not a sin e.g. sharing the gospel, sensitively standing against something that society tolerates but the Bible condones etc.)

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What is the most challenging thing you have learnt from Romans 13 and how is going to make a difference in your life?

Check out – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.

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