

Romans 13

Written by K B Napier
Monday, 17 August 2015 16:15

Today, Christians are hard-pressed to act properly. Yes, I know we ought to act properly at all times. But, we are only human beings, and we can fail at times, especially if we are personally and continually pushed hard. Every person has a breaking point. Only those Christians who have a quiet life can be pompous about it! What is true and what we do can often be very different things. We do not wish to sin, but continuous harassment can catch us off-guard.

This is why every Christian should prime themselves in what to do 'if'... if this happens, or that happens. We must teach ourselves inwardly until we know what to do and how to think. It might not stop all failures, but it will give us a head-start!

In this chapter Paul deals with something that affects every one of us. In his time it was a reference to magistrates, but it also includes any high government officials who have charge over us. As I point out later, Christians must not obey sin or sinful requirements. Nor are we slaves... to hand over our consciences to government is to become their willing slaves.

I have dealt with this first section in cursory manner, just to give the gist. The reader will need to continue the discussion himself. The section is very important today, given government wickedness and laws that repudiate God and harm His people. In all things we must be God's witnesses, even when we are hard-pressed.

Verses 1 & 2

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.

2.

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

This section of Paul's letter to the Romans is very difficult to think about! Never be afraid to

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admit to something being difficult. Honesty, including in our thoughts, is paramount when dealing with any issue.

We must be subject to higher powers. This refers to civil powers: government and its agents. This is difficult enough, but the following phrase makes it doubly difficult: "For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." We cannot say we are worse off than the Roman Christians, for they were also taxed heavily. Today, we are also taxed heavily, but moreso, with dozens of 'secret' taxes, and more to come based on false science and false social mores. Everything in us cries out 'injustice'! So, how do we deal with this matter?

So, the government is there by God's decree. Even a government that is Marxist, or violent, or evil. What does it really mean? To add to our possible distress, we are told "Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God." To 'resist' means to do battle-with in a physical struggle.

However, in James there is reference to leaving persistent evildoers to their own course, knowing there will eventually be godly retribution. We are then told that if we 'resist', we will receive 'damnation'. That is, judgment or condemnation by the civil authorities, as the Greek word *krima* implies (e.g. criminal). It does *not* mean loss of salvation.

Thus far, we are told not to resist government but to obey. If we do not, we can expect punishment. We then think of vile governments that kill or destroy their own citizens. Surely these must be resisted? We will not yet answer this, for the text continues. Paul knew all about civil authorities and the wickedness they can do. Also remember that he 'resisted' by demanding to go to Rome to be tried... but it was still within the law.

Verses 3 - 5

1.

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:

2.

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

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him that doeth evil.

3.

Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

We then seem to have even more of a conundrum: “rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil.” Oh, that this were true today! Rulers are terrorizing Christians and all who wish to live quietly and lawfully. Christian lawyers are opposing government on many points, because of this. Christian groups are opposing godless governments for a variety of reasons. If this opposition is truly wrong, then we at this ministry are also wrong, or have been. As I say, this section is extremely hard to discuss!

Are not governments today a 'terror to *good works*'? Of course they are! Are they a terror to what is evil? No, in the main, they are not. For example, evils such as violence, murder, child abuse, abuse of Christians, rulers who extort and defraud, sexual wickedness, and so much more, are not just condoned but promoted and protected by law! The reverse of what Paul says is true. So, how do we respond?

Should we be afraid of the government if we do not obey, asks Paul? The answer is that most Christians are afraid of the government not because it wields proper power, but because it does not, and because it attacks godly believers. So, the fear is of illicit government power, not of true power designed to uphold genuine law and authority.

Yes, we can “do that which is good” and thus be praised for doing good. But, in what sense? Are we praised for opposing evils? No, instead, we are bitterly attacked for not supporting evil. What God calls 'good' is turned on its head, so that it has been called 'bad'. (In Mark 3 this is referred to as blasphemy). Thus, when Paul says “he (the government) is the minister of God to thee for good.” How can this be, when it is the government that attacks us for being true to God? How is 'he' a 'minister for good'? It simply does not make any sense. How can 'good' be defined in government terms that are wicked and sinful?

Instead of being a terror to evil, governments are a terror to good! Therefore, they are not

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'ministers for good', but they do what God condemns! What sense does this make? Yes, if we do evil we can expect punishment... but when Christians wish to do good and are stopped from doing so by godless laws, and commanded to do what is sinful, what do we do? Still obey?

When people do wrong against society, they can expect punishment because rulers "beareth not the sword in vain". Should we expect the sword when we try to live godly lives, but in so doing we break government laws? Paul says that the government "is the minister of God, a revenger to (execute) wrath upon him that doeth evil." To do 'evil', kakos, means to do what is of a bad nature, something that ought not be, a wickedness, destruction, etc. That is, sin. Is Paul saying that if we obey the government and go along with sin, then we do good? Not only that, but it is our duty to do what is evil, because God set up governments and we must obey them?

So, says Paul, there is a need for us to obey governments, not just because we can otherwise expect a punishment from them, but because of the sake of Christian conscience. How should we respond, when every fibre of our being cries out against doing these things? Is our cry legitimate, or must we just obey and do the evils our leaders demand? Let us continue.

Verses 6 & 7

1.

For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.

2.

Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

Because we must obey, we must also pay tribute. That is, various taxes. Once again, Paul says we must do so because the authorities demand it, and because they are God's ministers, we must obey. "Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour."

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'Dues' refer to debts; tributes are taxes, though, in those days, they generally meant taxes extorted by an invading army; custom refers to indirect taxes – and in the UK we have many of these! We should also, said Paul, fear those who can bring us punishment. But, perhaps the hardest statement is that we should give "honour to whom honour (is due)". Honour can be one of two types in this text: reverence, or honour by reason of rank or office. We cannot reverence anyone who demands us to sin. So, it must mean deference because one has a particular office over us.

I think you can see why I said this section is extremely difficult. It is even more difficult than speaking about spiritual things, which are very much more straightforward! Are we, then, to obey authorities just because they are authorities? Are we to honour them when they tell us to sin or to condone their sin? Are we godless if we do not obey a command by government to obey a sinful law, or should we remain silent when they order us to allow sins to proliferate? Is this what Paul is saying? I do not think so! Rather, we must take in all of scripture, not just this section. In these we find certain balances to the argument.

The Explanation

The text is seemingly at odds with God's own word. I take the view, however, that It cannot be at odds. So, what is the answer? The answer is this: those who rule are appointed by God. That is, their *office*. Therefore, we must accept their office. But, if they demand that we sin and act against our godly beliefs, we must refuse. When what they demand is godly, or, not against God, we can have no problem obeying. There is, then, a distinction between their God-given office, and the things they do. If what they demand is against our beliefs but does not involve us in sin, then we must just put up with it. Once they demand that we sin, we must refuse.

However, we must make very sure that our resistance is genuine and is about an issue that is vital, or we sin ourselves. God will take retribution Himself, not us. Mainly, we should oppose by voting and by ordinary objections.

Verses 8 - 10

1.

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

2.

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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.

3.

Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

What does Paul mean by “Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.”? Is this a bland and overall command to love everybody no matter who or what they do? Again, I do not think so... unless, that is, we pervert scripture.

Again, there are two possible meanings, but only one applies. Superficially, it seems to tell us not to be in money-debt. This is a true saying, but it is not the meaning in this particular text. Rather, the other meaning applies: it metaphorically means not to hold back good will. This is ratified by the following phrase: “but to love one another.” The word for love here is *agapao*. Thus, it is not the deeper love of those who are true friends, but is the general love we should have for people as people. We may not love their beliefs or actions, but we must still love (a closer meaning is respect) them as people, as created beings.

Mainly, it means to entertain or to make welcome, or to put it another way, we must not deny them civil pleasantries. It cannot mean to ‘love dearly’ if, for example, they act in a godless way. So, we must show a general civil friendship for all men. Yes, I acknowledge how hard that can be at times, but it is essential.

Do not pretend in this matter of ‘love’. In the past I have known countless Christians use this word ‘love’, which they insist they have for everyone, including me. Reality, though, is rather different, for what they express with their words is certainly not found in their hearts and actions! Even if they think they mean it at the moment, it usually only takes a point of difference to show their ‘love’ to be superficial. If you cannot find it in your heart to *really* love another, please do not express it, because not only do you lie before God, you also accrue destructive feelings within that cause damage to your soul.

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When, however, we have put the matter right (and not just with those who are within our close circle), we are then in a position to fulfill the law of God. I have lost count of those who 'loved' me and yet, at the drop of a hat, rescinded it easily because I did not agree with them! For them, it was a matter of withdrawing their support and respect. For me, I can disagree with their views and beliefs and yet not let it affect my inner response of love toward them.

So often, some readers of my ministry, for example, think I 'must hate' those I disagree with, or those who disagree with me. This cannot be farther from the truth! I can argue my case and yet love my enemy. Sadly, most 'enemies' cannot do the same in return. Do we hate our children just because we have occasion to warn them, or even punish them? Of course not! As I have said elsewhere, I do not care if people disagree with me as a person. What I care about is their disagreement with God and His word.

Now, because we have a proper love for people, says Paul, we will not do certain things that harm them. (Verse 9). Note that the sins listed here are not just against God: Paul says they harm others, which they do. For example, as genuine believers we will not commit adultery, because we have a proper respect for our spouse and our general family, friends and Church. Similarly, we will not murder, or steal; we will not lie in court to gain advantage; nor will we covet (lust after what is forbidden – this applies to many things, not just sex).

Paul then says that this law extends to every known commandment. As he says, every commandment can be summed up as "love thy neighbour as thyself". It is fact that some will harm their own selves and lives, but he is not talking about this kind of perversity. Very clearly, then, Paul is saying that when we break a commandment, though it is primarily against God, it is also against our neighbour, some of whom may be devastated by what we do wrong.

The question many ask is: "Who is my neighbour?" A neighbour can be a friend. To a Jew it meant anyone who was a Hebrew. But, in Christ, a neighbour is anyone who we happen to meet, or who is in our vicinity. Paul is saying that if we would not harm ourselves, we should not harm anyone else by sinning.

For a Christian, any sin can potentially harm many others; it also harms our witness and our inner spiritual life; it harms the name and cause of God and Christ; it harms ourselves. And if we find it hard to love our neighbour we must at least not do them harm. This goes back to God taking vengeance, etc. As human beings we sometimes find it hard to love another if they do us harm, but we may not take vengeance.

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Remember, the most basic form of agapao is simply being civil and not harming another. If we find it hard to maintain even this, then we are at fault and must repent, calm our soul and seek to do good. Like so many things in the Christian life, it is partly a matter of exercise. Hopefully, the inner holiness will follow, if it does not precede!

Verses 11 - 14

1.

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.

2.

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.

3.

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

4.

But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.

'And that', or, 'therefore', signifies that what Paul said previously has a bearing on what he is about to say. It is high-time, he says, to wake out of sleep, because our salvation is closer than we think! I, and others, say this today. If Paul said it nearly two thousand years ago, how close is the end time today? It must be knocking at our door!

Paul refers to the state of things. 'Time' here is kairos. The time in 'high time' is hora (as in horology). Thus, it is 'about time we stopped being lax' is another way of talking about it. The 'salvation' he speaks of is not the instant salvation that follows regeneration. Nor is it the state of

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salvation that ought to be found in our everyday life: 'Work out your own salvation'. Paul is referring to the 'final' state of salvation, the end goal of salvation – Heaven. He is saying, then, that the last day is coming fast. This is very evident now, as all the world rides hard towards every wickedness known to man.

The day is at hand; we must wake up! We must stop our sins and live righteous lives. To help us, we must put on the armour of light: truth and holiness. Paul gives a short list of things we should do to live in the light, starting with: "walk honestly", meaning, to live in a seemly and decent manner. You might think this is automatic for a Christian, but, sadly, it is not. Many live like this on Sundays and when they can be seen by others. But, when they think they are unseen and act in secret, they sin.

Drunkenness is self-explanatory. Rioting is linked to it in the sentence, because drunks often riot, as any television news report will prove! Scripture has no ban on drinking alcohol: the wine taken at communion was alcoholic, and wine was taken as a beverage during meals, etc. But, there has always been a ban on drinking too much, making a person 'tipsy' or out of control. That is, being drunk. Not just because they can become riotous and sin, but also because drunkenness means the mind is not monitored and becomes an easy target for demonic activity.

Paul speaks against "chambering and wantonness". Nothing has changed in the past 2000 years: this is illicit sex, whether fornication between singles, or adultery. They were commonplace in pagan Rome, just as they are commonplace today in our own pagan society. Wantonness includes this sexual licentiousness, but also other kinds of immorality, unbridled lust, excess in anything, outrageous and shameless behaviours, and insolence. Again, we see all this today, as people, especially youngsters, could not care less about decency. They have no problem 'facing off' with police officers, and treat their elders with contempt. Not all are like this, but many are.

Other features mentioned by Paul, common today, are "strife and envying". Strife is continual contention in anger; look at any town street at night and you will find gangs attacking each other and others. Many people today have a constant mood of anger about them, wanting only their own way. And many show envy, here meaning fierce anger, the desire to punish, and intense rivalry. Few are content with their lot!

All these things, says Paul, must be put aside as sin. Instead "put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ".

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When we do this we have no time or inclination to sin! If we always seek to be like Christ, we will not be like sinful human beings and will make no "provision for the flesh". It is a very simple equation! If we see Christians always 'going wrong' it can only be because they have not put on Jesus Christ. Do not make excuses!

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