

Romans Part 45 – Chapter 13

Sunday, March 25, 2023

With input from BibleRef.com

Last week we ended with **Romans 12:21**: *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

Paul has told us how to act and that we are empowered to act with the help of the Holy Spirit throughout chapter 12. He's now ready to go on to a difficult subject: How do we respond to our government leaders.

Romans 13:1-7:

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, 4 for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

5 Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. 7 Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

Those in Christ must be "submissive" or "subject to" human authorities in the government. In other words, one's place in God's kingdom does not allow us to ignore those in charge of whatever earthly kingdom we occupy. This is not just about keeping the peace. Christians are to submit to earthly authorities because God put them there. In fact, Paul says that every position of government authority on earth was, ultimately, filled by God Himself for His purposes. To improperly resist authority, then, is to resist God (Romans 13:1–2).

That rejection of authority brings painful judgment. God's intention for authorities in human governments, in part, is to use them to bring judgment on people who do bad things. If you're doing good things, Paul writes, you should have nothing to fear from those in authority. If you're doing bad things, though, you should be afraid. Governments, broadly speaking, are there to rein in and punish evildoers on God's behalf. The punishment a criminal receives from the government is also from God (Romans 13:3–4).

Remember this section from our study of chapter 1?

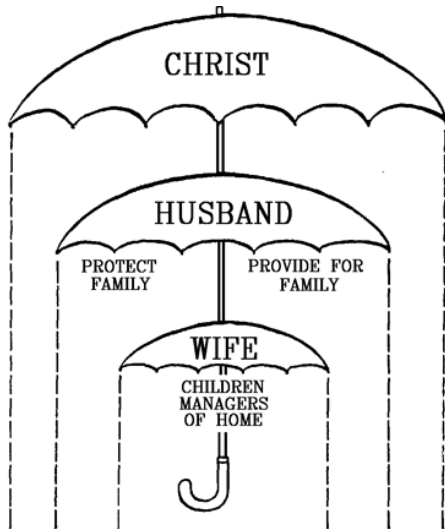
God's Wrath on Unrighteousness

¹⁸ *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.*

1. There is a moral law that God has put in place just as there are laws of gravity, laws of thermodynamics, laws of motion, etc...

A. It does not require God to dole out judgment or punishments.

B. We need to stay under God's authority structure to remain protected from Satan's threats



We should not submit to our human government only out of fear, though, but also because it's the right thing to do. For that same reason, Christians must pay their taxes as a way of supporting the structure God has set up to accomplish His will on earth. In fact, in addition to taxes, we also owe to our human governments respect and honor (Romans 13:5–7).

Paul chooses not to address in this section something he faced in his own life: What do you do when a human government tells you to do something that contradicts God's commands? Or when the government is not acting fairly, or morally, or in good faith? In that case, a believer must defy ungodly commands and willingly face the consequences (Acts 5:27–29 ...but Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men”). Paul's instruction here speaks of subjection and submission, but he is not discussing disobedience versus obedience. This distinction was lived out by Jesus' closest followers. Nearly all the apostles were eventually killed by government authorities for preaching the gospel: they refused to obey when told to be silent, but they submitted to the punishment and authority of the government.

Paul is clear that this applies to every person. He calls for us to be in submission to government authorities, though he does not say that we must obey them in all cases.

Every authority in the world was established by God. This would include, of course, good leaders, evil leaders, and everyone in-between. Paul's instruction here, then, is not about blind nationalism or absolute obedience to men. Rather, it is a recognition that human government—in general—is a legitimate authority, and that Christians cannot use their faith as an excuse for civil lawlessness. God puts all leaders in place for the specific reasons Paul will describe in the following verses.

We should remember that Paul is writing this letter to Christians in Rome. The government of Rome ruled much of the known world at the time. It was led by the Emperor Nero from AD 54–68. Nero is famous for his cruel and unfair treatment of Christians, among other groups. We must not assume that Paul is writing these words lightly. He was aware of the implications of his teaching.