

Good afternoon. Hope YOU are well this afternoon. You might like to keep your bibles open Romans 13, as we start the sermon.

You may remember from last week that Bruce used the chameleon as an example. Well this week we are going to look at the black bear. [P]

An amazing feature of THE BLACK BEAR is it's sense of smell. It has a sense of smell that can detect food upwind and from a distance of 32 kilometres away. Amazing isn't it, that's 2100 times better than what a human can smell. Another interesting feature about this black bear is that it can hibernate, it can sleep up to 7 months in a year. And in the other 5 months of the year, the bear is awake and is eating as much as it can, to get ready for hibernation.

Today I want us to consider this question together: [P] Are we hibernating or are we awake and ready?

Romans 13:11 [P] says "do this, understanding the present time." This verse challenges us to

[P]Firstly understand what the present time is and secondly it challenges us about how we are to live?

So Firstly, [P] What does Paul say about this time that we are now living in?

Just like the bear having a state of hibernation and a state of being awake and ready, we too have two states of living. In verses 11-14, Paul describes these two states as the night time and the day time.

[P] If we belong to the night we will be wearing the deeds of darkness, our behavior will include things like orgies, drunkenness, sexual immorality, debauchery, dissension, and jealousy, and our thoughts will be filled with how can we gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

[P] If we belong to the day, we will be wearing the armour of light, clothing ourselves with Christ, and our behavior will be decent, no sign of night's behavior, and our thoughts, instead of desires of the sinful nature, our thoughts will be filled with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now in verse 11 Paul says [P] "The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed"

It is the hour to awake – the world is asleep, the world is caught up in darkness, but dawn is about to come, the sun is rising. So Christians are to wake up because the return of Jesus is closer than it has ever been. Can you hear that sense of anticipation that Paul has in verse 12? He says "The night is nearly over, the day is almost here." Pauls says, stop hibernating, and live like you are awake and ready.

And this brings us back to the first part of chapter 13. Jesus is about to return, so how are we to live? In verses 1-7 Paul focuses in on the relationship between us and the authorities and this is what we are going to look at now.

This passage has raised a lot of questions for Christians like how can God be in charge of bringing Hitler or Stalin to power and what relationships should Christians have with cruel dictators? Unfortunately because of time, we won't be able to go into depth with these issues. Instead I want to focus on what Paul is saying rather than the exceptions to what he is saying. I think people tend to spend more time looking for the exceptions in this passage, rather than looking at what Paul is saying.

It's helpful if we first look at the background of the Christians in Rome at the time of Paul writing this letter. What situation were they in?

Christians in Paul's time were being taught that they were to live transformed lives, and not to conform to the patterns of this world. And some of the Christians were taking these words to the extremes, saying that you were to avoid things like marriage, physical pleasures and the laws of authorities. So when we deal with this passage we need to take these things into account.

What do these first seven verses say about how we should relate to the authorities:

[P] In verse one, it says everyone must submit to authorities. To help us understand the passage I think it is important to clearly understand what the word submit means. In demanding submission to the authority, Paul is not

demanding obedience to every command of the authorities. He is demanding that you recognize that authorities have a place in society over you. The reason why becomes clear when we look at the last half of verse 1.

Why are we to submit? We are to submit [P] Because all authority has been established by God. God has placed authorities in society for his good purposes part of which is to punish people who break the laws. But this doesn't mean that they are the ultimate authority on everything. We need to recognize that the authorities have been appointed by God, which means that God is the ultimate authority. So if the government's laws oppose God laws, then we should obey the higher authority- God.

Our basic attitude to government should be one of submission, rather than resistance.

I'm not sure if you know but recently the government of Victoria passed a Bill which will remove abortion from the criminal code, and make abortions legal if they occur. As Christians what are we to do about the issue of abortion? The government has made a decision to legalise abortion, are we just to accept it? Well I know a group of people who are trying to make a difference to the women who are affected by abortion. They are not sending hate mail to the politicians, or starting riots, they are submitting to the government, they are actively and positively addressing the issues of abortion by providing a program that will support young women in adverse circumstances who want to keep their child, and try to educate women that abortion is not the only option. Here is an example of people submitting to the government.

from verses 6,7, [P] Submission also involves, paying taxes and giving what is due. But this submission is not slavery; it doesn't just come from fear of possible punishment, but it should also come from conscience, this is what verse 5 says. And what is conscience it is the conviction that this is the right thing to do.

Let's take the law of speeding. If you speed in New South Wales the punishment would be to pay a fine, which could be up to \$3300 or spend time in a jail and you lose your licence. Well that kind of punishment is enough for me not to speed. Is that the only reason that we shouldn't speed? I'm sure you've heard and seen many articles about fatal accidents due to speeding. Just recently I read an article where a young man who was speeding 60 kmh over the speed limit, his four teenage friends were in the car, and they all died. You see, The laws that the authorities have made are for our protection. it's not just the punishments that should keep us from speeding. It's also because of conscience, we should know that it is the right thing to do.

Last week in chapter 12 we saw how we are to relate to our brothers and sisters in Christ and how we are to relate to our enemies, and we have just seen how we are to relate to authorities. From what I can see all these relationships that Paul has stated so far in Romans 12 and 13 seem to be based on the foundation of love.

When the Beatles sang the song all you need is love, most people probably thought, yeah that's right, all you need is love, if you've got love and you act with love, they think that means everything is going to be ok. And we would probably agree, after all Jesus talks about love all the time. But the command here in verse 8-10 takes this idea of love even further than the worldly idea of love. What is the character of this love supposed to be like? Unfortunately love in today's society can mean almost whatever we want it to mean, from something that is fickle and fleeting to things only concerned with pleasures of the flesh. Do we mean romantic love, is it affection, is it loyalty? Well, Romans 12-15 has a lot to say about the life of love. We saw last week in chapter 12 that love must be sincere. And in here in verses 8-10 Paul continues to unpack for us what love is. Chapter 13 says three things about what our love is to be like with Jesus return' in mind

Firstly, [P] Verse 8 says that it is a lifelong love, we can never say "I have finished loving". Because Even though I have loved today, I will need to love tomorrow, even though I have loved one person, there will always be another person to love. It just never ends. Paul says that the character of our Christian love is that we are called to love continuously.

Secondly, [P] love is a radical love. Note who Paul says we are to love in verse 8 and 9. We are to love not just fellow Christians or friends we are to love one another, love our fellowman, and again in verse 9, love our neighbor. Do you remember Luke 10? The parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus was asked the question “who is our neighbor?”, his answer was anybody we meet is our neighbor. We are to love the mass of humanity, that’s who we are to love. Christian love is not just to be a love for those who love us, or those who are nice and pleasant, Christian love is for everyone, even those who are not loveable.

This is so different to the world’s view isn’t it? The World’s view is I’ll just love the people who I want to love or who love me. What difference have we made as Christian people if we just love the people that are nice? If we only love our family, and the nice neighbor on one side of our house, but not the grumpy, rude neighbours on the other side, or if we only love the pleasant people at work, and stay away from the unpleasant, difficult people at work.

If we love like this, We are only loving like the world does, and that is not the heart of Christian love. We should be loving as Christ did, clothed in his love. Because when did God love us? He loved us and sent his son to die for us when we were enemies, while we were still sinners - that's the message of Romans chapter 5. Yet we so easily think that we don’t have to love like that, But Paul says that we must love with this radical love.

I'd like to tell you about a man named David Wilkerson who showed this radical love through his actions. He was a preacher in New York around the 50's and 60's. David was spat on, insulted, slapped, almost killed a couple of times by the leader of the most notorious gang in NY at the time. What would you do if these things were done to you? I know I'd probably run away and forget this guy. Instead of giving up David continued to pray, and showed love to the people around him, and by the grace of God the leader of this notorious gang Nicky Cruz became a christian, who now spends his time to show the same radical love, he was given, to people who are involved in gangs. David practiced love, his love wasn't just the love of this world, it was a radical love.

I know of a lovely lady who spends time every week taking a person shopping in their car. Would we do something like that?

As I examine my own heart, I know I don't always love like this, Even in this last week there are times when I just didn't bother, and it's just too much trouble, I'll wait till they call me. And yes, I should have called, I should have done something, I should have acted, and I regret it now.

We must love with this radical love. The love that we're called to live out is a lifelong love, and it is a radical love.

Finally this love is a fulfilling love. [P] The word fulfilling here does not mean, 'I will find great satisfaction in loving like this'. Though you probably will. No the fulfillment that he's talking about here, is that when we love other people we will fulfill God's law. You see God has always wanted love, it's not just a Jesus/New Testament thing, have a look at what [P] Leviticus 19:18 says 'Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself..

Love has always been at the heart of the law, doing what's best for the other. We cannot say that we love our neighbor, and yet behind their backs we cut them down. We cannot say that we love our neighbor and ignore the poor in our community, we cannot say that we love our neighbor and seek to get back at them because they've done something to hurt us. We cannot say that we love our neighbor and yet desire their possessions.

[P] The love we are called to have is a life long love, it is a radical love, it is a fulfilling love because we're doing what God has always intended that we love our neighbours as ourselves.

SO let us come back to the question I asked at the beginning. Are we hibernating or are we awake and ready?

Are we a sleepy church, are we slumbering? Are we still hibernating? Are we still caught up with the things of the night, rather than having moved into the day time?

Paul says it is time to live the life of love and to clothe yourself with Christ because he is coming again. Soon. We should no longer be hibernating, but we should be awake and ready.

Remember that you no longer belong to the dark, but belong to the day .

Let's Pray..

Heavenly Father,

We thank you for your word to us here in Romans 13. We thank you that while we were still your enemies you showed us true love and gave us a new life through your son Jesus Christ. We pray that we will remember that we are people who belong to the day. We pray that in all our thoughts, words, and actions we will be people who reflect a lifelong love, a radical love and a fulfilling love. In Jesus name we pray, AMEN.