

Romans Study

Session 20 - Romans 13

Last session we finished up chapter 12 and saw the critical element of a believer's life love - showing God's love in every circumstance to every other person God places within our path. In this next chapter, Paul goes back to Romans 12:1-2 to discuss service. While what we learned in chapter 12 was that service is the natural outpouring of the Spirit in our lives, it is also done in love. Now Paul turns our attention to what service looks like in the broader scope of our lives. The passage before us is the most notable and comprehensive teaching in the New Testament concerning the Christian's civic responsibility.

Back in Matthew 22:21, Jesus told the lawyer, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's". Paul's words are merely an extension and clarification of what the Lord's words mean in our day to day lives. But like before, this passage draws its power from Romans 12:1-2.

[Romans 12:1-2]

This is part of the natural flow of Paul's thought. Christians are those who have dual citizenship. As such we owe a certain amount of respect obligation to our worldly civic leaders. As we will see, the life of the Spirit within believers will lead us to live in a way that seeks harmonious living with the other members of society and thus have a strong witness.

1. The Christian and the State

[Romans 13:1-7]

Q: According to Paul in v.1, what is the responsibility of every believer? (*to be subject to governing authorities*)

Q: Why are Christians admonished to live in subjection to their civil leaders? (*Every authority owes its existence to God and God has established every authority*)

Q: If a person resists the civil authority, what are they truly opposing? (*v.2 - the ordinance of God. Ordinance is the same as an institution from God*)

Q: What is the penalty for opposing the civil authority God has established? (*v.2 - such a person will receive condemnation upon themselves*)

[Matthew 26:52]

With the basics spelled out, let's go back and fill in some of the blanks. The first question is "why?" Why did Paul feel the need to write this chapter because he really is silent on this issue in most of his other letters.

For this we need to go back to ancient Rome. Nero's persecution was still a few years away (probably one or two) but there was social and economic persecution of Christians breaking

out within the empire and the Roman government was not doing anything to stop it. The real reason Rome allowed this sort of persecution and then ramped it up in the two centuries that followed was that Rome feared the social upheaval that would happen when the population shifted from the Roman gods and their worship to the worship of one God, and it being a God who was not controlled by the government. Religion was not only a huge business in the empire but it was also the way of life for all the citizens. In large part it was the glue that held many otherwise diverse segments of the population together. The Roman leaders saw the economic and social and religious disintegration of their society if Christianity was allowed to thrive and flourish. Roman culture would devolve into chaos and anarchy. So Rome had a vested interest in destroying Christianity or at least keeping it a small splinter group of another minority religion (Judaism).

Speaking of the Jews, especially the Christian Jews, the Jews had a long history of rebellion against their non-Jewish civil authorities. They were a “hard to manage” religion. However, in the Old Testament the Jews, after the exile, were commanded to seek the prosperity of the nation where they were taken. They were to settle down and work hard and not rebel but rather see this nation as an opportunity for them to thrive and spread their religion and live in peace. To their credit, this happened often, especially by the New Testament times.

Yet, there was one thing that kept the Christian Jews and even the Gentile believers to have a hard time with this commandment and that was the thought of the Messiah arriving. When the Messiah, the warrior-king liberator of the Jews showed up, He was going to destroy all rule over the Jews and set them up as the governing power over the world. With this expectation being that the Messiah would show up quickly - like in their lifetimes - they were always ready to rebel against the rule of whoever God had placed over them to follow God’s Messiah.

One other problem on a practical note of why Paul might have felt this section important to the Romans was that the emperor Claudius banished all the Jews and Christians from Rome. They were eventually allowed to return (years later) but there might have been some hard feelings toward their governing authorities after their hostile relocation in the past. Into these three reasons: a state fearing Christianity, a naturally rebellious religious minority experiencing Messianic agitation, and a group of people who were forced out of their homes and businesses by a capricious ruler just a decade earlier; Paul wrote this chapter.

One of the first things noted in this passage is that Paul uses the word “submit” rather than the much stronger word “obey” when discussing the Christian’s responsibility to the state. This word means to place yourself under another person.

Q: Why do you think Paul used the word “submit” rather than “obey”? *(Submit recognizes one’s place in the hierarchy God has established for the governance of mankind while on earth. It recognizes one’s subordinate position to God and His plan. Paul understood that there might be times when it would be impossible for a believer to obey or comply with every demand or order of a governing authority. There would be times such as in Acts 5:29, when a Christian will need to obey God rather than an earthly civic leader. But even when such a stand is necessary, the Christian still submits to the governing authority in that it accepts the consequences for his refusal. Every believer can maintain the attitude of respect towards the institution God has placed over us for our protection.)*

Keep in mind that the Roman government Paul lived under was, for the most part, responsible for allowing the gospel to spread as far as it did in such a short period of time. The Romans built roads everywhere and they were good roads. The Romans kept the peace (for the most part) so that Christians weren't having to travel to war zones to preach the gospel. There was something called the Pax Romana (the peace of Rome) that kept all the rival nations in line so that commerce and religion and education could spread freely. Since Paul's goal was to spread the gospel and plant churches everywhere, especially in the larger population centers, the empire was serving his purposes (thus God's). Now this was changing during Paul's life and especially after his death but this was the case at this point in history.

Q: Many scholars see vv. 3-4 as the most difficult portion of this passage because of something it's missing. What is it about this passage that might make it difficult to apply? *(It doesn't seem to take in to account the possibility of a tyrannical or evil government. It also uses the phrase "bear the sword" which is enigmatic. Other answers possible)*

As mentioned before, in just a few short years the Roman government began a widespread systematic persecution of Christians because they refused to honor the gods of the Romans. Paul is presenting the norm in this passage. He's describing the state that is functioning in terms of fulfilling the ideal for governments God has ordained.

Q: What is the role of government given to it by God according to vv. 3-4? *(rewarding or encouraging good while punishing wickedness)*

The government is called a "minister of God to you for good".

Q: What is the "good" government is supposed to do for its citizens? *(It is tasked with punishing those who would act lawlessly and counter to the public good.)*

It is important to understand the phrase "bear the sword". This term referred only to the power given to provincial governors who had Roman citizen troops under their command, to enable them to maintain military discipline without being hampered by the provisions of the local law. It's like in our nation, federal law superceding state law which supercedes local laws. This phrase is Paul warning Christians not to engage in activities which would seem subversive or rebellious to the Roman government. In Roman times, punishment could include the death penalty. The important fact about this phrase is that it implies that God has given the governing authorities the responsibility to maintain peace and order and law. When that is threatened, the authorities are able to administer whatever punishment (wrath) that their laws entail.

Q: According to Paul in v.5, what is the second reason a Christian should live in submission to the governing authorities? *(conscience sake - this means the pain of suffering when one has done wrong. The Christian, due to his indwelling of the Holy Spirit, will probably have a clearer understanding of a certain issue than the official in the government. We are to use that higher knowledge guide us in our civic actions and thoughts)*

Lastly, Paul reminds believers to pay their taxes. Those who have given their lives to civil

service have forsaken business ventures to do so. They must be supported by the taxes of the citizens. In the Army there is a saying, "You salute the rank, not the man." This is given so that even if you don't like the superior officer or have a disagreement with him, you show him the respect his rank commands. This is the principle Paul is discussing here. A believer is not paying taxes to the man but to the office and the institution it represents. In this, Paul gives no wiggle room for one to claim that a local tax collector is evil and quit paying his taxes. It is the office that is being supported not necessarily the man.

Q: Where in this passage do we see the Christian's right or responsibility to revolt against an unjust government? (*We don't - it's not in this passage.*)

Even though Paul does not qualify his statements in this passage, it is possible that when a government ceases serving the purposes of God that some form of civil disobedience could be carried out by a believer so inclined. The question then is one of a very slippery slope and that is in what way is the government failing consistently to carry out its responsibilities to its citizens? There are some who will run to arms against the government as soon as it does something they don't agree with. There are others who would never act against the government. This becomes a real problem that only the Spirit can rectify in the lives of believers.

We have to keep in mind that there will be a horrific government that will defy God and His purposes for human government and seek to lead the world to worship the devil.

[Revelation 13:3-10] - Due to this time where the antichrist will be given authority to overcome the saints and this is the time when the perseverance and faith of the saints will be given their final test. This government will be the ultimate human government which is as far from God's ideal as is possible. Yet, even it is ordained by God - for a brief time.

[II Peter 3:3-9]

For our brothers and sisters in Christ living under hostile governments, they have to make the choice whether it is better to be alive and somewhat free to spread the gospel or be imprisoned or killed for their faith and rebellion against the state. Our citizenship is mainly in heaven yet this does not excuse us from the responsibility to acknowledge that the state derives its authority from God and in that sense we hold dual citizenship.

2. The Comprehensive nature of the Christian's love

[Romans 13:8-10]

Love is the essential ingredient in all Christian service. The thought flow from the last passage to this one goes like this: While we owe submission and honor to our civil authorities, we owe all men much more. We owe them the love of Christ.

Q: According to v.8, how does one fulfill the Law? (*by loving one's neighbors*)

Q: Who is your neighbor? (*your fellow man - not just other Christians. Like Jesus in Luke 10,*

we need to reject the narrow and nationalistic notion concerning the definition of who is our neighbor. Our neighbor is any other human God places in the circle of our lives who has a need.)

[I Thessalonians 3:11-13] - all men are in view to be loved by the love of Christ

[Romans 8:3-4] - The fulfillment of the Law is accomplished by the Spirit's work in us as we love other people. Paul is expanding the circle of our love to include everyone else.

In relation of our social relationships, civic issues and national problems we are being told that God's love is the only solution. Don't expect government to solve the real issues of life. That's not its charge from God. It's our charge from God and we've been empowered to do it. V.9 means that if love is present, it makes possible everything else God desires from us.

Q: Why is love the fulfillment of the law as stated in v.10? *(It does no wrong to a neighbor.)*

[Romans 13:11-14]

This paragraph is literally a wake up call for Christians. This world is passing away so the life of the Christian is to be clothed with the armor of light instead of the past deeds of darkness. The end time is upon believers. The word "time" in v.11 is actually not the usual word for time but rather the word that means the "appointed or right season, the appointed time set for something to happen". It's used in Galatians 4:4 and translated as the "fulness of time" referring to the time of Jesus Christ's birth. We are not to be lulled into sleep by the seemingly long time between the two appearances of Christ.

Q: Why does Paul say it's important for Christians to readjust their thinking and behavior in v.11? *(because the time for salvation is nearer than we think it is)*

Q: Why do you think Paul says we need to put on armor in v.12? *(because we are engaged in a warfare with the forces of darkness until Jesus returns and His light with Him.)*

[Ephesians 6:12-13]

Q: Look at v.13. Which two sins mentioned seem to not go with the others? *(the last two - strife/dissension and jealousy. The first several mentioned are sins of excess and deeds of the lost world. The last two mentioned are a preview of where Paul is going next in chapter 14.)*

The word "provision" in v.14 means forethought. Don't plan ahead to satisfy the lusts of the flesh. The flesh is the patterns of thinking and acting we used before we came to know Christ to get our needs met. It always acts against the Holy Spirit's leadership. Lust is wanting something now - a refusal to wait or be patient for something. It denies God's leadership and provision by seeking something now.

Q: What is the way to give no forethought or provision to the flesh according to v.14? *(by putting*

on the Lord Jesus Christ. We clothe ourselves for the tasks we plan on engaging in that day. If we are going to shovel snow, we plan by wearing clothes that are waterproof and warm. If we plan on going swimming, we put on a bathing suit and sunscreen. The thought here is that we don't plan to fulfill the lusts of the flesh but instead use our minds to plan ahead how we are going to serve the Lord - which takes us back to Romans 12:1-2.)

Our thoughts of Jesus should be not only on His love for us but also that He's returning soon. That hope gives us the ability to move beyond living in the flesh.

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?