

Kingdom Perspective: Living Out God's Grace in a Divided World

Live Like Jesus

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Romans 13:1–7 (NLT)

Everyone must submit to governing authorities. For all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God. So anyone who rebels against authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and they will be punished. For the authorities do not strike fear in people who are doing right, but in those who are doing wrong. Would you like to live without fear of the authorities? Do what is right, and they will honor you. The authorities are God's servants, sent for your good. But if you are doing wrong, of course you should be afraid, 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. Pay your taxes, too, for these same reasons. For government workers need to be paid. 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.

A Kingdom Perspective of Authority:

- A. God is sovereign over all authority.
- B. God institutes authority according to His divine plan.
- C. Rebellion against earthly authority is ultimately rebellion against God's authority.

Romans 13:8–10 (NLT)

Owe nothing to anyone—except for your obligation to love one another. If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God's law. For the commandments say, "You must not commit adultery. You must not murder. You must not steal. You must not covet." These—and other such commandments—are summed up in this one commandment: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to others, so love fulfills the requirements of God's law."

Proverbs 29:18 (NLT)

When people do not accept divine guidance, they run wild. But whoever obeys the law is joyful.

Romans 13:11–14 (NLT)

This is all the more urgent, for you know how late it is; time is running out. Wake up, for our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. ¹² 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. ¹³ Because we belong to the day, we must live decent lives for all to see. Don't participate in the darkness of wild parties and drunkenness, or in sexual promiscuity and immoral living, or in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, clothe yourself with the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. And don't let yourself think about ways to indulge your evil desires.

1. Living like Jesus means choosing to submit to and serve the authority God has placed over us, out of love and trust in Him.

Romans 14:1–12 (NLT)

Accept other believers who are weak in faith, and don't argue with them about what they think is right or wrong. For instance, one person believes it's all right to eat anything. But another believer with a sensitive conscience will eat only vegetables. Those who feel free to eat anything must not look down on those who don't. And those who don't eat certain foods must not condemn those who do, for God has accepted them. Who are you to condemn someone else's servants? Their own master will judge whether they stand or fall. And with the Lord's help, they will stand and receive his approval. In the same way, some think one day is more holy than another day, while others think every day is alike. You should each be fully convinced that whichever day you choose is acceptable. Those who worship the Lord on a special day do it to honor him. Those who eat any kind of food do so to honor the Lord, since they give thanks to God before eating. And those who refuse to eat certain foods also want to please the Lord and give thanks to God. For we don't live for ourselves or die for ourselves. If we live, it's to honor the Lord. And if we die, it's to honor the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. Christ died and rose again for this very purpose—to be Lord both of the living and of the dead. So why do you condemn another believer? Why do you look down on another believer? Remember, we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For the Scriptures say, " 'As surely as I live,' says the LORD, 'every knee will bend to me, and every tongue will declare allegiance praise to God.' " Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God.

Colossians 3:16–17 (NLT)

Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.

Romans 14:13–19 (NLT)

So let's stop condemning each other. Decide instead to live in such a way that you will not cause another believer to stumble and fall. I know and am convinced on the authority of the Lord Jesus that no food, in and of itself, is wrong to eat. But if someone believes it is wrong, then for that person it is wrong. And if another believer is distressed by what you eat, you are not acting in love if you eat it. Don't let your eating ruin someone for whom Christ died. Then you will not be criticized for doing something you believe is good. For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. If you serve Christ with this attitude, you will please God, and others will approve of you, too. So then, let us aim for harmony in the church and try to build each other up.

2. Living like Jesus means that, because of our unity with God through faith in Jesus, we aim to live in harmony with other believers.

How believers can live in harmony while having differences:

1. Prioritize love over opinion
2. Accept one another in grace
3. Focus on what unites
4. Practice humility
5. Seek peace and mutual edification

Romans 15:1–7 (NLT)

We who are strong must be considerate of those who are sensitive about things like this. We must not just please ourselves. We should help others do what is right and build them up in the Lord. For even Christ didn't live to please himself. As the Scriptures say, "The insults of those who insult you, O God, have fallen on me." Such things were written in the Scriptures long ago to teach us. And the Scriptures give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God's promises to be fulfilled. May God, who gives this patience and encouragement, help you live in complete harmony with each other, as is fitting for

followers of Christ Jesus. Then all of you can join together with one voice, giving praise and glory to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory.

Romans 15:13 (NLT)

I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in Him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Small Group Guide: Live Like Jesus

Opening Question:

What's one personal conviction (a "non-essential") you hold that might look different from someone else's, but you've learned to live with love and grace about it?

The Kingdom Perspective on Authority and Unity

Paul's words in Romans 13–15 give us a framework for how Christians are called to live together under God's authority and in relationship with one another. He begins with a Kingdom perspective of authority, reminding us that all authority ultimately comes from God. Submission is not simply about outward compliance or fear of punishment—it is about trusting God's sovereignty and choosing to honor the structures He has put in place. Yet our ultimate allegiance is always to God, which means that if human authority ever contradicts His commands, we obey Him first.

From there, Paul moves into the central ethic of Christian life: love. He reminds us that love is the fulfillment of the law, and that when we truly love others, we naturally live in alignment with God's commands. The danger of moralism is that it reduces faith to outward rules and legalism—looking for playbooks and extra rules to ensure we “get it right.” But Paul is clear: the Kingdom perspective calls us back to love, which leads to transformation rather than mere performance.

In chapters 14 and 15, Paul tackles one of the most practical challenges for the church: how do we handle differences in non-essential matters? The Jewish and Gentile believers in Rome were clashing over food laws, holy days, and cultural traditions. Paul insists that these disputable matters should not divide them. The moralist perspective demands that someone be right and someone be wrong; the Kingdom perspective calls us to accept one another in grace, trusting that God is at work in each person.

This is what Paul means by “not causing your brother to stumble.” It's not about creating new rules like “don't dance, don't drink, don't celebrate holidays.” Instead, it's about choosing love over personal preference. Sometimes that means limiting your liberty for the sake of someone else's conscience. At its core, Paul is calling the church to unity, reminding them that God has welcomed each of them—and so they must welcome one another.

Discussion Questions:

1. What challenges you regarding submitting to authority? What might it look like to approach authority from a Kingdom perspective instead of a moralist one?

2. What's the difference between living by rules (moralism) and living by love (the Kingdom perspective)? How does that play out practically? How have you seen this in your own life?
3. Why do you think non-essential differences (food, traditions, customs, etc.) so easily divide people? How can we resist that in the church today?

Activation:

This week, identify one way you can intentionally choose love over preference in your relationships. It might mean extending patience where you usually judge, giving grace instead of insisting on being right, or limiting your liberty to encourage someone else. Share with the group what you plan to do, and prepare to share next week how it went!