

Romans 12:14-14:1

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Lecture 13

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Abstract

This lecture by Dr. Craig Keener covers Paul's teachings in Romans 12:14 through 14:1, illustrating how a renewed mind manifests in loving both community members and persecuting enemies. Keener explores the socio-historical context of the early Christian minority in Rome, emphasizing the general wisdom of submitting to governing authorities and paying taxes to avoid public scandal. The core of Christian ethics is shown to be the fulfillment of the law through love, which acts as a primary unifying principle over secondary matters like food customs and holy days. Believers are urged to remain eschatologically vigilant and welcome one another across ethnic and cultural divisions to honor God.

Outline

I. Introduction (Romans 12:14-14:1)

- **A. The connection between the renewed mind and practical ethics**
- **B. Shifting from internal community relationships to relations with outsiders**

II. Loving Outsiders and Enemies (Romans 12:14, 17-21)

- **A. Blessing persecutors rather than cursing them (12:14)**
 1. Going beyond mere non-retaliation to active blessing and prayer
 2. Echoing the teachings of Jesus in Luke 6:28
 3. Entrusting personal defense and safety entirely to God's care
- **B. Public witness and avoiding retaliation (12:17)**

1. Behaving in ways universally recognized as good and honorable
 2. Cultural adaptation for the sake of protecting God's honor
 3. Comparing non-resistance to Stoic philosophy and non-revolutionary Jewish sages
- **C. Personal and historical illustrations of enemy love**
 1. Dealing with hostile internet critics and online friendliness
 2. Keener's struggle to love jihadists after visiting Northern Nigeria
 3. Sunday Agung's exemplary prayer of forgiveness for the killers of his cousin
 - **D. Relational peace and leaving room for divine justice (12:18-19)**
 1. Living at peace with all people as far as it depends on the believer
 2. Forgoing self-vengeance and leaving a place for God's wrath
 3. Citing Deuteronomy 32:35 regarding God's vindication
 - **E. Conquering evil with good (12:20-21)**
 1. Quoting Proverbs 25:21-22 regarding feeding and watering enemies
 2. Heaping coals of fire interpreted as bringing greater judgment if they remain hostile
 3. The ultimate goal: winning the enemy to become a friend
 4. Illustration of Keener's wife feeding a captured soldier assumed to be a spy during war

III. Submission to Civil Authorities (Romans 13:1-7)

- **A. The historical and sociological context in Rome**
 1. Early period under Nero's reign (under influence of Seneca and Burrus) before active persecution
 2. The vulnerability of the Christian and Jewish minorities in Rome
 3. Precautionary measures to avoid scandal and prevent another expulsion (such as the one in 49 AD)
- **B. Submitting to the state as a general, non-absolute principle**

1. Traditional philosophical themes regarding household and state order
 2. Presupposition of a benevolent state rather than endorsing evil regimes
 3. Post-WWII theological reflections (Barth, Cullmann) against absolute state loyalty
- **C. Evaluating Roman rule and societal order**
 1. Acknowledgment of injustice (e.g., class-based judicial favoritism and the cross)
 2. Practical benefits of Roman stability: trade, communication, and protection (Paul's safety)
 - **D. The obligation to pay taxes and tributes (13:6-7)**
 1. Property, head, and burdensome local customs taxes
 2. Funding the skeletal provincial administration, roads, and conquering armies
 3. Echoing Jesus' teaching to give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's
 4. Praying for civil leaders and governments (1 Timothy 2, 1 Peter)

IV. Love as the True Fulfillment of the Law (Romans 13:8-10)

- **A. The continuous debt of love (13:8)**
 1. Debts as a severe social issue in antiquity (often carrying 12% interest)
 2. Love as the single permanent debt that believers always owe to one another
- **B. Love as the summary of the commandments (13:9-10)**
 1. Pharisaic debates regarding the greatest commandment in the Law
 2. Jesus' synthesis of loving God and loving neighbor (Mark 12, Leviticus 19:18)
 3. Hillel's summary of the Torah while standing on one foot
 4. Paul citing four specific Decalogue commandments to illustrate love's fulfillment

V. Eschatological Vigilance (Romans 13:11-14)

- **A. The metaphor of waking from sleep (13:11)**

1. Sleep as a figure for lack of vigilance or inattention
 2. Urgency rooted in the closeness of final salvation and the Lord's return
- **B. Putting on the armor of light (13:12-14)**
 1. Contrasting night activities (drunkenness, sexual excess) with day activities
 2. The armor of light representing moral readiness and divine empowerment
 3. Putting on Christ Himself as the ultimate garment of virtue and spiritual defense
 4. Historical backdrop of Roman infantry shields and tactical invincibility

VI. Welcoming and Navigating Secondary Disputes (Romans 14:1-23)

- **A. Welcoming and accepting one another (14:1, 14:3, 15:7)**
 1. The repeated use of the verb *proslambano* (to welcome/receive) as a structural frame
 2. Overcoming ethnic and cultural divisions (Jews and Gentiles in Rome)
 3. Letting primary issues (love, unity) guide secondary disagreements
- **B. Understanding diverse food customs and kosher laws**
 1. Examples of ancient food avoidance (Pythagoreans, Egyptian priests, Hittites)
 2. Jewish Kashrut (kosher rules) as a key identity marker that invited Gentile mockery
 3. Paul's hyperbolic advice on vegetarianism and wine to prevent causing others to stumble
 4. Practical realities of limited clean choices in prison or foreign settings
- **C. The weak, the strong, and stumbling**
 1. Comparing Romans 14 to Corinth's disputes over idol food in 1 Corinthians 8-10
 2. Defining 'stumble' as causing a brother or sister to fall away from the faith
 3. Honoring and respecting the conscience of others without forcing conformity