

Transformed into Loving Obedience

Spring Sermon Series on Romans

Romans 13:1-14

Kenwood Baptist Church

Pastor David Palmer

May 8, 2016

TEXT: Romans 13:1-14

Happy Mother's Day! It is a joy to continue in our series on Romans as we are reading this together as a church family and seeking to be transformed by the gospel. It is very appropriate

ROMANS

**"...PRESENT YOUR BODIES AS A LIVING SACRIFICE,
HOLY AND ACCEPTABLE TO GOD,
WHICH IS YOUR SPIRITUAL WORSHIP.
DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD,
BUT BE TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWAL OF YOUR MIND,
THAT BY TESTING YOU MAY DISCERN
WHAT IS THE WILL OF GOD, WHAT IS
GOOD AND ACCEPTABLE AND PERFECT."
ROMANS 12:1-2 SERMON SERIES FEB 7 - MAY 29, 2016**

this morning that Romans 13 is all about being transformed into loving obedience. This is one of the great objectives for parents, for mothers, to have obedient children. God's Word describes for us in Romans 13 the transformation that happens to us when the gospel starts to penetrate our lives, our thinking, our affections, as we are changed by that from a disobedient or

rebellious people into a people transformed into loving obedience. Last week, we looked at the end of Romans 12 and the description of God's new humanity that is made possible through the gospel in Jesus Christ, the community that lives in this very unusual way. They are zealous for God; they are in harmony with one another; they rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. They do not repay evil for evil, but they give honor to those around them. The question emerges as to how God's renewed humanity described in Romans 12 relates to the power structures around us. Romans 13 then takes up the topic that we all love to talk about, the topic of how we relate to the governing structures around us, to the authority of the state, and ultimately to the authority of God, as we will see.

Romans 13 holds together as the next topic of living as God's people in the world, a people obedient to Christ. Romans 13:1-7 addresses how we relate to the government, and then we will discuss how we relate in God's providence and sovereignty to Him and to His will, His law. Lastly is a renewed summons for us to live as people of the day, as the beginning of God's New Creation. So, let's dial in at the beginning to talk about how Christians relate to the governing authorities around us. The vision in Romans 13 is that government, that ruling power around us, is actually instituted by God, and this is true whether the governing authorities realize this,

confess it, or not. That is very important. In Romans 13:1, Paul says:

“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.”

I know that deep within us lies the thought that only good government is from God and bad government must be from somewhere else. Remember that Paul is describing the government of his day and that Nero sits at the head of that government. Nero is the last of the Julio Claudine emperors. Nero is the man that will cut Paul's head off in a few years. He is a tyrannical ruler. He is the worst of the Roman emperors to date, and Paul says even that government is established by God. We need to hear that because we are quick and eager to say we are to obey only a good government. Paul's vision is government, rule, authority around us, that it is there by God's design. Why would God place rulers around us? It's because God is a God of order. God doesn't want a society to be characterized by anarchy, the absence of rule, and Paul reminds the Roman Christians that, though they live as the beginning of God's renewed humanity in Christ, they still live in this world, and they should be a people not characterized by rebellion or revolution against those structures. He reminds them again in Romans 13:2:

“Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.”

He reminds them in Romans 13:3-4:

“For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good.”

Notice again, and this is staggering, but he calls Nero God's servant. This man, he says, is God's servant, and the government has a responsibility by God to punish wrongdoing and to honor that which is good. Paul stresses, for this alternative community, that it is important for us to remember that Christians are to be good citizens. At one level, they care more about the society than the governing structures do. He says that the government is there as God's design to avenge, to carry out wrath on wrongdoing, and that government exists to punish criminal conduct. He wants Christians to know that our lives should be such that it would not be possible to accuse Christians for criminal conduct. I remember someone I was trying to share Christ with in my extended family, and this relative had a serious objection to Christian faith on one particular issue. I gave him a book to read and a set of lectures to watch, and he was still struggling. A little bit later, he looked into the person who had published that book, who had published those lectures, and he said: “You know what? That guy, that Christian guy, he is in jail now. Did you know that? He is in jail for tax evasion because he didn't report properly the income from his ministry.” It was a great discretization, if you will, of the gospel by the conduct,

by the criminal conduct, of a believer. Paul is stressing for us that God's people, renewed humanity, are actually for society not against it, that we should be a people who are characterized by an obedience to society, and yet at the same time, in Romans 13:5:

“Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.”

In one sense, the Christian community functions as a conscience for society, but the emphasis in this passage is on showing respect and honor to those to whom it is due. Paul says to pay our taxes. This is a word we all need to hear, even though it is not April. Pay revenue to whom revenue is owed; respect to the one to whom it is owed; honor to the one to whom it is owed. Christian faith does not make us an armed revolutionary force trying to overthrow government power. Christian faith makes us into a conscience for the state, and where the state exceeds its bounds, or where there are laws that force Christians to violate God's law or moral authority, that must be resisted. That must be objected to as a matter of conscience, but the presence of God's people in society is not a hostile, revolutionary force. This is particularly hard for those of us who have grown up in America, because revolution and rebellion is in the fabric of our being. Many things happened on July 4, 1776. One of the things that happened was that the Continental Congress invited Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson to draft a seal for the new country. This was Benjamin Franklin's plan.

This was the first draft for the seal of the United States. There are features of this seal that I love. Ben Franklin chose the imagery of The Exodus. He said: “I want the seal to show Moses standing on the shore extending his hand over the sea, causing the sea to overwhelm Pharaoh in a chariot with a crown on his head, and rays from the pillar of fire in the clouds reaching to Moses, expressing that he acts by command of the Deity.” I'm all about the above, the Exodus imagery of this, and then Franklin said: “We will have as the motto for our new country—seen around the outside rim of this seal—‘Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God.’” That was the first draft of the great seal of the United States. Thomas Jefferson also chose The Exodus imagery, but he chose Israel in the wilderness being led by a pillar of cloud and fire. John Adams, reflecting his pagan background, chose the image of Hercules ascending the mountain and choosing to reject the path of self-indulgence and ascend the rugged uphill way of duty. Nobody talks about that because the early committee rejected that as a bad idea. The committee also worked with Eugene du Simitière who was trained in heraldry. Simitière took these early drafts and thought he could come up with something little better. He came up with a different image of the seal of the country, a different model. Instead of *Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God*, Simitière came up with a model for the United States: *E Pluribus Unum*, a



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more positive statement of the reality of this new country, not rebellion but that *out of many there is one*. Simitière then worked with Charles Thompson and they came up with the great



seal design that we actually have as our country's seal. This great design reflects the bald eagle. It holds images of peace and war, the

Olive branch, the 13 colonies, the stars of the colonies above, and over the eagle's head is the motto which we cherish: *From the Many, One*. It is easy for us to think that rebellion against

tyrannical power is the right thing to do, and yet we need to be challenged from God's word that Christians exist in the

state not to lead an armed revolution to overthrow earthly power, but Christians exist in society for society. They function as the

conscience of society, and there is only a very limited place for civil

disobedience, when the laws of the land require us to violate God's explicit decrees.

Christians serve a higher authority, but that higher authority calls the state to be what it should be. We saw this very powerfully in January, in how Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrestled with both obedience to the governing structures and then when the governing structures required him to violate God's moral order. That is something we must protest like the Hebrew midwives in Exodus saying Pharaoh's decree to kill infants must be resisted. We must stand for sanctity of life, both for the unborn and the aged. Christians should be leaders in concern for the environment because they have a theological basis for it. Christians should be leaders in urban renewal because they know that this world leads to a heavenly city. Christians should be leaders in providing healthy, accessible food for all because all people are made in God's image and likeness. These issues are ones that we have foundation for from Scripture and should care for even more than the state. Yet, we do not move with armed revolution against the state. That would radically misrepresent who we are. Christians are to be a community that obeys earthly power. They are to be a community that obeys heavenly power. As Paul describes next, the Christian community is to be a people that is living in loving obedience not only to government, but living in loving obedience to the ultimate governing authority, which is God Himself.

In Romans 13:8, Paul says:

"Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law."

This is not an abstract to sentimental loving. This is the loving that is actually active and fulfills the heart of the Torah, the meaning of God's revealed will, the meaning of God's law. Paul says in Romans 13:9:

“For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,’ and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Love does no wrong to the other, because love is the fulfillment of God's law. This summarizing of Scripture we hear from our Lord Himself in Mark 12:31:

“The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.’”

Galatians 5:14 says:

“For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

James 2:8 says:

“If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well.”

God's Word calls us to become a people characterized by loving obedience, and that obedience then has a tremendous effect on the lives around us. That obedience has a tremendous effect within our families. That obedience to God has a tremendous effect in our societies, in our neighborhoods. The imagery of submission is not to acquiesce in silence. It is the image used of husbands and wives. It doesn't mean that wives are to be silent in relation to their husbands. It means that wives are to be in a posture of support, of respect, of honoring, so Christians exist towards the other in a posture that loves the community, loves the neighbor, loves the family, and causes God's new humanity to be on display in the lives around us. Our new life in Christ is real. It is not something that we hold in private devotion. It is something that manifests itself in how we live, how we act, and this way of living, this way of acting, is visible. It is visible inside our family structures where the life of Christ is replayed, where the gospel is on display, where forgiveness is granted, where costly, sacrificial love is offered, where a community would say to its neighbors: “We will come and give our time on a Saturday, and we are going to serve our neighbors.” This opens the hearts of people to receiving a word of Christ. I want to challenge you if you have not participated in a Go! Cincinnati. This is such an easy, fun way to touch the community right next to us. This new life marks a new beginning, a new humanity, signaling God's new creation of the recovering of our humanity. “Love your neighbor as yourself,” the Scripture commands. Stand in a posture toward society that holds in trust that you keep a conscience for society. It is a shame when Christians are accused or condemned for criminal acts. That does not reflect who we are called to be.

The final paragraph of Romans 13 takes us into this wonderful image of God's new creation, of a new time. In Romans 13:11, Paul says:

“Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.”

You know what time it is. Some of you are thinking: “It's time to take mom out for brunch, and I wish I had made those reservations.” I myself was one of those tardy to reserve, so we are going to have a Mother's Day dinner tonight as a family. Where we had wanted to go to eat for brunch was already filled. But, what time is it in Scripture? What time is it in Romans 13? Paul tells us we know what time it is. It is time for us to wake up from sleep. He says salvation is closer, it is nearer to us than when we first believed. Salvation is something that we have now and yet will have in fullness as we look ahead. The imagery of waking up in Scripture is used in Daniel 12 to describe the resurrection from the dead. Daniel 12:2 says:

“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, . . .”

In 1 Thessalonians 5:4-8a, Paul says:

“But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, . . .”

The day of God's new creation in Christ has dawned; the night is far gone. The day is at hand, he says, so let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. We are to live as children of the day, and this image is not just a metaphor. It is a signal that God's new creation has begun. Some of the people I admire the most are people who serve our community in law enforcement. That is a difficult job. It is a difficult job to spend most of your working time with people who are pushing the edge, seeking to tear down the collective life that we have together. Policemen, policewomen, that I have known over time get worn down in their own lives. I remember a man who had served for a couple of decades as a police officer, and I remember his telling me that bad things happen at night. He said that when the sun goes down and it's dark, a lot of bad things happen. The image in Romans 13 is that the light of day, the God who said ‘Let there be light,’ this new creation light has actually dawned. We are called to be people who live like the sun has actually come up and that the beginning of God's new world in which righteousness dwells has actually started. You and I are called to be part of that, to signal that, to represent that in the world. We are signposts of God's real future that has actually started. It is like we hold the moon rock in our hand and say it's really there. You can believe that the moon is made of cheese, but if you talk with Neil Armstrong, he will say: “It isn't. I have been there. Here's a stone.” God's new creation, do you believe that? It started when Jesus died and rose again. Your sins and mine are forgiven. We are filled with the Holy Spirit, and we actually begin to live in this new radical loving obedience that is impossible for us without the cross. But it is possible. It has begun: the life of Christ replayed, demonstrated in

lives around us, living as though the day has dawned. We had the opportunity to spend family vacation a couple of years ago in Hilton Head, and when you're on the Atlantic coast, the sun



comes up early. We sit in Cincinnati on the western edge of the Eastern time zone, so the sun comes up a little later here. When you're on the edge of the East Coast, right next to the ocean, the sun comes up quickly, powerfully, early, and the day starts. When you come out in the morning and walk out on the beach and it's dark, you see that the sky is starting to change as the sun starts to move. It comes up so quickly that people stream out onto the beach to

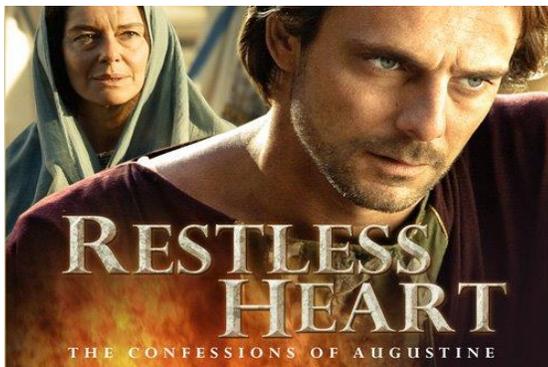
watch, but when the sun comes up, day is there. It cannot be pushed back down into the sea. You and I are called to live and act as people who have seen the beginning of the sunrise. This has a transformative effect on us. Romans 13:13 says:

“Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy.”

Let us walk as people of the day, not in the behaviors that characterize the night, of immorality, sensuality, arguing, jealousy. No barroom brawls for the people of God. No striving; no impropriety. We live as people who actually are participating in God's new creation. How do we do that? Romans 13:14 says:

“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”

We wear the clothes of the Lord Jesus Christ. We put on Christ and make no provision for the flesh, no provision for the appetites that would destroy lives and communities around us. This new humanity is real in Jesus Christ. We are changed into a people characterized by loving obedience. We are a people no longer conformed to this world, but transformed in a renewed mind, and the effect of this transformation is real and plays out in lives around us.



I want to close with telling you the story of a famous mother and a famous son: a mother whose life of prayer and dedication and pleading to God for her son played a significant role in his conversion; a son who saw a life of a Christian whose life was changed by the gospel, and this changed him. The life I want us to consider in closing is the life of Augustine. He is the subject of a recent film called *Restless Heart*. I

encourage you to see this film. It is based on his spiritual autobiography, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, which many have considered one of the greatest books written in Western

literature. You see Augustine this in the cover picture and his mother in the background. Monica prayed for him for years. Augustine was born in North Africa in AD 354. His father died when he was 16 years old. Like many families, his family cared only that he get a good education and be able to compete in the global marketplace, so he was trained in rhetoric to speak well. He received a very good education; he was making progress in his society, and yet his life was a wreck. During the period of his life equivalent to college, he became involved with many relationships of the opposite sex. He was living a life that he described as a hissing cauldron of lust. He was 19 years old when, he reflected, he was swollen with pride, given over to immorality, and his life was rapidly descending to the pit. His mother prayed for him earnestly, and over many years, God began to draw his heart to His own. He read Cicero's *Hortensia* and realized that life was more than having a good job; that life was more than making good money; that life was more than sexual conquest; that life was more about wisdom, and this book began to move him on a serious spiritual journey. By the spring of AD 385 when he was 31 years old, his mother, having prayed for him for many years, Augustine took notice of the transformed lives of Christians around him, like a young man named Anthony who had renounced well-paying jobs, who had renounced success in worldly criteria and had dedicated himself to God. Anthony signaled to Augustine this beginning of a new humanity, and it stunned him. He began to seek earnestly after God. He narrates the story, the moment of his conversion, in Book 8 of the *Confessions*. Augustine describes this time when he was trapped and caught in the behavior of the night, if you will, in immorality that he could not shake himself from. He was in awe of the holiness and dedication to God in men like Anthony. He wrestled with this, and this was the anguish of his soul. He went to a garden near his home with this best friend, Alypius, and these are Augustine's words. He said:

“There was a small garden attached to the house where we lodged. . . . I now found myself driven by the tumult in my breast to take refuge in this garden, where no one could interrupt that fierce struggle in which I was my own contestant. . . . I was beside myself with madness that would bring me sanity.

“I was dying a death that would bring me life. . . . I was frantic, overcome by violent anger with myself for not accepting your will and entering into your covenant. . . . I tore my hair and hammered my forehead with my fists; I locked my fingers and hugged my knees.”

This is a man in soul agony of laying aside the pleasures of this world, the behavior of the night and longing to embrace the path of God the new humanity. He says:

“I was held back [from Christ] by mere trifles. . . . They plucked at my garment of flesh and whispered, ‘Are you going to dismiss us? From this moment we shall never be with you again, for ever and ever.’ . . . And while I stood trembling at the barrier, on the other side I could see the chaste beauty of Continnence [self-control] in all her serene, unsullied joy, as she modestly beckoned me to cross over and to hesitate no more. She stretched out loving

hands to welcome and embrace me.”

Here is a man who saw the attractiveness of Christ, the attractiveness of the day, and he was in agony: “Do I leave aside the life of darkness and embrace Christ?” In soul agony he said:

“I flung myself down beneath a fig tree and gave way to the tears which now streamed from my eyes. . . In my misery I kept crying, ‘How long shall I go on saying “tomorrow, tomorrow”? Why not now? Why not make an end of my ugly sins at this moment?’”

As the tears fell from his eyes, he describes:

“All at once I heard the singsong voice of a child in a nearby house. Whether it was the voice of a boy or a girl I cannot say, but again and again it repeated the refrain 'Take it and read, take it and read.' At this I looked up, thinking hard whether there was any kind of game in which children used to chant words like these, but I could not remember ever hearing them before. I stemmed my flood of tears and stood up, telling myself that this could only be a divine command to open my book of Scripture and read the first passage on which my eyes should fall.”

He heard the child's voice in the neighboring house, “Take up and read, take up and read,” and so he went into his home and he saw the Bible that he had in his home, and he did what sometimes we do, he just dropped the Bible open, and he read the very first passage that his eyes dropped on. Would you believe that the very first passage his eyes fell upon was the end of the text of Romans 13. The man who was wrestling and agonizing, “Do I lay aside the works of darkness? Do I step into the light of day? Do I renounce this life that has caught and trapped me in my sin, immorality, to walk in the day? What do I do?” He opens the Bible and he reads Romans 13:13-14:

“Not in reveling in drunkenness, not in lust and wantonness, not in quarrels and rivalries. Rather, arm yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ; spend no more thought on nature and nature's appetites.”

He read those words and stepped forward. He said:

“I had no wish to read more and no need to do so. For in an instant, as I came to the end of the sentence, it was as though the light of confidence flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled.”

He embraced Christ, and he spent the next four decades of his life in Christ's service. He became, by God's providence, perhaps the greatest theologian in the church. Why? Because he saw Christ on display in the life of another; because his mother prayed for him for years; and because the power of God's Word transformed him from a man of the night into a man of the day.

The calling for us this morning from Romans 13 is to adopt a respectful stance. God forgive us when we are leaders in vitriolic rhetoric against the power structures of our society. God forgive us for so quickly asserting that we have the right to lead the rebellion rather than embrace the reality of *E Pluribus Unum*, out of many there is one, and that we exist in society as a conscience for society. We exist in society to demonstrate the reality of God's new creation in our families, in our communities, and in the lives around us, signaling to those around us that the end time light of the new creation has really gone off. The power is on. When people see you and see me and they say: "I've never seen anyone act that way. I've never seen anyone say 'no' to a good paying job and embrace a full-time ministry and dedicate themselves to God. Why in the world would you do that?" Yet, seeing in that very thing people shaped by loving obedience does actually change the world. Save your energy from the blog posts and exhaust yourselves in a long, hard, loving obedience to Christ, earnest prayer for those around you, active hands-on service to the communities around us, and let's let God transform the world, because the sun has come up over the horizon and no one can push it back down into the sea. Let's pray.

Dear Lord, we give You our praise. Lord God, we thank You that You are at work in the world around us, and You have changed us, Lord. You have changed us from a rebellious people to an obedient one. Lord, You have honored the prayers of many for each of us, and You have shown the light of the gospel, the light of Christ, the face of the living God upon us. Lord, I want to pray this morning for those struggling in some aspect of their life, where the old creation, where the deeds of darkness are still powerfully exerting influence or still holding a tight grip. Father, would You release us from those bonds to walk as sons and daughters of the King, to live as children of the light, children of the day. Father, we praise You that the tomb is empty, that Jesus Christ sits enthroned, that the power of the Holy Spirit is available. Would You fill us now anew, we pray.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.