

Romans 13

What subject does Paul initially discuss (v. 1)? Our role in relation to the governing authorities which is one of submission. The civil authorities were all probably pagans at that time. It perhaps would have been tempting for the Christians to claim allegiance to only Christ and not to submit to them.

"Subjection," or submission, involves voluntarily placing oneself under the authority of another, and doing or not doing what the authority requires. Submission is essentially support.¹

God has "established" three institutions to direct our lives: the family (Genesis 2:18-25), the civil government (Genesis 9:1-7), and the church (Acts 2). In each institution, there are authorities to whom we need to submit for God's will to go forward.²

From what source do rulers get their authority (v. 1)? They are appointed by God and serve a purpose in His plan. Paul wrote this during the reign of the Roman Empire. It was no democracy, and no special friend to Christians, yet he still saw their legitimate authority. Likewise Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, one of the worst Roman governors Judea ever had and yet He did not deny Pilate's authority. Civil government is ordained by God.

Every ruler exercises their authority because God has allowed them to occupy their position, even Satan (Luke 4:6). Every Christian should acknowledge that the government under which they live has received authority "from God" to govern, regardless of whether it governs well or poorly.³

What does it mean to rebel against the authority, and what is the consequence (v. 2)? Rebelling against the governing authority is the equivalent of rebelling against God and judicial consequences will follow which are really the indirect judgments of God.

Under what circumstances are citizens justified in disobeying rulers? Since governments have authority from God, we are bound to obey them – unless, of course, they order us to do something in contradiction to God's law. Then, we are commanded to obey God before man (Acts 4:19; 5:29). If the state commands what God forbids or if the state forbids what God commands, then civil disobedience is a Christian duty.

When the will of man conflicts with the will of God, the Christian must choose to do the will of God (Acts 5:29). For example, the Christian's obligation to submit to a government that requires abortions would be different from his or her duty to one that only permits them.⁴

What work did God appoint rulers to do (vv. 3-4)? To do good to those who are right....and to punish the evil doer. Paul describes government officials as God's servants. They have a ministry in the plan and administration of God, just as much as church leaders do. It is through the just punishment of evil that government serves its function in God's plan of holding man's sinful tendencies in check.

What is expected of us (vv. 3-4)? *"Do what is right and he will commend you."* Paul's idea is that Christians should be the best citizens of all. Even though they are loyal to God before they are loyal to the state, Christians are good citizens because they are honest, give no trouble to the state, pay their taxes, and – most importantly – pray for the state and the rulers.

In what sense do rulers act as ministers for the good of God's people, if they do not do their job properly (v. 4)? As God's servants, they have received from God their power and the right to punish wrongdoers.

What two reasons are given for submitting to rulers (v. 5)? Not only for fear of punishment, but because it is right before God to do so. Christian obedience to the state is never blind – it obeys with the eyes of conscience wide open. To maintain a clear conscience, Christians must honor the God-ordained civil authorities.

What duty is given in v. 6, and what reason is given for it? We are to pay the taxes due from us, because there is a sense in which we support *God's work* when we do so. The taxes collected are to be used by the institution to get the job done of restraining evil and keeping an orderly society – not to enrich the government officials themselves. Individual rulers may be unworthy, but the institution is not. Jesus came out flatly in favor of paying taxes, and led His disciples in doing so, even though the Roman government to which He paid them crucified Him.⁵

What else should we give to others (v. 7)? Honor and respect. **Are these conditional?**

What is the basic financial principle (v. 8)? Pay your bills on time. This is not a prohibition to borrowing but is a call to financial responsibility by living modestly and within our means. The borrower is always slave to the lender (Proverbs 22:7).

What debt will we continue to owe (v. 8)? The continuing debt to love (agape) one another. This is a perpetual, never-paid-off obligation we carry both before God and each other. It is an undeserved and unconditional love that extends even to our enemies. This kind of love can only be demonstrated by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, i.e. it is impossible for an unbeliever to manifest this kind of divine love.

This love is primarily a matter of *the will* rather than the emotions. The fact that we are *commanded* to love indicates that it is something we can choose to do.

What point was Paul making (vv. 9-10)? Paul again appealed to the Law (the second tablet....the social section) to show that what he had written in v. 8 was in harmony with what God had commanded earlier. Whereas the Mosaic Law specified numerous situations in which the Israelites were to practice love, the Law of Christ contains comparatively few. The simple principle is enough: "Love your neighbor as yourself." This is another excellent example of the essentially legal character of the Mosaic Law vs. the gracious character of Christ's teachings.⁶

Love is the fulfillment of the law. Fulfillment is not mere conformity to the rules. It is easy to do all the right religious "things" but to neglect love. Our love is the true measure of our obedience to God.

What does Paul mean by "*the present time*" (v. 11)? Essentially the time between the first and second comings of Christ. The day in which Paul lived and the day in which we live.

What is Paul's primary concern (vv. 11)? Paul lived with a sense of urgency. And he urges his readers to live lives of spiritual alertness and moral purity because the day of our salvation, the return of Christ, is nearer than ever. They must wake up from their slumber, i.e. their spiritual lethargy and inactivity, and get ready to meet the Lord...."*wake up from your slumber.*" The point is we are to realize the brief nature of this life.

What is meant by the comparison between night and day (vv. 12-13)? The "night" represents our earthly life, (or the present evil age) which has just about run its course. The day refers to the return of the Lord Jesus. We need to be prepared.....to remove our dark deeds like dirty clothes, and put on the shining armor of right living. Paul called these new clothes "armor" because we are still at war with sin and the forces of evil (Ephesians 6:11).⁷

What is Paul's final exhortation (v. 14)? The first step in putting on the armor of light (v. 12) is committing ourselves to follow Jesus Christ wholeheartedly. However, dedicating is not the only thing that is necessary. We must not allow ourselves to even think about ways to indulge our evil desires (1 Peter 2:11; Colossians 3:2).

The flesh cries out to be pampered with comfort, luxury, pleasure, amusement, illicit sexual indulgence, etc. The flesh will be as active as we allow it to be. Do not indulge the flesh. Give no chances to the flesh to have its fling. A Christian's lifestyle must be pure and holy, especially in view of Christ's approaching return (1 John 3:2-3).

God used this passage, specifically v. 14 to show Augustine, the great theologian of the early church, that he really *could* live the Christian life as empowered by the Holy Spirit – he just had to *do it*. And so do we.

¹ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Romans, 2017 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), p. 186

² Ibid. p. 187

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid. p. 190

⁵ Ibid. p. 189

⁶ Ibid. p. 192

⁷ Ibid. p. 193