

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

August 23, 2023

Series - The Life and Writings of the Apostle Paul

The Letter to the Romans

The Righteousness of God

The Duty Section (Chapters 12 – 16)

The Christian's Civil Responsibilities (or The Christian and the Law)

Text – Romans 13

Introduction

Chapter thirteen will teach us how we are to behave as citizens of an earthly kingdom (vs. 1 – 7), and how we are to treat our fellow man on earth as ambassadors of a Heavenly Kingdom. Jesus made it clear that we have secular responsibilities as earthly citizens and spiritual responsibilities as citizens of Heaven:

"And he said unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's." (Luke 20:25)

God has established three institutions:

- 1 The Home – Genesis 2:18 – 25
- 2 The Government – Genesis 9:1 – 17
- 3 The Church – Acts 2

Government is here to protect us, not provide for us. When government goes beyond what it was ordained by God to do, there will be problems. For instance, I do not believe it is the job of government to raise and educate children; that job has been given to the parents.

It is important to remember that God is sovereign over government, and he can at any time remove a leader to set up a new one. Sometimes God will allow a wicked ruler to reign because the people have turned against him:

"The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will." (Proverbs 21:1)

Government is not the cause of the spiritual condition of the people, but rather, it reflects the spiritual condition. We like to blame the government, but I believe the fault lies within the churches:

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14)

I. Our Duty to Submit as Citizens (vs. 1 – 7)

"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." (Romans 13:1)

The Christian is commanded by God to obey the laws of the land, even in days when the government has become totally corrupt.

"I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:1-4)

Notice also that God wants us to be under the authority of the leadership within the Church.

"Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." (Hebrews 13:7)

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." (Hebrews 13:17)

"Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints. They of Italy salute you." (Hebrews 13:24)

"Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." (Romans 13:2)

We are only permitted to resist authority when that authority is in opposition to a higher authority.

"Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29)

It is not always easy to determine when we are to be subject, and when we are to oppose. In times of revolution and civil war, the Christian is to support the better government, because the better government is concluded to be the one ordained of God. There were many Christians on both sides of the American Revolution, and on both sides of the Civil War.

"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:" (Romans 13:3)

The government is in place to punish evil, and generally, we do not need to be afraid if we are doing right.

"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." (Romans 13:4)

Government is the protector of the innocent and the punisher of the guilty. Notice here that the government bears the sword, and executes wrath upon those that do evil, which implies that God is OK with capital punishment being administered by government.

"Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake." (Romans 13:5)

The Christian needs to obey not only because of the fear of judgment, but also because of his conscience. In other words, the Christian ought to do right, because it is right to do.

"For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing." (Romans 13:6)

God expects us to pay taxes, even when we disagree with the amount of taxes we are commanded to pay.

"Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour." (Romans 13:7)

Notice that we are to honour, or respect, those in government. It is the office that we are to respect, even if the person in the office is not worthy of it.

Our responsibility to government is to:

- 1 Pray for those who serve in government.
- 2 Pay our taxes.
- 3 Participate in government by voting and serving.
- 4 Play by the Rules – Obey it.

II. Our Duty to Love as Christians (vs. 8 – 10)

"Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law." (Romans 13:8)

The phrase, "owe no man anything" transitions us to the subject of our duty to all men, whether within the church or without.

1 The Christian is commanded to love his brother:

"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." (1 John 3:14)

"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1 John 4:20)

"And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also." (1 John 4:21)

2 The Christian is commanded to love his enemy:

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;" (Matthew 5:43-44)

Many believe that the phrase "owe no man anything" is a commandment regarding debt:

Does "Owe no man anything" refer also to the Christian's financial practices? Some people believe that it does, and that it is a sin to have a debt. J. Hudson Taylor, the godly missionary to China, would never incur a debt, basing his conviction on this verse. Charles Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher, had the same conviction. However, the Bible does not forbid borrowing or legal financial transactions that involve interest. What the Bible does forbid is the charging of high interest, robbing the brethren, and failing to pay honest debts (see Exodus 22:25-27; Nehemiah 5:1-11). Matthew 25:27 and Luke 19:23 indicate that banking and investing for gain are not wrong. Certainly no one should get into unnecessary debt, or sign contracts he cannot maintain. "Thou shalt not steal." But to make Romans 13:8 apply to all kinds of legal obligations involving money is, to me, stretching a point.¹

"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." (Romans 13:9)

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 557). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Every precept within the Law could be funneled down to two general areas: our relationship with God, and our relationship with our fellow man. Many of the Old Testament laws were designed to help us treat our neighbor, as we would have them treat us. God, however, does not want us to focus on the laws, but on the love. If we have the love of God flowing through us, then we will not want to mistreat the people around us. Biblical love will always manifest itself in action.

"Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." (Romans 13:10)

Love will never do his neighbor dirty.

III. Our Duty to Walk Circumspectly (vs. 11 – 14)

The last few verses of chapter 13 will remind us how short our time is on this earth, and that we need to be busy preparing for eternity. Too many Christians are living as if they have all the time in the world to accomplish the task that the Lord has given them. We need to develop a sense of urgency in our fulfillment of the will of God for our lives. Time is running out.

"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." (Romans 13:11)

"Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." (Ephesians 5:14-16)

"Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." (James 4:13-14)

"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." (Romans 13:12)

We already read Ephesians 5:14 – 16. Now let's look at the preceding verses:

"For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them

in secret. But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light." (Ephesians 5:8-13)

"armour of light" - See Ephesians 6:10 - 20

***"Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying."* (Romans 13:13)**

"chambering" – could be referring to sleep or fornication, both of which take place in "the chamber", or bed.

"wantonness" – unbridled lust, excessiveness.

Here, and in Ephesians, God warns us be sober and awake. Time is running out, and the enemy is everywhere. We need to be focused on the task at hand, and we cannot be distracted with the sinful pleasures of this world.

***"But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof."* (Romans 13:14)**

Party time is when we get to Heaven. Right now, we are in the middle of the battle. Our focus ought to be on the Lord's will for our lives.

Wiersbe says this regarding these verses:

Paul gave several admonitions in the light of the Lord's soon return. The first is, "Wake up!" Relate this with 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11, and also Matthew 25:1–13. The second is, "Clean up!" We do not want to be found dressed in dirty garments when the Lord returns (1 John 2:28–3:3). The Christian wears the armor of light, not the deeds of darkness. He has no reason to get involved in the sinful pleasures of the world. Finally, Paul admonished, "Grow up!" (Rom. 13:14) To "put on" the Lord Jesus Christ means to become more like Him, to receive by faith all that He is for our daily living. We grow based on the food we eat. This is why God warns us not to make provisions for the flesh. If we feed the flesh, we will fail; but if we feed the inner man the nourishing things of the Spirit, we will succeed.²

In 2010, the death rate for America was 800 people per 100,000. Atlantic County has a population of approximately 275,000 people, which means that in 2010, the number of deaths was approximately 2200. In Camden County, the number was approximately 4,100. With that amount of people dying, and many of them dying lost and on their way to Hell, our churches need to wake up, quit partying, and get busy for the Lord.

² Wiersbe (p. 558)