

Romans Chapter 13- John Karmelich

1. My title for this chapter is, "Dealing with issues beyond our control".
 - a) I'll come back to this theme in a moment.
2. This lesson is a continuation of "Part 3" of the Book of Romans:
 - a) The first part of Romans, Chapters 1-8, essentially says, "Without God, we can't". It is about man's sinful nature and how God requires "perfection" for salvation. A main point of Chapters 1-8 is that God's promises to the Christian are unconditional. As long as we are trusting in Jesus for our salvation, God cannot go back on His unconditional promises. It is His reputation on the line, not ours.
 - b) The second part of Romans, which is Chapters 9-11, is another example of the fact that God cannot go back on His promises. It has to do with God's promises to the Nation of Israel. The main point is that there is still a future salvation plan for the Jewish Nation, as again, God cannot go back on His unconditional promises.
 - c) The third part, which started in the last lesson, is the "practical" aspect of Romans.
 - d) Chapters 12-16 are dealing with the issue of, "I believe in Jesus, now what?"
 - e) The first few verses of Chapter 12 are the methodology for living the Christian life. The key phrase is "present your body as a living sacrifice". The idea is that we as Christians live for God's will in our life moment by moment. It is about catching ourselves doing things that are not pleasing to God and changing in ways that are pleasing to God. It is about regularly praying for God's will to be done, as we need God's power in order to accomplish His will. It is about being submissive to God's desire for our lives and acting accordingly. We study God's Word to learn the commands and "patterns" that God desires for our lives.
 - f) The rest of Chapter 12 was mostly practical examples. They range from such easy things as loving one's enemies ☺ to being hospitable to others. The secret to living the Christian life is to let God work through us to give us the power to live the life God desires for us. It is another example of "Without God, we can't".
 - g) God desires to work through people in order to get His will done. Let's face it, God could make us "robots" or send audible messages attached to deadly lightening bolts saying, "Here is what I want to today, get moving!" ☺
 - i) Instead, God desires to stay in the background, as He wants people to come to Him by faith, and not by blatant evidence. The corollary cliché to "Without God we can't" is "Without us, God won't". Since God desires to work through people, He then gives us the power to make a difference. God asks us to do things that would be impossible without His power to do so. We as Christians must be dependent upon God in order to live the life that is pleasing to God.
3. This leads back to the introduction theme: Dealing with issues beyond our control".
 - a) Chapter 13 can be paraphrased as the Christian asking, "OK, I can understand all that stuff in Chapter 12. Chapter 12 is all about the stuff that Christians can personally deal with. How does one show Christian love in situations beyond our control? It is one thing to love an "enemy" next door. That is having an impact for Jesus and being a good witness. What about say, living in a country with a corrupt government? Honoring those government leaders isn't going to make that government any less corrupt. Why and how should I act on things that are beyond my control?"
 - i) This leads to the specific example of Chapter 13 is "Christians and government".
 - ii) My point is as you read these bible verses, not only do they apply to our attitude toward government, but also toward things that are beyond our control.
 - iii) Getting to the verses themselves, Paul is going to say in effect that government leaders are God-appointed and we should respect that government.

- iv) Let me try to paraphrase Paul's main point of this chapter: "I'm not here to say that Roman Emperor is a good guy or the Roman government is desirable. If I, Paul were emperor I would change lots of things on the spot. That's not the point. The point is that the institution of government is God-ordained and we as Christians have to live within that institution whether we like it or not. Given that, we have to make the best of it. We have to have a good attitude and accept the things that are beyond our control."
- v) This means we are to accept our government leaders as being God-ordained. That includes the ones we cannot stand. If Paul can call a pagan-worshipping Roman Emperor "God-ordained", then we can call our leaders "God-ordained".
- b) What does this mean for Christians and our government?
 - i) Does that mean voting is irrelevant? No, that's not the point.
 - ii) Does that mean Christians shouldn't get involved in politics? That's not the point.
 - iii) Does that mean Christians ignore the "wrongs" of our world? That's not it either.
 - iv) The point is we accept the things we cannot change. God does not want anything blocking our relationship with Him. If we are angry with our political leaders, that anger blocks our love relationship between God and us. That anger gets in the way of a love relationship between ourselves and those around us.
 - v) Let me also say there are exceptions to this rule. For example, if a government leader says believing in Jesus is illegal, then God does call us to disobey that specific order, and still obey all the other laws. The dividing line between obedience and disobedience is God's commands. The rest is "fair game" for government and we must be obedient to government leaders no matter what.
- 4. The application of, "Dealing with issues beyond our control" goes beyond government.
 - a) The main example used in Chapter 13 is "government".
 - b) This theme can be applied to any issue in our life beyond our control.
 - c) For example, we may be dealing with a loved one dying of cancer. Sometimes we pray and pray, and understand it is "God's will" for this person to go through us. I can't explain it; I just have to accept it. If it wasn't for the fact there is a heaven and people do live forever, I couldn't accept the cruelty of it. We have to understand we live in a sin-filled world and it affects us in ways that are beyond our understanding.
 - d) The point here is about our attitude despite what is going on around us. God is not calling us to be passive and just accept things. There are situations where we have to fight it out or do what we can to resolve situations. The point is we have to leave the results up to God and not up to us. God is in control, whether we choose to accept it or not. We can have peace and accept that fact, or be frustrated and fight that fact.
 - e) I have seen God perform some of His best miracles when we truly let go of the results. It is us saying in effect, "OK, God, I've tried this and that. I've done all I can. The results are now Your problem. If it is Your will for this thing to happen, help me to accept it and give me the strength and peace to deal with it. Let not this situation block my love-relationship with You and let it not block my love for others around me, Amen.
 - i) Often, God then steps in once we truly let it go. It's not a guarantee, but I have to admit I've seen this happen a lot. When it does, make sure to turn back to God and give Him the glory for that miracle.
- 5. 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.
 - a) If you study the bible carefully, there are very few "institutions" that have been established by God himself as opposed to established by man.
 - i) For starters, marriage is God-instituted with Adam and Eve. (Ref. Genesis 2:24)
 - ii) The Nation of Israel is "God-instituted" as God called Abraham to start a nation to be His chosen people. (Reference Genesis 12:2)

- iii) The Christian church is “God-instituted”. (Ref. Acts Chapter 2)
- iv) In Genesis Chapter 10, there is a list of nations. It is often called the “Table of Nations”. A point of that list is “nations” is a God-instituted concept. Remember that when humans tried to unite under “Tower of Babel” (Genesis 11), God essentially broke it up. We get the idea that God desires that we as humans live under specific nations or tribes as a form of government leadership.
- b) Since God has ordained government, then we must respect the leaders of that government. This leads to the first word of Verse 1: “Everyone”. The verse says, “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities.” That is pretty inclusive.
 - i) Paul is saying the reason we submit ourselves to government authorities is not because our leaders are good people, but only because the concept of government is a God-ordained concept. If God set it up, we must obey it.
- c) Do you mean I have to obey that rotten so-and-so who “stole the election?” Yes. ☺
 - i) I’ll take it one step further. Not only do we have to obey them, but God calls us to pray for them:
 - ii) Paul said, “I (Paul) urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.” (1st Tim. 2:1 NIV)
 - a) Notice the purpose of this prayer: “That we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.” The prayer is not for the government to change some laws. The prayer is not for the government to stop their corruption. The prayer is for Christians to live peaceful lives for God.
- d) To understand this, we have to get back to the “big purpose” for Christian living:
 - i) Paul said, “It was he (God) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”
 - a) (Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, 4:11-13 NIV)
 - b) I’ll argue that these verses are the best description one can find for the purpose of living the Christian life. It is the idea that God gives each of us gifts and each of us “jobs” so that we all help each other grow in our faith toward God. Part of that job is to bring in new members as well. That is why bringing in new members (i.e., “evangelism”) is a part of this purpose.
- e) This leads us back to understanding Christians and “government”:
 - i) Christians should be focusing on telling people there is a hell. A person may be a moral giant, but they are still far from perfect and need Jesus for their salvation. Focusing our efforts on having a better government makes our lives on earth better. Focusing on winning people for Christ saves people for eternity.
 - ii) I am not arguing that getting involved in government is a bad thing. Some Christians are called to that role and be a part of that life-long political struggle to do the right thing. My argument is to put politics in the perspective of eternity. Getting good people elected makes our life easier today. Getting the government out of the way so we can practice Christianity should be our primary prayer. That is Paul’s point of praying for kings “so we can have a peaceful life”.
- f) This gets us back to Verse 1. I knew I’d get there eventually. ☺
 - i) The point of Verse 1 is that we as Christians need to submit ourselves to government authorities only because those authorities are God-ordained.
 - ii) The idea of “submit” is to obey the laws that are passed. Christians can make exceptions to laws that are direct violations of God’s commandments, but that’s it.

- iii) This includes paying our taxes, even if the money goes to things we don't approve of, we still must pay those taxes. To quote Jon Curson, "I don't believe Roman Emperor tax money was used to build Christian schools and hospitals". The point is Paul commanded Christians of that day to be submissive to the Empire.
 - iv) We'll expand more upon this in the next couple of verses. Speaking of which...
6. Verse 2: Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.
- a) Verse 2 is the "corollary" to Verse 1. In other words, Verse 2 is an expanded commentary on the principal that government is a God-ordained institution.
 - i) Verse 2 is saying in effect, "If government is God-ordained and Christians rebel against that government, than what we are doing is rebelling against God".
 - b) This verse can bring up all sorts of "what-if" historical questions:
 - i) For example, was the American Revolution a violation of Verses 1-2? Did the American colonists violate this principal of submission in its revolution? One could argue yes, but in God's grace, He "used that fact" to establish a country that has accomplished great things and has been a great witness for God's name. (Illustration source: John MacArthur)
 - a) I don't have an answer for this one. I just pose the question. ☺
 - c) Another issue is: what about really oppressive governments in the world? What about places where Christianity is illegal? To answer that question, one has to remember the principal of "Higher Authority". For example, when the religious leaders told the apostles to stop preaching about Jesus, Peter responded with "We must obey God rather than man" (Acts 5:29 NIV). The point is there are times when disobedience to that law is necessary, specifically when it violates God's laws. If a government leader says, "murder is acceptable" than I would argue disobedience to that particular law is necessary.
 - d) The best way to deal with this issue is the historical context. Paul wrote this when the leadership in Rome was corrupt and Christianity was a crime. Yet, Paul is arguing to be submissive to the Roman Government.
 - i) I don't believe Paul meant to be submissive to the point of ignoring one's faith in Jesus. One has to read these verses in balance with the rest of the bible.
 - ii) If one is being chased out of town for being a Christian, it is "God's will" to run. That what was practiced in the book of Acts. The point is not to be passive about government. The point is to accept the fact that God has a purpose for those government leaders to be there, even if it is oppressive to our lives.
 - iii) If it weren't for the Roman Empire, Christianity would never spread as quickly as it did. A common language and a good road system gave Paul and others the opportunity to spread the message. Think about the fact the Roman Empire was at its peak size at the same time Paul was a missionary for Jesus! God has His purposes for allowing "corrupt" governments to exist. If we can change them peacefully, we should. In the meantime, we must submit to their authority.
 - e) One last point about Verse 2: If we fail to be submissive to government, the verse says we bring judgment on ourselves.
 - i) This is not about salvation. God's "judgment" is broader than that concept.
 - ii) God's judgment can include for example, whether or not He allows a certain church group to go on existing (e.g., Revelation 2:5) or a city or town to go on existing (e.g., Matthew 11:21-24).
 - iii) Remember that there are rewards in heaven for Christians based on our behavior. (E.g., See 1st Corinthians 3:8, Revelation 22:12) This is a topic for another day.
 - iv) My point here is that we are to be submissive to government leaders. Failure to do so may not affect our salvation, but God has other ways of "pronouncing judgment upon us" other than the salvation issue.

7. Verse 3 Part 1: For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong.
- a) The idea of this sentence is that if we obey government laws, we should have no fears of punishment by that government.
 - i) For example, if we are driving the speed limit, we should not be in fear of being pulled over for speeding.
 - ii) The point of this verse is those who disobey man's laws have to live in fear of being caught. If we obey such laws, there is no fear.
 - b) Let's get back to the opening theme of "Dealing with issues beyond our control".
 - i) God wants us to have a loving relationship with Him. If we are stressed because we are disobeying government laws, that stress blocks our relationship with God. It blocks our ability to be loving to others if we are busy worried about being caught for disobeying the laws of those in authority.
 - ii) What about those "higher laws"? What if our government says Christianity is illegal and we have to secretly meet in caves? What about that stress? In such situations (which don't exist in the United States, thank God!) we are being obedient to God despite the government. That should relieve our stress knowing that we are pleasing to God and not immoral laws.
 - iii) What about the fact that our tax money is used for immoral things? That is no excuse to not pay taxes in the first place. Paul and his companions had to pay taxes to Roman Government and they are much worse than anything we can imagine today. Paul's concern was saving people for eternity, not trying to improve the world around him. That should be our primary concern as well. If we can also improve the world around us too, praise God! My point is that should be a secondary concern after people's salvation and relationship with God.
 - iv) The main point is we need to be submissive to government laws so that we can have peace with God. Being disobedient to government causes stress and worry and that blocks our relationship with God and makes us ineffective Christians. Remember, "Without God we can't". If "things" are blocking our relationship with God, then it blocks God's power to work within us. Stress, worry, and yes, disobedience to government authorities are examples of things we do to block our relationship with God.
 - c) We need to "let go" of things beyond our control: For example, what about oppressive taxes? God calls us to be submissive to government and that means paying those taxes. What if we say, "I can't afford to live unless I cheat": The answer is, "Where God leads, God provides". If God wants us to be submissive to government, then God will make it possible for us to survive financially. We may not "like the answer" if we submit to authorities, but again, where God leads, God provides."
 - d) Another issue is election voting. If we live in a society that allows voting, then we should take advantage of that privilege. Christians should study candidates and vote based on the best knowledge available. My point is after the elections, we need to "let it go" and accept the fact that the winners are "God's appointed leaders". It doesn't mean we don't fight to change bad laws if we have the opportunity. It means we accept the laws at hand only because we accept the idea that government is a God-ordained institution.
8. Verse 3, Part 2: Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you.
- a) Let me start with an illustration: A policeman will never pull us over and say, "You know, I just want to commend you for driving the speed limit. Keep up the good work, I'm proud of you". ☺ My point is we are rarely commended by government leaders for doing the right thing.
 - i) Paul is saying that if we do what is right "he" (government leaders) will commend us. Since that rarely happens, I believe there must be more to Paul's point.

- b) With that in mind, notice the word “he” in the second sentence. The “he” does refer to government leaders. We know that by reading this sentence in context of Verse 4.
 - c) It is God that ordains these government leaders. We become good witnesses to these leaders by being submissive to their commands. The government does not have the time and resources to thank all of us who obey the laws. They can barely focus on trying to catch those who disobey the laws. My point is we don’t get commended with pats on the back for being obedient to the laws. We are commended by our living witness for God by submitting to government laws.
 - d) God “commends us” by submitting to government and then living in peace knowing we have nothing to fear if we do no wrong. We are free to develop that loving and submissive relationship to God’s will for our lives since we are not stressed out by being disobedient to government laws.
9. Verse 4: For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.
- a) Let’s start with the reminder that “he” in Verse 4 refers to government leaders.
 - i) Paul says that “he” is “God’s servant”. That “he” may not be aware of it, but he is.
 - b) There is a Proverb that applied here: “The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.” (Proverbs 21:1, NIV)
 - i) The point of that Proverb, as well as the first part of this verse is that God works “behind the scenes” on leaders whether they realize or it. Since their role has a major impact on those under them, they are “influenced” by God.
 - ii) The prime biblical example of this was the Pharaoh of Egypt at the time of Moses. The Pharaoh didn’t believe in God. Yet, the story clearly states that God raised up Pharaoh for that particular moment and God “hardened Pharaoh’s heart” in order to suit God’s purposes. (References: Exodus 9:16, 9:12, 10:1, et. al.)
 - iii) The point is “the government leader we can’t stand” is still God appointed! Pray for them. Pray that God may use them for His will to get done. Pray like Paul told Timothy so that we as Christians can live peaceful and effective lives under them. (Reference to 1st Timothy 2:1)
 - c) The next key word is “the sword”.
 - i) During the Roman Empire, the most common way prisoners were executed was by cutting off their head by a sword. Crucifixion was only used for the worst crimes. Death by a sword was a far more common means of capitol punishment.
 - ii) Paul is saying in effect to Christians, “Be very fearful of the government leaders because they have the power to kill you if you violate their laws. You may not like those particular leaders, but God put them there for a reason. Focus your life on being an effective witness for Jesus and do your best not to be a lawbreaker.”
 - d) God understands that we live in a sinful world. In order to keep sin “in check”, God ordained governments. One of the main purposes of governments is to protect innocent people from getting hurt. Therefore, government leaders all the way down to local city officials and policeman are “God-ordained” to protect the innocent from getting hurt.
 - i) For what it is worth, around election time, I like praying for whoever will be our new future leaders. I understand that whoever is elected is “God-ordained”. A good prayer is for God to prepare their hearts and give them good discernment.
 - ii) Do I still smuggle in a prayer for my favorite candidates? Guilty as charged. ☹️ After the election is over, one must accept whoever is elected as God-ordained and pray for them. Praying for the elected leaders we can’t stand helps us to have peace with God and not be angry over the election results.

10. Verse 5: Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.
- a) To paraphrase Paul, "It is necessary to obey all the government laws, not only to avoid jail time but also so we don't feel guilty about breaking those laws".
 - b) Again, this is about avoiding stress that can block our relationship with God. If we're busy worrying about being caught, it causes stress so that we have trouble focusing on God in prayer.
 - c) There is another reason for law obedience I haven't brought up as of yet: We need to be obedient in order to be a good witness to people around us.
 - i) Does breaking government laws have anything to do with salvation? Technically, no. The problem is our neighbors don't know that. They could think, "That guy or gal calls him or herself a Christian, yet they are being hauled off to court for breaking the law. I don't want to be like them."
 - ii) The point is a reason for being obedient to government authorities has to do with being a public witness to those around us.
11. Verse 6: This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing.⁷ Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.
- a) Now comes the verse nobody likes: the biblical support for paying taxes. ☺
 - b) Paul's point is that if these government leaders are God-ordained, then we should honor and submit to them by paying the taxes that are due.
 - c) During the times of the Roman Empire, there was a sales tax and an income tax. (Gee, what's changed today? ☺) Paul's words he used for taxes (i.e., "taxes" and "revenues") in the original Greek, apply pretty closely to these two types of taxes.
 - d) Does this mean we should ignore legal tax deductions? No. The government sets up those deductions for us as incentives to make certain financial decisions. That is not the issue. Use whatever tax deductions one can.
 - e) I have watched Christians justify cheating on their taxes because they think the taxes are illegal or immoral. In such cases, do you think the tax system was any better during the days of the Roman Empire when Paul wrote this? Verse 6 calls us to pay our taxes.
 - f) Like most people, I find our tax system repressive. In the United States, the average person works roughly five months out of the year in all the taxes that we pay. That's pretty repressive. Yet Paul is saying in effect, "Look, these leaders are God-ordained and one has to pay them." I would add that if we could legally change the system, let's do so. In the meantime, the taxes still must be paid."
 - g) There are many who complain, "If I paid all that was due, I could not afford to live". My response is, "Where God leads, God provides". If God cares for us, and God has called us to pay these taxes, then God will provide a way for us to live. We need to have faith that God will provide in such situations.
 - i) David wrote, "I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread." (Psalm 37:25 NIV)
 - h) One last thing: Notice the word "honor" is there in this verse as well.
 - i) That means not only are we to pay taxes, but also to honor our leaders.
 - ii) Does that mean I can't complain about our government leaders? Isn't complaining about politicians our God-given right? No. ☺
 - iii) As a Christian, Paul is calling us to give honor to a politician because of their office, not for what they believe in or what they stand for.
 - iv) A good example is how Paul treated Roman governors and the Jewish High Priest. Paul may have disagreed with everything they stood for, but Paul still treated them with the dignity because of their office. Paul even apologized when the high priest slapped Paul because that guy was the high priest. (Ref.: Acts 23:2-3).

12. 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.
- a) One thing I always enjoy about Paul is that he likes to give positive illustrations to go with tough demands on Christians. Paul connects the idea of “tax debts” with “debt of love to one another.
 - b) Let’s talk about what “let no debt remain outstanding” means:
 - i) There are some Christians who take this to an extreme. They argue that Christians should have no debt whatsoever. We should pay for all things up front with no exceptions. My favorite response to that is, “Do you pay an electric bill? Do you realize you are “accumulating debt” until your monthly bill arrives?” ☺
 - ii) Jesus himself subtly condones the lending system. He gave a parable about using one’s God-given gifts to make a difference for Him. (Ref.: Matthew 25:14-30). My point here is Jesus said in effect, ‘The least you could do is give what gifts I give you and put in the bank so I can get some interest on it.’ (A paraphrase of Matthew 25:27). In that verse, Jesus is subtly condoning the banking system, which makes money by lending.
 - iii) My point here is that in Romans 13:8, Paul is making the point of paying off one’s debts when they come due. It is not anti-borrowing. It is anti-borrowing what we cannot afford to pay back. For example, I believe it’s acceptable for Christians to have a home loan or a car loan as long as they have the ability to make their monthly payments. There is also a danger of too much debt, but that is off-topic.
 - c) Paul is also saying that when we make our last loan payment, we are done with that debt. Paul is contrasting that fact that our “debt” to love one another is never fulfilled.
 - i) In other words, we can’t say, “OK, I did thirteen loving deeds today; I can call it a week.” ☺ The command to love one another has no limits.
 - ii) I should also mention the topic of “boundaries” here. I’ve watched Christians practically kill themselves because they think they have to non-stop serve others at the point of ignoring themselves. Jesus often stopped and rested with his disciples. Jesus often stopped and prayed in His ministry work. My point here is only to have a good sense of balance in loving and serving one another.
 - d) The last point Paul makes in this verse is that “if” we show love to others, we have fulfilled the law.
 - i) Jesus once said in effect: “Let me summarize all of God’s laws for you: Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul and mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. The rest is commentary.” (Ref. Matthew 22:38-40). Jesus said all of the Old Testament laws “hang” on those two commandments. What applies here is the phrase, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”
 - ii) Paul in a sense is saying the same thing as Jesus did in Matthew 22. Paul is saying that if we show love to others, we have “fulfilled” the law.
 - iii) Paul will expand upon this concept in Verses 9-10.
13. Verse 9: The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰ Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.
- a) Listed in Verses 9-10 is a good chunk of the “10 Commandments”. It is not all of them, but it is a good summary of the second half of those commandments. The first “half” of the 10 commandments focuses on our relationship with God. The second “half” focuses on our relationship with other people. The second half is in focus in these verses.
 - b) Before I get into these commandments, it is best to define biblical “love” at this point.
 - i) The biblical definition of love is not about going around hugging people. Not that I have anything against a good hug, ☺ but that is not what is in focus.

- ii) Biblical love is about putting other's needs as a priority before one's own needs. It is about saying or thinking, "I'm going to ignore what I want to do for myself right now so I can go do something for someone else at this moment." Biblical love is about caring for those around us and putting their needs before one's one.
- iii) Both Jesus and Paul state in effect that loving one another is the "foundation" of obeying all other commands of the Old Testament. That not only includes most of the 10 commandments, but all of the hundreds of commandments listed in the first five books of the bible.
- c) With the idea of "loving one another" understood, the rest of those commandments in Verses 9-10 are just further commentary. Let me explain:
 - i) Verse 9 says, "Do not commit adultery". If we are showing biblical love to our spouse, why would we want to commit adultery? If we are showing biblical love to the spouse of the one we are tempted to commit adultery with, why would we want to commit such an act?
 - a) One of the points to understand is we should not to be driven by our emotions. We need to obey the commandment to love one another and then let our feelings follow. In other words, we should never act on our feelings if it is disobedience to God's commands.
 - ii) Verse 9 then says, "Do not murder". Let's face it; it's pretty tough to murder someone who we are to show love to! Again, we are tempted to harm one who we are angry at. God wants us to give that anger over to Him so we can then call on His power to show love to that person.
 - iii) Verse 9 then says, "Do not steal" and "Do not covet". To covet is to desire something that is not yours. Stealing is to act out on that desire. Again, if we have love for a person, why would we want their stuff?"
- d) Paul is laying out how to overcome the temptation to violate those commandments. Let me give a sample prayer: "Lord, right now I admit I am jealous over that person because they have "x" and I don't. I give that desire over to you. You are in charge of my life and I am not. If it is Your desire for me to have that thing, You will make it possible. Help me to let go of that desire. Fill my heart with Your love so I can show love to that person, just as they are, without any expectation of anything in return."
- e) It is important at this time to discuss the term "neighbor".
 - i) Paul said the ability to obey all of these commandments is summed up in the commandment to "Love your neighbor as yourself".
 - ii) That leads to the question of "Who is my neighbor?" Is it just the people in my apartment building or housing tract? ☺ How far away can one go and someone is still considered someone a neighbor?
 - iii) Jesus specifically answered that question in the "Good Samaritan" parable. This is in Luke 10:29-35. To summarize the parable, a man was mugged and is lying on the ground injured. A few people passed by and ignored him. Finally, a Samaritan helped the injured man out. The religious Jews looked down upon Samaritans as a cult preaching a false religion. Jesus point is the "hated" Samaritan was the good neighbor because he had mercy on a total stranger.
 - iv) Jesus is saying in effect that a neighbor is anyone or everyone that comes across our path. There are no geographical boundaries when defining a "neighbor".
- f) Let me wrap up this section and tie it back to my opening theme of "Dealing with issues beyond our control".
 - i) The early verses of this chapter deal with obeying the government. That applies to corrupt governments as well as good ones. Paul says we are to obey those governments as to be good witnesses to those living around us and to have a clean conscious about not disobeying any civil laws.

- ii) The next section of this chapter has to do with loving those around us.
 - iii) The question is, "What do these two sections have in common?" In other words, why does Paul jump the issue of government obedience to loving one another?
 - a) The first answer is that this whole section of Romans deals with Christian conduct. These final chapters of Romans deal with how we should respond to God's love for us.
 - b) The second point is we need God's power in order to affect our behavior. If we live in a society with a government we can't stand, we need to have a sense of peace through it so we can have the ability to love others.
 - c) In this next section, the issue is still about showing love to others. We are tempted to harm others and covet things. Those are our desires and not God's at the moment. My point here is for example, if an "enemy" wants to do us harm, there may not be much we can do to stop that hatred other than self-defense. We can't let the fact that someone hates us affect our ability to love those around us. We can't let that hatred block God's love relationship with us and God's ability to give us the power to love others.
14. 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.
- a) Paul is now giving us a further motivation to love one another: Time.
 - i) The one thing we never know in life is how much time we have left to live.
 - ii) Paul believed Jesus could return at any moment. The Christian life is designed so that Jesus can return at any moment. Two thousand years later, I believe Jesus can return at any moment. God designed it that way to keep us on our toes. The other possibility is we can die at any moment. The idea is not to make us paranoid, but to keep us motivated to serving God.
 - b) When Paul says, "wake up from your slumber", this is a word-picture. Reading that line in context, it does not make sense if Paul is talking about literal sleep.
 - i) Let me paraphrase Paul here, "Look folks, you don't know how much time you have left on earth. Whether you like it or not, God judges us based on our behavior here on earth. One's eternal destiny and rewards are based on our actions right now. Get out of the "automatic pilot" mode. Get your focus on God. Pray for His guidance daily and regularly. Pray to be filled with His love so you can love others. Study His word so you know what He desires for Your life. In summary, get moving!"
 - c) I should also talk a little about the concept of "salvation". It has multiple meanings.
 - i) When we first commit our lives to serving Jesus, we are "saved". That means as long as we trust in Jesus for paying the price for our sins, and we believe Jesus is the resurrected Son of God and Lord of our lives, we will live forever.
 - ii) When we die, that is also a point of our salvation. That is when we're transferred to our new resurrected bodies in heaven. This transformation-salvation is what Paul is referring to here in Verse 11. Paul says, "Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed". He is referring to the time of Christians' death (or Jesus Second Coming) when we are "transferred" into our new heavenly bodies.
 - iii) The word "salvation" can also be used as a maturity process of the Christian life. Think of salvation in that context as a synonym for maturity. (See Phil. 2:12.)
15. 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.
- a) When Jesus first started his public ministry, there was a 40 days period where he was fasting in the desert and was tempted by Satan. (Ref. Matthew 4:1-10, et. al.) One of the temptations was that Satan offered Jesus "all the kingdoms of this world" if Jesus would worship Satan. My point here is that it is not a "temptation" unless Satan "owned" it.

- i) If I offered you a billion dollars to do something, it would not be a temptation unless you believed I really had a billion dollars. (Trust me, this is only an illustration. ☺) Satan's offer was a temptation because in a sense, the world is his until Jesus reclaims it at His Second Coming.
 - b) With all of that in mind, I can now talk about Verse 12: It says, "The night is nearly over".
 - i) This ties to the fact that Satan "controls" this world. It is the idea that sin exists in the world and that "darkness" is everywhere.
 - ii) When Paul says, "the night is nearly over", he is referring to Jesus Second Coming. Paul believed Jesus would return at any moment for His Second Coming. Two thousand years later, Christians still believe it can happen at any moment. Again, God designed it that way as a motivation tool to keep us on our toes. Even if it doesn't happen in our lifetime, we never know when we are going to die. That is part of the motivation to keep us on our toes.
 - c) Paul is contrasting "darkness and light" as a metaphor for "living for God" as opposed to living for ourselves. Think of sinful acts as "darkness". Think of being available for God and living in obedience as "acts of light". We'll get into this a little more in Verse 14.
16. Verse 13: Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.
- a) Verse 13 is further proof that when Paul speaks of "light and day", he is speaking in word-pictures and not literally referring to daytime and nighttime.
 - b) Paul illustrates "night activity": This includes orgies, drunkenness, sexual immorality, debauchery. Debauchery is "extreme indulgence in sensuality" (Webster's Dictionary).
 - i) The examples Paul gives here are "extremes". For example, Paul does not say committing adultery, but instead says getting involved in an orgy. The point here is that if one goes down the road of sin, there is no sense of satisfaction. One needs "more and more" in order to have that feeling of satisfaction. Paul is describing "darkness" as examples of going down a particular path of sin.
 - ii) Let me also say that if you have engaged in any of these activities prior to being a Christian, it is a non-issue. All of ones sins are forgiven and forgotten. If someone engages in these activities and claims to a Christian, then one should question their sincerity and salvation. The issue is not the sin itself, but how one views that action. In other words, if you consider such actions as "biblically wrong", and want to repent and change, then one is on the right path.
 - c) With that in mind, notice Paul's last two examples are "dissention and jealousy". Let's fact it, those two don't sound nearly as bad as "orgies and drunkenness". ☺
 - i) Dissention is about continuous quarrelling. I believe the idea here is that we are so busy arguing and complaining about what we believe is wrong, that anger blocks our relationship with God. It goes back to my opening theme of dealing with things beyond our control. Dissention comes because our egos want things done our way and we get frustrated when it is not. Part of Christian behavior is to accept the things we cannot change.
 - ii) The word jealousy is at is used here, is a synonym to discernment. Jealousy is about desiring something different than what "is". In context of this verse, Paul is talking about desiring things that are not ours as in "coveting". Remember the context of this verse is about "dark" things.
 - d) Remember Paul is urging us to "live in the light". That is a combination of changing our behavior in a way to make a difference for God, and having acceptance of things beyond our control. Examples include paying our taxes and not coveting what is not ours.
 - i) At the same time, we are to change our behavior of things we can control. Paul gave such examples as orgies and drunkenness. The point is we should live our lives in ways that are pleasing to God as opposed to trying to please our desires.

17. Verse 14: Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.
- a) The final verse of this chapter is the “how” verse of living the Christian life.
 - b) Romans Chapters 12-16 can be read as one section on how to live the Christian life.
 - i) The first few verses of Chapter 12 give the “methodology”. Paul used in those verses the word picture of “present your body as a living sacrifice”.
 - ii) Here, at the end of Chapter 13, Paul is using another word-picture to describe the same concept. Paul says here, “Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ”.
 - c) Let me explain “clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ” a bit further.
 - i) We have certain clothing we associate with certain activities. Many of us wear pajamas when we go to sleep. We associate “putting on pajamas” with the activity of going to sleep. Some people wear uniforms to work. We would associate putting on that uniform with that particular work activity.
 - ii) Paul is using that same type of illustration with the idea of, “clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ”. Jesus is not a literal piece of clothing to put on. It is a reference of “preparation” to live the Christian life. For example, one puts on pajamas before going to bed. One “puts on” Jesus Christ before living the Christian life. It gets back to “Without God, we can’t”.
 - d) How do I do that practically? Where do the buttons and zippers go when I put on the “clothing” of Jesus Christ? ☺
 - i) It starts with daily prayer. Ask God for “His will to be done today”. Ask God to fill us with His love so we can manifest that love upon others. It starts with asking for God’s protection through the day. It includes regular time in God’s word to know how to live the Christian life. It is all about drawing upon God’s power in order to love other people.
 - e) The last part of Verse 14 says, “Do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature”.
 - i) The best way to overcome sin is to let it die of starvation. There is something about sin that makes us want to more and more. Any sinful activity never fully satisfies us and it makes it want it more and more. The only way to actually overcome sin is to get away from it.
 - f) This last verse, taken as a whole is a good summary of the Christian life. It is a combination of “putting on Jesus” and at the same time, turning from sinful desires.
 - g) Remember this whole section is about “Christian behavior”. Most of Romans deals with God’s love for us and the extent that God goes through to show His love for us. These last few chapters of Romans deal with how we should respond to God’s love. The short answer is to love God back and use the power of His love to affect the world around us. It is through God’s love that we can serve others.
18. Let’s get back to “Dealing with issues beyond our control”. Some of you may have recognized by now I have alluded to the classic “Serenity Prayer” throughout this lesson, without actually quoting it. I figured it was a good way to end the lesson itself. Living the Christian life is about changing our behavior in ways that are pleasing to God as well as accepting the things that cannot be changed and asking God for the discernment to tell the difference.
- a) With that said, let me end this lesson with that “Serenity Prayer”: “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardships as the pathway to peace; taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His Will; That I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever in the next. Amen. (Reinhold Niebuhr).