

ROMANS CHAPTER THIRTEEN : THE BELIEVER AND GOVERNMENT

Read Romans chapter 13 in its entirety.

The apostle Paul continues to address other aspects of Christian living - how we view and respond to government, our love to one another and our life of purity.

Governing Authorities

Romans 13:1 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

Romans 13:2 Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

Romans 13:3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.

Romans 13:4 For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

Romans 13:5 Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake.

Romans 13:6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing.

Romans 13:7 Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

The apostle Paul is writing to believers in Rome (Jewish and Gentile believers) who are under the Roman government. Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus, was the Roman Emperor at this time (AD 54-68), and was considered the worst of the Roman emperors, extravagant, corrupt, and cruel attacking Christians burning them alive. It is important therefore, that we keep this context in mind as we read of what God desires of us His people as we relate to governing authorities.

vs 1-2 As believers, we are instructed

- ✓ to submit to governing authorities. The word 'subject' meaning 'to submit' calls for a willing subordination or yielding, and taking our proper place under leadership.
- ✓ to recognize that all authority flows from God
- ✓ to recognize that the authorities that are in place have been set there and put in place by God
- ✓ not to oppose governing authorities, so as not to oppose what God has set in place (ordinance Greek = arrangement, institution)

Let us consider several questions with regard to governing authorities:

In what sense are governing authorities appointed by God? What about unjust, corrupt or wicked leaders?

Are wicked rulers appointed by God? Are rulers who condone evil, rulers who do what is unjust, rulers who persecute Christians also appointed by God?

There have been and are all kinds of leaders (kings, rulers, civic leaders, etc.), some good and some very wicked. From Scripture we understand the following:

1) God has instituted governmental authority

We recognize that all authority flows from God. God has instituted authority structures through which His purposes unfold on the earth - whether in **family, church, workplace or government**. Honoring this authority structure is honoring God Himself, from whom all authority flows. Authority and submission are interdependent. One is in authority because of first being in submission. Ultimately the highest point of authority should be in submission to God Himself and thus become a channel of God's government into that system. *"But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God."* (1 Corinthians 11:3).

2) We recognize God's permission

We recognize civic leaders and honor them for the position they hold, and see that without God permitting them, they would not be there in that place of authority. There is the providence or permission of God where He allows (permits) people to enter into places of authority - whether they deserve it or not, whether they have gained access lawfully or unlawfully. They are appointed by God in the sense that they have been permitted by God to be in that place of power and influence. God's permission does not imply God's approval of all that is said or done.

We see this throughout Scripture that kings and rulers are in their place by God's permission to be in that place of influence and power at that particular time and place. There are times God sovereignly sets up one, and puts down another, and God sovereignly steers the king/ruler to carry out a specific purpose.

Psalm 75:6-7

6 For exaltation comes neither from the east Nor from the west nor from the south.

7 But God is the Judge: He puts down one, And exalts another.

Daniel 2:21

And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise And knowledge to those who have understanding.

Daniel 4:17, (see also verses 25,34-35)

17 'This decision is by the decree of the watchers, And the sentence by the word of the holy ones, In order that the living may know That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, Gives it to whomever He will, And sets over it the lowest of men.'

Here are a few examples:

Pharaoh - was in that place at that given time so that God could display His power

Saul and David - Saul was acting out of jealousy and was motivated by evil intent to kill David. Yet David called Saul "the Lord's anointed" recognizing God's authority in placing Saul as king.

Nebuchadnezzar - was used by God to judge His own people and then brought to a place where he recognized that God is truly God.

Cyrus - a Persian king who was moved upon by God to empower the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city and Temple.

Consider how the Lord Jesus spoke of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor over Judea:

John 19:10-11

10 Then Pilate said to Him, "Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?"

11 Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin."

Jesus recognized that Pilate was in the place where he was, because the Father had permitted it to be so. While Pilate would be responsible for the decision he made, the Lord Jesus also affirmed that the wrong doing was not entirely Pilate's but of those (the Jewish leaders, with Judas' help) who delivered Him to Pilate in the first place.

3) Government's responsibility

God's permission or a governing authority being appointed by God, does **not** mean that the leader's character, motives, decisions and actions are all directed by God or approved by God. The leader or governing authority is responsible and will be held accountable by God for their words and actions.

Proverbs 17:15

He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, Both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD.

4) People of the land

The choices and actions of the people of the land influence who comes to a place of authority over them.

Proverbs 28:2

Because of the transgression of a land, many are its princes; But by a man of understanding and knowledge Right will be prolonged.

5) God can steer the leaders for specific purposes

We know that God can steer the heart of the leader or governing authorities to release specific purposes. He often does this in response to prayer.

Proverbs 21:1

The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, Like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.

To what extent do we submit to governing authorities?

Be subject means to submit. We are to submit in all things so long as we do not contradict the laws of God. In such cases, we obey God before man.

Acts 4:18-20

18 So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.

19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge.

20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

Acts 5:28-29

28 saying, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!"

29 But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men.

We submit even if we are wrongfully treated because of our faith (1 Peter 2:13-25).

Should we not raise our voice, express concern, or stand against injustice, wickedness, etc.?

While we honor and walk in submission to governmental authorities, this does not imply that we do not use our rights as citizens or freedom as people to express our ideas or raise our voice against injustice and wickedness.

Proverbs 25:5

Take away the wicked from before the king, And his throne will be established in righteousness.

Proverbs 31:8-9

8 Open your mouth for the speechless, In the cause of all who are appointed to die.

9 Open your mouth, judge righteously, And plead the cause of the poor and needy.

God's minister

Three times Paul calls them "God's minister". The word "minister" is similar to the English word for deacon. This represents God's intent for governing authorities, for them to be God's ministers, although in practice many fail to live to this calling.

vs 3-5, We submit to governing authorities

- to receive their approval (vs 3)

- to avoid punishment (vs 4,5)

- for conscience sake (vs 5)

vs 6-7, Pay taxes, give honor and what is due to the government.

Matthew 22:21

They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

Loving Others

Romans 13:8 Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.

Romans 13:9 For the commandments, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," "YOU SHALL NOT MURDER," "YOU SHALL NOT STEAL," "YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS," "YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."

Romans 13:10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

There is one thing we owe people - a debt to be paid - it is to love them.

Loving people is essentially the fulfillment of the law, because when we walk in love we keep all the other commandments.

Purity - Live As In The Day

Romans 13:11 And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.

Romans 13:12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.

Romans 13:13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.

Romans 13:14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

Awake, the night has gone, the day has come

Live as one who is awake - not as one who is still in deep sleep or slumber.

Live as one who is alert.

Cast off the works of darkness

Get rid of deeds of darkness.

Put on the armor of light

Put on righteousness as an armor.

Walk properly

Walk decently, walk honestly.

Avoid :

revelry, wild parties,

drunkenness
lewdness, indecency, sexual immorality
lust, sensuality
strife, quarrels, arguments, fighting
envy, jealousy

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ

Be clothed with Jesus. Be soaked, completely covered, fully attired with Jesus Christ. Greek writers used this phrase "put on" a person meaning to imbibe his teachings, follow his principles, to imitate his example, to copy his lifestyle, to become like him, to become his disciple. So that when one sees us it is as good as seeing Jesus Christ Himself.

Make no provision for the flesh

provision = preparation for future needs, preparation in anticipation of needs. Do not make any preparation beforehand to meet its sinful desires. To say it differently, prepare beforehand and ahead of time to deny the flesh of its sinful desires. Preempt the flesh and cut off any opportunity for it to have its way.

Don't give the flesh an opportunity.

Deprive the flesh on any chance to have its way.

Say 'no' even before the flesh makes its request.

Reflection



Q1, Discuss the believers view of governing authorities, as presented here in Romans 13.

Q2, How would we "put on" Christ in practical ways in everyday life?

Q3, Think of one or two real life scenarios where we can prepare beforehand to deny the flesh any opportunity for its sinful desires to be fulfilled.

ROMANS CHAPTER FOURTEEN : RESPECTING OTHERS

Read Romans chapter 14 in its entirety.

Do Not Judge Another (On Non-Essentials)

Romans 14:1 Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.

Romans 14:2 For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.

Romans 14:3 Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.

Romans 14:4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

Romans 14:5 One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.

Romans 14:6 He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.

Romans 14:7 For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself.

Romans 14:8 For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

Romans 14:9 For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

Romans 14:10 But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

Romans 14:11 For it is written: "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL CONFESS TO GOD."

Romans 14:12 So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

[To add notes here]

Do Not Cause Another to Stumble

Romans 14:13 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.

Romans 14:14 I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

Romans 14:15 Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.

Romans 14:16 Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil;

Romans 14:17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Romans 14:18 For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.

Romans 14:19 Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.

Romans 14:20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense.

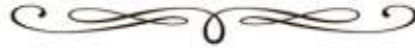
Romans 14:21 It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.

Romans 14:22 Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.

Romans 14:23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.

[To add notes here]

Reflection



Q1, Think of some contemporary examples where we need to be non-judgmental towards other believers and accept their preferences, even if it differs from ours.

Q2, Think of some examples in our present context where something I do could potentially become a "stumbling block" to another brother, who may not understand why I do what I do.