

Romans 13 Bible study guide

 bcbsr.com/books/rom13.html

Romans 13

Submission to Civil Authorities

13:1 Let every soul be in subjection to the higher authorities,

for there is no authority except from God, and those who exist are ordained by God.

13:2 Therefore he who resists the authority, withstands the ordinance of God; and those who withstand will receive to themselves judgment.

*13:3 For rulers are not a terror to the good work, but to the evil.
Do you desire to have no fear of the authority?
Do that which is good, and you will have praise from the same,*

*13:4 for he is a servant of God to you for good.
But if you do that which is evil, be afraid,
for he doesn't bear the sword in vain;
for he is a minister of God, an avenger for wrath to him who does evil.*

Paying Debts

13:5 Therefore you need to be in subjection, not only because of the wrath, but also for conscience' sake.

13:6 For this reason you also pay taxes, for they are ministers of God's service, attending continually on this very thing.

13:7 Give therefore to everyone what you owe:

- taxes to whom taxes are due;
- customs to whom customs;
- respect to whom respect;
- honor to whom honor.

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

Love

13:9 For the commandments, **"You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not give false testimony," "You shall not covet,"** and whatever other commandments there are, are all summed up in this saying, namely, **"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."**

13:10 Love doesn't harm a neighbor. Love therefore is the fulfillment of the law.

Enlightened Behavior

13:11 Do this, knowing the time, that it is already time for you to awaken out of sleep, for salvation is now nearer to us than when we first believed.

13:12 The night is far gone, and the day is near.

Let's therefore throw off the works of darkness, and let's put on the armor of light.

13:13 Let us walk properly, as in the day;

- not in reveling and drunkenness,
- not in sexual promiscuity and lustful acts, and
- not in strife and jealousy.

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

Questions

What problems do you suppose the Christians might have had back then with Paul's statements concerning submission to the civil authorities?

What about authorities that might be considered "evil" or overly oppressive?

What are appropriate motivations to submit to civil authorities?

When you figure in taxes, what percentage of your income are you giving back to God?

What harm do you see people doing to others - directly or indirectly?

What good - directly or indirectly?

What are examples of where doing things in the name of love actually brings harm to others?

What are examples of Christian love?

How do you measure "decent" behavior?

What motivates you to live appropriately as a Christian?

What people are you modeling your life after?

Comments

Submit to Authorities

Rom 13:1,2 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

Likewise Paul instructs Titus, "Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men." Titus 3:1,2

And Peter writes, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king." 1Peter 2:13-17

Civil Authorities God's Servants

Rom 13:3,4 For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.

Evil doers generally live in fear of legitimate authority. "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment." 1John 4:18a So if you want to be free from such fear, practice love, do what is right.

Of course human authority only has a limited realm of authority, but within that realm they are legitimate God-ministering authorities. And in this sense Paul is speaking of these civil authorities. If they are rewarding evil and punishing good, they are acting outside their legitimate realm of authority. But that does not nullify their God-given authority to reward good and punish evil. The Old Testament has many examples of God even using pagan authority figures as his ministers, and punishing them if they overstep their authority. "*Woe to the Assyrian, the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the club of my wrath!*" **Isaiah 10:5** (niv)

Subordinates, whether they be children, wives, citizens, employees or the like often are rebelliousness and contemptuous of those who are in legitimate authority over them in reaction to discipline and restrictions to their freedom. But God has ordained authority to limit the destructive influence of the sinful nature upon oneself and others. And thus such authority is necessary for the benefit of society.

Notice also a couple of other things here. It is the authority's responsibility not only to dispense justice, but also to reward good behavior, though the latter is often neglected. Furthermore notice that the dispensing of justice is not about reform, though reform may occur. It is primarily about pay back - more literally it says, "he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil."

Taxing Issues

Rom 13:5-7 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

While ideally when we reach maturity we will do what is right just because it is the right thing to do. But in the mean time God gives us motivations based upon positive and negative incentives. And with regards to conscience, "The integrity of the upright guides them" Pr 11:3a and "Righteousness guards the man of integrity" Pr 13:6, but we should also be sensitive to the conscience of others. "Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody." Rom 12:17

Now some attempt to read these commands as limited only to spiritual authorities, but if it hasn't been clear enough yet Paul's mention of taxes makes it perfectly clear that he's primarily referring to secular authority. Regardless of whether they're believers or godly, civil authorities are God's servants, and it's God's will for you to pay your taxes, and Christians should obey the law where it does not violate their conscience to do so. This is a good topic for a discussion group. I would particularly challenge those who are illegal aliens and those who hire them, whether they are in God's will in this regard.

"Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king." 1Peter 2:17

"I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." 1Tim 2:1-2

Love Fulfills the Law

Rom 13:8-10 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Lev 19:18) Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Concerning love, that is a debt which can never be fully paid off. The obligation remains forever. There are relationships based upon an enlightened self-interest in which one does good to another so that those other person may feel obligated to reciprocate. But that's not love. Jesus said, "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. Love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back." Luke 6:32-35

The particular commands he's pointing out have to do with our social relationships. And while the overriding principle of the law with regards to such relationships is to love your neighbor as if he were you, another way of viewing this is to make it one's intention to do no harm to one's neighbor. Each prohibition of the commandments have to do with not bringing harm to one's neighbor. That is clear from "Do no commit adultery", "Do not murder" , "Do not steal", but even coveting a neighbor's property apparently does the neighbor harm.

This gives us a way to view the, approximately, 500 particular regulations of the law of Moses. Each has to do with not harming one's neighbor, but rather doing good to one's neighbor. If we embrace the general principle, there is no need to impose regulations upon us. For love fulfills the law.

An Urgent Message

Rom 13:11-12 And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

The salvation he is referring to is not our justification. We have already been justified. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith. But rather the salvation he is referring to is our being delivered out of this present world into glory, to occur on the day of the Lord. "The day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming." 2Peter 3:10-12a Likewise Paul writes concerning the present crisis, "What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away." 1Cor 7:29-31

There are unnecessary weights, materials things, responsibilities which we take on, and more significantly are the sins we commit. "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" Heb 12:1b All these passages contain a sense of urgency which should be characteristic of the Christian life.

As for "the armor of light", he alludes to this also in [Eph 6:14-18](#). And also to the deeds of darkness here "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them." Eph 5:11

Enlightened Behavior

Rom 13:13,14 Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

"You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." 1Th 5:5-9

Interesting to note the motivation he gives in both passages. He doesn't motivate right behavior out of fear of condemnation. For that would be contrary to the idea that salvation is by faith and not attained by means of behavior. Rather he motivates Christians to behave well in view of who we are and in view of the hope we have. Furthermore, right behavior is simply characteristic of those born of God. "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires." Gal 5:24 So "walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh." Gal 5:16

[The Berean Christian Bible Study Resources](#)

Search the Site (use " " for phrases)

Jun 17,2016