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Hey, if you are a medical professional or a healthcare worker at all of our locations right now, would you have the courage to stand to your feet right now? Please stand to your feet if you would.

Stay standing. Stay standing if you would. I know you all don't want the attention, but I want to ask you to stay standing because I want to speak to you and I want to pray over you, alright?

I just want to say to all of you who serve us so faithfully in this role, thank you. I know that the last year-and-a-half has been incredibly challenging. You all have been put in situations that few of us have.

Many of you work really long hours, many behind the scenes. I know many of you, I have spoken with many of you, you're exhausted physically, emotionally, spiritually and we just want to say right now that your church family sees you and we love you and we're so grateful.

I know many of you have been caught in the middle of these swirling debates in society and culture and they've been tugging on you. And right now we just simply want to come around you and we want to encourage you just to stay in it.

In fact, later today, be looking on our social media feed. We want to give you a cup of coffee on us. It's not a way to repay you, but a way to say thank you and we love you.

So what I want to do at all of our physical locations right now, if you've got people standing near you, don't physically put your hand on them, just put your hand up in their direction. This is sort of a symbolic way of lifting them up and supporting them in prayer.

We just want to pray for you right now.

Father, we come to You right now and I thank You for the men and the women in this room right now who are serving You so faithfully to provide care for those of us who desperately need it.

So, God, I thank You for the way that they work really, really long hours, I thank you for the sacrifices that they have made. God, I ask right now that You would give them what they need. That they could walk out of here today feeling encouraged and hopeful to know that there is a church family around them, rallying around them, cheering them on, praying for them.

God, as we're going to read here in a minute, we want to pay honor where honor is due. So we honor them, and we thank them, and we pray that You would guide them, lead them, protect them, and fill them up. We ask this in Jesus' name. And everybody says: Amen.

Hey, can we give it up for them one more time? We love you guys so much. I really do mean that.

Well, I just want to greet everybody joining us at our physical locations and those of you online. We have two weeks left in this series. That's hard to believe, but two weeks left in this series we've been journeying through this fall together. We've been walking our way through the New Testament letter called Romans.

And if you're just now joining us, let me kind of catch you up to speed. We've been calling this series *Recalibrate*. And the reason for that is that all of us have these internal compasses, so to speak, in our lives. Those internal compasses are what help us to make sense of this crazy world that we live in.

Your internal compass helps you discern what is right from wrong, what you value, what is good and bad, what is just and what is unjust.

And this internal compass could go by a variety of names. We could call it our conscience. We could call it our worldview. But here's the deal when it comes to our internal compasses. They are being calibrated all of the time by the content that we consume, by the people who we spend time with, and the thoughts that we think. We have all been through a massive crisis and content overload to where our internal compasses are just spinning.

Paul writes this letter in a very similar context in Rome. What was going on then, that church had experienced a massive crisis that had disrupted their lives that had led to an incredible division. So he takes the time to write this letter to recalibrate their compasses by explaining what the Gospel message is and what it isn't.

So we've just been allowing God to use the same content to recalibrate our internal compasses back to what we've said is True North, the voice of Jesus Christ. We want to be formed more and more into His image and His likeness.

And already we've established in this letter that we have an enemy who does two things really well. He deceives and he counterfeits.

So he deceives us into exchanging the truth of God for a lie, and then he urges us to counterfeit the real gift for something else.

So we have a worship disorder. That's essentially what we have. Worship is taking the affection that is already in your heart and aiming it toward the One who is worthy of it. And what our enemy does is he says, "Why don't you worship created things over Creator God."

So as we come to chapter 12—if you’ve got a Bible, go ahead and find chapter 12—we’re going to cover a large portion of chapter 12 and much of chapter 13 today. It’s really, really ambitious, I know. I’ve prepared way too much content than I can adequately cover in our time together, but what else is new? You all have just learned to expect that from me.

So what we’re doing here is in chapter 12 and 13, this is a massive transition in the letter. Here’s what I mean. Paul has just spent the first 11 chapters explaining to us what the Gospel message is. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone through Christ alone.

And it is a gift that God gives to us that we do not deserve. But we receive it, and we accept it, and we repent of our sin, and we begin to follow after Him. It is this great exchange where Jesus pays the debt of our sin and then He gives us His righteousness.

And we’ve been wrestling to the ground this question over the last couple of weeks, “Well, then what’s the purpose of the law? What is the purpose of the 613 laws found in the Old Testament? What is the purpose of the Ten Commandments?”

We could say it this way, “Does moral behavior matter? I thought Christianity was just a bunch of rules.” To which we would say,

“Yes it matters, but not to justify ourselves or earn our salvation.”

Remember, the law does two things. The law reveals how we were meant to live—meaning that if you and everybody you knew could follow all the 10 commandments perfectly, every single day, your life and their lives would be so much better. But we just can’t do it. So the law, then, is a mirror. The law reveals our sin. It shows us our need for a Savior.

We could never earn salvation on our own. But because God has granted us His grace, now I want to live for Him. Now I want to pursue holiness. Not because I’m trying to earn anything, but because of what Jesus has already done for me.

Now, as we come to chapter 12 and 13, here’s what Paul is doing.

He’s just spent 11 chapters exhaustively unpacking what the Gospel message is. In the last five chapters of the book he’s going to say, “Here’s why it matters in real life. This is what the application of it looks like.”

And he’s going to progressively move out in intrinsic circles. So in chapter 12 he’s going to say, “This is what it looks like in the church.” Remember who he is writing this to, the Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome who were deeply divided. He said, “This is how it should change your relationships.” And even us today.

And then he goes outside of that and says, “Now this is the difference that this should make outside of the church where you live, work, and play with your friends and even your enemies.”

He says, "If the Gospel doesn't impact the way that you interact with your enemies, then you'd have to say that it hasn't really made that much of an impact on your life." It's a gut-check question.

And then he's going to go one more circle, and this is what he gets into in chapter 13, he's going to say, "This is how the Gospel message should change the way you think about, talk about, and interact with government." Oh, this is going to be fun, alright? Buckle up.

Now, I want to give myself plenty of time to unpack chapter 13, because it's just so, so important. But I've got to lay the groundwork with chapter 12, verse one. Starting off in verse 1 he says:

*"And so..."*

Some translations say therefore. You might remember that a few weeks ago I said that there were four major therefores in the book of Romans. If you can get a handle on the therefores, you can really get a handle on the message of Romans. They are all hinges in the book. And this is a massive one. He's essentially saying:

*"And so, dear brothers and sisters..."*

In other words what we've already learned about the Gospel, here's how it should look in real life. And then he says:

*"I plead with you to give your bodies..."* he's talking about our physical bodies that house our souls, *"... to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable."*

A living sacrifice. A holy sacrifice.

Now a couple of observations that I want to make before we continue to move on. He uses the word *plead*. Why do you think that he is pleading with us? Well, because the appetites and desires of our flesh are warring against us.

In fact, I would say that the one, two punch that takes so many of us out are the motivations of our hearts and the desires of our flesh.

And he says, "I want you to think about your bodies. Everything that you do with your body: you feed it, you rest it, you exercise it—anything that you do with your body, I want you to think about that as worship. It is a living and holy sacrifice to God. Not because you're trying to earn anything, but out of response to what God has already done for you."

This talk of physical bodies would have made the Greco-Roman readers really uncomfortable because they had this mindset that the body was dirty. And so you should cultivate your mind and your soul, not your body.

Paul kind of interrupts all of that and says, "No, no, no. Everything that you do physically, that is an act of worship." And he's using temple terminology here from the Old Testament.

Some of you might be familiar with this if you know your Old Testament history. In the Old Testament prior to Jesus paying the price for our sins, prior to the cross, you would have to go to the Temple on a regular basis and you would have to make an offering to justify yourself, for forgiveness of your sins.

And what that offering looked like, was you had to bring a spotless lamb to the Temple and shed its blood to cover your sins.

Aren't you so thankful that we don't have to do that anymore? How weird would that be? You're walking through the parking lot, people have got lambs wrapped over their shoulders, "How are you doing today?"

"Oh, pretty good."

It would get so messy in here if we had to do that. I'm so glad we don't have to do that. Why? Because Jesus shed His blood once and for all, so we don't have to do that anymore. The book of Hebrews talks about that.

There was a second kind of offering. This was a whole burnt offering. And this was the idea that when you would bring that lamb you brought the best of your livestock, not the worst. In other words it would have been really tempting to go out on Sunday morning and pick out the lame one that was going to die anyway, "Well, I'll take that one." And he goes, "No, no, no. You bring your best of your best to God."

And this is an application of that goes for every area of life. This is the principle undergirding tithing, "I'm going to give God my first and my best, not the leftovers." This undergirds my service. This undergirds every act of worship in my life.

Think about it this way. Here's what God is asking. God is not asking for your Venmo. He's asking for your bank account, your password, and your PIN. He's not asking for your Venmo where He makes a request, and you can either accept or deny it.

No. You go, "God, here's my bank account, my password, and my PIN. You have access to my accounts whenever you want and however you want." Why? Because He's the source of the deposits anyway.

Here's the idea. You want to get to this place in your life as you are following after Jesus where you say, "Jesus, the answer is, 'Yes.' Now, what is the question?" That is a living and holy sacrifice.

Then he says this:

*"This is truly the way to worship him."*

It has nothing to do with whether or not you can carry a tune. In fact, the word *truly* in Greek is the word:

*"logikos"*

And that's where we get our word *logical*. In other words he goes, "If the Gospel message is really true, if Jesus paid the debt for your sin and He imputed His righteousness to you, then the common-sense response to what God has done for us is to give Him our everything."

And then he says in verse 2:

*"Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you..."*

In other words don't be conformed, be transformed. And the Greek word there is:

*"metamorpho-o"*

And this is obviously where we get our word for metamorphosis. This is dramatically different than behavior modification. This is dramatically different from, "I'm going to try to white knuckle good behavior." This is a radical transformation by God's Spirit from the inside out. You are becoming a new creation.

So this idea of metamorphosis, this is what happens to a caterpillar in a cocoon. Now, I don't know exactly what all goes on. I've never been in there with a caterpillar when this happens, but the caterpillar doesn't come out with a few modifications. It is a brand-new thing. It completely changes into a new thing.

Now what is happening to that caterpillar inside that cocoon? Well it's not reading flight manuals and it's not working out. No these enzymes are released that actually break it down and its body turns into a soup and then it is reconfigured. When it emerges it comes out with eyes and antennas and wings. This is the idea.

This is the word he uses for you and me as we follow after Jesus.

And he goes:

*"Let it transform you into a new person by changing the way..."*

Not the way you behave. Not what you believe or not how you live, he goes:

*"... by changing the way you think."*

This is literally where the battle is lost or won, which is why we kept coming back to this in this series, why the content we expose ourselves to is so crucial.

See, fuel for your thoughts is the content you consume. So if we were to use that caterpillar in a cocoon metaphor, your thought life is the cocoon that you marinate in. You literally become what you think of or expose yourself to. So we have to watch that carefully.

Then he goes on and he says:

*"Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect."*

Anytime I have a conversation with somebody about trying to discern God's will for his life.... Primarily how we want this to work is that we want God to give it to us in a fortune cookie or an email or maybe a red phone in our room somewhere—it just rings, and we answer it, and God says, "This is My will for your life."

That's not how this happens. What happens is: What is the next step of faith that God is asking you to make? "What is the next door that I should walk through? And God's plans and purposes for me are good, pleasing, and perfect. Which means, if I fail, I fail forward. I get up and I keep going."

Now, verse 3, Paul's going to shift to motives. And he says this:

*"Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us."*

Real talk. Be real. Don't pretend anymore. Don't pose anymore. Just authentically be yourself.

Ask other people this sobering yet penetrating question that few of us have the courage to ask, but it's always so helpful. Just simply ask this question to your spouse, to your friends, to your co-workers, to the people you lead:

"What's it like to be on the other side of me?"

And then keep your mouth shut and listen, even if you don't like what they have to say. It is this idea of honestly evaluating ourselves. And the Gospel keeps us from thinking more highly of ourselves than we should, because we are sinners saved entirely by God's kindness and grace.

However, the Gospel also keeps us from thinking too lowly of ourselves than we should because we are saved sinners who are loved and valued by the One whose opinion really matters anyway.

Look at what he says in verse 4:

*“Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ’s body.”* Now he is talking about the gathered church, what we are doing right now. *“We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.”*

There is no such thing as a solo Christian. There is no such thing as God and me. Now, there is a personal element of your faith, but that doesn’t mean that your faith was ever meant to be private. We are connected to each other. Why? Because we are on mission together.

And Paul is going to get into this in a minute, we all have been given gifts by God and we all need each other’s gifts. You do not have all of the gifts. We need other people. Why? Because we are on mission in this world.

We have an enemy who is deceiving and counterfeiting God, we come together to represent the kingdom of God here on earth. We have a mission in front of us. And that is to get as many people to Jesus Christ as we possibly can as we are formed and shaped into the image and likeness of Jesus Christ.

So he says this in verse 6:

*“In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy...”* don’t be ashamed of that, *“... speak out with as much faith as God has given you.”*

*“If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.”*

So here’s what he is saying: The day that you gave your life to Jesus Christ and the Spirit of God came into you, God gave you a spiritual gift, likely not just one. He gave you several, to be used to advance His kingdom here on earth. You have been gifted with a spiritual gift.

A gift is something that God grants to you for the advancement of His kingdom and so you hold onto it loosely and you leverage it wisely for the good of others and the kingdom of God.

My top three spiritual gifts, through taking different spiritual gift inventories, through the affirmation of others, and then just through life experience are: wisdom and discernment, teaching and preaching, and leadership.

Now, here’s the thing I know about all three of those. I didn’t grow up, that I can recall, having any of them. I was not a very wise and discerning teenager.

I hated public speaking; I really did. In fact, the one thing that was keeping me from going into full-time ministry is because you had to talk every week. And I was like, “I don’t want to do that.”



I was never seen as a leader when I was in high school growing up.

There was a tangible day that I could take you back to when I just fully gave my life to God and I said, "God, here I am, send me. I want to be used by You."

It was like a switch got flipped and God granted me those gifts. Now, have I had to steward them, and grow in them, and manage—yes. But because there was a clear day when I felt like God granted me those gifts, I hold onto them really loosely because I know that if He gave them, He can take them away.

Now here's the application for you. Can I just ask those of you who are Christ followers listening to this right now, are you aware of your spiritual gift? And are you using it?

And I just want to encourage you to find out what your spiritual gift is. If you don't know there are a number of inventories that we can give you to help. Those have a good place.

But, primarily I would just simply say this. What are you naturally good at? Where do your abilities lie? What are you passionate about? And do other people affirm those things in you? If they do, it is likely that that is your spiritual gift.

And I just want to urge you to use it. I want to ask you to use it within your church family. It's not that you can't use those spiritual gifts out in the community, and we need you to, but I want to encourage you to use them within the body of Christ.

And here's why. Every single weekend there is somebody walking through the doors of all of our campuses or joining us online looking for hope and help. And I need you to step up to the plate and exercise your spiritual gift because God has gifted you with something that the rest of us don't necessarily have.

Here's what we have a tendency to slip into. It's a very natural progression and I want to make us aware of it so that way we can work against it. It doesn't even matter if the church is large or small. We have a tendency to think of the church as a cruise ship rather than a battleship.

So it's like a cruise ship where I'm kind of lounging on my recliner and other people are serving me and I'm just coming to consume something when the church really is a battleship because we are on mission, and I need you to man your station.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to come in and to see everything that we're doing wrong. I can give you a list. All it takes is two eyeballs and a pen and paper to become a critic. And you can walk in here and go, "We had to shut down classrooms because there weren't enough people to serve in Kids' Ministry. And nobody said hi to me in the lobby."

Great, we'll see you next weekend. Early. You can serve in the Kids' Ministry, and we'll see you out in the lobby to greet other people. Be the church you always wanted to attend. Don't just church hop and shop.

Verse 9, it gets better:

*"Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other."*

I love that. It says delight in honoring each other. It's the whole idea of paying honor where honor is due. And honestly we oftentimes don't do a very good job of that in society. Why? Because other people will get a big head. And so we refrain from giving encouragement.

And I just want to urge you right now, don't do that. Just understand that everybody who you will lock eyes with today most likely needs some encouragement in their life because they are discouraged. It's like a deflating balloon. And when you offer encouragement you are inflating them.

Now, oftentimes we're like, "Well, I want to make sure that they don't get too big of a head. I want to make sure that they stay humble." That's God's job. God will keep them humble. He will discern the motivations of their hearts. Our job is to honor up, down, and all around.

So can I just say that those of you who have kids, when you go pick up your kids in Kids' Ministry, honor the people who just served your kids. Just love on them. Just thank them. Bless their socks off because they are coming, and they are using their gifts to actually serve your family. That's just one application.

Verse 11, he goes:

*"Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying."*

Verse 12 is so powerful. So applicable. And then he says this:

*"When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality."*

This is the idea where he says.... This is more than just finances but that is certainly a big application of it. He says, "Be ready to help them." What does that mean? Well, make sure that you are living below your means so that way when a need presents itself, you have the margin to meet the need.

And most of us want to be generous. Most of us want to do that, but we're so far in debt and we're living upside down outside of our means, that when we see a need, we're not able to do anything. So he says, "Get your finances in order so that way when you see a need, you are ready to help and always practice hospitality."

One of my favorite definitions of love is this: Love is doing whatever it takes to give to people whatever they need. And one practical way that we're trying to do that as a church, and you've already heard about it today....

We've been talking about this over the last couple of weeks. We are just coming along Shepherd Community Center to offer a good Christmas to families who are in need.

But we want to do so in a way that allows these families to give their kids the Christmas that they deserve with dignity and respect. We don't want to offer toxic charity. We don't want to try to help, and it ends up hurting.

That's why we love what Shepherd is doing. They are offering this Christmas store. And here's what we're doing. We're purchasing the inventory and we are stocking the shelves of that Christmas store so that way families in need can go to the store, they can pick out what they need, they take it home, they wrap it, and they can give it to their kids. They can give them a good Christmas while holding their heads up high and doing it with dignity and respect.

So we are trying to stock the shelves so that way the store has enough items for Christmas. Here's where we are right now. We've been talking about this over the last couple of weeks. So far our church has purchased 633 items. As of today, we have 3,267 more that need to be purchased in order to stock the store. I think we can knock that out today.

So go ahead, not right now because I worked too hard on this message, take out your phones later today and text:  
"Outreach" to 87221

Or go to the link on the website and get all of the information you need:  
[tpcc.org/christmas-outreach](http://tpcc.org/christmas-outreach)

We will collect the items here at our campuses in bins. The last day to do that is December 5. I really think we can knock out all of the items today.

Now, Paul turns his attention to relationships outside of the church, which then is going to set up our relationship, the way that we think about government in chapter 13. Look at what he says in verse 14:

*"Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!"*

*"Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable." Might I add, even if they don't believe what you believe, they can still see that you are honorable. "Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone."*

Ouch. Just in general, how do you think we would give the body of Christ, Christians in general, a grade on that one over the last two years? Don't answer out loud. It's an "F."

*"Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God."*

Now, all of that tills up the soil and sets the foundation for what Paul is going to talk about in chapter 13, which is the Christian's relationship with governing authorities. Here's what Paul is going to do. He's going to lay out some guidelines for how we should think about, talk about, and interact with government.

And might I add, honoring the government when government isn't always honorable.

And he's going to show us why. And he's going to show us if there is ever a time to disobey the government. And the answer to that is: yes. He's going to encapsulate all of that. But he's going to lead with honor and he's going to provide the *why* behind this.

So, chapter 13, verse 1, you guys with me? Oh, this is going to be so much fun. My email is going to be filled this week. It's going to be great.

*"Everyone..." everyone, "... must submit to governing authorities."*

Hold your applause 'til later, alright? I know you want to. I know you want to say amen, but hold your applause. It's going to get better, or worse, depending upon your perspective. Why? *"For all authority..."* even the people who you don't agree with politically, *"... all authority comes from..."* where? *"... God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God."*

To which you would say, *"What? Are you serious? Do you know the men and women who serve in political office? Do you know what they stand for? Do you know the policies they are trying to push through? How could God place them there?"*

This is the whole idea; this word called the sovereignty of God. I am reminded of one of my favorite verses in the book of Daniel. Daniel, chapter 4, verse 17, check this out. It says:

*"... the Most High..."* that's God, *"... rules over the kingdoms of the world."* Check this out. *"He gives them to anyone he chooses—even to the lowliest of people."*

This is the idea that God rules with His feet up. He is not wringing His hands about who got into political office. He is not worried about the judges who get voted onto the Supreme Court.

You might say, "Well, how could God place somebody in a position of authority whose policies and values run counter to His Word?"

Read the Old Testament. He did it all of the time; primarily all of those earthly rulers have an expiration date. Their kingdoms come. Their kingdoms go.

God's kingdom reigns forever.

And God is so powerful and so sovereign that He can work even through very ungodly leaders. So we calm down on the inside and we recognize God is.... When we freak out, that is an insult to the sovereignty of God.

Verse 2:

*"So anyone who rebels against authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and they will be punished."*

Wow. That is so sobering. Especially after the last two years. Now he's going to get really practical:

*"For the authorities do not strike fear in people who are doing right, but in those who are doing wrong."*

What is he talking about there? Well, he's talking about laws, not the abuse of the laws, but he's talking about laws that protect us all—a civil society. And we're all very grateful for that.

So let me just kind of apply this to everyday life. Have you ever been, hypothetically speaking, driving over the speed limit? You're flying down the interstate and all of a sudden (maybe you just didn't realize how fast you were going), you look in your rearview mirror and you see red and blue lights.

What happens? Oh, man. If you are anything like me, and this hasn't happened to me in a really long time, (Father, forgive me, I have just sinned) but what happens? Your heart starts beating out of your chest, your hands go immediately to 10 and 2, as if that matters. Adrenaline is pumping. You hit the brakes. And then the officer flies around you, he's going to some other emergency.

Then what happens? Well, your heart rate comes down. You speed back up. And if you're anything like me, you start complaining, like, "Why are all of these police officers out today?"

To which my wife ends up saying, very calmly and very rationally, and very annoyingly, "Well, if you go the speed limit you wouldn't have to worry about how many police are out today." I hate it when she is right.

That's what he's talking about. Then he says this:

*"Would you like to live without fear of the authorities? Do what is right, and they will honor you."*

He's talking about upholding the laws, not the misuse of the laws, upholding them. And he goes, *"They will honor you."* Verse 4:

*"The authorities are God's servants, sent for your good. But if you are doing wrong, of course you should be afraid..." you're breaking the law, of course you should expect the consequences, "... for they have the power to punish you."*

*"They are God's servants, sent for the very purpose of punishing those who do what is wrong. So you must submit to them, not only to avoid punishment, but also to keep a clear conscience."*

Here is a very practical take away. We don't just go the speed limit to avoid getting a ticket; we go the speed limit to keep a clear conscience before God. That's essentially what he is saying.

Now, this isn't the only time that Paul tells us to submit to imperfect authority as we are submitting to God. He would tell children, "Children, obey your parents as imperfect as they are because when you do you are submitting to God."

Now, I just want to recognize the tension within these verses that we just read, because obviously in the media.... Right now, the media has a tendency to highlight it when law enforcers act in very dishonorable ways. And we want to grieve that and speak out against it in all of its forms.

And yet we don't say this enough, we want to recognize that the vast majority of our law enforcement officers are good men and women who are doing an incredible job, making an enormous sacrifice for us, putting their lives on the line. Many of you serve our church so well.

And listen. I know, as a pastor, what it feels like to be judged by the worst of your profession. That happens to me every week. So we don't want to do that to those who serve in law enforcement.

We want to thank you. We want to honor you. We're so grateful for you. That's what he's getting at. Verse 6:

*"Pay your taxes, too, for these same reasons. For government workers need to be paid."*

*"Oh, no you just didn't, Paul!"* That's not going to end up on any coffee mug. Our next merch that we release, that verse ain't going on the back of our t-shirts, alright? But it's there. It's there.

*"Why should we do that, Paul?"*

Well he said so in verse 6. This goes back to a civil society. He goes:

*"They are serving God in what they do. Give to everyone what you owe them: Pay your taxes and government fees to those who collect them, and give respect and honor to those who are in authority."*

So he's basically talking about roads and bridges and emergency services that obviously require resources to fund. And he says that we should pay those taxes and be grateful for the services provided.

I know, this is a really, really hard teaching. But I didn't write it. I'm just delivering the mail. And at this point you might be wondering, because I wondered this as I studied this passage, "Why is this in Romans?" I'm reading this and I'm like, "Why is this here? What does this have to do with the Gospel? What does this have to do with the conflict that was happening in the church at Rome? This just seems so random."

And what I want to point out to you is that this is part of the application of what he just walked us through in chapter 12.

Remember when he said in verses 17 and 18, "*Live in such a way that everyone will see that you are honorable,*" to which we could insert, "Even if they are not." In verse 19 he said, "Don't get revenge. Leave that to God."

Another very practical reason why many scholars believe that Paul included this in his letter is because he fully expected the Caesar in Rome to intercept the mail and read this letter before it got to the church in Rome. And he wanted to clearly communicate that his intention was not to overthrow the Roman government.

Here's why. Many religious philosophies of the world during that time and throughout history have seen it as their duty to overthrow the government and replace it with leaders of their religion.

Lots of examples of this. Many Jews during Jesus' time would have felt that way. They believed that God wanted them to overthrow the Roman government and establish a kingdom. They were called Zealots. In fact, Jesus has one of them as His disciple, Simon the Zealot.

And Jesus would often say, "I've not come to establish an earthly kingdom. I've come to advance the kingdom of God here on earth."

Islam, in many places around the world, not all, but in some places throughout history, this would be the intention—to overthrow the government. We've actually seen an example of that here recently in Afghanistan.

So, what Paul is saying here is, "Hey, listen. Our role is not to overthrow human governments." As Christ followers, pray for and influence and serve—absolutely. Speak prophetically to rulers and those in authority and rebuke them for unrighteousness and warn them of God's coming judgment like John the Baptist did with Herod, you bet.

And as Christ followers we pray for Jesus to get ahold of the hearts of those who govern, not try to force a quote/unquote Christian government. And there is a very real danger that often happens when well-meaning Christians attempt to nationalize their faith.

What I want to point out to you is that throughout history, this has never worked. It always goes bad. In fact, let me just nerd out with you for a minute. Scholar John Stott points out four ways in which the Christ followers can interact with government. The first, if you're taking notes would simply be this:

#### Theocracy

And a theocracy means the church controls the state. And that always goes bad. The second would be:

#### Erastianism

This is where the state controls the church. So think China or Russia. That's even worse. The third is:

#### Constantinianism

It's kind of named after the Roman Emperor, Constantine. And this would be a compromise in which the state favors the church; so the church makes accommodations with the state in order to preserve favored status.

And what almost always happens is, instead of the church influencing the state, the state overly influences the church, waters down the Gospel. Parts of old Europe were this way. It never goes well. Here's the fourth way. John Stott says:

#### Partnership

And that's where the church and state recognize that each have distinct God-given responsibilities, and they encourage and collaborate with each other in fulfilling these roles within society.

Stott would say that partnership most aligns with Romans 13.

Paul wants the Caesar in Rome to know that when he comes he comes as a representative of Jesus, not a political agitator. And to the Roman Christians, their role is to influence, not overthrow.

Now I know what some of you might be thinking. The question that you might have. So if I can, let me just try to save you an email. Some of you are sitting here thinking, "Okay, I hear all of that, but how in the world can I honor or submit to a political leader who is leading in the exact opposite direction of God's Word?"

And for many of us, we feel that if we see that it gives us the green light then to revolt, protest, and even curse them. That it gives us the green light to post really mean and unkind things on social media.

So what I want to point out here is that when Paul writes Romans 13, none of the governing authorities in Rome at the time were Christians. In fact, they were unfriendly toward the church at best and they were openly hostile toward the church at worst.



Paul would not have approved or endorsed the vast majority of who they were and what they did. And if there would have been a democratic election in Rome, which there was not, he wouldn't have voted for any of them. And yet he still writes Romans 13 and says that we should submit to them and honor them.

We should just take a look at some of the political leaders in Rome during the time. You can think whatever you want about some of our political leaders, but they make our leaders look like angels.

In fact the Caesar at the time that Paul writes Romans 13 was a guy named Caligula. And let's just look at this laundry list of this Boy Scout, alright? Here's who he was:

- He had his mom and brothers killed to make sure they never challenged his right to the throne.
  - He openly committed incest with three of his sisters.
  - He would often cross-dress in public.
  - He installed his favorite horse as a senator and then promoted him later to consul!
- How does that even work? All in favor, say I. All opposed... ha-ha. There's a whole dad joke section down here.

Get this:

- He once got angry at the weather and declared war on Neptune, the Roman god of the sea. And he wasted tax payers' dollars by ordering soldiers from the Roman army to whip the waves and bring home seashells as plunder from his domain.
- He had the heads of statues of deities removed and replaced with a bust of himself. Imagine if our political leaders superimposed their face over every statue of Jesus throughout the land.
- During the gladiator games he would take random people from the crowds (they thought they were just showing up for a show) and throw them into the arena to be attacked by wild animals for entertainment.

The point is, he was no Abe Lincoln. Nobody was shouting, "Four more years." It was all #notmycaesar. That's what was happening.

Now after that you have Claudius, who was his own special brand of crazy, and he was every bit as cruel. Then right after him, you have a guy named Nero, who you've likely heard of.

And Nero, when he assumes the throne, and by assume—there wasn't a democratic election that took place. By assume I mean this: his mom killed Claudius in his sleep so her baby boy could be ruler. And your mom just packed you a lunch, alright?

Nero ends up becoming one of the most sadistic, meanest, hostile rulers against Christians of all times. He is believed to have set fire to the very city that he governed. It is believed that he set fire to Rome and then he stood on his balcony like some sort of tragic opera playing his harp. And he blamed Christians for the fire, crucified hundreds of them as a result.

We know that he had a party where he lit up his courtyard by dipping Christians in tar, sticking them in lanterns and lighting them on fire.

One time, this is crazy, he got mad at his pregnant wife and kicked her to death. Afterward he felt really bad about it, so he found a boy who looked similar to her, he castrated him, and married the boy and called him by his wife's name.

It is within that context of a dumpster fire of government that Paul writes Romans 13. Submit to governing authorities and honor them.

Why? Because when you submit to them you are acknowledging your trust in the sovereignty of God who rules over kings and kingdoms and appoints them to whomever He wishes. They are not really in control. God is. And when you submit to them, you are placing your trust in Him.

Here's what that practically means. You don't freak out about who's in office. Now, you may be upset about it. Sure. Sure. But you don't freak out about it. You don't offer a response that is fearful, angry, or anxious, because when you do that is an assault on the sovereignty of God.

Now, here's the question. Is there ever a time for us to disobey? You bet there is. I love how Tim Keller puts it. He says this:

"The Bible gives a very clear basis for civil disobedience;" emphasis on civil, "... namely, if the state commands what God forbids, or if the state forbids what God commands, then civil disobedience is a Christian duty."

Civil disobedience does not look like fear, anger, or anxiety. Here's just a good gut check. Before you post or repost anything political online, ask yourself, "Does this cause fear, anger, or anxiety?" If it does, refrain.

How do you exercise civil disobedience? Read all about Daniel in Babylon. He did it so well. Daniel in Babylon—there were moments when he submitted to the ungodly direction of Nebuchadnezzar and then there were other moments when he calmly and respectfully defied it.

Now, here's what I want to close with. You have to wonder, as Paul writes Romans 13, if he's thinking of Matthew 22. In Matthew 22, some of you might recall, that Jesus gets into an argument with the Pharisees about whether or not they should pay taxes.

It was a trap, as usual, the question that they posed to Jesus. They come to Jesus and they say, "Hey, Jesus. Should we pay taxes?"

Now here's the dilemma that He was in in how He answers. In those days taxes were paid to Rome, but Rome, was oppressing the Jews and the Jewish Christians. In fact, the taxes that

they gave to Rome were often used to fund Caesar's lavish lifestyle and to fund the crucifixions that were taking place.

So you get the dilemma that Jesus was in. If He says, "Yes, you should pay taxes, then they could accuse Him of indirectly oppressing the Jews and the Christians. And then the Jewish Zealots would get really angry and want to kill Him.

If Jesus says, "No," then the Romans can say, 'Well you're just trying to incite a riot. You're a revolutionary. We can kill you too.'

So Jesus is in a real bind with what he answers. Now, look at what Jesus does, as He so often does. He Jesus jukes them. And he totally crosses them over and breaks their ankles. Jesus simply says this, "Whose image is on the coin?"

"Caesar's."

He says, "Okay, give Caesar what is Caesar's. You give to God what is God's." And at this it says that they marveled.

Well, what is He saying there? This is a very subtle teaching that reinforces our trust in a sovereign God, and it undermines the government's claim on our lives.

And basically it's this: The coin has Caesar's image on it, but God's image is stamped on you. So you give to Caesar what is Caesar's because his image is on the coin, but you give God your everything.

Remember, living as a holy sacrifice because His image is stamped on you, which means that you never obey Caesar in a way that would cause you to disobey God, yet you refrain from defying in a way that dishonors God, because He is ultimately in control.

You losing it and going off on social media does not reinforce anyone's trust in God. Aren't you so thankful this message came just in time for Thanksgiving?

Now, let me finish up the last three verses, 11-13:

*"This is all the more urgent, for you know how late it is; time is running out." In other words, eternity is racing at us. "Wake up, for our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. "*

*"The night is almost gone; the day of salvation will soon be here. So remove your dark deeds like dirty clothes, and put on the shining armor of right living. Because we belong to the day, we must live decent lives for all to see."*

On down in verse 14 he would say this:

*"Clothe yourselves with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ."*

In other words, any subject that comes up around the Thanksgiving table, including politics, people should see Jesus in you.

So here's the deal that I want to end with. Right now here's the question that I want you to contemplate. You might be a decent human being. You might be an upstanding citizen. You might treat your friends and your enemies with respect. You don't seek revenge.

You intentionally go five miles under the speed limit. You avoid saying inflammatory things on Facebook. And you follow the letter of the law of the land, except for that one time when you removed the tag off of your mattress. But other than that... alright?

Here's the sobering reality. You can do all of that, and still die and face a Christless eternity. Why? Because you never actually gave God what was God's—you.

Today I want to give you that opportunity. Caesar's image may be stamped on your coins, but God has His image stamped on you. You are made by God and for God and your soul will ultimately be restless until you give yourself completely to God.

And one day we will stand before His throne and give an account of the life that we lived. The question is: will you be ready? And you can be ready right now, today.

So what I want to do across all of our campuses.... Bow your head, close your eyes, I want to lead you through a prayer here and I just want you to claim this prayer for yourself if you are ready to receive this.

Maybe you've drifted. You've allowed your internal compass to be totally directed toward other things. You've totally taken your eyes off of the kingdom of God. You've placed too much emphasis on the kingdom of men.

Right now we just come to God, and we say:

God, I confess my sins to You. And I acknowledge that Caesar's image may be stamped on my coin, but Your image is stamped on me. And I want to live for Your kingdom, not be too wrapped up in this passing earthly kingdom.

So, Father, today I acknowledge my sin, I repent of my sin, I place my trust in You, King Jesus. Thank You for paying the debt of my sin and giving me Your righteousness in my account.

So now, God, today the answer is, "Yes." Now, what's the question?

Father, I receive You. I accept You. I want to follow You throughout every day of my life. I place my trust in You, not only as Savior, but as Lord. And we ask this in Jesus' name: Amen.