

## VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN LIFE

Romans 13:1-14

Key verse: 13:12

"The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light."

Many people say, "Human life is the survival of the fittest in the jungle." Still others say, "Human life is like an intense boxing match in a ring." In a boxing match there is always a victor and a loser. The victor is joyful and gets some fight money. On the other hand, the loser is miserable and gets nothing but shame and injuries. The same is true with Christian life. Jacob compared human life to a pilgrimage. He said to Pharaoh, "The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty. My years have been few and difficult..." (Ge 47:9a) Paul compared Christian life to racing and fighting. 2 Timothy 4:7 says, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." Paul testified that his life had been literally a battle, although it was a spiritual battle. This life principle applies to common people. As there have been innumerable battles and wars in history, so there are unceasing battles and wars in the life of faith. In the battle or war there is always a victor and a loser. Since we are God's people we must win many victories through our lives of faith and render glory to God. Romans chapter 13 tells us the secrets of a victorious life.

First, we must submit to the authorities. (1-7) Look at verse 1. "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God." Here, Paul lays down the principle that we must submit to the authorities. What a ridiculous principle it is for modern people! Fallen men want to exercise authority over others. But they don't want to submit to others' authority. To submit oneself to someone, especially to the authorities, may be the most difficult thing to do. Especially the people of Israel regarded submission to the Roman authorities as a suicidal act or surrendering to the evil of the world. They would rather use terrorism against the Roman government. They would rather resist until none of them were left. They would rather wreck the houses and assassinate the families of their own fellow Jews who paid taxes to the Roman government. This was normal Jewish conduct, because they believed in God only and contributed to God, and no one else. In terms of nationalism, they may have been right. But history would say that the Israelites resisted to the end until they all died, and that the Roman Empire was strong but it disappeared from the stage of human history. In view of history, the people of Israel contributed nothing to their country by blindly resisting the authorities. So as Paul laid down the principle of how to deal with the authorities, we also need a Biblical principle of how to deal with the authorities of the world.

In verse 1, Paul counsels Christians to obey the authorities absolutely. His teaching surprises us. But when we study the Bible, this principle is not unique to Paul. The flow of all the epistles repeats the same principle. 1 Timothy 2:1,2 urges us [to pray](#) for kings and all those in authority. And Titus 3:1 tells us to be subject to rulers and authorities. 1 Peter 2:13,14a tells us to submit ourselves "for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether

to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors." According to the Bible teachings our submission to the worldly authorities is not political submission but spiritual submission. Spiritual submission is to [pray for](#) rulers and honor them as God's servants. Still, we have to think about why God's people should submit to the authorities.

Firstly, we must submit to the authorities because they are under God's sovereign rule. The last part of verse 1 says, "The authorities that exist have been established by God." Paul's view of the state was that the Roman Empire was a divinely ordained instrument to save the world from chaos. Paul saw that the Roman Empire was in the hand of God. However, to the people of Israel Paul's views of the state and of submission to the authorities were not acceptable.

When we look around the world, many things are happening. We wonder and say to ourselves, "What's going on? What's going to happen?" But God's people should not think in such a fatalistic way. God's people must believe that God is ruling the world according to his own sovereign purpose. For example, when God wanted to return Israel from Babylonian captivity, God raised King Cyrus of Persia and destroyed Babylon and brought the Israelites home to the holy city Jerusalem. When the Roman Empire conquered the world of the time, people only thought about the cruelty of the Roman authorities. But behind the scenes, God was working for his own purpose. He was preparing to send the messengers of the gospel to the whole world through Roman roads, which extended from Rome to all other countries and from all other countries to Rome. During World War II the use of the atomic bomb seemed to have been a most catastrophic and cruel event in human history. But after World War II many peoples of many nations came to God. In other words, after World War II a season of Christ came. After World War II God eventually began to tear down the communist system so that Russians may worship God freely without fear. Therefore God's people must firmly believe in the sovereignty of God.

Secondly, when Paul said to submit to the authorities it meant that we must overcome any kind of situation or circumstance, with the power of faith and cope with any kind of ruler so that we may win many spiritual victories and render them to God. Therefore, when Paul said, "submit to the authorities," it had a significant spiritual meaning: It was to engage in the spiritual battle. God's people must learn how to win the spiritual victory over adverse human conditions or irresistible human circumstances. In short, God's people cannot be victims of circumstances. God's people must win spiritual victories and render them to God. Our missionaries to Russia are under unbearable human situations and circumstances. They have no center and must endure hard winters and an unstable economy. But no missionary complains about anything. In that situation, they spread the gospel all the more and increased the number of Bible-believing people in Russia and rendered glory to God.

Thirdly, we must submit to the authorities out of obligation. It is easy for us to fear the authorities for no obvious reason. But we should not fear them. Instead we must [pray](#) for them and work hard doing what is right. Then we are free from the fear of authorities. On the other hand, if we don't work hard and only do what is wrong we suffer from guilty consciences and from possible punishment. Therefore, it is necessary for God's people to work hard doing what is right, according to our consciences, not because of possible punishment. Read

verses 4 and 5. Moreover, we must submit to the authorities out of obligation. Authorities are given to man to protect the nation and to serve its people. Those in authority rule the country and give their full time to governing. Therefore, we are obliged to pay taxes and give respect and honor to those who are in authority.

At that time, the Roman government promoted peace and order to those who were a part of the Empire. However, Paul anticipated that they would persecute Christians because Christians would not worship the Emperor. Still, Paul urges God's people to submit to the authorities. In short, God's people must regard the authorities, be they king, dictator, or judge, as God's servants and respect them and honor them because God rules the world in his sovereign will and they are his servants.

Second, the obligation of love. (8-10) Look at verse 8. "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law." In this verse "debt to love" means an obligation to love others. Living in this world, we have many things to do. Some must study hard. Some must prepare for their wedding. But we must first fulfill our obligation to love others. We must love our fellow brothers, our nation and God's people as our obligation. But sinful men cannot fulfill this obligation of love. One young man bought some cookies to give his wife. But on the way home he ate them up. So those who are in Christ should learn how to overcome their selfishness and how to fulfill their obligation to love others. This is the reason Paul quoted only the second part of the Ten Commandments which are related to our neighbors. Let's read verses 9 and 10. To hate others is Satan's battle. But to fulfill our obligation to love others is a godly battle. To love others is not an option but an obligation from God. When we fulfill our obligation to love others we feel really good, sensing that we won a spiritual victory and we pleased God.

Third, understand the present time. (11) Look at verse 11. "And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed." There have always been some strange Christians who try to fix the date of our Lord's second coming. Some time ago, magic artists tried to deceive naive Christians, saying that he was coming in 1992. But the Bible does not tell us when he will come. If we knew when he was coming, we would indulge in sin and repent a few hours before his coming. So God did not tell us when he will come. Nobody knows when he will come, not even Jesus himself. Nobody knows when he is coming. It is because God has set the time and date by his own authority. (Ac 1:7; 1 Th 5:1)

The phrase, "understanding the present time," in verse 11 means that we must have a prophetic vision. We should not be fearful because the world is evil. We must not despair because we are under unfavorable human situations. Rather we must have spiritual eyes to see what God is doing at the present time. Paul urged the Ephesians, who lived in a chaotic world, to see the world with God's eyes. Ephesians 1:18 says, "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints..." Again in verse 22, "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church."

The early Christians believed three things: first, Jesus' crucifixion,

second, Jesus' resurrection, and third, Jesus' second coming. They lived with the faith that Jesus is coming soon. Their faith in Jesus' coming again was very pure. They believed that Jesus would come again and restore the whole world and complete the work of salvation. But their faith in the second coming of Jesus was not unbalanced. They believed Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection and second coming as one body. They were faithful in prayer, joyful in hope and patient in affliction, serving others in the name of the Lord. Their lives of faith based on the gospel, composed of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection and second coming, were very sincere. Their faith transcended time and space. They were like the 5 virgins waiting for the bridegroom to come any minute. (Mt 25:1-13)

These days many people have adopted an easygoing mentality. As a result, they are spiritually deranged; finally they despair. Among these despaired people many became drug Christians. They shop around at many churches so as to overcome their despair. In some churches people get emotionally high, yelling and waving their hands in the air. But soon they feel they despaired even more. What is worse, they become very fearful. One of them said "Hello" to one of his Christian friends on New Year's Day. So his friend asked him, "Do you still have missionary calling to Mainland China?" He answered, "No. I am too fearful to think about that." Drug Christianity made him emotionally high and then very fearful.

What could we do at the present time? As Paul admonishes us, we must be joyful in hope. (12:12) There is no hope, but there is always hope in God. We must be joyful in hope, believing that God will make America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. When we have a prophetic vision in God and stick to the basic Bible teachings we can live victorious lives.

Fourth, let's put on the armor of light. (12-14) Look at verse 12. "The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light." The word "night" is the symbol of darkness. In darkness, many people do many evil and shameful things. But we are sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So we must put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Here, the words "armor of light" describe the act of a soldier who escaped from a POW camp and came back to his army camp. Here we learn that our real enemies are within us. To put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light is the most intense spiritual battle and we should not give up.

Many people say, "Don't be extreme. Don't be too fundamental. Just be nice." These days most Americans seem to adopt the Chinese philosophy, "the middle way." But those who want to go through "the middle way" have in their subconscious world deep love of the darkness. They indulge in wild parties in outspoken despair (orgies), and in drunkenness, and in indomitable desire for sexual immorality and rock-parties (debauchery), and in a spirit of division. They also become slaves of jealousy; they really don't like others' success or promising future. Let's read verses 13 and 14.

Look at verse 14. "Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." As we know, we really want to live a life of faith. Also, we want to live a decent life in Christ. But this is beyond our ability. So Paul said, "Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ." As ancient warriors

wore helmets to protect themselves, so we must clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ to protect ourselves from the deeds of darkness. As we know well, we cannot change ourselves. But when we are in Jesus, Jesus can transform us. St. Augustine was an intellectual person. But he was always sad and uneasy. So he read and studied many subjects deeply. But he was still sad and uneasy. One day he happened to read Romans 13:13,14. Then heavenly sunlight came into his heart. He could not change himself. But the word of God changed him completely from a man of uneasiness into a man of peace.

In this passage we learn that God is the Sovereign Ruler of history and the authorities of the world are his servants. We also learn that we must overcome all kinds of circumstances and situations with the power of faith. Most of all we learn that we must decide to fight the spiritual battle and render many victories to God.