Romans 13

Intro: Here Paul addresses the believer's basic attitude toward human government. Now, this was important because there was a desire from both Jews and Christians to shake off responsibility toward Rome for a new king—even through conflict.

Acts 17:6-7:** ***They dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, 'These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus.'*

--There was added tension in the fact that Christ was crucified as a criminal King, situations such as **Acts 18:2**, and also the doctrine that we are citizens of heaven.

--Can you imagine that? Political debate, confusion, and rebellion?!

--Paul is going to show that there is not necessarily conflict between God's rule and the presence of sinful human governments. Our heavenly citizenship doesn't free us from all responsibility to human government.

Verses 1-7:

--**(1)** ***Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.***

--The first thing Paul makes clear is that human government is a part of God's plan in this present world. God is the One who established it going all the way back to **Genesis 9**.

--Numerous times Paul mentions the state as God's ***minister (3)*** and as God's ***authority (5)***. In describing the state as a minister of God, Paul even uses the same Greek words he applies to his own ministry from God, and even is applied to angels serving God **(Heb. 1:14)**.

--The reality is that God has delegated authority in numerous areas of life: Marriage roles, Parents with children, Church leaders, Human government. All of these are His design—they can be abused by man—but they should still be respected as His design.

--**(2-4)** ***Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise of the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.***

--The main role of human government is that of encouraging good works and judging bad works. Government will ***bear the sword*** (as Rome literally did!) or be ***an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.***

--This is part of the way that God is working in the world. We can often confuse God's grace and God's government, or God's heart in the salvation of the world with God's design in the preservation of the world. The two work together. They are not in conflict.

--The judgment of human government is a part of the way that God is working His present vengeance in the world. This is why John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, the apostles, and Paul himself never told a Centurion to quit being a soldier—only not to abuse their authority. *This should be an encouragement to every police officer, judge, soldier, prosecutor, etc.*

--**(5)** ***Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake.***

--The heart of what Paul is trying to get across is: *We are not only to obey government because we don't want to be thrown in jail, but because we recognize God's authority behind them and are thereby serving and honoring Him.* That is what makes subjection to governments a matter of ***conscience***.

--**(6-7)** ***For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.***

--We also pay taxes and customs because we see the government as God's ***minister*** and interact with them with the proper respect. *No tax evasion or fraud*

--This same underlying principle is what causes Paul to tell us to pray for our rulers and those in authority (despite the political type of government: Monarchy, Republic, Democracy, etc.) because God is involved.

--Our attitude toward human government is a reflection of our relationship with God and a serious part of our testimony.

Titus 3:1-3:** ***Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men. For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.*

--We have this example from Jesus Christ, Paul the apostle, and the early saints—as well as numerous Old Testament fathers such as Joseph, Moses, Daniel, Nehemiah, Esther, etc.

1 Peter 2:17:** ***Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.*

Applications:

--What Paul is saying here is very clear. Paul is speaking of government in its proper God-given place. The problem comes in—of course—when we ask: *But what if the government is evil? Or commanding submission to evil? What happens when the state abuses its God-given authority?* (As does happen and as can happen in any of those previous situations: Marriage, Parenting, Church, etc.)

--I would like to make one thing very clear—Paul is not answering that question in this passage. Apparently he doesn't feel like he needs to!

--It was very clear, from the beginning, who Christians were to obey and it is implicitly clear in Paul's argument here. We obey government authority *because* it is a God appointed servant.

Acts 4:18-19 + 5:29:** ***So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than God, you judge… But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men."*

--The government is to be obeyed as God's authority in all that is good (God's definition of good) and is to judge what is evil. This is clear in nearly every passage that deals with human government:

Titus 3:1:** ***Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work.*

1 Peter 2:13-16:** ***Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.*

1 Peter 4:15-16:** ***But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.*

--Context is very important. **Chapter 13** cannot be divorced from **Chapter 12** which it often is. Others just have a hard time seeing the connection. The connection is essential. The good and evil spoken of in **12** and **13** is God's good and evil. The vengeance worked out is God's vengeance on God's good and evil. (The unsaved culture/governments do not get to define what is good or evil in God's sight!)

--Where the government forsakes God's good and commands obedience to God's evil we surrender to the higher authority of God and disobey human government. But we do it with the respect and character of Jesus Christ and Paul the apostle.

--This is where **verse 5** comes back into play. The conscience is involved because the conscience before God and His authority must choose between good and evil.

--Now this is where we come to all our most recent debates: COVID masks, and vaccinations, and other government rules are only clear based on how individuals saw the situation as good or evil. That is why so many godly men and women ended up on either side. That is why as a church we did our best to lovingly minister to both!

--The problem was that everyone thought that they had the right to bind the consciences of other believes in situations that were not uniform. *Pastors and parishioners were all at fault here!*

--This struggle is the same all over the world. Chinese churches that are underground Vs. The state sanctioned churches that must have cameras inside of them. Is it good or evil to allow a communist government to put a camera in your church? Believers are understandably on either side of the issue, as is their obedience to government.

--We are going to face these things again. We are beginners with issues of civil disobedience here in America. Praise God that we are. We are going to be put in these situations again, and that is also why the rest of the chapter is so important!

Verses 8-10:

--***Owe no man anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.***

--The word for ***Owe*** is the verb of the word ***Due*** in **verse 7**. Paul is making a connection here for all men—not only believers.

--Paul is not making a blanket statement here about all borrowing as other Scriptures make it clear all borrowing is not wrong: **(Ex. 22:25; Ps. 37:21; Mt. 5:42; Lk. 6:35)**.

--Paul is using the reasoning of Christ with Caesar's coin. We should not leave outstanding debts. . . especially the debt of love we owe to our neighbor!

--Paul then brings in Christ's golden rule 1b, which is mentioned many times in Scripture: **(Lev. 19:18; Mt. 22:39; Mk. 12:31; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8)**.

--The love he is speaking of goes beyond the simple meeting of commands in the law. Also, adultery and covetousness are <u>*not*</u> love at all in God's eyes.

--We all tend to find a way to love ourselves, or see ourselves worthy of love, despite our many faults. Loving others is not only what is best for *them*. It is also commanded by God because it is what is best for *me*.

Verses 11-13:

--It is after this encouragement to Christian love that Paul gives this exhortation to realize how close we are to Christ's return. We only have so long to deal with human government and to pay our proper debts so we cannot fool around squandering precious time.

--**(11)** ***And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.***

--When we sleep, we are living in a temporary reality where there is real experience, but the experience we have in sleep is swallowed up by actual reality when we wake up. Believers sleep by being "awake" to the world but "asleep" to eternal spiritual realities.

--Our salvation is near and we cannot fool around with the time that God has given us—asleep to the reality of eternal priorities.

--**(12)** ***The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.***

--Our time in this night is almost over. The day of Christ's return and reign is just on the horizon. Let us put on the armor of God and walk now as we would like to be walking when the light of the glory of God shines on us!

--The armor of God is mentioned in: **2 Cor. 6:7; Eph. 6; 1 Thess. 5:8.** Paul does not have a uniform interpretation of the armor of God. He uses various descriptions as applications of the life of Christ *put on* as needed.

--**(13-14)** ***Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.***

--The day and the night—the life of Christ and the life of the flesh—are mutually exclusive. One takes the place of the other. One must be put off for the other to be put on.

1 Thessalonians 5:5-8:** ***You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of the darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.*

--We should not to live with secret expectation of gratifying our flesh.

Proverbs 4:18-19:** ***But the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines every brighter unto the perfect day. The way of the wicked is like darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble.*