

## Romans 13

- The Gospels teach us that Jesus Christ “suffered under Pontius Pilate” a Roman Governor.
- History tells us that Peter, Paul and many other Christians were executed in Rome under Nero.
- In fact for the next 250 years persecution of Christians by Rome would go in and out of style, depending largely on the personal preferences of officials and emperors.
- What was the attitude of the apostles toward the Roman government? Did they organize themselves into rebellious militias? Did they become angry misfits like Unabomber Ted Kaczynski or Timothy McVeigh (OKC)? Is that why so many were persecuted and died?
- Here in Romans 13, a chapter written to the churches *in Rome*, we'll read first hand what Paul actually taught regarding a proper attitude towards the government. As it turns out, it was not very controversial.

- I. As Christians we should submit to human government. 13:1-7
- II. As Christians we should submit to the law of love. 13:8-10
- III. As Christians we should be ready for Christ's return. 13:11-14

We need to live up to a much higher standard than the world.

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

**Main Point: As citizens of heaven we ought to be ideal citizens on earth.**

- I. As Christians we should submit to human government. 13:1-7
  - A. 13:1-2 Paul's point is that civil government has been put in place by God and fulfills a definite role as part of the earthly order that God has set up.

*whoever resists Lit., sets himself in array against. (Vincent)*
  - B. 13:4 *God's minister (diakonos)* used specifically of deacons, but also of servants of God in general.

*1 Corinthians 3:5 (NKJV) Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but **ministers** through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?*

- C. *Bear the sword Borne as the symbol of the magistrate's right to inflict capital punishment. Thus [the Roman jurist] Ulpian: "They who rule whole provinces have the right of the sword (jus gladii)." The Emperor Trajan presented to a provincial governor, on starting for his province, a dagger, with the words, "For me. If I deserve it, in me." (Vincent)*

This right to human government to bear the sword for capital punishment seems to go back to the days of Noah. Prior to that there is no record of it in Scripture.

*Genesis 9:6 (NKJV) "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man.*

- In some segments of Christianity there is a strong tradition of complete pacifism, which opposes all taking of human life under all circumstances. Still, this principle of the ruler bearing the sword that runs through Scripture has given rise to two non-pacifistic viewpoints:
  - The idea that capital punishment is OK when exercised fairly by the government.
  - The idea of the “just war” against violent, aggressor nations.

D. 13:5 Not just because you might be punished, but so that your conscience will be clear.

E. 13:6-7 We should all be familiar with Jesus' response to the question about taxes.

*Mark 12:17 (NKJV) And Jesus answered and said to them, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”*

F. It's also worth noting that this passage regarding submission to rulers is not unique:

*1 Timothy 2:1-4 (NKJV) <sup>1</sup>Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, <sup>2</sup>for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. <sup>3</sup>For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, <sup>4</sup>who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

*Titus 3:1-2 (NKJV) Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, <sup>2</sup>to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men.*

*1 Peter 2:13-17 (NKJV) <sup>13</sup>Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, <sup>14</sup>or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. <sup>15</sup>For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—<sup>16</sup>as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. <sup>17</sup>Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.*

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II. As Christians we should submit to the law of love. 13:8-10

A. 13:8 The Greek (*opheilete*) expresses a sense of moral obligation and personal responsibility. The Bible extends this obligation beyond the church (“one another”) by making reference to our “neighbor”. As God loved us when we were His enemies, so we Christians are to love all. (See *Victor Bible Background Commentary*)

*Matthew 22:34-40 (NKJV) <sup>34</sup>But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. <sup>35</sup>Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, <sup>36</sup>“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?”*

*<sup>37</sup>Jesus said to him, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ <sup>38</sup>This is the first and great commandment. <sup>39</sup>And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ <sup>40</sup>On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”*

13:10 *Augustine put it succinctly. "Love God, and do as you please." A person who loves God will do nothing to displease Him. And a person who loves others will do nothing to harm them. (Victor Bible Background Commentary)*

Application: We cannot be indifferent to the needs of others.

The law of love supersedes both religious and civil laws. The law of love has no loopholes. The law of love goes beyond indifference. Whenever love demands it, we are to go beyond human legal requirements and imitate *the God of love*. (See *Handbook of Bible Application*)

### **As citizens of heaven we ought to be ideal citizens on earth.**

III. As Christians we should be ready for Christ's return. 13:11-14

A. 13:11 We should always be ready for Christ's return.

B. 13:12-14 Spurgeon explains this passage in very strong words:

*The rags of sin must come off if we put on the robe of Christ. There must be a taking away of the love of sin! There must be a renouncing of the practices and habits of sin, or else a man cannot be a Christian! It will be an idle attempt to try and wear religion as a sort of celestial overall over the top of old sins. [Link to original sermon here.](#)*

*Matthew 25:13 (NKJV) "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.*

*James 5:8-9 (NKJV) <sup>8</sup>You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. <sup>9</sup>Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!*

*1 John 3:2-3 (NKJV) <sup>2</sup>Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. <sup>3</sup>And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*

*Hebrews 10:24-25 (NKJV) <sup>24</sup>And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, <sup>25</sup>not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*

C. 13:14 This verse had a big impact on Augustine who we mentioned earlier:

*Augustine. Augustine was born in A.D. 354 in North Africa. Although he had a Christian mother, he led a wild life that was restless and without peace. In his search for peace he became a disciple of the Manichaeans and later studied Neo-Platonic philosophy. Under the influence of Ambrose, bishop of Milan, Augustine was introduced to Christianity, but he experienced the "terrible power of sin and his own inability to overcome his sinful desires." Upon reading Romans 13:14, Augustine experienced release from his burdens and was converted. He immediately began a diligent study of Paul's epistles, wherein he had experienced the grace of God. (Moody Handbook of Theology)*

## Conclusions:

- Q: Wait a minute Dave, this submission to rulers stuff is all fine, but I heard that back in the 80s, when Eastern Europe was communist, you used to smuggle Bibles. How do reconcile that with this chapter?
- A: Sometimes, human governments choose not to remain neutral on questions of faith, but set themselves up in direct opposition to God. This was the case under communism, which was officially atheistic. The Bible gives us some examples of how this works:
  - One way is by commanding disobedience:
    - In Exodus, Pharaoh ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill the Hebrew male babies. They rightly did not do so.
    - Nebuchadnezzar commanded Daniel's friends to worship his golden image. The story of the fiery furnace was the result.
    - Similarly in Roman times, some emperors demanded emperor worship. The Christians refused and persecution was the result.
  - At other times, rulers forbid obedience to God or punish those who speak in His name:
    - This is why many of the OT prophets were persecuted, imprisoned or killed.
    - Daniel went to the lions' den because he was forbidden to pray.
    - In Acts, this is why the apostles got in trouble in Jerusalem:

*Acts 5:28-29 (NKJV) <sup>28</sup>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!"*

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

- In some countries it can still be hard to get a Bible legally. It's right to obtain one by whatever means available.
  - Other countries have enacted anti-conversion or anti-evangelism laws. In these countries, some Christians, especially new converts or those who convert them, will inevitably suffer for their faith.
- Normally, however, the lessons of this chapter still apply:
    - As Christians we should submit to human government. Most laws have nothing to do with the practice of our faith. The Roman Empire had its problems and Paul still wrote this chapter.
    - As Christians we should submit to the law of love. That means we're truly looking out for everyone's best. We make ourselves our brother's keeper.
    - As Christians we should be ready for Christ's return. This gives us a context for the way in which we live out our faith.

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

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