GOD'S GLORIOUS GOSPEL
Romans, chapters 12-13
The Gospel: Transformed Relationships

I | CONTEXT AND CONNECTIONS

1 / **Chapters 12-13** comprise a distinctive section of their own. Paul has been carefully and meticulously drawing out for us a detailed commentary on ***God's Glorious Gospel***. Here is a very generalized over-all breakdown of the larger sections here in **Romans**: **chs 1-8**: *What the Gospel is and how God has provided and applies His righteousness to believers—through faith in Jesus Christ*; **chs 9-11**: *How the Gospel has been sent into the world to include Gentiles through Israel's unbelief and rejection of Christ—God's eternal and cosmic plan to save His people from all nations and peoples*; **chs 12-16**: *How the Gospel is lived out in the transformed conduct of His people in all their relationships with one another and as His witnesses to His saving Grace here in this life and world.*
2 / And so, **chapters 12-13** will begin to apply the Gospel life and lifestyle to all the relationships we have as the saved people of God. What we will do here in this lesson is just point out the various relationships we all maintain in our daily lives, and how the Gospel transforms us to have a Gospel witness to all those relationships. Obviously, all we can do here is just give an outlined breakdown of the various relationships we all maintain and broadly summarize Paul's instructions to us. And when I say *instructions,* there are a lot of them. I did just a cursory count of the *imperatives [verbs of command]* here in **chs 12-13,** and there are around fifty imperatives.
3 / And I am calling these instructions ***Transformed Relationships*** because they are all relational in one way or another—and the way we obey and practice them is by **being transformed by the renewing of our minds.**

II | ch 12.1-2 | The Gospel transforms our relationship with God

1 / The primary imperative Paul gives us in these two verses is **present your bodies as a ... sacrifice to God.** The sacrifice There were many kinds of sacrifices under the Old Covenant system of worship and offerings. The most prominent, of course, was the *sin-offering.* This was offered to atone for the sins the people had committed. But Christ is the once-for-all and only *sin offering.* This sacrifice that Paul is commanding is like their *whole burnt offering.* They offered this sacrifice to God as a confession of their giving themselves wholly to God. The *whole burnt offering* was a perfect animal—the best they had to offer, and when it was offered to God, *it was totally consumed by the fire of the altar.* This is the kind of offering Paul instructs us to give to God. And we give it by offering to God *all* the faculties and activities of our lives. And the characteristics of the offering of our lives are: **living, holy, acceptable to God, and our *logical* act of spiritual worship or service.**
2 / Our motivation for giving ourselves to God this way is because of **the mercies of God.** We don't serve God with our whole being in order to obtain or earn God's **mercies,** but because God has already given us His **mercies** in Christ and His Gospel. Paul has been highlighting these **mercies of God** especially in **chs 9-11.** In fact, the word Paul uses for **mercies** here is the same word He used back in **ch 9.15** where both **mercy** and **compassion** are attributed to God's will. Paul uses both of those words in this immediate context. In **ch 11.30-32,** he uses one word for **mercy,** and then in **ch 12.1**, he uses the other word that is translated as **compassion** in **ch 9.15.** So, we give ourselves wholly to God in every activity of our lives because of God's **compassions** toward us.
3 / The Gospel **transforms** us by its saving power **[see ch 1.16].** Note the contrasting imperatives: **do not be conformed** [we get our word *schematic* from this word—the world's pattern, model] **to this world** by embracing its values, beliefs, lifestyles, and practices. **But be transformed by the renewing of your mind...** We get our word *metamorphosis* from this word ***transformed.*** The Gospel gives us a new birth and makes us a new creation in Christ! And this **renewing of your mind** is not just new ideas, new philosophy, or new opinions of things—it is a ***new way of thinking.*** And what is that ***new way of thinking?*** It is the ability to test the differences between our old way of living in our born-human sin and fallenness,

so we can now know and do **the will of God—which is good, acceptable [to God, see v 1], and perfect** [complete]. So everything we will discover and discuss in all the following relationships are **the will of God—**this is who God saves us to become, and what God saves us to do in all our relationships—how we must conduct ourselves with every other person in our lives in a way that **God wants** from us...

III | ch 12.3-8 | The Gospel transforms our relationship with ourselves

1 / Before we can relate to others by **the will of God, the ways He wants and are acceptable to Him,** we must first of all learn to accurately assess ourselves. ***We must not over-estimate our own importance!*** That is the natural and normal *schematic* of our world and culture. That's why we call ourselves '#1.' But we must **renew our minds** to see, assess, and judge ourselves by the **grace given to each one of us,** and by the **measure of faith that God has assigned.** Which means God has given us all equality with one another in our value and worth to Him, but He has also given each one of us a specific role, task, and function to fulfill in the church body—in relationship with others.
2 / And so the way we learn to assess ourselves is by assessing how God has gifted, assigned, and enabled each one of us to serve one another. Paul gives us a sample list of how we can serve one another: **prophecy [preaching]; serving [doing things for others]; teaching; exhortation [counseling]; giving generously to meet one another's needs; leading; acts of mercy [favors, kindness, help].**

IV | ch 12.9-16 | The Gospel transforms our relationship with other believers in the church

1 / Our primary mutual relationships will be with those in our local church body **[see vv 4-5].** There is an extended list of relationship instructions in these eight verses—given in a kind of rapid-fire cadence. Depending on how you count them, there are around twenty specific instructions. We will just briefly comment on each one in our class time...
2 / But at the head of the list is **let love be genuine. Love** is always the preeminent grace in every activity in every relationship among us. As Paul says in **1 Corinthians 16.14, "Let all that you do be done in love."** Every other specific instruction that Paul gives in these eight verses is some expression and activity of **love. [We could read these instructions side-by-side with 1 Corinthians 13]**

V | ch 12.17-21 | The Gospel transforms our relationship with our enemies

1 / Of course, we will have our enemies. Jesus and His apostles all forewarned us of the assaults of our enemies against us, and also suffered themselves from their attacks. So, how does the Gospel transform us by renewing our minds in the ways we see, think about, and respond to them? And, we must note here also that Paul gives us no exceptions or wiggle room to pick and choose which ones we will respond to in this way: **no one, all, never...**
2 / Here are summaries of Paul's instructions:
[1] **Do not respond 'in kind' to their attacks and harm to you—but do the right and honorable thing that is God's will (v 17);**
[2] **Do everything you can, that is possible, 'go the extra mile,' to live at peace with them (v 18);**
[3] **Do not ever, 'never,' retaliate or seek to exact your own revenge against their attacks against you or the hurts they have caused you—leave all vengeance to The LORD (v 19, quoting from Deuteronomy32.35)**—if there is any 'payback' to be paid, trust God to exact and collect it**;**
[4] **To the contrary** [since we have been ***transformed*** by the Gospel], **seek every opportunity to do good and show the mercy to them that God has shown to you (v 20, quoting from Proverbs 25.21-22).** What might it mean **'for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head'?** It may mean that you will convict your enemy's conscience by your expression of love for his hatred and your expression of grace for his enmity—make them ashamed of themselves for treating you so meanly.
3 / Everything Paul has said in all these relationship instructions can be summed up by this: **Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.** It's kind of like we say: 'Somebody has to break the vicious cycle of paying back evil for perpetrating evil—which will only provoke more evil to be paid back again...and on and on... *This summary statement also serves as a transition into the next section...*

VI | ch 13.1-7 | The Gospel transforms our relationship with our civil authorities and government

1 / Now, Paul takes up our relationship with our civil governments. It is interesting that Paul introduces civil government immediately after addressing our relationship with our enemies—because historically, civil governments have been hostile to the Christian faith. Not without exception, but for the most part. So, the primary imperative Paul instructs us to obey is this: **Let every person be subject to the governing authorities.** There is a parallel passage to this one in **1 Peter 2.13-17.** And remember, that both Paul and Peter were executed and martyred for their Gospel faith by their contemporary Roman government. So this is not a command how to relate to civil governments that are friendly or cooperative to Christians. The ancient world and cultures didn't know of such a friendly 'church/state' relationship.

2 / At the outset here, we need to add the qualifying caveat that, for the Christian, submission to civil governments does not override our duty to obey God. When the civil government commands us to do something God has forbidden, or forbids us to do something God has commanded—then **we must obey God rather than men [Acts 5.29].** Otherwise, **those who resist [civil government] will incur judgment,** both from the government and from God who instituted the government.

3 / By way of simple summary, Paul gives several reasons why we must submit to our civil **governing authorities:**

[1] (vv 1-2) Civil government has been instituted by God. "For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God." God instituted civil government when He established the Noahic covenant **[Genesis 9.1-17].** All authority belongs to God, and He delegates and appoints all human authorities under His sovereign, supreme authority. Only God is not **under authority.** Every other earthly creation, being, and person is **under authority** to some higher rank, tier, and hierarchy of government. God has done this to establish and maintain order and function in our societies. Without governments—even bad ones—there would be only anarchy, chaos, and mutual self-destruction. So, to resist the **governing authorities** is to **resist what God has appointed.**

[2] (vv 3-4) It is for our 'good' to be submissive citizens. God's ideal for human government is that they rule over their subjects for their **good,** and punish those who are **wrongdoers [see 2 Samuel 23.2-4]. "...for he is God's servant for your good ... For he is the servant of God..."** Granted, almost all human governments at whatever level are filled with corruption, graft, and use their power and control over others to advance and enrich their own self-interests. But we must allow God to sort that out—and He will and does. But our responsibility is to **do what is good**—that is, be peaceful, law-abiding, respectful citizens of the communities in which we live.

[3] (vv 5-7) We must be submissive citizens "for the sake of conscience" before God. What does this have to do with our conscience before God? It is because God commands it. And if we break the 'lawful before God' laws of our land, we will incur, not only the civil penalty for breaking them, but also **God's wrath on the wrongdoer.** We violate both the civil laws and also God's law requiring us to **be in subjection.** And this issue of **conscience** extends even to the onerous responsibility of paying our taxes. **For because of this [conscience before God] you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing.** Paul is looking at taxes as being a necessary thing in order to fund the government's oversight and management of the social order. He is not entering into the debate of what is 'fair' or 'reasonable'—he is just addressing the core, baseline issue. NOTE Paul's repetition of the word **'owed.'** What he means is that governments have the right to exact taxation from the citizens. There will always be questions and debates about the rates and amounts—but the **'owe'** is a given. **Pay to all what is *owed* them: taxes to whom taxes are *owed*, revenue to whom revenue is *owed*, respect to whom respect is *owed,* honor to whom honor is *owed.*** We need to pay particular attention to those last two commandments also: **respect and honor.** That doesn't mean they have to be personally respectable or honorable. Almost all of the rulers of the Roman Empire and its provinces in Paul's day were despicable, immoral, and morally debauched people. But the **respect and honor** that we **owe** them is God's delegated **authority** that He has given them to govern the nations of the earth.

VII | ch 13.8-10 | The Gospel transforms our relationship with our neighbors and communities

1 / Of course, we don't live alone in our societies and communities. There are also all of our fellow-citizens and neighbors. And, as **Gospel-transformed** people of God, we have the responsibility to represent God will to them and among them. NOTE how Paul transitions to our relationships with our neighbors and communities by using the same imperative verb **'owe.'** Just as we **owe** the rulers in our governments **taxes, revenues, respect, and honor,** so we also **owe** a debt to all our neighbors—and that debt is **love!**
2 / God has given us numerous specific commandments in His word—both OT and NT—to tell us how to treat our neighbors. And we **owe** both God and our neighbors to treat them in ways that are **good, acceptable, and perfect [complete]—**in other words, in every way that is **the will of God [see v 2].** But all of those 'rules of engagement' with our neighbors are all summed up in one word: **love. Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law ... For [all] the commandments...are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.** And the best way we **love** and show **love** to our neighbors is by treating them with respect, kindness, and mercy; doing **good** to them and for them every opportunity we get; and especially sharing the Gospel of Grace with them! Remember what Paul wrote to the Romans in **ch 1.14-15: I am under obligation [*debtor,* KJV] both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the Gospel to you also who are in Rome.** We **owe** it to our neighbors to **love** them by doing the same!

VIII | ch 13.11-14 | The Gospel transforms our relationship with our present age—in view of eternity

1 / NOTE how Paul gives us this alert about how pressingly urgent it is that we live this **transformed life in all our relationships! "Besides this you know the time...the hour has come for you to wake from sleep."** The '**besides this'** refers to the Christian obligation and responsibility God has given us **to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship [logical, reasonable service].** That is the first and paramount reason we should conduct all our relationships as he has instructed us: **it is the will of God!**
2 / But also, *every moment counts—time is running out!* Both the times of our individual lifetimes, but more so, the very time of this present Gospel age. **The hour has come for you to wake from sleep! ... The night [time for rest and sleep] is far gone; the day [time to get up and get to work] is at hand.** This is no time for spiritual laziness, sloth, carelessness, and indifference! **For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.** Paul directs our attention to two truths here:
[1] We are dual-citizens while we live here in this world. We are citizens of the communities in which we live, and we need to fulfill that citizenship in a responsible, God-pleasing conduct—we need to represent God well. BUT, we are also, first, and preeminently so *citizens of Heaven **[Philippians 3.20-21]**...*
[2] ...and we are waiting for Jesus to come back and deliver us into His eternal Kingdom! That's what Paul means when he says, **"For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed."**
3 / So then, how shall we live before a watching world as people, children, and servants of God in all our ***transformed relationships?*** There is 'lifestyle clothing' that we must **put off,** and also that which we must **put on. "So then let us *cast off* the works of darkness** [think here: **'do not be conformed to the *schematic, model, pattern, mold* of this world'**] **and *put on* the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy."** That is what we must **put off.** That is NOT who we are.
4 / What we must **put on** is **the armor of light.** The **'light'** is the Gospel by which we have been saved and transformed. And all the **armor of light** is in Christ! Since we have been saved from our sins and our former lifestyle by faith in Christ and His Gospel, we must live like who we are! **Live like Christ who lives in us! "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires!"**
5 / And so, with that all-encompassing **clothed in the righteousness of Christ,** Paul sums up **vv 1-2** to describe our primary ***transformed relationship with God!***

LET'S LIVE LIKE WHO GOD HAS MADE US TO BE!