

Romans – An In-Depth Study

[Chapters 9-16]

[Part 7]

Romans 13:1-7 [NIV] *“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. 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. 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 honour, then honour.”*

At a first reading this is an extremely surprising passage of scripture, for it seems to counsel absolute obedience on the part of a Christian to the civil power of the nation in which they live.

Yet this same commandment is **not** isolated for the theme runs through the whole of the New Testament.

1 Timothy 2:1-6 [NIV] *“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. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men, the testimony given in its proper time.”*

This submission to the civil laws is linked to Christians being able to live at peace and thus able to be light and salt to the local community in which they live.

Also in such a peaceful and safe society to be able to proclaim the good news that Jesus Christ brought to all humanity.

Titus 3:1-2 [NIV] *“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 towards all men.”*

Not only be ready to do good in the community but able to do good without repression.

1 Peter 2:13-17 [NIV] *“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, honour the king.”*

When Peter told his readers to submit to civil authorities he was speaking of those in the Roman Empire under the notoriously cruel tyrant Nero.

Peter was **not** telling believers to compromise their consciences [read **Acts 5:29**] but in most aspects of daily life it is possible and desirable for Christians to live according to the laws of their country.

Christians should be respected as law-abiding people even when they are persecuted for their Christian beliefs.

As we study the life and witness of Paul we see that he received justice and protection in the hands of impartial Roman justice.

Also in Paul's time there was one immediate cause of his stressing of civil obedience.

The Zealots who were convinced that there was **no** king for the Jews but God, and that tribute must **not** be paid to anyone except God.

The Zealots were **not** content with anything like a passive resistance.

They were sworn and pledged to a career of murder and assassination.

Their aim was to make any civil government impossible.

Zealots were fanatical nationalists sworn to terrorist methods.

Not only did the Zealots use terrorism towards the Roman government, they also wrecked the houses and burned the crops, even assassinated the families of their own fellow-Jews who paid tribute to the Roman government.

We see similar response by certain fanatical non-Christian religions today.

Paul saw this as direct negation of all Christian conduct.

There was more than a merely temporary or local situation in the Holy Spirit inspired mind of Paul.

First and foremost, **no** person can entirely dissociate themselves from the society in which they live.

John 17:1, 9, 13-18 [NIV] *“After Jesus said this, he looked towards heaven and prayed: “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.” ... “I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.” ... “I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. **My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.** They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, **I have sent them into the world.**”*

It was Jesus Christ's prayer for his followers that they did **not** separate themselves from the world to the extent they could **not** continue to spread the good news that he brought from God the Father of all humanity.

As part of a nation every human, including Christians, enjoy certain benefits which they could **not** have as an individual.

Christians cannot claim these benefits and privileges and then refuse all the duties they have towards the civil government.

It is to the state that humans owe protection and also justice.

Originally the state was a body of humans who banded themselves together and covenanted to maintain certain relationships by observance of certain laws.

Without such laws and mutual agreement to observe them, the evil and selfish strong humans would be supreme, and the weak would be oppressed.

To the state ordinary people owe a wide range of services which individually they could not enjoy.

Municipal services such as water, sewage, power and transport system are things that are only easily obtainable when people agree to live together.

No person can take everything and give nothing, this is one compelling reason why a Christian is bound in honour to be a good citizen, and to fulfil their part in all the duties of citizenship.

Ideally people should be bound together by Christian love, but this does not happen in a non-Christian society.

What does cement humans together in a reasonable state of peace and unity is the laws of the civil state.

Paul saw in the state an instrument in the hand of God, for the state preserved the world from chaos.

Those who administered the state were playing their part in the work of God, whether they knew it or not.

It is a Christian's duty to help **not** hinder the work that God is doing at this time through a worldly government.

Romans 13:8-10 [NIV] *“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow-man 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 neighbour as yourself.” Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.”*

Why is love called a debt?

Because we are permanently in debt to Jesus Christ for the lavish love that He poured out on all humanity, through His physical life, death and now His resurrected life.

The only way we can even begin to repay this debt is to love other humans.

Because Jesus Christ's love for us will always be infinitely greater than ours, we will always have the obligation to love other human beings.

“Love your neighbour as yourself” – somehow many Christians have got the idea that self-love is wrong.

If this was true it would be pointless to love our neighbour as ourselves.

Philippians 2:3-4 [NIV] *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”*

Selfish ambition can ruin any relationship, only genuine humility can build a relationship.

Being humble involves having a true perspective about ourselves, that which our Creator God has.

Before God we are sinners, saved **only** by His grace, but we are saved and therefore of great value in God's Kingdom, His created family.

Even if we have a low self-esteem we don't willingly –

- Let ourselves go hungry.
- We clothe ourselves reasonably well.
- We seek to keep a roof over our heads.
- We try not to be cheated or injured.
- We do get angry if anyone seeks to ruin our marriage.

This is exactly the kind of love and concern we should have for all other human beings.

Loving others as ourselves means actively working to see that others' needs are met.

Christians are to obey this law of love, which supersedes both religious and civil laws.

It is easy to excuse our indifference to others by saying there is **no legal obligation** to help them, and even to justify harming them if our actions are technically legal.

But Jesus Christ does **not** leave loopholes in the law of love.

James 2:8-9 [NIV] *“If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, **“Love your neighbour as yourself,”** you are doing right. **But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as law-breakers.**”*

We are to treat other humans as we would wish to be treated.

We should **not** ignore the rich because we would be withholding our love towards them.

But we must **not** favour the rich for what they can do for us, while ignoring the poor who can offer us seemingly so little in return.

James 4:11 [NIV] *“Brothers, do not slander one another. **Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it.** When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it.”*

We need to examine our actions towards others.

Do we build people up or tear them down?

When we are about to criticise someone, remember God's law of love and say something beneficial to them instead.

Always saying something that is beneficial to others will cure us of finding fault, judging them, and increase our ability to obey God's Law of Love.

Romans 13:11 [NIV] *“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.”*

Like many great people Paul was haunted by the shortness of time.

But added to Paul's thought was the crisis of world history which he expected at the return of Jesus Christ.

The early church expected Christ's return to happen at any moment, and therefore had an urgency to be prepared for that day.

The same urgent expectation should be in the lives of every Christian in every generation.

Ecclesiastes 8:8 [Living Bible] *“No one can hold back his [human] spirit from departing, no one has the power to prevent the day of his death...”*

Remember that the day of our death is for us personally, the day of Jesus Christ’s return to sit in judgement as to how we have conducted our life as a Christian and as His servant.

How then should we respond to this knowledge?

Romans 13:12-14 [NIV] *“The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light. 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.”*

The “night” refers to the present time when the vast majority of human beings are in the dark about the very reason for our existence as human beings, and the existence of a Creator God.

Luke 1:67-68, 76-79 [NIV] *“His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people.” ... “And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.”*

John the Baptist, the miracle baby born to the barren Elizabeth and elderly Zechariah, was to prepare people for the first coming of Jesus Christ.

John called the people to repent of their sins and to be baptised as an outward symbol of their living a new life.

Matthew 28:16-20 [NIV] *“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

Christians in every generation are commissioned to prepare a people for the second coming of Jesus Christ, this time as ruler and judge.

As Christians, we are commanded **not** to go to sleep on the job given to us.

Paul then gives us in Romans a list of things Christians must do to fulfil this commission.

- Set aside our involvement with this world’s deeds.
- Put on the spiritual armour that will protect us from the attacks of Satan and his society. [Ephesians 6:10-18]
- Be an example to other humans we come in contact with, not joining them in the excesses.
- Remain sexually pure.
- Seek peace and harmony.
- Clothe ourselves with the very nature, character, of Jesus Christ.

- Resist gratifying our physical desires that are of a sinful nature.

Use the above list as a check to see if we are fulfilling our commission as given to us by our Saviour.