

We Defeat Evil by Doing Good



SABBATH—DECEMBER 16

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Romans 12, 13.

MEMORY VERSE: “Do not act like [the same as] the sinful [wicked] people of the world [earth]. Let God change your life. First of all, let Him give you a new mind. Then you will know what God wants you to do. And the things you do will be good and pleasing and perfect” (Romans 12:2, NLV).

PAUL'S FIRST PURPOSE in the book of Romans is to correct the wrong ideas the Roman Christians have about the law. Paul also tells all Christians to live obedient lives. Obedience comes from a change in our hearts and minds. This change comes only from the power of God working in everyone who surrenders his or her life to God.

The book of Romans never says that obedience is somehow easy. Christians need to be taught how to obey. Christians must also want to obey God's wishes for their lives. Finally, Christians should ask God for the power to help them obey. God's power makes our obedience possible.

Paul tells us that our doing good works is part of the Christian faith. Paul never meant to put good works down. In fact, in chapters 13 to 15, Paul puts a lot of importance on good works. Paul's words about obedience do not go against the things he said earlier about our being made right with God by faith. When we do good works, we show to other people the meaning of living by faith. New Testament believers were given an Example of correct behavior. That Example was Jesus. Jesus and no one else is the Example we must follow (Philippians 2:5). There is no better example than Jesus!



Our doing good works is the best way we can show others what it means to live by faith.

THE GIFT THAT MAKES GOD HAPPY (Romans 12:1, 2)

Chapter 11 was the last chapter in the book of Romans to deal with church teachings. In chapters 12–16, Paul gives us useful and helpful lessons for everyday life. These lessons show us how to live the life of faith.

To start with, faith does not take the place of obedience. Faith does not mean that we no longer need to obey the Lord. The law continues to have power in our lives. The New Testament explains the law some more and makes the law easier to understand. But the New Testament never says that living by these rules will be easy for the Christian to do. In fact, we are told that, at times, following the law might be very hard to do. Why? Because the war with self and with sin is always hard (1 Peter 4:1). But God promises the Christian power over sin. What happens if we fall? Then Jesus lives to save us (Hebrews 7:25).



Christians should now give their bodies to God as living gifts.

Read Romans 12:1. In this verse, Paul shows us how two different things—the body and gifts—are the same. How does this example teach us to live as Christians? How does Romans 12:2 help explain this idea more?

In Romans 12:1, Paul hints at the animals brought as payment for sin in the Old Testament plan of worship. In the same way, Christians should now give their bodies to God. We are to give God our bodies as living gifts to serve Him.

During the time that Israel spent in the wilderness, every animal the Israelites brought to God as a payment for sin was examined carefully. What if something was wrong with the animal? Then that animal was rejected. God said that the gifts brought to Him were not to have anything wrong with them. In the same way, Christians should “let your bodies be a living and holy gift given to God” (Romans 12:1, NLV). We can offer this gift only if we make sure our bodies are as healthy as possible. True, we all have things wrong with us. But the important idea here is that we must live holy and loyal lives by God’s power.

“The Christian life does not mean we do not improve. Instead, the Christian life means we move from good things to better things.”—Martin Luther, *Commentary [Explanation] on Romans*, pages 167, 168, adapted. What does it mean that we move from good things to better things in our Christian lives?

THINKING IN THE RIGHT WAY (Romans 12:3–21)

We spent a lot of time this quarter talking about how God’s law lasts forever. We also pointed out again and again that Paul’s message does not teach that faith has somehow put an end to the Ten Commandments.

But it is easy to get so caught up in obeying the law that we forget that God’s law comes from His love. So, we show love when we obey the law. And to obey the law means to show love for God and love for one another. Anyone can say that he or she loves. But it is not always easy for us to show our love everyday to the people in our lives, is it?

In Romans 12:3–21, Paul talks about showing love to other people. How does Paul say we should do that?

In 1 Corinthians 12 and 13, Paul talks about love. For Paul, love is “the best way of all” (1 Corinthians 12:31, NlrV). John agrees. John says, “God is love” (1 John 4:8, NlrV). From this verse, we can see that love tells about God. When we love other people, we show them the love that God shows us.

In Romans 12:3–21, Paul teaches us how we can show love in everyday life. First, Paul points to the importance of our not being proud. “I ask each one of you not to think more of himself than he should think” (Romans 12:3, NLV). Next, Paul says believers should be willing to “honor others more than yourselves” (Romans 12:10, NlrV). Paul warns each believer to “keep [stop] yourself from thinking you are so wise” (Romans 12:16, NLV). Jesus’ own words explain the meaning of Paul’s advice: “Follow My teachings and learn from me. I am gentle and do not have pride [feeling more important or better than other people]” (Matthew 11:29, NLV).

Christians should be less proud than anyone. After all, look at how helpless we are and how far we have fallen into sin. Look at how much we need to depend on Jesus to be made right with God and to save us. Without Jesus, we cannot change our ways or ourselves. So, what have we done that is worth bragging about? Nothing! We must live without pride before God and other people.

Read Romans 12:18. Are you following this warning in your life right now? If you are not, then what might you need to change so that you can follow it?



Christians should be less proud than any other people. After all, look at how helpless we are and how far we have fallen into sin.

CHRISTIANS AND THE GOVERNMENT (Romans 13:1–7)

Read Romans 13:1–7. What important rules does Paul give us in these verses to guide us in how we should think about the power of government?

What makes Paul’s words so interesting is that he wrote his letter to the Romans during a time when Rome ruled the earth. The people of the Roman Empire [Kingdom] worshiped many gods. The Roman Empire was very cruel and evil. The Roman Empire knew nothing about the true God. Not long after Paul wrote his letter, Rome would begin to attack people who wanted to worship God. In fact, both Paul and Jesus were put to death by the pagan Roman Empire! So, is it really possible that Paul is telling Christians to be good citizens of such an evil government?

But that is exactly what Paul does! Why does he do that? Because the idea about government is found everywhere in the Bible. God Himself gave humans their ideas about good government and helped them to see the need for good government. Nowhere does the Bible teach us the idea that we do not need government and laws.

At the same time, God does not accept all government or how some governments are run. We do not need to look too far to find examples of awful governments. But even under the rule of these governments, Christians should obey the laws of the land as much as they can. Christians should be loyal to their governments as long as the governments do not ask them to go against what God asks. We should think very carefully before doing anything that would put us at war against the government. We know from the Bible that one day all of God’s loyal followers will need to stand against the ruling powers in control of the whole earth (Revelation 13). Until then, we should do everything we can do to give honor to God by being good citizens of the country that we live in.

“We must accept that God put government in place. We must teach other Christians that we have a duty from God to obey the laws of the government. But what would happen if the laws of the government were at war with God’s laws? Then we must obey God instead of man. God’s word in the Bible must be shown respect above any laws of the land.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [Leaders]*, page 69, adapted.



The idea of government was put in place by God Himself.

LOVE ONE ANOTHER (Romans 13:8)

What does Romans 13:8 mean? Does this verse mean that love frees us from obeying the law?

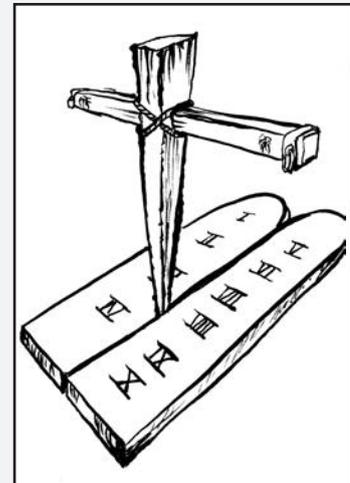
In Romans 13:8, Paul explains more about the law. Paul shows us that love must be the power behind everything we do and the reason for it. The law shows us God. And God is love. So, when we love, we do everything that the law asks us to do. At the same time, Paul is not throwing out God's law. Paul is not putting some strange idea of love in its place. Some Christians argue that Paul is doing that very thing. But they are wrong. The Ten Commandments continue to have power in our lives. The law's job is to point out sin. And who would say sin is not real? But we can only obey the law when our hearts are filled with love.

Read Romans 13:9, 10. Which of God's Ten Commandments does Paul list? How are these commandments examples that explain why we need love to obey the law? Why did Paul choose to list these commandments and not others?

It is interesting to see that the importance of love to the law was not a new idea. Paul proves this fact by pointing to Leviticus 19:18: "Love your neighbor as you love yourself" (NIRV). Paul shows us that this law of love was a necessary part of the Old Testament plan of worship. But some people argue that only the laws Paul mentions in Romans 13:9, 10 have any power in our lives. So, these laws would be the only ones we need to obey anymore. What would happen if this idea were true? Would that mean that Christians could dishonor their parents? Or worship false gods? Or let other gods take God's place in our lives? Of course not!

Look at what is going on here in Romans 13. Paul's topic deals with how we understand and show kindness to other people. Paul talks about the laws that deal with our personal connections with other people. We should not think that Paul's words mean that the rest of the law has been thrown out. The New Testament writers also show us how important love is to the law. As they say, when we show love to other people, we show our love to God.

How can you learn to love people the way God loves you?



**The law shows us God.
God is love.**

THE TIME IS NOT FAR OFF (Romans 13:11)

We have shown all quarter that Paul had a very clear purpose in mind when he wrote his letter to the church at Rome and to the Jewish believers there. Paul wanted to explain to them the meaning of faith and works in the New Agreement that God made with His people. Another name for the New Agreement is the New Covenant. Also, Paul explained how we are saved and how a sinner is made holy and right with God. Many of the people to whom Paul wrote had a deep respect for the law. So, Paul showed how important the law was in the New Agreement. Even in the Old Testament, the Jewish religion was a religion of grace. Grace is God's gift of mercy, forgiveness, and power over sin. But many Jews turned away from grace to legalism. Legalism is the belief that you can save yourself by your own good behavior or by obeying the law. This belief did a lot of damage. Let what happened in Paul's time be a warning to the church in our time. We need to be careful not to make the same mistakes!



God's promise of everlasting life is nearer than we first believed.

Read Romans 13:11–14. What special time in the future is Paul talking about? What should we be doing to get ready for this special time?

Notice the strong words Paul uses in these verses. How very interesting to read that Paul told believers to wake up and get it together. Jesus is coming back! Remember that Paul wrote this letter almost two thousand years ago. But how long ago he wrote makes no difference. Why? Because the Second Coming is as near as our own death. Next week or 40 years from now, we could close our eyes in death. Then we might sleep only four days or for 400 years. It really makes no difference to us. Because the next thing we know is the Second Coming. Any one of us could die at any time. So, time is indeed short. And God's promise of everlasting life is nearer than we first believed.

What if you knew for sure that Jesus was coming back next month. What would you change in your life, and why? Do you feel you would need to change these things a month before Jesus came back? If yes, then why not change these things right now? What is the difference between changing these things now or waiting until later?

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “The Bible shows us God’s plan. Bible truths are God’s words. The person who makes these truths a part of his life becomes a new person in every way. But God does not give this person new powers of the mind. Instead, God takes away the sin that has darkened the person’s mind. God’s words to us: ‘I will give you a new heart’ also mean ‘I will give you a new mind.’ God changes our heart first. Then He gives us a clear understanding of truth and our duty as Christians. We must study the Bible with careful attention and prayer. Then we will gain clear understanding and the skill to judge wisely in everything.”—Ellen G. White, *My Life Today*, page 24, adapted.

“The Lord . . . is coming soon. We must be ready and waiting for Him to come back. Oh, how wonderful it will be to see Jesus and be welcomed as His saved ones! We have waited for a long time. But we must not let our hope grow weak or fade. What would happen if we could see the King [Jesus] in all His beauty? Then we would be blessed forever. I feel as if I must cry aloud: ‘We are going homeward!’ We are nearing the time that Jesus will come in power and glory to take His saved ones to their everlasting home.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies [Messages] for the Church*, volume 8, page 253, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① How are we to be both good citizens and good Christians at the same time? That question can be difficult to answer. What if someone were to come to you for advice about how to be a good citizen? What if taking a stand for God put this person at war with the government? What advice would you give this person?
- ② What is harder to do: to be very strict in obeying the law, or to love God and others without limits? Or would you argue that this question is unfair to begin with because it seems to say obedience and love are completely different and cannot be done at the same time? Is that idea true or false? Explain.
- ③ What have you learned from Romans to help you understand the importance of the Reformation? The Reformation was a time of big religious changes that began in the 1500s. At that time, people began to “wake up” to Bible truths. These truths led to the start of the Protestant churches. So, what does the book of Romans teach us about our beliefs as Protestants and why we believe the way we do?



“We must study the Bible with careful attention and prayer. Then we have a clear understanding of the things God wants us to do. And we will have the skill to judge wisely in all things.”