

Romans 12-Romans 13: Transformed Relationships

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[0 : 00] Good morning and a warm welcome to the service this morning.

It's good to have you tuning in whether it's on YouTube, online or listening in on the telephone. It's good for us to come together in worship as we have been doing.

Intimations are just as has been in most weeks. The service tonight should be online just before 6 o'clock and in the course of the week the YF will meet at half past 7 tonight on Zoom and the prayer meeting this coming Wednesday at half past 7 also on Zoom.

So please be encouraged to come to these meetings. We'll begin our time of worship and we'll sing to God's praise. We'll sing from Psalm 63.

Lord, thee my God, I'll early seek, my soul doth thirst for thee. My flesh longs in a dry parched land wherein the waters be, that I thy power may behold and brightness of thy face, as I have seen thee heretofore within thy holy place.

[1 : 21] and so on we sing to God's praise. Lord, thee my God, I'll early seek, my soul doth thirst for thee.

My flesh longs in a dry parched land wherein no waters be, that I thy power may behold and brightness of thy face, as I have seen thee heretofore within thy holy place.

Since better is thy love than life, my lips thee praise shall give.

I in thy name will lift my hands and bless thee while I live.

In us with marrow and with fat, my soul shall fill it be.

[3 : 07] Then shall my mouth with joyful lips sing praises unto thee.

When I do thee upon my bed, When I do thee upon my bed, Remember with delight, And when on thee I meditate, In watches of the night, In shadow of thy wings I'll joy, For thou mine help hast been.

My soul thee follow thee, Thy right hand doth sustain.

Let's come to God in prayer. Let's pray together. Our heavenly Father, Our heavenly Father, We thank you once more that we can come to you and worship this Lord's Day morning.

And we thank you for the gift of your word which you have given to us, Your word which we have sang together. We thank you that you are the God who reveals yourself to us.

[4 : 48] And we see that in the glory and the majesty of creation. And we see that more as we open the scriptures. And as we listen to what you have said to us through those who were inspired by the Holy Spirit over many years, Over many centuries.

We thank you that the Holy Spirit took hold of those who would speak your words. And we thank you that we have these words in scripture and the Bible.

We thank you that we have it in translations that we can understand. We thank you that we have no shortage of copies of scripture. We thank you that we are able to open your word and pray that the Holy Spirit would enable us to hear your voice and to know your will.

And even to sense your presence as we open this book. Help us, we pray. To be often in the scriptures. And each time we open them, whether we sing, whether we read, whether we meditate upon them in preaching.

We ask, Lord, that we would have that sense of expectation that you will meet with us and speak to us. We thank you, Lord, for the word made flesh for the Lord Jesus, your son and our saviour.

[6 : 07] We thank you that he is the fulfilment of all that is written in scripture. We thank you that every chapter bears witness to him. And we thank you for all that he has done on our behalf and coming to this world and living that righteous life that we cannot live.

We thank you that he, the sinless one, died in the place of the sinner to take the punishment for our sin. And we thank you that he rose from the dead and said that all who believe in him shall share in the resurrection life that he has demonstrated.

So help us, we pray, to have our eyes fixed upon Jesus as the scriptures are open. And we thank you for the privilege of being able to draw near to you in prayer. We thank you that we thank you that we thank you that we thank you that we thank you that we can speak to the living God and that we can know that you hear our prayers.

That we can come to you, the God of heaven and earth, and address you as our father. and we ask Lord that you would help us, that you would teach us to pray.

Help us to make time each day to spend with you in prayer and help us to be praying without ceasing in all the events of life, the things that are planned in our own diaries, the things that come at us that we never expected.

[7 : 29] We thank you that we have a friend that we can turn to in prayer and that we can be praying without ceasing, asking Lord that you would walk close with us all the days of our lives.

We ask Lord that you would be near to us in a special way in this hour of worship. We pray that we would know your presence in our homes. We ask Lord that we would hear your voice.

We pray Lord that you would work on us, that you would mould us and transform us, that we would become more like Christ. We pray for any who listen in or who watch, who do not yet know the Lord Jesus as their Saviour.

And we thank you that we can come to know the Lord Jesus simply with a prayer. When we see our sin and when we cry out, God have mercy on me as sinner, we thank you that we are promised that when that cry comes from the sincerity of a heart which is repenting, we are promised salvation.

We are promised salvation. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. So we pray that if there is anyone who has not yet called, that we would be found calling in prayer upon the name of the Lord Jesus, even this morning.

[8 : 46] We ask Lord that you would be with those who are in particular need at this time. Again, we are conscious of those who are sick and those who are struggling. And we pray that your hand of healing, that your hand would be upon them, steadying them through this time.

We pray for those who have been in hospital and who are at home recovering. And we ask Lord that you would speed that recovery. We pray for some who have been anxious in past days about relatives who have undergone surgery.

And we ask that you would be near to them, both those who were in hospital and those who perhaps were not able to sit at bedsides, but who from a distance drew near to you in prayer.

We thank you that we can carry those that we love to you in prayer. We pray on for those who battle with addictions and who find this time of lockdown difficult. Give them the strength that they need to resist temptation.

And we pray on for those who are grieving, asking Lord that you would strengthen them, that you would comfort them, that you would enable them to know in the dark valleys that they may go through, that you are God and that you are with them.

[10 : 05] And we pray for our young people. We ask Lord that as they continue to seek your will and your guidance, as they acknowledge you, we ask that you would direct their paths.

We think especially of those who have had exam results, perhaps amended exam results in these past few days. Help them, give them wisdom as they make decisions about the future.

And we pray that the young people of our congregation would grow up to know you, to trust you, to walk close with you, and to glorify you in and through their lives.

So hear our prayers. Bless this time that we have in worship. May Jesus be lifted up and may we be drawn in faith to him. And we ask all these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Boys and girls, it's good to know that you're behind that camera, you're behind that screen this morning. I don't have anything to show you this morning.

[11 : 04] I don't have any toys or transformers or whatever. But I thought I would just tell you a wee story about something that happened to us a couple of weeks ago. A couple of weeks ago, you know that we were on holiday.

We went off to the mainland to see my parents and Mary's parents. And after we were away, we were coming back home. And we were in the ferry queue at Uig, waiting to come over the mince to get back to Harris.

The ferry was delayed, so we were stuck in the car for quite a long time. And Grace, my middle daughter, she decided that she wanted to get a drink from the shop.

So she went out to the shop. And after getting her drink, she headed back to the car. Now, those of you who know us know that we have a Volkswagen Passat, a state car, a black car.

And Grace and all of us know what that car looks like. But in the same lane where we were parked in the ferry queue, two or three cars behind us was another black Volkswagen Passat estate car.

[12 : 18] It looked almost identical to ours. So what happened next? Well, you can probably guess what happened next. Grace, as she wandered back from the shop and found the right queue with the cars, she walked along past all the other cars.

And when she came to the first Volkswagen Passat estate car, she opened the door and she went to sit down in the car.

And when she went to sit down in the car, the lady who was already in the car, she looked at Grace, she shrieked. She got a big shock, which caused Grace to shriek.

And then she apologised. And as fast as she possibly could, she got out of the car. She heard the voice of the stranger, or she heard the shriek of the stranger.

And she moved away as soon as possible because she had no relationship. She didn't know this stranger. Reminds me of what Jesus said in John 10.

[13 : 26] Jesus, when he was talking about his sheep, those who know him, he said, they will never follow a stranger. In fact, they run away from him because they do not recognise a stranger's voice.

So when Grace didn't recognise the stranger's shriek, she ran away as fast as she possibly could because she had no relationship with the lady in that car. Now today in the sermon, we're going to be thinking about what it means to be a Christian.

And a Christian is somebody who is in relationship with God. Now what is it that causes a relationship with God not to happen? If I asked you that question in normal times, you'd tell me the answer right away.

It's sin that blocks a relationship with God. It's sin that keeps us back from God. But when we trust in Jesus, he takes our sin away.

He removes our sin. And he takes us close to him. He takes us actually so close to him that he holds us in the palm of his hand.

[14 : 36] That's how safe we are. That's how close we are. That's how secure we are when we're Christians. We are in this relationship with God where he holds us and the Father holds us in the palm of his hand.

John chapter 10 and verse 27. Jesus said, My sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me.

I give them eternal life and they shall never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all.

No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. So when we hear the shriek or the voice of a stranger, we move away, don't we? But boys and girls, what I want to say to you this morning is when you hear the voice of Jesus, the call of Jesus, as we open the Bible and as we listen to our Sunday school lessons, when we hear the call of Jesus, come to him.

Come close to him. He loves us. He's done everything to take our sin away and he promises that when we trust him, he will bring us into the closest, the best relationship that we can ever have.

[15 : 55] And it begins the moment that you pray and ask him to come into your life and it goes on forever and ever and ever. So let's be trusting in Jesus as we hear him call us close into relationship with him.

We'll pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that we can know you. We thank you that we can have Jesus as our saviour and as the friend who sticks closer than a brother.

We ask, Lord, that you would help us to hear the voice of Jesus and that you would give us the faith that we would come to Jesus and know the eternal life and the rich relationships that he offers us when we trust him.

And we ask all this in Jesus' name and for Jesus' sake. Amen. We'll turn now to God's word and we'll read from Romans chapter 12.

The first two verses of Romans chapter 12 and then we move on to Romans chapter 13. Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.

[17 : 10] This is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

And then we move on to Romans chapter 13 and verse 1. Everyone must submit themselves to the governing authorities for there is no authority except that which God has established.

The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted. And those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

For rulers hold no terror for those who do right but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you 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 and agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.

[18 : 24] This is also why you pay taxes for the authorities are God's servants who give their full time to govern it. Give everyone what you owe him. If you owe taxes, pay taxes.

If revenue, then revenue. If respect, then respect. If honour, then honour. Let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt to love one another.

For he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law. The commandments do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not covet. And whatever the commandment there may be are summed up in this one rule.

Love your neighbour as yourself. Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore, love is the fulfilment of the law. 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. The night is nearly over. The day is almost here.

[19 : 25] So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light. Let us behave decently as in daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.

Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature. Amen.

And may God bless that reading of his word to us. Well, as we turn back now to Romans 12 and 13, let's again ask God for his help.

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We pray now for the help of the Holy Spirit. May he be our teacher. May he open and illuminate our minds, stir our hearts and enable us, we pray, to meet with you in Scripture.

And we ask all this in Jesus' name and for Jesus' sake. Amen. I want to begin this morning with a question, a huge question that's been asked often over the years.

[20 : 36] Perhaps it's even been asked by somebody who's tuning in. I don't know who watches these services on YouTube. But the question to begin with is what is Christianity? What is Christianity?

And according to Wikipedia, which is where most people seem to go for their definitions, Christianity, and I'm quoting here, is an Abrahamic monotheistic religion.

Christianity is an Abrahamic monotheistic religion. And that's true, that's factually true, but I think we can say, those of us who are Christians, that we know that Christianity is much more than that.

Yes, it's a religion, but it's not just a religion, it's a relationship. It's a relationship with God. And that's an amazing thing for us to begin on, the fact that we can know God.

We can enter into relationship with God. God, sometimes we might hear a piece of music and be moved by it.

[21 : 53] Or we might look at a painting and we see something amazing in this painting, and when we have that kind of experience, whether it's art, whether it's music, something in you wants to meet the artist, you want to meet the person who produced this, who created this, but usually that's not possible.

Now, we look out our windows, especially in Harris, and we see the majesty of God's creation. We see the force of nature in the sea.

We feel it through the elements. and behind that is God, the God who created it all with a word, the God who sustains it all, who holds it all together.

Behind us even, as we look in the mirror, is God. He is our maker. He's the one who formed us. And the amazing thing that we must never take for granted or lose sight of is the fact that we can know him.

We can know God. We have been made to know God. We can enter into relationship with him.

[23 : 14] And then when we think about who we are as sinners, as Paul has made so very clear in the opening chapters of Romans, and then when we think about who God is and his holiness, and his purity, and his perfection, we rightly ask, how is it possible?

How can the God who cannot look upon sin, as it says in Habakkuk 1.13, how can he look upon and even allow us sinners to enter into relationship with him?

And the answer to that question is Jesus. The answer is found in the gospel.

We've so often sung this. How deep the Father's love for us, how vast beyond all measure, that he should give his only son to make a wretch, that's us sinners, his treasure.

How great the pain of searing loss, the Father turns his face away, as wounds which marred the chosen one, that's Jesus, bring many souls to glory.

[24 : 32] The God who could not look upon sin, could not look upon his own son. The Father turned his face away from Jesus, the Son, as he became sin for us on the cross.

But because he did, the Father now is able to look upon us in Christ and call us into relationship with him.

And that's what I want us to consider today. I want us to consider in the time that we have, our relationship, relationship we can have, or do have, with God.

And I want us to think about how that relationship with God affects all the other relationships that we have in this life. So today, although we read and focused on Romans 13 in our reading, I really want to look at the whole span of Romans 12 and 13 as one unit.

And Paul begins in Romans 12 at the beginning with the most important thing. He begins by focusing on our relationship with God.

[25 : 55] And that's our first point, our relationship with God. Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.

This is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing, and perfect will. Now, as Paul begins Romans 12, he takes us, he takes us in a sense to the summit, he takes us to the mountaintop, and he causes us with that word, therefore, to look back the way before we look forward.

We look back in the first 11 chapters of Romans at the vastness of God's mercy shown to us in Christ. And then Paul says to us, in view of all that God has done for you, in view of all that Paul has expounded in these first 11 chapters of the book, in view of God's great mercy and saving you and taking you into relationship with him, Paul says, don't live the way you used to live before you were in Christ, but be transformed.

Live a life that will bring glory to Jesus. Now, we hear that, and we nod enthusiastically.

[27 : 35] We want to be transformed. Romans 12 and verse 2 is probably one of the most popular verses in the Bible. We make posters of Romans 12 verse 2, do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

We see that verse in bookmarks, we see that verse when we open our phones on Instagram pictures, there's a beautiful landscape, and that verse overlaps it.

We want to be transformed people. We love this verse. And that transformation begins in and through our relationship with God.

It's not something we can do for ourselves, it's not something that we do to ourselves, it's something that God does as we enter into relationship with him.

He is the one who saves us from sin in Christ. He is the one who sanctifies us, who transforms us as we stay close to him.

[28 : 45] So the most important thing for you and for me is to make sure that we are in that saving relationship with God as we put our faith in Jesus.

Without that relationship we can gain the whole world, we can become rich, we can become popular, we can do all kinds of things in the material sense, but we will be lost eternally.

Jesus said, what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and yet loses his soul? without that relationship with God we are lost eternally.

Without that relationship with God we'll never be transformed people. We might be slightly tweaked here and there in some areas of our lives as we try to fix ourselves, but invariably we fail in that and we'll never be transformed without a relationship with God.

But when we're brought into that relationship with God, when we enter into that relationship with God by faith, when we trust in Jesus, think about this, where is it that that work of transformation occurs?

[30 : 06] Think about the athlete. She wants to be the best, she wants to be the fastest that she can be. Now that involves work, it involves getting off the couch, it involves getting onto the track, it involves getting down to the gym.

Now where is it that God's work of transforming us is done? Where is that transformation that God wants for us?

Where is it seen? Where is it worked out? Where is the gymnasium of transformation if I could put it that way? Well it's in all our relationships in this world.

world. And so Paul in Romans chapter 12 and from verse 3 right through to the end of Romans 13 he steps through all these various relationships that we enter into as those who live in this world.

And that's what Jesus would have us do. Remember in the prayer in John 17 Jesus says of the disciples he didn't want them to be out of this world, he wants them to be in this world, just not of the world.

[31 : 23] So let's think about these different relationships that form our lives in this world. We thought about the first relationship that's so crucial, that's essential and that's our relationship with God.

And now we think about how that relationship shapes our other relationship, starting with ourselves. Second point is our relationship with ourselves and that's chapter 12 verse 3.

And we learn there, and we thought about this last week, so I'm not going to spend much time on any of the verses in chapter 12, but we learn in chapter 12 and verse 3 that we're not to think too highly of ourselves and become proud.

We're not to think too critically of ourselves and become depressed, but rather we're to recognize that our identity is secure in Christ and our mission in this world is to live for him, to live for his glory.

And that's a really important point for us to grasp, that's a really important point, especially for the person who feels a constant pull onto social media. Now the world of social media is a world that will puff you up and then it will pull you down.

[32 : 41] it's a world that leads to people, especially young people. Sometimes they become so depressed at what they see in that world that they end up hating themselves as they measure themselves against other people and what they need, what we all need, is that relationship with God.

That's a relationship, relationship with God that transforms how we think about ourselves and how we see our lives.

It's a relationship that enables us to understand and accept who we are and why we are here. So we have this relationship with God, that's where Paul begins.

And then he thinks about how that affects our relationship with ourselves as we view ourselves. And then Paul moves on to the relationship that we have with other Christians.

And that's verses 4 through to verse 13. You'll need to have Romans 12 in front of you here because I'm not going to read these portions but if you scan these verses you see that in chapter 12 verses 4 through to 13 Paul begins using the illustration of the body.

[34 : 09] And in the body every part is connected. And every Christian teaches Paul is a member, it's a part of the body of Christ. We're all connected.

At chapter 12 verse 5 each member belongs to all the others. So how do we live out the transformed life?

Well I think Paul is teaching us here that we as part of the body are to depend on each other. We're to respect each other. We're to serve God as we serve and care for each other.

We don't hurt each other because like the body when one part is hurt the pain shoots through the whole body.

I mean think about it if you hit your thumb with a hammer. It's not just the isolated thumb that feels the pain. It shoots through the arm. The brain sends the signals.

[35 : 16] The mouth shrieks out in pain. It affects everywhere. So as we consider our relationship with other Christians we depend on each other.

We respect each other. We serve God as we love and care for each other. We don't hurt each other but rather we show love for and honour to each other.

Verse 10. We encourage each other. Verses 11 and 12. We share our lives with each other. We open our homes. Verse 13.

In hospitality to each other. That's part of what it looks like to live this transformed life. And that can be challenging.

We might be thinking even now some people in the church, some people who are other believers, I struggle with them.

[36 : 12] We might be thinking just now about certain people who are Christians and we know they're Christians but they annoy us. And if we're honest we find it hard to love some people.

And if we're honest as we think about this teaching here we may be saying I don't really want to share too much of my life and I certainly don't want to share my home and hospitality with everyone, with every other believer that I know.

And yet Paul is saying to us here that's what the transformed life looks like. We've become so individualistic in our ways in the last couple of generations that this seems unreasonable to us.

But this is what we're called to. And yes there is a cost to belonging to all the others as Paul puts it in verse 5.

But there's rich blessing in it. And when we live this out the world notices. That was the observation of the ancient Romans who were looking into the early church about 140 years I think it was after this was written.

[37 : 45] In AD 197 Tertullian wrote about the Christians and the famous quote that described the church was see how they love each other.

And we're called into that. We are to show that we are transformed people. We are to show the transformed life in our relationship with other Christians.

We're to show the transformed life out in our relationship with ourselves as we see ourselves and as we think about how we live our lives out.

The next thing we see here is that we are to show out the transformed life in our relationship with the world, the hostile world often.

And that takes us from verse 14 down to verse 21. Now Paul, he experienced much hostility in this world because of his faith in Jesus.

[38 : 50] And Paul knows that the Roman believers that he writes to would also experience much hostility if they hold firm to their faith in Christ, if they walk close with Jesus.

But the teaching that's coming through here is that we're not to withdraw and hide when we feel that pressure and that hostility at times. We're also not to fight evil with evil.

But Paul teaches us in verse 21 that we're to overcome evil with good. Look at verse 20, Paul says, if your enemy is hungry, feed him.

If he's thirsty, give him something to drink. Why? Well, in doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.

it's so first I often thought about in the past, not really fully understanding what it meant.

[39 : 53] I mean, what is all that about? What does it mean when Paul says that in doing these good things, we will heap burning coals on the heads of our enemies?

Are we to take some kind of dark pleasure in knowing that there are burning coals on our enemies' head? Are we to smile gleefully every time we do something good for our enemy, imagining his hair catching fire?

Is that what Paul is teaching here? Well, clearly that's not what Paul is teaching. This is not some dark kind of spiteful thought that Paul is having. The picture of burning coals in verse 20 is a picture of our enemies being caused to burn with shame because of the love and kindness that we show towards them.

Kofi, the commentator says, when enemies realize they are on the receiving end of so much love from those they have maltreated for being Christians, they may turn and repent.

And that is one of the main drivers for living in this way. we want Jesus to be glorified, to be lifted up through our transformed life and our transformed relationships.

[41 : 17] And we want those who don't yet know Jesus, who are in the world, we want them to see something of Christ in us and we want them to want to get to know Jesus through our witness.

so in our relationship with the hostile world, we are to show that we are transformed people.

That God is doing that work of transformation as we stay close to him, as we stay in that close relationship with him. Now as we move into Romans chapter 13, Paul begins to address our relationship with the state and how we can live as transformed people in the state.

Now when we think about our context here, we live in a democracy. Now we get our vote and we use our vote. So who brings in the government?

government? Well we would probably argue that we bring in the government in a democracy. And in one sense that's right. Our vote is cast and our vote is counted and our vote is put together with all the other votes and then we see a government being formed and coming into power on the basis of the votes that have been cast.

[42 : 54] So in one sense we bring in the government, but in the ultimate sense it's actually God who brings in the government. Look at verse 1, Romans 13.

Everyone must submit themselves to the governing authorities for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

So Paul is teaching us here that those in power, God has allowed to be in power.

He has put them there. And in one sense they are his servants. That's taught in verse 4 and verse 6.

Now if we were to go to Westminster or Holyrood and interview some politicians and ask if they agree with this, many of them, probably most of them would not agree. They wouldn't have this perspective.

[43 : 56] Do they go to work morning by morning thinking about serving God? Well, no, most of them don't. But that doesn't change what the Bible teaches that they, whether knowingly or unknowingly, are God's servants.

God has allowed them to be in power. Does that mean that they'll govern well? No, it doesn't. And often they don't. Does that mean that what they as God's servants do is right?

Well, no, it doesn't. They and we are given free will. And when they act and form policies that are wrong, they will be held accountable for these wrongs.

but if we employ big picture biblical thinking here, Paul teaches us that God has established the governing authorities.

So in our view of government and state, we need to recognize, first of all, there's four elements within this point. The first thing we recognize in our relationship with the state is the sovereignty of God.

[45 : 16] And I think that's something that steadies us, that we recognize the sovereignty of God, even in government. There's some people, and when they begin to talk politics, they become crazed, whether it's because the government that's in power they love and defend vociferously, or whether the government that's in power they can't bear, and they just hate.

We meet these people, and they take to social media, or they may engage in conversations, and they rant and they rave about the government, as if the existence of the universe depended on the politicians, and the history of the rest of the world was dependent on those people who are in power.

we meet people, and we can think of people who are so unsteady when they move into the realm of politics.

Now, it is steadying, I think, for us as Christians to know that although the governing authorities have some delegated power for a period, it's God who's sovereign.

it's God who's in control. So we don't need to panic. We don't need to go into a state of temporary madness when we see Boris Johnson or Donald Trump or Nicola Sturgeon on our screens telling us what to do.

[46 : 58] We need to recognise that God has actually permitted them to have these positions of authority for a period. God in his sovereignty has allowed it.

Remember the conversation between Pilate, the Roman governor, and Jesus, the king of kings, as he is tried just before the crucifixion.

Jesus is silent as the questions come in his direction. and Pilate says, this is John 19 verses 10 and 11, Pilate says, do you refuse to speak to me?

Don't you realise that I have power either to free you or to crucify you? Jesus answered, you would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.

so even in that darkest of hours in one sense, even in that darkest of hours when those who were in authority, Pilate, Herod, the religious authorities, the court system, even when they were abusing their powers against Jesus, God in his sovereignty was working out his purposes.

[48 : 29] and our salvation. So in our relationship with the state, we are to recognise the sovereignty of God.

And in our relationship with the state, we are to be those who are submissive, we are to show submission, that's the second element here. That's part of what we are called to, as those who are being transformed through our relationship with God, we are to respond to those who are in authority over us with submission.

We are called to submit. Verse 1, everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities. Verse 5, therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities.

Now, some of us, when we come to terms with that calling, we may not like it. Some of us might be tempted to say, well, that's okay for Paul to say, but if he was living in this day and age, if he had Boris Johnson or Nicholas Sturgeon or some of the politicians that I dislike, if he had them to deal with on a daily basis, he wouldn't be writing this.

We need to remember Paul was living under the rule of Nero, who was a tyrant, not some gentle pro-Christian ruler.

[50 : 01] That's the context that Paul lived in as he called Christians to submit. But should we always submit?

Well, not always. Where there's a clash between what those in authority demand of us and what God demands of us, then we must say with the apostles, we must obey God and not men.

Remember that scene in Acts chapter 5. The authorities have taken the apostles aside and said, no more speaking about Jesus. No more sermons about the cross.

No more talk about this resurrection. enough about Jesus. The apostles said, we can't submit to that command.

We must obey God rather than men. Or think about, as another example, think about Daniel. Daniel chapter 6.

[51 : 10] There was a law passed in order to try to catch out Daniel. It was a law that prohibited praying. Now, Daniel was somebody who was normally very submissive and very respectful of government.

He was part of it. But when that law was passed, when that rule came in, when he was asked to submit to a life of no prayer, he refused.

He would not submit. He continued in his prayer life and it took him into the lion's den. Or think about in the same book, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, Daniel 3.

God's people and yet they were told that they were to bow down and worship the golden image. Now, did they submit? Did they bow down before the idol and give their worship to another?

No, they didn't. And their lack of submission took them into the fiery furnace. And even Paul, there would come a time in the not too distant future where Paul would not submit.

[52 : 25] He would not deny Jesus and he would be executed for that. So there is a time for godly rebellion when the government tells us to go against God's word, there is a time for us to say we will not submit.

But until that time we are to show respect, we are to give honour, we are to pray for those who are in authority as Paul teaches us in 1 Timothy 2, we are to submit.

love. So we recognise the sovereignty of God as we consider a relationship with the state, we submit.

The third thing we are to do here is we are to show love and that's the essence of verses 8 to 10 of Romans chapter 13. Paul says there, let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt to love one another.

Now Paul previously has been talking about not withholding taxes and not withholding revenue and not being in debt to government or neighbour when we should be paying out.

[53 : 46] And then in verse 8, here the bridge verse, Paul says remember there's one debt that you'll always owe and that's the debt to love one another.

And that's a debt that you don't owe to one another in the primary sense but you owe to God. But it's to be worked out in the love that you show to one another.

Verse 8, let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt to love one another for he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law. And so Paul goes on and he expounds that a bit more.

See when we are called here to live transformed lives within the state we're not simply to be those who refuse to rebel against the state but we're to be good citizens.

that's what we're being taught here. We're to be good Samaritans. We're to be loving members of the state.

[55 : 03] We're not to withdraw and live in monastery somewhere but we're to be active members within our communities.

We're to be those who show love, who serve the people around us. Remembering that Jesus set us that example.

You can go to John 13 and see that. The son of man, Jesus, he came not to be served but to serve. And having washed the disciples' feet, he says, now you go and live like that.

And Paul is building on that here. He's calling us to be good citizens. He's calling us to show love. He's calling us to serve within the context that we live.

And it's a good question for us to ask, although it's a challenging question perhaps for us to ask. I've heard it being asked by various ministers in the past in different places.

[56 : 06] We're to consider this question. If the church doors were never to open again, if we as a church ceased to exist, or even let's expand this, if all the Christians in North Harris, of all denominations, were to be taken out of the community and relocated, dispersed across the world, would the community that we're part of as Christians, would they miss us?

Would they feel that there is something lacking in terms of the love that we show to them? How are we expressing in service the debt of love that we owe to God that is expressed in the way that we love each other?

God so we're to show love within our community, we're to show love as good citizens, members within the state.

And the final thing here is we're to do all of this, keeping constantly a clear view of the second coming of Jesus. Jesus. I was very conscious when COVID first hit at the beginning of March and it came close to us and we started to get the alarms and the lockdowns.

There was a sense of real tangible fear that rippled through the whole nation and it came to our shores. We had a sense, we spoke to each other about it, we had a heightened sense of our own mortality.

[58 : 00] I think as Christians when this came to us, it caused us to wake up. We suddenly thought much more about the shortness of life here and the reality of eternity.

We live with a greater awareness of eternity. We had to use Paul's words, a greater understanding of the present time. I fear that now perhaps we as we've become accustomed to COVID-19 and living with it, we've begun to hit the snooze button again.

And so this is a timely word. We're to wake up. We're to understand verse 11, the shortness of life here.

The hour has come, says Paul, for you to wake up from your slumber because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over.

The day is almost here. And we ask Paul, what day is that, Paul, that you're speaking of? What day is it that's almost here? And he's speaking about the day of the Lord.

[59 : 18] He's speaking about the day when Jesus will return. And when we live with an awareness of the second coming of Jesus, we do, verse 12, want to put aside the deeds of darkness.

We are careful, verse 12, to put on the armor of light. We want to, verse 12, behave decently. we want to be close to.

We want to be clothed with the Lord Jesus, verse 14. As we think on that, as we think on the second coming of Jesus, it actually takes us back to the beginning of Romans chapter 12 once more.

It takes us right back to where we began this sermon, and that's with a relationship with God. and our desire to want to be ready to meet with him when he returns.

So let me finish by asking the question of each of us, how is your relationship with God? If you don't have one, if you're still outside of Christ, then that can change with a prayer, even now.

[60 : 46] God be merciful to me, a sinner. But if we are in Christ, if we have that relationship with God, let us not neglect it, but let us seek to walk close with God, and allow that relationship with Jesus, the primary relationship, to mold and to shape and to transform our relationship with ourselves, our relationship with other Christians, our relationship with the world, hostile as it can sometimes be, and our relationship with the state.

God, do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed.

may God enable us to live transformed lives, and to show that transformation in our relationships.

May we be enabled to live for his glory. we pray. Help us, Lord, we pray, not simply to hear these things, but to do these things.

Enable us, we pray, to walk close with you. And Lord, as we enjoy that relationship with God, we pray that you would indeed transform all the relationships that we enter into.

[62 : 34] We ask that we would see ourselves with clarity as your people called to serve you in this world. Help us, Lord, within the church to love each other so much so that people will notice that we love each other.

Help us, we pray, to show your love and grace and kindness in the world that you have placed us. And enable us, even as we think about being good citizens, to pray for those that you have allowed to be an authority over us, to trust you when sometimes things go in a direction that we would not choose.

Enable us, we pray, to live for your glory. And we ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. There is a higher throne than all this world has known, Where faithful ones from every tongue Will one day come Before the sun we'll stand Made faultless through the Lamb Believing hearts find promised grace Salvation comes Hear heaven's voices sing

Their thunderous anthem rings Through every cold and sapphire skies Their praises rise All glory, wisdom, power Strength, thanks and honour are To God our King who reigns on high Forever home And there we'll find a home Our life before the throne We'll honour Him in perfect song Where we belong In white each tear stay nigh As thirst and hunger die

[65 : 34] The Lamb becomes our shepherd The King who reigns on high And there we'll find a home Hear heaven's voices sing Their thunderous anthem And there we'll find a home And there we'll find a home In the Lord's anthem And there we'll find a home Their praises rise For glory, wisdom, power, strength, thanks, and honor are to God our King, Who reigns on high forevermore.

Hear heaven's voices sing, Their thunderous anthem rings through emerald colds and sapphire skies, Their praises rise.

For glory, wisdom, power, strength, thanks, and honor are to God our King, Who reigns on high forevermore.

Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, both now and forevermore. Amen.