

Romans 13

The Christian and Civil Government: Romans 13:1-7

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.

13:1 Having spoken of the evil that men do in Romans 12:20,21, the natural thoughts of the apostle's readers would turn to state sanctioned evil. The early church knew much about undeserved suffering that had its ultimate origin in a sadist form of government. What, then, should be the Christian's attitude in regard to the state? Is the church to be over government, or subordinate to it? The first seven verses of Romans 14 defines the believer's duty to the state.

Paul begin his exposition by showing that the state can claim a certain measure of obedience of *every soul* (Romans 13:1) because the power it enjoys has been entrusted with care from God. "*For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God*" (Romans 13:1cf. Isa. 10:57; 45:1; Dan. 5:26). Does this mean that the state has absolute power over people without protest? No, for under girding Paul's position is another principle: the authority of the state is a divinely delegated power and so it is not an absolute authority without redress.

2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

13:2 Because every human government is ultimately subject to God, the state has no supreme power over the souls of men. When state laws do come into conflict with the laws of God, then it is better to obey God rather than men. (Study 1 Kings 21:3; Dan. 3:18; 6:12; Mark 12:17; Acts 4:19; Acts 5:29; Heb. 11:23) While the Christian is to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar, the things that belong to God must also be honored.

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:

4 For he is the minister [servant] 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.

13:4 Any movement to resist an established form of government should be done with due consideration lest the Christian be found resisting God and receiving greater judgment. (Romans 13:2) Under normal conditions, believers must obey magistrates who exercise lawful authority in order to promote self-control and enhance the good of society. If wives are to be obedient to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22), and children are to be obedient to their parents (Ephesians 6:1), then Christian citizens are to obey the state's sovereignty. (Romans 13:3)

If there is no general principle of obedience, even for totalitarian regimes

like Rome, then there will be unrestrained anarchy for it is the natural inclination for every man to do that which is right in his own eyes. (Judg. 21:25). Over all, the rulers in government do function as the ministers of God for good. (Romans 13:4) And as God's ministers they have the supreme right to administer capital punishment upon those that do evil. (Romans 13:4)

5 Wherefore *ye* must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

6 For for this cause pay *ye* tribute [taxes] also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.

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.

13:5-7 Those who obey the laws of the land generally have nothing to fear and are able to be a good witness for God. (Romans 13:5) It would be a meaningless message to tell people to submit to God's rule and reign while defying the laws of man. Therefore, let the Christian pay his direct taxes, "*tribute to whom tribute is due,*" and even the indirect taxes as necessary, "*custom to whom custom*" all the while showing fear and honor to God. The reason for such honor to all is this: there will be another day of reckoning.

One day the saints shall judge the world. (1 Cor. 6:2) In that day, the state shall

perish but the city of God and the citizens of the heavenly kingdom shall remain.

8 Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

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.

13:8-9 The Christian is not only to render civil obedience to the state, he is to faithfully fulfill all social obligations to society (Romans 13:8). Unpaid debts should be avoided for the social stigma they bring to the cause of Christ. The guiding principle of life in all things is to be love. (Romans 13:10) The second half of the Divine Law is summed up in the command, "*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*" (Lev. 19:18). Therefore, let God's people avoid adultery, murder, stealing, the bearing of false testimony, and covetousness. (Romans 13:9)

10 Love worketh no ill [evil] to his neighbour: therefore love *is* the fulfilling of the law.

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.

As the apostle brings this section to a conclusion he sets forth once more several practical reasons why Christians

are to obey civil authorities, honor all personal obligations, live righteously before others, and manifest genuine love.

◆ **Time is short.** The Christian message has always contained an element of urgency for death is certain and eternity is real. Therefore, Christians must awaken from any form of spiritual lethargy. Some Christians are asleep doctrinally. They have no idea of the many cults that have arisen to challenge, transform, or deny the history faith. Other Christians are asleep practically. They no longer care if souls are saved. It seems that the church has forgotten that hell is not just a doctrinal truth, it is a geographical reality.

*Must I go and empty-handed?
Thus my dear Redeemer meet?
Not one day of service give Him,
Lay no trophy at His feet?*

~*~

◆ **Salvation is near.** One day Jesus Christ will come again the second time for all that believe. (Heb. 9:28) One day the skies will split open and reveal the Lord of lords and the King of kings. (Acts 1:11; 1 Thess. 4:16) With each year that passes, with each that day that slips by the coming of Christ draws that much nearer. Robert McChayne, the Scotch preacher, once said to some friends,

*“Do you think Christ will come tonight?
One after another they said, I think not.
When all had given this answer, he*

solemnly noted, *The Son of Man cometh at an hour when ye think no”.* (Luke 12:40).

◆ **The spiritual warfare is real.** As some put on evil under the cover of darkness, the Christian is to put on the Lord Jesus Christ like a robe of righteousness. And for any that would be tempted to deny the Lordship of Christ for salvation and sanctification, attention should be noted that whenever the terms are used in Scripture together, the focus of attention is on the Lordship of Christ (Acts 2:36). Unless there is a fundamental recognition of Jesus as Lord of one’s life there can be no hope for genuine conversion. Christ said, *“Why call ye me Lord and do not the things which I say?”* (Luke 6:46) Those who think they can live without holiness and still see God fly in the face of the Scriptures. (Heb. 12:14) They have found a heavenly way to go to hell.

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 Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to *fulfil* the lusts [desires] thereof.

13:12-14 The Salvation of St. Augustine

Because the early church took seriously the apostolic exhortations to live a holy life, a man by the name of Augustine (AD 354-430) more easily came to faith one day when he picked up the Scriptures and read the call of Christ to a life of consecration. Augustine himself has recorded the story of that dramatic moment of conversion. He writes,

“There was a small garden attached to the house where we lodged... I now found myself driven by the tumult in my breast to take refuge in this garden, where no one could interrupt that fierce struggle in which I was my own contestant, until it came to its conclusion.

I probed the hidden depths of my soul and wrung its pitiful secrets from it, and when I gathered them all before the eyes of my heart, a great storm broke within me, bringing with it a great deluge of tears... For I felt that I was still enslaved by my sins, and in my misery I kept crying,

How long shall I go on saying 'Tomorrow, tomorrow'? Why not now? Why not make an end of my ugly sins this moment? I kept asking myself these questions, weeping all the while with the most bitter sorrow in my heart, when all at once

I heard the singsong voice of a child in a nearby house. Whether it was the voice of a boy or a girl I cannot say, but again and again it repeated the chorus, Take it and read, take it and read. At this I looked up, thinking hard whether there was any kind of game in which children used to chant words like these, but I could not remember ever hearing them before.

I stemmed my flood of tears and stood up, telling myself that this could only be God's command to open my book

of Scripture and read the first passage on which my eyes should fall...So I hurried back to the place where Alypius was sitting, for when I stood up to move away

I had put down the book containing Paul's letters. I seized it and opened it, and in silence I read the first passage on which my eyes fell: [Romans 13:13-14]

“Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.”

I had no wish to read more and no need to do so. For in an instant, as I came to the end of the sentence, it was as though the light of faith flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled.

May Augustine's experience be known to all of God's people as they too put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof.

Study Guide

Romans

Questions on Romans 13

1. What biblical evidence can be appealed to in order to prove the power of the state is not absolute over the lives of its citizens?
2. What will result if there is no general principle of respect for the government?
3. Besides civil obedience what else is the Christian obligated to do in regard to society at large?
4. List three reasons Paul gives for holy living.
5. What passage of Scripture did Augustine attribute to illuminating his mind leading him to salvation?

Answers to Romans 13

1. Because every human government is ultimately subject to God, the state has no supreme power over the souls of men. When state laws do come into conflict with the laws of God, then it is better to obey God rather than men. (Study 1 Kings 21:3; Dan. 3:18; 6:12; Mark 12:17; Acts 4:19; Acts 5:29; Heb. 11:23)
2. If there is no general principle of obedience, even for totalitarian regimes like Rome, then there will be unrestrained anarchy for it is the natural inclination for every man to do that which is right in his own eyes. (Judg. 21:25).
3. The Christian is not only to render civil obedience to the state, he is to faithfully fulfill all social obligations to society (Romans 13:8).
4. Three reasons for holy living include the following:
 5. Time is short
 6. Salvation is near
 7. The spiritual warfare is real

8. Augustine believed Romans 13: 12-13 were providentially used by God to lead him to salvation. *“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 Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. 14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts [desires] thereof.”*

Personal Application and Reflection

1. Do you believe Christians should engage in social activism? If so, what form should that activism take?
2. Comment on Christians who either bomb abortion clinics and other institutions or encourage others to out of anger or misguided zeal.
3. Should Christians serve in the government and if not why not?
4. What should be said to those who withdraw from society as much as possible?
5. State your own attitude toward government. Include in your statement any acts of injustices you have received by government officially or help such as financial, educational or informational.