

The Book of Romans

Romans 13

v 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.”*

Since the days of Noah God placed some of His governmental ways with man in the hands of man. (I mean by governmental — *“whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap”*).

“Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man” (Gen.9:6). So here, in Romans, the Lord will soon say by Paul, *“For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil.”* This is God’s purpose for “higher powers” amongst men. We know men have tragically failed in fulfilling this purpose of God. (The crucifixion of Christ, beheading of John Baptist, and the horrible, unmentionable atrocities of our day, clearly and plainly show this tragic failure.)

Does this mean Christians no longer are to submit to these higher powers ordained of God. Paul, with Peter deliver the same answer. *“Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well”* (1 Pet.2:13-14).

Perhaps we should note, *“submit”* and *“obey”* are *not the same*. We see this vividly illustrated in the account of the three Hebrew children. *“Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king...If it be [so], our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver [us] out of thine hand, O king But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up”* (Dan.3:16-18). They did not obey, but they did submit to the consequences. It is well for us as believers to discern God’s purposes in a matter, and not man’s failure in his responsibilities to respond to God’s purposes.

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

There are many *“ordinances of men”* we may not like, but if they do not force us to disobey *“God”*, we are to submit. It is solemn to set ourselves over the laws of men simply because we do not like them.

v 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”.*

The believer holds the ruler according to the purpose God had for the ruler. If the ruler misuses his power, God will deal with him about that misuse. We see this with the Assyria, a rod in God’s Hand, for the punishment of His people Israel.

“Wherefore it shall come to pass, [that] when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks” (Isa.10:12).

“Shall the axe (Assyria) boast itself against Him (God) that heweth therewith?” (Isa.10:15).

vv 4,5 *“For he is the minister 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. Wherefore [ye] must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake”.*

It is well for the believer to realize we live during the time that is called *“the times of the Gentiles”*. *“And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled”* (Luke 21:24).

Today Christians are to be subject to this type of rule (secular government). It now belongs to *“Caesar”* (the Gentiles). *“And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him”* (Mark 12:17).

The church is to take care of itself only in *“religious”* rule. *“For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?”* (1 Cor.5:12). This is why *“Peter and the [other] apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men”* (Acts 5:29).

The high priest had neither secular or religious authority. But both types of authority once belonged to Israel—both the throne of the Lord and His Temple were in Jerusalem. However, those two types of rule have now been separated. And will remain so until God restores His people Israel upon this earth. *“[Israel is] the rod of his inheritance: the LORD of hosts [is] his name. Thou [art] my battle axe [and] weap-*

ons of war: for with thee will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy kingdoms;" (Jer.51:19-20).

"Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both" (Zec. 6:13).

Let us seek grace that we not to confuse "Caesar's" secular rule and God's "religious" rule. The Gentiles do not make "ordinances" in the church, and the church does not make political ordinances for the Gentiles.

vv 6,7 "For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing." Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute [is due]; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour."

Whether it be taxes, or custom, the believer needs to be sensitive as to customs of order in the land in which we are. Some are in places of being "powers" over us, and we need to give proper respect to the office they fill. We must ever remember that the powers that be are ordained of God.

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

Here we leave the subject simply relating to the powers that be. We come to all men, none to be left out. We have a debt of love to all men, so great it cannot ever have the writing "Paid in Full" written over it. Living in a day when men are "living in malice and envy, hateful, [and] hating one another." something we ourselves once did, it is easy for us to forget to love. "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Mt. 24:12).

vv 9,10 "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. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love [is] the fulfilling of the law."

Here we learn the power of true love, and its triumph over all forms, or manifestations of evil. Surely it is true: "Charity [love]...thinketh no evil" (1 Cor. 13:4-5).

v 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."

We presently are saved as to our acceptance in Christ. "He hath made us accepted in the beloved" (Eph.1:6). But there is an aspect of our "salvation" which has not yet appeared. It is "salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet.1:5).

This salvation will be freeing us from the "trial of your faith". Our pathway of faith will then be over. We are nearer to this than when we first believed. Oh may we awake out of spiritual sleep, and live today in the good of that salvation that is ready to be revealed.

v 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."

"The night is far spent" is a reference to this present time of moral darkness here on earth. Our "armour" consequently, is "armour of light." We presently are "children of day". But we are in a scene of darkness. We need the armour of light to see, not where we are, but where we are going. Darkness cannot exist with light. "Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness" (1 Thess.5:5).

v 13 "Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying."

We are to walk, "as in the day". Our behavior should, here in the night season, be in keeping with that day of light. This I believe, is what is meant when Paul says "I have gone preaching the kingdom of God," (Acts 20:25). It doesn't say preaching the gospel of the Kingdom. That is because the moral features in us now (during this moral night) should not be different than they will be then when we arrive in that day which now is "at hand".

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

We are soon to be in that city where "the Lamb [is] the light thereof" (Rev.21:23). Once, without Him, we "were sometimes darkness, but now [are ye] light in the Lord: walk as children of light" (Eph 5:8).