

Romans

Chapter 13

II. Practical Godliness - Part 3

Romans chapter 13 is the second chapter in the practical section of the book of Romans. In chapter 12, we looked at the believers ultimate sacrifice, the place and purpose of spiritual gifts, and practical duties toward ourselves and others. In chapter 13 we will look at our responsibility to government, our unpayable debt of love to others, and our call to diligence in light of our limited time.

D. The Christian's Responsibility to Government - Romans 13:1-7

13:1 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. 13:2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. 13:3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: 13:4 For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. 13:5 Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. 13:6 For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. 13:7 Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

In this section of scripture Paul lays out the believer's responsibility to government. This is an important topic since the church at Rome lived under a very godless, and soon to be repressive, government. Not too long after these words were penned, a matter of years, Christians were being killed all over the empire. The relative freedom enjoyed by Christianity during it's first few years was rapidly drawing to a close. In our world today, the situation may not be too different. Although we have relative freedom in America to preach and teach the gospel, it may be that these days are drawing to a close. Already it is a capital offense in some countries to be a believer in Christ. Paul's words are not only applicable to the time in which he lived, but are applicable to us as well. This section can be divided up into the following points: 1) government is ordained by God, 2) government exists to uphold law and order, and 3) we are to pay our taxes.

1. Government is Ordained by God - Romans 13:1-2

13:1 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. 13:2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

The first, and most necessary, point Paul must make is that all government exists at the pleasure of God. It is not men that raise up and destroy government, but it is God. We sometimes feel that God is powerless against

the forces of evil in government when in actuality he set those governments up in the first place. The scripture is abundantly clear on the fact that God is sovereign in the affairs and governments of men. We find this point brought out in the book of Daniel where God's sovereign control over men is mentioned several times. In fact, God went out of his way to drive this point home to the king Nebuchadnezzar as seen in Daniel 4:29-37 (see below).

Paul further states in verse two that if we resist the government, we resist God himself! There is absolutely no excuse for a Christian to be rebellious to governmental authority unless that authority specifically contradicts the clear commandments of God. In Acts 5:29 we find Peter's famous statement before the Sanhedrin, "**we ought to obey God rather than men.**" The reason for this quote is that the Sanhedrin told Peter to not mention the name of Christ or preach the gospel. However, we must note that this is the exception, not the rule. We can disobey the government only when it is clear that we are being forced to do something that we should not, or disallowed to do something we should. At all other times, we have a responsibility to submit and obey the authorities over us as if they were God himself.

Some passages showing the sovereignty of God in the establishment of government are:

Daniel 2:37-38

2:37 Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. 2:38 And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold.

Daniel 4:29-37

4:29 At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon. 4:30 The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty? 4:31 While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee. 4:32 And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. 4:33 The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws. 4:34 And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: 4:35 And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? 4:36 At the same time my reason returned

unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me. 4:37 Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.

John 19:10-11

19:10 The saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? **19:11** Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore, he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.

From the above passages it is clear that God is sovereign when it comes to human governments. He sets the up, and he takes them down. We should take great consolation in that fact.

2. Government Exists to Uphold Law and Order - Romans 13:3-5

13:3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: **13:4** For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. **13:5** Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

The second reason we are given to submit to governmental authorities is that they exist to uphold order in society. In fact, in every government in existence today, there exists a penal and judicial system for dealing with criminals and disrupters to that society. Although we may not all agree on the particular form that government should take, or the specific crimes that should be controlled, all governments, to a degree, fulfill God's purpose in bringing order and control to society. Without governments, we would live in a constant state of anarchy.

As an aside, we need to take a lesson from Christ and the early Christians regarding their reaction to the Roman authorities. Nowhere in scripture or in external literature do we read of Christ or his followers rebelling against the government of their time on "moral issues". By "moral issues" we mean things such as justice, morality, type of government, social issues, taxation, etc. Jesus did not come to overthrow the government of his day, in fact, this was one of the major reasons he was rejected by the Jews. They were not as much looking for a spiritual deliverer as they were looking for a political king. In John 6:15, after the feeding of the five thousand, the people wanted to take Jesus and make him a king by force, but he set them away and would not allow it. Jesus' entire ministry was designed to provide spiritual deliverance from the kingdom of Satan, not political deliverance from Rome. This same attitude carried over into the early Christians. They did not aspire to overthrow or subvert the governments of their day and only disobeyed when those governments directly contradicted the clear commands of God. Instead of Christians becoming more and more involved in the political processes of the

day, we should become more and more involved in proclaiming the truths of the kingdom. To do otherwise is to trade the eternal for the temporal. It is not the Church's responsibility to change the external political structures of government but the internal sinful structures of men's hearts. We are called to a higher purpose.

In the process of upholding law and order, the Bible clearly gives the government the right of capital punishment. This is clear, not only in this passage, but throughout the Old Testament as well. The current idea that capital punishment is barbaric and archaic has no foundation in the Bible. In Genesis 9:6 God instituted capital punishment with these words, "**Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.**" By divine decree human governments exist to insure that whenever a murder is committed, the murderer pays with his life. Unfortunately, that is hardly the case today in America. We are so concerned about the rights of murderers and criminals that we throw justice out the back door. We need to return to God's divinely established decrees. By the way, the murder of millions of innocent babies each year through abortion is a crime for which a future payday is coming. A study of the Old Testament will clearly reveal that an unborn child is considered life, and when that life is taken, the perpetrator is to pay with their life. Much more could be said in this respect but we do not have room for it here.

3. We Are to Pay Our Taxes - Romans 13:6-7

13:6 For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. 13:7 Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

Since government is a divine institution set up by God and since all government draws its power from God, it naturally follows that we, as citizens, are to support that government through the payment of taxes. It is somewhat sad to see many so-called Christians refuse to pay taxes on the ground that they do not approve of the use of those tax monies. Unfortunately, as far as God and the Bible are concerned, that is no excuse at all.

In Matthew 22 we find one of the many confrontations between Jesus and the religious leaders of Israel. In fact, we find four separate confrontations in this chapter, namely, on taxes, on the resurrection, on the most important law, and on David's Lord. However, our interest is in the first one, on taxes. In verse 16 we find the Pharisees and Herodians coming to Jesus to ask him whether it was lawful to pay the poll tax to Caesar or not. Basically, the poll tax consisted of one drachma, or day's wage, for each person. This money was paid directly to the Roman treasury for the support of the government. The fact that this tax was paid with a coin that was considered idolatrous (the picture of the emperor was on one side and the inscription "High Priest" on the other) caused even more problems for the religious minded Jew. The Herodians and Pharisees, interestingly enough, were bitter enemies. However, they had joined forces to try and trap Jesus into saying something that would discredit him in front of all the people. Their question is recorded in verse 17, "**Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar or not?**". The Herodians, as representatives of the

government, would want him to say yes. The Pharisees, as representatives of Israel, would want him to say no.

They thought they trapped him! If he said, yes, then he would be discredited in front of the people who thought it a horrible thing to be required to pay taxes to their Roman oppressors. If on the other hand he said no, then they could accuse him of sedition. What he did, however, was to take a coin and tell them **“Whose is this image and superscription?”**. When they answered “Caesar’s”, Christ responded **“Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s”**. What he said in essence was, “Yes, pay the tax but do not give the emperor more than his due, i.e. worship. Give your worship to God”. We, as believers, are to support our government through the payment of our taxes although we may not agree with all of its policies. On the other hand, we render our devotion to God and let him take care of the inequities. As Peter so forcefully states in 1 Peter 4:15-16 that if we suffer, let it be because of Christ, not because we are an evildoer or breaker of the law.

E. The Christian’s Unpayable Debt - Romans 13:8-10

13:8 Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. 13:9 For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 13:10 Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

In these three verses Paul changes the subject to our unpayable debt to one another. It is one of the definitive marks of Christianity that we love one another. Jesus himself, in the Upper Room Discourse, gave the disciples this very commandment along with an unforgettable object lesson in humility and what it means to love one another. In John 13:34-35 we read, **“A new commandment I give unto you that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another.”** Paul, in these three simple verses, shows us that the sum of the law, as far as our fellow man is concerned, is wrapped up in the command to love one another.

Verse 8 starts out with the statement, **“Owe no man any thing, but to love one another.”** In other words, if we need to owe someone something, let it be love. The reason for this is given in the second part of the verse, **“for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.”** On Monday of passion week, we find Jesus in the temple silencing those critics who would discredit him in front of the people. He answers the question regarding taxes put forth by the Pharisees and Herodians, and then answers the question regarding the resurrection asked by the Saducees. His next question is found in Matthew 22:36 which is put to him by a lawyer, a law expert, **“Master, which is the great commandment in the law?”**. The importance of this question cannot be underestimated since the religious leaders of Jesus’ day had broken the law down into over six hundred specific rules. The arguments about which was the greatest rule of all occupied many hours.

Jesus answer is found in Matthew 22:37-40:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two hang all the law and the prophets.

Jesus not only answers his question, but gives him the second greatest commandment as well, “**Love your neighbor as yourself**”. In fact, if we fulfill these two laws, all of the others are fulfilled as well. For example, if we love God as we should, we will tolerate no other gods before him, we will not take his name in vain, and we will take time off of work to get to know him better. The same holds true with the second commandment as can be seen by Paul’s argument in verse 9 where he goes on to say that the last five commandments of the decalogue, namely those dealing with our relationships to other men, are fulfilled in the single command to love our neighbor as ourself. If we love others as we should, we will not kill them, we won’t take what is their’s, we will not be envious of their material possessions, we will not take advantage of them to fulfill our own lusts, and we will not lie to them. Furthermore, we must realize that our neighbor is not someone whom we are acquainted with, but any man who happens to cross our path. That is the point of the parable of the good Samaritan which Jesus gave in answer to the question, “Who is my neighbor?”.

A good commentary on this idea of love can be found in 1 Corinthians 13 where we find Paul describing this kind of love. All of the words used are action words. In other words, our love is measured in how we treat others, not how we feel about them. The world’s definition of love is based on emotion and passion, the Christian’s definition of love is self sacrifice and deeds of kindness. Only when our love is significantly different from the world’s will we be fulfilling Christ’s command in John 13:34-35. Only then will the world see that we are indeed Christ’s disciples because of the love we have one for another.

F. The Christian’s Limited Time - Romans 13:11-14

13:11 And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. 13:12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. 13:13 Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. 13:14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

The third great theme that we find in this short chapter can be titled, “The Christian’s Limited Time”. All too often we act as though we have all the time in the world to do the King’s business. We are slothful in our Christian walk and less than diligent in the way we broadcast the news about the Kingdom. In these four short verses Paul tries to get us to see that we do not have as much time as we think. Instead of dilly-dallying around, we need to get busy for God while we can.

The word translated “time” in verse 11 refers to epochal time, not time in general. What Paul is really saying is “in light of the age in which we live, it is time to wake up!”. Christians are to live with an understanding of the times in which they live. We are not to be like the Scribes and Pharisees whom Jesus rebuked when he told them that they could read the weather by looking at the sky, but they could not discern the signs of the times. For a Christian to be in the dark regarding the days in which he lives is inexcusable. All we need to know is contained in God’s word.

Why should we wake up? Because our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. This can be interpreted several ways. First of all, we could say that Paul was referring to the fact that the Lord’s return is nearer than when we first believed. Secondly, he could be talking about the fact that at the moment of death for the believer, salvation is fully realized in the sense that we are freed from the power of sin in our life. Thirdly, and most probably, he is talking about the fact that we as believers are to live with a constant awareness that we can face our Lord at any time, whether it be by death or by his return. This is the same idea expressed by John in 1 John 3:1-3 where we are called to holiness in light of Christ’s imminent appearing.

In the next two verses, Paul explains what he means by the command to “wake up”. In verse 12 we are to cast off the hidden works of darkness and put on the armor of light, and in verse 13 we are to walk honestly, not in debauchery and sin. The picture of a soldier might make this more understandable. A soldier needs to be ready at all times for inspection since he does not know when the general may arrive. My father-in-law told me the story of an experience he had in Australia during the Second World War. As his outfit was waiting to be shipped out, most of the men slipped off into town for some entertainment, himself being one. However, instead of staying out all night, he slipped back early and as a result was there when a sneak inspection was done. All those who were missing were busted down to privates, including his sergeant! It pays to be ready. In the same sense, we as believers need to be ready at all times for our Lord’s arrival since he may call us home, or may come again at any time.

Verse 14 gives further instructions on how we are to be ready. We are to put on Christ Jesus and we are not to make any provision for the flesh. Our flesh is very strong. Many times the reason we suffer defeat in our lives is that we pander to the flesh by feeding it’s lusts. As a result, when temptation comes along we find the flesh hard to resist. On the other hand, if we are constantly putting on Christ in the sense of submitting ourselves to his rulership in our lives, and at the same time denying our flesh, we can have victory. However, we must do both. To submit to Christ while feeding the flesh is no better than starving the flesh and forgetting to put on Christ. God will give us victory in our lives only when we do things his way. We need to be careful to fill our lives and thoughts with things the engender godly thinking and conduct. Then when we submit to Christ, we can experience the joy that only victory brings.