

Glen Park Gospel Church
Tuesday Evening Bible Study Group Notes

Rev Chris Trinham

Studies in Romans Series 6

No 30

The Christian and Civil Authorities

Scripture Reading: Romans 13:1-7

Let us remind ourselves of the historical context into which this letter was sent. It will help our study. The reign of Claudius was as benign as it was going to get in early Rome, and when Paul sent on his letter, it appeared that Nero intended continuing such policies. Nero's violent politically convenient persecutions against the Christians were still a few years away. There are times when the policies of the Government of some States are malignantly hostile, but Paul's comments here are more a reflection of what the average Christian might expect.

God Established Human Government in Society v1.

Everyone - 'Let every soul...' It is a Hebrew term used as an address. Jewish believers in the Church at Rome would have recognised it. Paul instructs them about living in a Gentile society under a secular government.

Remember that the Jews in Rome had recently stirred the then emperor Claudius, by their resentment of the new Christian sect, resulting in his expelling them from the city Acts 18:1&2.

Many Jews believed that Deuteronomy 17:15 prohibited their accepting a non Jewish head of state and to do so was to dishonour God.

The Bible teaches that from the time of the flood, God has provided that the individual should be answerable for his actions to the society in which he is living, in effect, the authorities in power.

Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man. Genesis 9:5&6.NASB.

It is this basic principle that Paul expands in this passage. It has a priority to Deuteronomy 17:5 which must be understood in the context in which it was given, that of the preparation of the Jewish people to live under a theocracy. The theocracy ended when Israel rejected God's leadership and opted for a king like the nations around them 1 Samuel 8:7. Saul was chosen. Jesus taught that Jerusalem would be subjected to Gentile dominance until the end of this age, as did the apostles. Luke 21:24, Acts 15:14, Romans 11:25. Also see Amos 9.9. After this time, the Bible teaches, a just theocratic government will be established under the returned Christ Jesus. Jewish

and Gentile believers, therefore, need to be in submission to their governments, imperfect though they be, until the time when Jesus comes again.

In this passage Paul restates the teachings of Jesus in relation to Christian subservience to the offices of authority within a secular government.

We Resist Authority at Our Peril v2-5.

When Paul tells us that authority is 'ordained', or 'established' by God, he used the perfect tense which indicates that it is a permanent arrangement. To 'resist' or 'rebel' comes from a word that initially meant to 'stand in line against', reminding us of a militant demonstration opposing government. They are opposing (resisting, standing out against) God's institution and will bear the consequences. The context is v4 indicating that the magistrate acts on God's behalf. This raises some questions.

It is recorded that the Emperor Trajan once handed a soldier's short sword to a governor starting out for his province to take up his duties, and Paul tells us that the official does not hold the sword in vain, that is, he holds the power of capital punishment. At the same time he is God's servant. The word 'servant' is the same word we know for deacon in the Church, one serving God's purpose in calling for justice. We are reminded of Genesis 9:5&6.

We Obey for Conscience Sake v3-5.

Magistrates punish evil, not good behaviour. Those who do what is right have nothing to fear. Paul reminds us that as a Christian we ought to respond from a conscience motivated by love, not from fear under compulsion. Paul expects us to live the overcoming life in Christ in the power of

the Holy Spirit in the home, in the fellowship and in society. If we do what is right from a good conscience and concern for others we have nothing to fear.

Meet Your Obligations v6&7

Paul address the Hebrew Christians and their problems. The Jews in Jesu's day had a problem with paying taxes to Gentile occupying nations. This is why tax collectors were doubly unpopular. Who wants to pay taxes! And to Romans! This is the motivation behind the Jews trying to catch Jesus out and were amazed at how astute was his answer:

"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

The wider meanings of Paul's words in v7 are worth our attention:

Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

RENDER 591* - to give back what is owed, rather than to surrender

OWED 3782* - 'signifies to owe, to be indebted, especially financially' - Vine. When it is plural, as it is here, it means taxes.

TAXES 5411* - a tribute, such as is laid on a subject peoples by a conqueror.

CUSTOM 5056* - the full performance, in instances such as this and Matthew 17:25 it is the last amount; or a tax added on, such as a value added tax or toll. 'In Palestine the Herods of Galilee and Perea (beyond Jordan) received the custom; in Judea it was paid to the Procurator for the Roman Government' - Vine. A tax additional to other taxes.

FEAR 5401* - the Greek word is 'phobos'. Sounds like a fear of something? Good deduction!

HONOUR 5092* - a reckoning of value, price, veneration. In Matthew 27:9 it is translated 'the price', or his worth.

Give back the taxes you owe; levied tribute if levied tribute; added duty if added duty; due respect of fear; the value as reckoned. A paraphrase of

Romans 13:7.

We also may have mental objections to the paying of tax to a secular government who use them to support programs we may consider to be unworthy causes. Paul speaks of it as a debt. However there is also a broader principle here. There are other moral questions for the Christian to consider.

Christians Have Dual Citizenship

We Christians were born of the flesh into this world, but we are also born again into the Kingdom of God (John 3:3&5). We have citizenship in our country, but we also are fellow citizens of the household of God (Ephesians 2:9).

It is clear that Christians have an allegiance to both God and man. It is not a serving two masters. Christians are called to respect the obligation given by God conferring to secular human leaders for good governance and the maintenance of peace in society.

The question is, what happens when the obligations of one citizenship conflict with the obligations of the other. Here is an opportunity for wisdom and humility. However two principles at least are clear.

We have an obligation to, wherever possible, seek to resolve our conflict in peace.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Romans 12:18.

Sometimes authorities use their authority inappropriately causing conflict with what is right or commanded by the word of God. Then our allegiance is to the Kingdom of God and his righteousness. Our example is:

But Peter and the apostles answered and said, We must obey God rather than men. Acts 5:29.

Taking this step does not mean that we are excused the punishment of the secular authority. It means that we must count the cost as unto the Lord and maintain a witness that will honour Him.

Bible quotations in this study are from the NASB, unless otherwise acknowledged.

* Numbers given are from Strong's Concordance.

Welcome

Glen Park Gospel Church

Lower Road, Eltham North

Sundays 10.30 am

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