

Romans Chapter 13
New American Standard Bible®

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There can be no doubt where the citizenship of a Christian exists.

From Philippians:

²⁰ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; (Philippians 3:20 NASV)

We are citizens of Heaven. Traveling through this place and time, but we belong elsewhere for eternity (minus the vapor of time we spend here). So, if we belong elsewhere, what is our relationship to the nation where we live during our time here? Are we to comply with the laws and regulations of Governmental authorities, or do we turn away from any responsibility to those who govern the place we live?

Paul uses the portion of his letter to the church in Rome we designate as Chapter 13 to discuss the relationship of Christians to government. In typical Pastoral fashion Pastors have used three conveniences to outline Paul's understanding of this relationship. They are (1) God's institutions, (2) God's Instruments and (3) God's intruders.

Romans Chapter 13

1 - God's Institutions

¹Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

All authority exists with God. There can be no question that the one who created the universe and our world would have all authority over it. Yet, Paul begins this portion of his letter to the church in Rome by stating plainly that we are to be under subjection to the governing authorities. The reason he gives for this is that no Government would exist except under the establishment authority of God. This statement could be (is) hard for many of us to understand and even harder for us to agree with, but Paul states it plainly, and simply with no room for disagreement for God's establishment of dictatorships, human rights violators and governments that call on the name of other gods in His place.

The same conditions existed in the time of Jesus. One need only look into the Gospel accounts to find Jesus standing before the Roman Official Pilate, the proud self centered representative of Rome? When Jesus refused to answer one of his questions, Pilate asked him,

"Do you not know that I have the power to crucify you?" (John 19:10 KJV)

The Lord Jesus looked at him and said,

"Thou couldst have no power except it be given thee from above" (John 19:11 KJV)

In his mind, Pilate had all authority and in a sense that was true. God had allowed him to be where he was and make the decisions he made. The truth was, Pilate would not have been able to lift a finger against Jesus had it not been permitted by God that he do so.

Extending this, Pharaoh was allowed to be where he was in the position he held, with the nation of Israel under his control and authority by God. God gave Nebuchadnezzar his power as the mightiest monarch who ever reigned on earth. All through the Old Testament, God shows himself to be the one who allowed every ruler his reign and authority. The conditions that led Rome control of Israel when Christ came were under the authority of God.

To extend this statement to Paul and his letter to Rome, as he was writing these words, the emperor seated on the throne of Rome was the infamous Nero. There may have never been in all the history of the world, a more cruel and malicious man to sit upon the seat of power and authority of the most powerful government in the world than Nero and when Paul wrote, "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities," it was Nero in Rome that he was writing about. Later, when Paul wrote to Timothy, and said, "Honor the king" (2 Timothy 2:17), Nero was the one he was instructing Timothy to honor. All of this is simple confirmation of the statement that government is (all governments are) of God.

All through modern history, we look to elections and military coups, wars, revolutions and such as the reason for the Governments we have seen. We vote and cheer or sit in front of our TVs in disappointment, but Paul tells us that as good or bad as governments are, they exist under the establishment authority of God, and to extend Paul's statement (and my confusion) – they work within the all inclusive plan of God for the world he loves.

It is not votes, or war, or revolutions that determine our governments. It is God. Such things are the tools He uses to achieve his will, in spite of what we do, or hope or plan on achieving. Some people say we get the governments we deserve. Perhaps we get better governments than we deserve. Regardless, they exist under the establishment authority of God.

So, Why would a loving All knowing God allow the cruelty that exists here? People say, "If I were God, I would never permit that to happen, and I can't understand why he does." The fact is that God is not ruling the Earth. He holds back and waits as our history (the history of a flawed species) plays out. He certainly limits the scope and power of evil and absolutely holds it back, but scripture is plain that He has not up to this point in (Post Eden) history ruled the earth. He someday will, but his plan at this point is to limit how bad evil could truly be as his children individually work out their destiny toward the salvation he has offered (with Him) or their chosen doom (separation from Him).

2 – God's Agents

²Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. ³For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; ⁴for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

Twice in these verses, Paul refers to the one in authority as a "minister (servant) of God" that we should have no fear of as long as we are doing good, but fear if we are evil. Paul writes that the function of this minister is either to praise (if you are doing good) or avenge – bring on wrath (if you are doing evil). Paul tells us that when we resist their authority, we stand on opposition to the ordinance of God and bring on condemnation upon ourselves.

The commandments of God come first and above all else and we would never be expected to subject ourselves to anything that is in direct opposition to God's commandments, but short of that, we need to obey the rules and laws of

our government. The reverse is true, also. If we choose to break the law, we should expect to receive the punishment which has been ordained by our government.

How far does the authority of Government go?

But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing;

Government has the authority to bear the sword (to take life or impose and carry out a judgment of death).

3 –God’s Intruders

⁵Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. ⁶For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. ⁷Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

Plenty of us have believed at one time or another that the Tax Man was an intruder on our lives. We are intruded on when we come into the world. The intrusion comes again at every payday and the end of every year. It comes on us when we purchase anything and when we die. The only good thing I can say is that we are not currently taxed on our taxes.

What does Paul write? Taxes are levied and it is our responsibility to pay them. To those to whom it is due, we should render (pay) what is due to them. This includes Taxes, Customs, fear and honor.

Why do we need to pay? We need to because these “rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.”

Wouldn't it be nice if they weren't so devoted?

The word Paul uses for servants and Ministers here is the same as used for priests, who had the responsibility for collecting God's (temple) tithes and offerings from the Jews. Paul simply transfers the responsibility of collecting God's tithes and offerings from the Priests to the agents of government who exist at God's establishment authority and as difficult as some make it to believe, are God's agents here.

Are all taxes Just?

No. There are many cases of unjust taxation, but the principle behind taxation is right.

We need to remember that to cheat on our taxes, grieves the Holy Spirit, who authorizes the authority of those who tax. So does the failure to respect or honor Governmental officials and to pay duties and fees imposed by the government.

The Christian and Society

We have responsibilities to Society just as to Government. The remainder of Chapter 13 addresses how the Christian deals with society.

Owe nothing to anyone?

⁸Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. ⁹For this, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." ¹⁰Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Should we never incur debt? No. we enter into contracts all the time, and mutually agree to pay a set amount for services or goods. A trade is made, with well defined agreements stipulated. No debt is incurred until we miss a payment. At point, we owe and are at fault with Paul's instructions and come under the enforcement of this passage.

Is it wrong to over commit ⁹Take on more debt than we can pay? Yes. It is dishonesty and wrong.

However, there is a debt we can never fully pay. That debt is "Love".

In Romans Chapter 1, Paul writes, **"I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarians," (Romans 1¹⁴)** When he wrote this, Paul knew that he owed every man a debt – the obligation to love him. The reason Paul gives us for this debt is because the law is fulfilled by love.

¹⁰Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Love alone fulfills the Law. It makes a good citizen out of the Christian without any need for a policeman or prosecutor or Judge. If we love our neighbor, we can do them no harm or injury. You will never commit adultery with his wife, or steal the things you covet from him.

The simple thing is that laws alone are not enough to preserve order. What we need is a widespread desire to keep the law. We need a way to convince people to love each other, so that they do no evil toward their fellow man.

How can we convince people to love each other? This simple question illustrates the failure of society to establish righteousness. What is the answer?

"Love thy neighbor as thyself," (Lev 19:18, Matt 19:19, 22:39, Mark 12:31)

Looking back at Chapter 12, what is the full expression of love?

²⁰"BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD." ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Why show love?

¹¹Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. ¹²The night is almost gone, and the day is near Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

We need to show love, because the hour is near. Salvation is nearer than when we believed. The night is almost gone and the day is near. We need to not do what is wrong as we begin to do what is right. Why? Because the time grows near. Scripture is plain. From the appearance of Christ in the manger at Bethlehem to the present time is what is called in the Scriptures "the last age" or "the last hour" of human history. Paul knew that and so he wrote to the church in Rome that it was time for them to wake up. Still Christ did not come in Paul's day. Will he come in our day?

Only the Father knows, but we need to be about loving while it is our day, because regardless of whether Christ comes (like a thief in the night) or whether he lingers, our time for loving is short (We are but a vapor in time). While we are here, it is our time and Paul writes that we need to, **"lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light."**

I read where a pastor said the words "hurry up" are never used in the New Testament regarding our actions. What the NT writers use are the words, "wake up". It is not that we are moving too slowly. It is that we are asleep in action and are not moving at all. In the OT, Isaiah said, **"He that believeth need not make haste" (Isaiah 28:16)**. Christians need to understand that we are not moving/acting/working too slowly. Many of us are asleep at the wheel and not working at all.

Why wake up?

"for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed".

Time grows short. The last days are passing and the final hour is nearer to us than when we first believed. The minute that we are born, death is near. Though we may live for sixty-five, seventy-five, eighty-five, or ninety-five years, death has been near all that time. The older we grow, the more we realize, and the more certain it is, that death is nearer than when we were born. What Paul is writing here is that the end of the age, the last age, the final hour is near. It has been near all along because no one knew when the end would come, but it is certainly much, much nearer now than when Paul first wrote.

If Paul were here today, he would surely tell us, "Wake up and move. The final hour is nearer than when we first believed."

So how do we love the people of this crazy world?

¹²The night is almost gone, and the day is near Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. ¹⁴But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

We need to be about doing what is right and just and good (behaving properly). We need to be considerate of others, not so full of ourselves that we turn away from a world that needs Christ. Each day, we need to wake up and put on Christ (the armor of light) and then take him (Christ like love) out into the world

Anyone can carouse and be drunk. We show the world nothing is that is the way we are. The last twenty years have demonstrated very well where promiscuity and sensuality will carry us. Strife and jealousy are so common now that anything else is the abnormal condition. How do we respond to the world? We put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the worldly problems others embrace.