



The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 40



SUBJECTION TO THE GOVERNMENT

13:1 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. ² Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. ³ For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. ⁴ 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. ⁵ Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. ⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. ⁷ Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor. ^{NKJV}

(Romans 13:1-7)

INTRODUCTION

All of life is significantly altered when we are "joined to the Lord" (1 Cor 6:17), or become a "new creation" in Him (2 Cor 5:17). "Old things" do pass away, and "all things" do "become new." No aspect of life is unaffected when we are in "fellowship" with God's "Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor 1:9). Of course, the very concept of "Lord" suggests this is the case, for He is "Lord of ALL" (Acts 10:36). For some, this only speaks of duty, obligation, and commandments. While all of these things are surely involved, that does not exhaust the meaning of Jesus being exalted to the right hand of God. A few examples of the

extensiveness of Christ's authority will suffice to set the stage for this lesson.

- ❑ He has been exalted to give repentance and remission of sins (Acts 5:31).
- ❑ In the capacity of LORD, He has been sent to "bless" us, by turning us away from our iniquities (Acts 3:26).
- ❑ He has been given power that He might "give eternal life" to those God has given to Him (John 17:2).
- ❑ He comes to give us an understanding, that we might know God (1 John 5:20).

- ❑ In the capacity of LORD, He is "bringing many sons to glory" (Heb 2:10).
- ❑ He is bringing us to God (1 Pet 3:18).
- ❑ He has been exalted that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is LORD, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:9).
- ❑ We have "peace with God" through Jesus Christ as LORD (Rom 5:1).
- ❑ We "joy in God" through Jesus Christ the LORD (Rom 5:11).

OUTLINE

- ▶ GOVERNING AUTHORITIES OR HIGHER POWERS (13:1)
- ▶ RESISTING GOD-ORDAINED AUTHORITY (13:2)
- ▶ HOW TO AVOID BEING AFRAID (13:3)
- ▶ HE IS GOD'S MINISTER (13:4)
- ▶ WRATH AND CONSCIENCE (13:5)
- ▶ WHAT ABOUT TAXES (13:6)
- ▶ RENDER TO ALL THEIR DUE (13:7)

- Grace now reigns *“through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our LORD”*^{NIV} (Rom 5:21).
- We are *“alive unto God through Jesus Christ our LORD”* (Rom 6:11).
- God grants us the gift of eternal life *“through Jesus Christ our LORD”* (Rom 6:23).
- Our thanksgiving to God is received by Him *“through Jesus Christ our LORD”* (Rom 7:25).
- God's love is experienced by us *“through Jesus Christ our LORD”* (Rom 8:39).
- Grace and peace are dispensed to us by *“God our Father, and from the LORD Jesus Christ”* (1 Cor 1:3).
- We are *“washed,” “sanctified,” and “justified”* in *“the name of the LORD Jesus Christ”* (1 Cor 6:11).

If Jesus Christ was not *“LORD,”* we could not repent, be acceptable, or receive remission of sins. We could not be turned away from our iniquities or receive eternal life. We could not understand God, be brought glory, or be brought to God. Peace with God and joy in God depend upon Jesus being *“LORD.”* The reign of grace, being alive unto God, and the gift of eternal life are all owing to Jesus being *“LORD.”* Our thanksgiving would not be acceptable if Jesus had not been exalted. The love of God could not be lavished upon us if Jesus was not *“LORD.”* Your experience of grace and peace, as well as your washing, sanctification, and justification, require that Jesus be *“LORD OF ALL.”*

The salvation of God is such a

demanding work, that it could not be initiated, experienced, or maintained without an exalted and reigning Savior.

ESSENTIAL OBSERVATIONS

These observations are essential to a proper response to the great work of God within us. Already, the Spirit has affirmed numerous things that we are to do, and that with great power.

- Reckon yourself to be dead indeed unto sin (6:11a).
- Reckon yourself to be alive unto God through Jesus Christ (6:11b).
- Do not let sin reign in your mortal body (6:12).
- Do not yield your capacities as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin (6:13a).
- Yield yourself unto God as one who is alive from the dead (6:13b).
- Offer your members as slaves to righteousness, leading to holiness (6:19).
- Boast not against the Jewish branches (11:18).
- Be not high minded, but fear (11:20).
- Present your bodies a living sacrifice unto God (12:1).
- Do not be conformed to this world (12:2a).
- Be transformed by the renewing of your mind so you can determine the will of God (12:2b).
- Do not think more highly of yourself than you ought to think (12:3a).
- Think soberly, in strict accord with the measure of faith God has given to you (12:3b).
- Exercise your ministry in strict comportment with the nature of the Kingdom (12:4-8).
- Let love be without hypocrisy (12:9a).
- Abhor what is evil (12:9b).
- Cling to what is good (12:9c).
- Be kind to one another in brotherly love, preferring one another (12:10).
- Do not be slothful in what you set your mind to do (12:11a).
- Be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord (12:11b).
- Rejoice in hope (12:12a).
- Persevere in tribulation (12:12b).
- Be instant and faithful in prayer (12:12c).
- Contribute to the needs of God's people (12:13a).

- Practice hospitality (12:13b).
- Bless your persecutors, and do not curse them (12:14).
- Rejoice with those who rejoice (12:15a).
- Weep with those who weep (12:15b).
- Do not practice respect of persons (12:16).
- Do not repay evil for evil (12:17a).
- Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of all men (12:17b).
- Whenever it depends on you, be at peace with all men (12:18).
- Do not avenge yourself, but make place for God's wrath, not your own (12:19).
- Minister to your enemy in the time of his need (12:20).
- Do not be overcome by evil (12:21a).
- Overcome evil with good (12:21b).

TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY

No person of sound mind will deny that these admonitions are to be taken seriously. They are not options, and no provision is made for them to be ignored.

Faith, with all of the various graces that are realized through it, are in order to the doing of these things. The Lord Jesus has been exalted to assure that our efforts are not in vain. Because He is Lord, He will get the required resources to us, subdue our enemies, and sustain us in our labors for Him. But none of this will happen until we, in faith, put our hands on the plow. That will only occur when we see that receiving God's righteousness has a direct bearing upon such matters.

I have become convinced over the years that the vast majority of people professing identity with Jesus are lacking in this area. They have not seen the relevancy of whole-hearted service to God, or made the correlation between daily living and justification. It is the business of the church to assist such souls to see these things more clearly.

TWO SIDES TO LIFE

While it is true that we are not primarily the servants of men, nor are we to court their favor, yet spiritual life does have an impact upon our peers. Jesus urged us to live in such a manner as would display the *“light of life,”* given to us in Him (John 8:12). The outcome of

this exhibit of light is marvelous. “*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*” (Matt 5:16).

There is such a thing as serving Christ in a manner that is “*acceptable to God, and approved of men*” (14:18). While it is true the world, or the ungodly, cannot love the people of God (John 15:19), sinners can be brought to a point where

they can “*be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you*” (Tit 2:8). It is possible to “*provide things honest in the sight of all men*” (Rom 12:17). Faith does put us an enmity with the world, but not because we conduct ourselves foolishly, or do things that are commonly acknowledged as base and reprehensible.

The section we are now entering deals with our relationship to civil government.

It confirms that Christ has not called us to be agitators, or to raise insurrections against civil authorities. Here is an area where our light can shine without compromising our commitment to God. Further, this is the only passage of Scripture that treats this subject to this extent. It should therefore capture our attention all the more. Here is the Divine perspective of temporal authority among men, and of our appropriate response to it.

GOVERNING AUTHORITIES, OR HIGHER POWERS

^{13:1} ***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 social context that existed when the Apostles wrote was not democratic. The first democratic forms of government were developed in the Greek city-states during the sixth century B.C. The imperial onslaughts of Macedonia and Rome crushed these forms of government. There was a republic form of government which allowed input from the citizens. Ultimately, that form gave way to the Roman emperors. Democracy in any substantial form did not reappear until the seventh century. All of Scripture, therefore, was written to people familiar with a governmental dictatorship.

It is essential to see this, for many read the Scriptures as though democracy was the only valid form of government. Such a view neutralizes the potency of the text before us. Also, it should be remembered that Nero was the Emperor in Rome (54-68 AD) when this book was written. Our text will not excuse the atrocities committed by Emperors like Nero, and that is not its intention.

No God-ordained institution makes sin right, or justifies overlooking it. That is true of government as well as the church, and a husband as well as a king. There will be sufficient examples in Scripture to confirm this is the case.

SUBJECTION IS FOR EVERY SOUL

“*Let every soul be subject . . .*” Other versions read, “*Let every person*” ^{NASB}

“*Everyone must submit himself*” ^{NIV} “*Everyone is to obey . . .*” ^{NJB} Here is an area where believers are to exercise their wills in faith. No person is exempt from this requirement. The submission is to be voluntary, not forced by civil law.

You may recall that at the time Jesus was crucified, an insurrection against the government had taken place among the Jews. The Roman government ruled in their very own city, Jerusalem, where God had placed His name (1 Kgs 11:36). The uprising was so strong, that murder had been committed during it, and several were being held in prison. Mark tells us of this circumstance. “*And there was one named Barabbas, which lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection*” (Mk 15:7). You may also recall that the Jewish mob preferred to have Barabbas released and Jesus crucified. In the sense of our text, Barabbas was not “*subject*” to the power, nor did he “*submit himself*.”

HIGHER POWERS

“*. . . governing authorities . . .*” Other versions read, “*the higher powers,*”

^{KJV} “*authorities that are above him,*” ^{DARBY} and “*the government.*” ^{NLT} I prefer the term “*higher powers,*” ^{KJV} for it more precisely conveys the idea intended. These are superior, or supreme authorities. This means, of course, that, from a social point of view, all souls are not on the same level.

Peter briefly expounded on this very subject, exhorting us to submit ourselves to the ordinances imposed by these powers. “*Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or no governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well*” (1 Pet 2:13-14). **The people of God must not be noted for being lawbreakers, or raising insurrections against the government.** We are solemnly charged to “*be subject to governing authorities.*”

An Area Where These Powers Have No Power

There is an area in which civil authorities are given no power. That is in the matter of the individual's identity with the Living God. When civil authority contradicts the mandate of the Lord, it is

If Jesus Christ was not “*LORD,*” we could not repent, be acceptable, or receive remission of sins. We could not be turned away from our iniquities or receive eternal life. We could not understand God, be brought glory, or be brought to God.

not to be obeyed. There are sufficient examples of this in Scripture to dissolve all doubts on the subject.

Egyptian Midwives

During the oppression of Israel in Egypt, “the king of Egypt” gave a commandment to the midwives who attended Jewish mothers giving birth. “When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools; if it be a son, then ye shall kill him: but if it be a daughter, then she shall live.” The midwives refused to obey the edict of the king. “But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive.” When called to account for their deeds, they told the king, “the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are lively, and are delivered ere the midwives come in unto them.” Those with a legalistic mind-set would say they disobeyed duly constituted authority, even resorting to lying to excuse their disobedience. However, this was not the response of the Lord, who gave the king of Egypt his authority. “Therefore God dealt well with the midwives: and the people multiplied, and waxed very mighty. And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that He made them houses” (Ex 1:15-21).

Moses

When the time drew nigh for Moses to lead Israel out of Egyptian bondage, he “went out unto his brethren.” Seeing an Egyptian smiting a Hebrew, he “looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand.” When the thing was eventually made known to Pharaoh, he sought after Moses. However, Moses did not yield to him, but “fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian” (Ex 2:11-15). Later, rather than requiring Moses to be subject to Pharaoh, who received his authority from God, the Lord said to him, “I have made thee a god to Pharaoh” (Ex 7:1).

Daniel

When an edict went out from king

Darius “that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions,” Daniel refused to honor it. Instead, when he “knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime” (Dan 6:10). For refusing to honor the king, Daniel was, indeed, thrown into a den of lions. You

Although it was a sovereign decree, issued by someone God Himself had set up, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to obey it.

already know the rest of the story (Dan 6:16-26).

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

Earlier, on another occasion, King Nebuchadnezzar set up a large golden image in the plan of Dura. It was ninety feet high and nine feet wide. At the dedication of this image, he made a decree. The herald shouted it out, “To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up: and whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.” Although it was a sovereign decree, issued by someone God Himself had set up, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to obey it. When confronted by the king, and threatened with the fiery furnace, they replied, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to

deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.” The result of their civil disobedience is one of the better known facts of Divine history (Dan 3:1-30).

Wise Men from the East

When the blessed Savior made His entrance into the world some of the only people aware of what was happening were some wise men from the East. After making a long journey, and coming to Jerusalem, they made inquiry of king Herod concerning the one “born king of the Jews.” Having been informed by those knowing the Scriptures that Bethlehem was the place of birth, the wise men continued on their journey. Before leaving, Herod, who received his authority from God, strictly charged them, “Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.” His word, however, was countermanded by a dream from God. The wise men thus ignored the word of Herod, and “departed into their own country another way” (Matt 2:1-12).

Peter and John (Acts 4:18-19)

When Peter and John powerfully preached Gospel, they were summoned before the Jewish rulers, elders, scribes, and high priest – all of whom received their power from God. These authorities commanded Peter and John, “not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.” Without any hesitation, “Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” After being further threatened and released, Peter and John went to the brethren. They prayed fervently with them, and a great outbreak of fruitful preaching followed (Acts 4:5-33).

The Apostles

On another occasion, when the Apostles were powerfully declaring the

Gospel, the high priest, an office created by God Himself, became indignant. It is written that they *"laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison."* That very night *"the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, 'Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.'" Later, after the Apostles had done as they were commanded, the "captain and the officers" apprehended them, bringing them before the council and the high priest. When reminded they had been commanded not to teach in the name of Jesus, "Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:17-29).*

Conclusion

The authority given by God to earthly magistrates, governors, kings, and the likes, is never given precedence over the authority of God Himself. When duly sanctioned earthly authority, from the domestic to the political level, requires disobedience to God, it is operating outside of Divinely appointed boundaries.

AUTHORITY IS FROM GOD

"For there is no authority except from God." Other versions read, *"there is no power but of God,"* ^{KJV} *"for there is no authority except that which God has established,"* ^{NIV} *"there is no power which is not of God,"* ^{BBE} and *"the government, for God is the one who put it there."* ^{NLT}

Here is a foundational teaching with which many souls have had great difficulty. Further, there is also a considerable amount of difficulty encountered when attempting to apply this principle to every-day life. Notwithstanding, let us have the courage and faith to receive this saying, knowing that it is frequently declared. Viewed correctly, and applied in wisdom, it will prove to be a great consolation for us.

With the single exception of "Divine power," (2 Pet 1:3) or authority, all power is delegated.

Only God the Father Himself has not received power, authority, dominion, or jurisdiction. Because of the emptying of Himself even the Lord Jesus Christ has been *"given all power"* (Matt 28:18). Even the blessed Holy Spirit functions in strict accord with *"the will of God"* (Rom 8:27; John 14:26).

What Is "Power" or "Authority"

The word *"power,"* or *"authority,"* includes the idea of jurisdiction or right. It is decision-making power that impacts upon others. It embraces the concept of leadership, and even the governing of other individuals. On the lowest level, we would have parents over children (Eph 6:1-2) and husbands over wives (Eph 5:23). At a higher level, there are shepherds or overseers over the flock of

The authority given by God to earthly magistrates, governors, kings, and the likes, is never given precedence over the authority of God Himself. When duly sanctioned earthly authority, from the domestic to the political level, requires disobedience to God, it is operating outside of Divinely appointed boundaries.

God (Acts 20:28). At still another level, and specifically the one addressed in our text, there is civil government, kings, rulers, governors, and the likes. At the ultimate level there is Jesus Himself, who is *"Head over all things"* (Eph 1:22).

Within the church, the Holy Spirit administers a diversity of gifts, all designed for mutual edification (1 Cor 11:4). There are also individuals within the church who have been given the gift of *"administrations,"* or *"governments"* (1 Cor 12:28). The Apostles were given authority to deliver the doctrine to be followed by all believers (Acts 2:42), and to edify (2 Cor 10:8), and to give *"commandments"* to the saints (2 Pet 3:2).

When Jesus began to send forth the twelve *"two by two,"* He gave them *"power over unclean spirits"* (Mk 6:7). Upon the triumphant return of *"the seventy,"* sent forth by Jesus, He announced to them, *"Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you"* (Lk 10:19; Psa 91:13).

We Must Accept This Postulate

As you can see, there is a wide variety of authority that has been distributed among the sons of men. However, all of it has come from God, *"for there is no authority except from God."* Self-appointed or existent power is an imagination. There is no such thing! *"For there is no authority except from God."*

While this may cause questions to arise in our minds, we must thrust such doubts from our thinking. **Our first and foremost responsibility is to receive this word without question.** If we fail to do this, the teaching that follows will make no sense, and Satan will tempt us to reject it in favor of our own opinion.

Power, or authority, involves the right to operate in a competitive arena without being hindered by it. It includes others serving the one with power, as well as the fulfillment of specific objectives.

AUTHORITIES ARE APPOINTED BY GOD

"... and the authorities that exist are appointed by God." Other versions read, *"the powers that be are ordained of God,"* ^{KJV} *"and those which exist are established by God,"* ^{NASB} *"The authorities that exist have been established by God,"* ^{NIV} *"those authorities that exist have been instituted by God,"* ^{NRSV} *"those that exist are set up by God,"* ^{DARBY} and *"All governments have been placed in power by God."* ^{NLT}

Scripture is written in such a way as to encourage trust in God. This verse is an excellent example of that fact. We are in a world where we are subject to authority. There is domestic

authority. Our social responsibilities involve authorities. Citizenship in a nation and its subsidiary divisions is related to authority. Even within the body of Christ, there are individuals invested with authority. But we must not be intimidated by these conditions, for *“the authorities that exist are appointed by God,”* who is our Father.

The particular focus of this passage is political, or civil, authority. These powers, however good or evil they may be, *“are appointed by God.”* He appoints them in the interest of His eternal purpose, using them as He sees fit, to implement His own good and acceptable and perfect will.

Powers, or authorities, ONLY exist because they have been appointed by God. They cannot be called into being by a created personality. As it is written, *“For promotion [exaltation^{NKJV}] cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: He putteth down one, and setteth up another”* (Psa 75:6-7).

Again, we have numerous examples of powers being appointed by God, some for good, and some for evil.

Pharaoh was told, *“And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth”* (Ex 9:16; Rom 9:17).

Nebuchadnezzar, who dominated the world, was raised up by God. *“And now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant; and the beasts of*

the field I have also given him to serve him. So all nations shall serve him and his son and his son’s son, until the time of his land comes; and then many nations and great kings shall make him serve them” (Jer 27:6). Again the Lord declared, *“For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘I have put a yoke of iron on the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and they shall serve him. I have given him the beasts of the field also’”* (Jer 28:14). God punished Israel through this king for their disobedience in the matter of not letting the land enjoy its sabbaths (2 Chron 36:21; Jer 26:9; 32:28). For this reason, God referred to Nebuchadnezzar as *“My servant”* (Jer 25:9).

God also raised up and used **Cyrus** for His own purpose (2 Chron 36:22-23). God took the kingdom from Saul and gave it to David (1 Sam 15:28; 2 Sam 6:21). Darius also *“took the kingdom”* after God had deposed Belshazzar on the very night he made a feast for a thousand of his lords (Dan 5:1-31). God raised Cyrus up according to His own commandment, to build the house of the Lord (Ezra 6:14).

God is ever imminent in the affairs of men and nations. In fact, He is the ultimate manager of all nations, *“For the kingdom is the LORD’S: and he is the governor among the nations”* (Psa 22:28). Again, it is written, *“For God is the King of all the earth.”* (Psa 47:7). For that matter, the Lord Jesus is the *“Lord of lord and King of kings”* (1 Tim 6:15; Rev 17:14; 19:16). He is also *“the prince [or ruler] of the kings of the earth”* (Rev 1:5). All of this is involved in the words, *“For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.”*

Jesus’ Word to Pilate

In confirmation of this, the Lord addressed a word to Pilate, who, according to appearance, was in charge of the situation. When He refused to answer Pilate, he said to Jesus, *“Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?”* With the tone of Divine authority and insight Jesus replied, *“You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above”^{NKJV} 19:11).*

CONCLUSION

We must not allow men to rob us of this truth. Times have not changed the manner in which God governs the world. He still *“raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, To set them among princes And make them inherit the throne of glory. For the pillars of the earth are the Lord’s, And He has set the world upon them”^{NKJV}* (1 Sam 2:8).

From a practical point of view, this is one of the obvious reasons why God can *“work things together for our good”* (Rom 8:28). It also confirms to our hearts that *“If God be for us, who can be against us”* (Rom 8:31). The God who gives authority does not relinquish one portion of it. He can withdraw power immediately from those to whom He gives it. He also uses those with power to ultimately serve His own immutable purpose. No believer, therefore, should balk at being subject to the higher powers. If Joseph and Mary asked no question when they were taxed by Caesar, how could we explain to them on the day of judgment why we refused to pay them to those God has placed over us? Something to ponder!

RESISTING GOD-ORDAINED AUTHORITY

“² Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.” Here is a Divine conclusion, one that is to be embraced by all believers. It is not a suggestion, but a statement of Kingdom reality. It is based upon the revealed

situation. There is no power, or form of authority, that has not been dispensed, or is not controlled, by the Living God.

THEREFORE

In view of the realities that have been affirmed, this is the only proper conclusion. Our thoughts must be affected

by this truth so that we can walk acceptably before the Lord.

RESISTING GOD’S ORDINANCE

“ . . . whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God.” Other versions read, *“Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the*

ordinance of God," ^{KJV} "he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God," ^{NASB} "he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted," ^{NIV} and "those who refuse to obey the laws of the land are refusing to obey God." ^{NLT}

It is important to have a working grasp of the three key words in this expression: "resist," "authority," and "ordinance."

Resist. To "resist" is to refuse to submit. It is to oppose, dispute, or challenge. It means to be arrayed against, or hostile toward.

Authority. This refers to another person's jurisdiction over us – someone to whose authority we have been subjected. It is someone who can tell us what to do, imposing their will upon us.

Ordinance. This is an arrangement put into place by God. It is an kind of authority that has been ordained by God.

Remembering that our text is speaking about civil authority, or government, the Spirit mentions a category of people who refuse to subject themselves to duly constituted authority. They choose their own will over that of the power ordained by God. They imagine they are self-governed, and have been excluded from any responsibility to another authority.

In the words of Jude, these are individuals who "despise dominion," or "reject authority," ^{NKJV} and are not hesitant to "speak evil of dignities" (Jude 8). This was the very first area in which the devil tempted man – in the matter of subjection to authority (Gen 3:5). When Saul was first made king, the "children of Belial" refused to submit to him (1 Sam 10:27). In a telling prophecy concerning Christ Jesus, the Psalmist spoke of those who rejected His authority, seeking to break the bands of His dominion from themselves (Psa 2:1-6). Jesus spoke a parable affirming those who refused Him as having that very trait. "But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this

man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14). The Lord speaks of flattering lips and His commitment to cut them all off. One of the traits of those so characterized is this: "Who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us?" (Psa 12:4).

Whether it is civil authority (the subject of our text), domestic authority, or that which Jesus has placed within His church, resistance of authority is never taken lightly by God. What He has put into place is to be honored. The holy angels are themselves keenly aware of this

Whether it is civil authority (the subject of our text), domestic authority, or that which Jesus has placed within His church, resistance of authority is never taken lightly by God. What He has put into place is to be honored.

requirement. On one occasion, when Michael the archangel disputed with the devil concerning the body of Moses, he "did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you" (Jude 9). Although he did not subject himself to the devil, for God had not placed the devil over him, Michael knew Satan's authority had come from God, and thus he did not dare cast a reviling aspersion at the devil. Satan has been given authority over evil, and over the kingdoms of this world (Lk 4:6).

Even the Law spoke to this subject, and with great clarity. "Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people" (Ex 22:28). Here, the word "gods" is applied to magistrates and earthly dignitaries, as in Psalm 138:1. Solomon also addressed this subject. "Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter"

(Eccl 10:20).

You may recall the occasion when Paul rebuked Ananias the high priest, when he commanded that he be struck on the mouth. Paul replied, "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?" Those standing by replied to Paul, "Revilest thou God's high priest?" Knowing the Word of God, Paul responded, "I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people'" (Acts 23:1-5). In this case, the "ruler" was a religious one, not a political one. Yet, Paul was aware of the need to give him honor, even though Ananias was personally a dishonorable man.

How much more serious it is for those who are living under authorities that have been placed over them, to resist those authorities! The gravity of their sin is revealed in the next clause.

BRINGING JUDGMENT ON OURSELVES

"... and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves." Other versions read, "and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation," ^{KJV} "and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves," ^{NASB} "and those who resist will incur judgment," ^{NRSV} "and rebels must expect to receive the condemnation they deserve." ^{NJB}

The word "judgment," or "damnation," is as strong as it sounds. This precise word is used at least eleven times in the New Covenant Scriptures, and is always of great significance.

- ❑ "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation." (Matt 23:14).
- ❑ "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (Matt 23:33; Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47)
- ❑ "But he that shall blaspheme against

the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation." (Matt 3:29).

- ❑ *"And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."* (John 5:29)

with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not." (1 Pet 2:3)

Other translations use the alternative words "condemnation" and "judgment."

out to all such individuals. I do not know the full nature of that punishment, but I do know it is something to be avoided at all cost. Authorities that have been put in place by the Almighty God are to be honored to the fullest extent possible.

The Example of Paul

Although Paul vigorously defended his character in a court of law, he did not do it in resistance of the law itself. In fact, he announced that he was ready to submit to any punishment due to him if he had violated the law. Here is what he said. *"For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar"* ^{NKJV} (Acts 25:11). That is the response of a man dominated by faith, who had the utmost regard for the authorities ordained by the God of heaven.

Faith will move us to a proper response in this area. While it is not at all popular to think in this way in our type of government, we do well to discipline our thoughts and manners accordingly. You may be sure, God will ordain no government that liberates His people from the obligation to honor duly constituted authority—particularly since that authority is given by Him. Nor, indeed, does His salvation give such license.

Faith will move us to a proper response in this area. While it is not at all popular to think in this way in our type of government, we do well to discipline our thoughts and manners accordingly.

- ❑ *"And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just."* (Rom 3:8)
- ❑ *"Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation."* (Rom 13:2)
- ❑ *"For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."* (1 Cor 11:29)
- ❑ *"Having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith."* (1 Tim 5:12)
- ❑ *"And through covetousness shall they*

The meaning of the word is damnation, condemnation, be condemned, a verdict, or a sentence. There is nothing inconsequential about this word, and it most assuredly does not have that tone in our text.

One might ponder whether or not God Almighty would condemn people for refusing to submit to the government of the land. Their own imaginations may excuse such disobedience as though it was relatively minor in the eyes of the Lord. However, wherever such authority is resisted and rejected, unless it be because of submission to the Lord Himself, God has determined punishment will be meted

HOW TO AVOID BEING AFRAID!

"³ For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same." It is possible for fear to grip the heart of those receiving this instruction – particularly if they are living under a heathen government like Rome. The Spirit therefore speaks to our hearts, assuring us there is no inherent disadvantage to submitting ourselves to the powers ordained by God. He will set before us the norm, not an inviolable rule. There may be despots who will persecute believers for doing good, but we are to regard them as departures from the

general principle of civil authority.

NOT A TERROR TO GOOD WORKS

"For rulers are not a terror to good works." Other versions read, *"For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior,"* ^{NASB} *"For rulers hold no terror for those who do right,"* ^{NIV} *"For rulers are not a terror to good conduct,"* ^{NIV} and *"For the authorities do not frighten people who are doing right."* ^{NLT}

Paul, moved by the Spirit, wrote these words while Nero was Emperor. He is not writing to condone everything rulers did, but is setting forth the general rule.

Believers are to think of rulers in terms of what God has ordained, not in terms of their persons. Our thoughts are not to be shaped by exceptions to the rule – a tendency against which we will have to wrestle.

Exemplary citizens are not to expect an outbreak of terror against them, even though such may happen. There may be a Pharaoh that arises who does not know Joseph, and oppresses the people (Ex 1:8-11). A Herod may rise who thinks nothing of slaughtering masses of children under two years of age (Matt 2:16). Nevertheless, we are not to consider this

the normal way the government responds to those who do “good works.” Robert Haldane wisely observes, “No man was ever punished because he would not injure his neighbors.” *Exposition of Romans*

What Are Good Works?

These are the works formerly described as “things honest in the sight of all men.” As I understand it, this emphasizes the avoidance of things **commonly** considered to be evil. “Good works” are the deeds that result in being good citizens, who behave well in their various neighborhoods. Those committing such deeds will do no harm to their neighbor. In so doing, they bring an advantage to their community, and have nothing to fear from the government.

We learn from this passage that one of the primary reasons for government is the encouragement of well doing. By this means, God has ordained that civility and obedience is to be encouraged.

A TERROR TO EVIL WORKS

“For rulers are . . . a terror . . . evil.” Other versions read, “For rulers are . . . a cause of fear . . . for evil,” ^{NASB} “For rulers hold . . . terror . . . for those who do wrong,” ^{NIV} and “For rulers are . . . a terror . . . to bad.” ^{NRSV} Those who engage in “evil” do harm to their neighbors, engaging in selfishness and ill will. They tend toward ruthlessness, like those in the days of Noah, when “the earth as filled with violence” (Gen 6:11).

God has ordained civil government for the punishment of those who inflict harm upon others, living only for themselves. That punishment is to be of such a nature as strikes terror into the heart of the offenders. They are not to imagine there is no penalty for evil works.

In this arrangement, God has ensured the inhabitants of the world do not fully duplicate the times of Noah, when violence and abuse ran rampant throughout the world.

DO YOU WANT TO BE UNAFRAID

“Do you want to be unafraid of the

authority?” Other versions read, “Do you want to have no fear of authority?” ^{NASB} and “Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority?” ^{NIV}

It is not God’s will that we live in continual fear of the authority of government, whatever its level. This is exceedingly practical – so much so that it can escape our consideration. Fear is distracting to the individual, corrupting the soul and defiling the affections. It is no vain word that God now gives, teaching us to avoid being afraid of those who have authority over us.

In this arrangement, God has ensured the inhabitants of the world do not fully duplicate the times of Noah, when violence and abuse ran rampant throughout the world.

DO WHAT IS GOOD

“Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.” Other versions read, “Then do what is right and he will commend you,” ^{NIV} “Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval,” ^{NRSV} and “So do what they say, and you will get along well.” ^{NLT}

Doing good has to do with man-to-man conduct, particular in regard to keeping the laws of the land. Any civil law, even though fashioned crudely, does not allow for pillage, violence, and extortion. By the same token, governments generally look with favor upon those who are mindful of their neighbors.

One might object to this line of reasoning, citing governments that have oppressed the common people and persecuted the saints. However, these are not fair representations of the principles declared in our text. This is a matter of faith – of believing God. If it is true that God raises up kings, and deposes them as

well, He will surely be mindful of His people in both cases. We are therefore to commit the keeping of our souls to God “in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator” (1 Pet 4:19). It is our business to trust God and do good, providing things honest in the sight of all men. Even if we suffer for righteousness sake, we still do not have to live in terror of the king.

EXAMPLES

As you might expect, there are some notable Scriptural examples of the recognition of those who did good. A brief consideration of them will serve to open the door of hope to us, encouraging us to translate this text into godly living.

Joseph

Joseph was recognized for trustworthy and exemplary work on at least three occasions. Potiphar identified Joseph’s goodness, making him “overseer over his house, and all that he had he put into his hand” (Gen 39:1-5).

Again, when Joseph was falsely charged by Potiphar’s wife, and because he refused to do evil, he was wrongly sent to prison. But even there, he continued to do good. The result is most remarkable. The keeper of the prison “committed to Joseph’s hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand; because the LORD was with him, and that which he did, the LORD made it to prosper” (Gen 39:22-23).

Again, in order that the purpose of God might be fulfilled, Joseph was brought before Pharaoh to interpret a critical dream for him. When standing before the monarch, Joseph did not chide him for being wrongly accused and imprisoned. Instead, he did good, giving the word of the Lord for a coming time of crisis, and offering a God-ordained solution. Again, the authority was mindful of him. The Pharaoh’s response to Joseph’s counsel is encouraging for those willing to believe God and do good. “And the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh,

and in the eyes of all his servants. And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is? And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath showed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou” (Gen 41:37-40).

Nehemiah

Another case in point is Nehemiah. He was in a foreign land, and serving a heathen monarch, Artaxerxes the king. On one occasion, upon hearing of the desolation of Jerusalem and the house of God, Nehemiah’s countenance fell. The king noticed the sadness of Nehemiah, for this was not his usual manner. Normally, he served the king with a cheerful countenance and spirit. When the king detected Nehemiah had sorrow of heart, he asked him about the matter. Upon hearing about the desolation of Jerusalem, the king simply asked, “What do you request.” After Nehemiah had prayed, he asked to be sent to the holy city to rebuild it. The king did, indeed, send Nehemiah, providing letters of authorization to begin the work (Neh 2:1-7). Thus Nehemiah was rewarded for doing good.

Daniel

Daniel was taken captive at a young age in the Babylonian captivity. Early on he was recognized for his ability and excellent spirit. He determined to please God, and not partake of the king’s dainties. Yet, he did so in wisdom, carefully avoiding any reproach to the

king. Not only did God give Daniel wisdom, it was recognized by the king. Nebuchadnezzar “made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon” (Dan 2:48).

Belshazzar “clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom” (Dan 5:29).

Darius “set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom; and over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first: that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage. Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm” (Dan 6:1-3).

Daniel “prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian” (Dan 6:28).

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

These three young men maintained their spiritual integrity along with Daniel. Yet, they were not reactionaries against the heathen government of Babylon. As a result, and at the request of Daniel, the king set them “over the affairs of Babylon” (Dan 2:49; 3:12). Following their deliverance from the fiery furnace, Nebuchadnezzar made a decree, “That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall

be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort. Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, in the province of Babylon” (Dan 3:29-30).

AN APPLICATION

Many professing Christians conduct themselves unacceptably among those who have authority over them. They speak ill of their managers, or those to whom they are responsible. They have a murmuring spirit, and continually complain about how they are treated. Such small souls do well to take heed to our text. Someday they will confront Joseph, Nehemiah, Daniel, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. How will they explain their conduct to those precious souls who did good and remained cheerful in a heathen land and under heathen kings?

It is good for the people of God to set themselves to be industrious, helpful, and noted for doing good. God has established authority for the encouragement of those who do good, as well as the punishment of those who do evil.

If you are a child, then do good and be industrious. Your parents will honor you. If you are employed, then be exemplary in your conduct and attitude. Your managers will encourage you. If you are a member of the body of Christ, submit to those who have the rule over you, and they will feed you and do good to you. If you are a student, be a model one, and your teacher will esteem you. As citizens, be noted for keeping the law without being forced to do so. It will honor God and help you.

HE IS GOD’S MINISTER

“⁴ 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.”

Capital Punishment

We now come to the matter of capital

punishment, a subject hotly debated in the professed Christian community. Here is how the Holy Spirit reasons on the matter, leaving no room for any contrary views. Those who oppose capital punishment saying it is better to show mercy, forget what God has ordained. God did not ordain the “higher powers” to have mercy on evil doers, but to punish

them. Government is not intended to placate those who insist on doing evil, but to strike terror into their hearts.

The issue here is society itself, not the individual. The Lord has made provision for the suppression of social ills and outbreaks of uncontrollable violence. In my understanding, this is in order that

His anger not again break forth as it did in the days of Noah. It is not enough for God simply to promise He will *“never again destroy every living thing, as I have done”*^{NASB} (Gen 8:21). Just as surely as His promise of the remission of sin was implemented by means, so His promise to refrain from destroying every living thing is being implemented by means. The Divine nature cannot change. God cannot simply overlook sin, passing it by as though it did not exist (Ex 34:7; Nah 1:3).

Civil law is an appointed means of keeping iniquity from breaking beyond the bounds of Divine tolerance. As we will see, there is nothing casual about it. It is not intended to eliminate evil, but to suppress it.

GOD’S MINISTER TO YOU

“For he is the minister of God to thee for good.” Other versions read, *“For he is God’s servant to do you good,”*^{NIV} *“for of God it is a ministrant to thee for good,”*^{YLT} *“The authorities are sent by God to help you,”*^{NLT} and *“it is there to serve God for you and for your good.”*^{NJB} This is a most provocative text!

“He” is the ruler, or civil authority, whether an individual, like a king, or a group, like a senate or some other form of republic government. God has ordained this authority for our good – particularly the good of His people. The “good” has two sides: the encouragement of good, and the punishment of evil. We learn from this that sin is so ingrained in humanity that it must be forcibly restrained, else it will break forth in ever-increasing measures. This is confirmed whenever law becomes slack, and wickedness is not duly punished. If all governmental restraints were removed believers would be more fiercely attacked in every city and region of the world. The persecutions that are unleashed against them now are only because of the slackness of the law. But how much worse it would be if there was no civil law at all! Let us learn to view civil authority in the way God describes: *“a minister to THEE for good.”* It seems to me that God will honor such an attitude.

Examples of civil authorities which ministered to God’s people *“for good”* include Pharaoh (Gen 41:44-46), Cyrus (2 Chron 36:22-23, Darius (Dan 6:1-2), and Artaxerxes (Ezra 6:14; 21), Ahasuerus (Esther 8:1-2,11), Felix and Agrippa (Acts 25-26), etc.

We also learn from this passage that rulers are not put into place to execute their own pleasure. That such rulers exist, cannot be denied – men who use the authority God ordained to fulfill their own purposes, and to seek their own advantage. That, however, is an abuse of

We also learn from this passage that rulers are not put into place to execute their own pleasure. That such rulers exist, cannot be denied – men who use the authority God ordained to fulfill their own purposes, and to seek their own advantage. That, however, is an abuse of power, not the proper use of it.

power, not the proper use of it. God will judge such rulers, as He did Pharaoh, Sihon, Og, Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Herod, and others. We can safely leave such matters with the Lord. They will all give an account to God for the manner in which they governed, and the diligence with which they encouraged good and suppressed evil.

IF YOU DO EVIL

“But if you do evil, be afraid.” “Evil,” in this case, is the transgression of the laws under which we have been placed. The only exception to this is when the laws countermand the laws of God. In that case, obeying the laws of the land would be evil, even though we may be punished for it. Such men as Moses, Daniel, Shadrach, Meschech, Abednigo, and the Apostles, provide us with examples of choosing to serve God rather than men, even though that choice was attended by political opposition.

This is the ordinary view of government, which is God’s means of encouraging good and suppressing evil. When God’s people break the laws of the land, which disobedience is NOT owing to an allegiance to Him, or a desire to obey God rather than men, they are not to look to the Lord for protection. They are to *“be afraid.”* When we *“do wrong,”* we ought to expect to be *“buffeted for our faults”* (1 Pet 2:20). This is something of what is involved in providing things that are *“honest in the sight of all men”* (12:7).

We should not expect to be treated considerably when we break the laws of the land. With the single exception of obeying God rather than men, such deeds not only have broken civil law, but the law of God as well. No wonder we are to *“be afraid”* under such circumstances.

BEARING THE SWORD

“... for he does not bear the sword in vain.” Other versions read, *“for it does not bear the sword for nothing,”*^{NASB} *“for the sword is not in his hand for nothing,”*^{BBE} *“for it does not bear the sword without purpose,”*^{NAB} and *“because it is not for nothing that the symbol of authority is the sword.”*^{NJB}

Bearing the sword, is carrying the means to execute punishment to evildoers. That sword is not a mere show, but a symbol of authority to carry out due punishment. The “sword” also speaks of the ultimate civil punishment, which is death. This means that civility will be forced upon men if they insist upon doing evil. God has ordained that those bent on doing evil and bringing disruption and harm to society in general, be forcibly caused to stop their wickedness.

We have in the crucifixion of Christ an inspired example of the proper and improper use of *“the sword,”* or capital punishment. Jesus was consigned to death unjustly, while the two thieves were so punished justly. Although many who wear the name of Jesus object to capital punishment, the penitent thief knew the truth of situation. He said to his cohort in

crime, “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong” (Lk 23:40-41). Notice how he related the punishment to the fear of God, as well as the exercise of civil authority. This came from a man who was only introduced to Jesus, yet his perception was vastly superior to that of many who wear the name of Jesus in our time. What is more, Jesus did not rebuke him for his observation. In fact, it led the man into a state of repentance in which he asked to be remembered by Jesus when He came into His kingdom. Jesus took him as a trophy of grace into the realm of paradise (verse 43).

AN AVENGER TO EXECUTE WRATH

“... for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.” The Spirit will once and for all throw down to the ground the notion that capital punishment is wrong.

That is a wicked imagination that has been raised by people with, at the very best, a distorted understanding. What is here affirmed will grate against the flesh, and we should not be surprised that it does. However, this word is directly related to our heavenly Father. It is not, under any conditions, to be questioned, much less denied.

He is God’s Minister

“For he is God’s minister.” Other versions read, “He is God’s servant,”^{NIV} “It is the servant of God,”^{NRSV} and “it is there to serve God.”^{NJB} Notice, some translations use the word “he,” while others use the word “it.” In the case of the former, “he” is the person using “the sword.” In the second “it” is the sword itself, which is designed to serve God. In both cases, the essential sense of the text is maintained. God has established “the sword” to bring an end to the malefactors. He has also established the person who has been given authority to use it.

Here is an office that is not necessarily held by a person who fears God, yet that person is “God’s minister.”

That means the office that he holds has been ordained by God. It also means the individual has been elevated to that office by God Himself. Additionally, it means that the means of suppressing evil has been appointed by God.

An Avenger

“... an avenger.” Other versions

Here is an office that is not necessarily held by a person who fears God, yet that person is “God’s minister.” That means the office that he holds has been ordained by God. It also means the individual has been elevated to that office by God Himself.

read, “a revenger,”^{KJV} “an agent of wrath,”^{NIV} and “His revenger.”^{NJB}

Here is a person – an offspring of Adam, whether an individual or an institution – that is appointed to carry out vengeance: “an avenger.” This may appear strange after believers have been admonished, “**avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord**” (12:19). However, “God is not the author of confusion.” His words are not intended to confound the godly.

This text reveals one of the ways in which God takes vengeance. All vengeance is not reserved unto the day of judgment, and consignment of sinners to the lake of fire. As it is written, “Some men’s sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later” (1 Tim 5:24). One way in which such sins are “clearly evident” is when punishment is inflicted upon offenders by their peers – as with Achan (Josh 7), and the thieves dying with Jesus (Matt 27:44).

When we are admonished to “leave

room for the wrath of God”^{NASB} (Rom 12:19), rather than taking it upon ourselves to be a revenger, it may well be that God will use government to execute His wrath. Our text affirms that is His appointment. God, then, has set an order in place that allows for the swift and decisive punishment of evildoers. That role has not been given to the church, but to the government, the “higher powers” among men. It is good for us to give thanks for this arrangement!

To Execute Wrath

“... to execute wrath on him who practices evil.” Other versions read, “to execute wrath on the wrongdoer,”^{NRSV} “to execute wrath on the wrongdoer,”^{NIV} and “to execute HIS wrath on the wrongdoer,”^{RSV} The magistrate is not executing his wrath upon the wrongdoer, but the wrath of God. Ultimately, the wrongdoer has offended God. Secondly, he has offended men. Punishment is the appointed penalty for evil – doing

wrong!

Immediately after the flood, God instituted capital punishment. In my understanding, this was in order to suppress the duplication of the society judged in the flood. God directed Noah, “Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of 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” (Gen 9:5-6). Because man is made in the image of God, his life is sacred. If an animal kills a man, that animal must die: “from the hand of every beast will I require it.” If a man kills a man, “his blood shall be shed.” Men may not like this rule, but God has put it into place, and has never rescinded it.

In order to keep evil from dominating His people Israel, God commanded the death penalty for a number of offences. Murder (Num 35:16-33), adultery (Lev 20:10), incest (Lev 10-11-14), bestiality (Ex 22:19), sodomy (Lev 18:22; 20:13),

whoredom (Deut 22:21), the rape of a virgin (Deut 22:25), kidnaping (Ex 21:16; Deut 24:7), witchcraft (Ex 22:18), offering human sacrifice (Lev 20:2), striking or cursing one's parents (Ex 21:15,17), disobedient and rebellious children (Deut 21:19-21), working on the Sabbath day (Ex 35:2), false prophets (Deut 13:1-5), sacrificing to false gods (Ex 22:20), not hearkening to the priest or judge (Deut 17:12).

There were also offences of a lesser nature that were punishable by scourging (Lev 19:20; Deut 25:2), and imprisonment (Lev 24:12; Num 15:34). There was also financial restitution for injury inflicted upon another (Ex 21:32-35). A person stealing or killing an ox was to restore five for one (Ex 22:1a). For sheep, the

restitution was four to one (Ex 22:1b). If the animal was found alive and restored to the owner, an additional one was also to be given (Ex 22:4).

Not only was wrath executed as a punishment of the evil doer, but in order that others *"shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you"* (Deut 13:11; 17:13; 19:20; 21:21). Solomon also said, *"Smite a scorner, and the simple will beware: and reprove one that hath understanding, and he will understand knowledge"* (Prov 19:25). And again, *"When the scorner is punished, the simple is made wise"* (Prov 21:11). This same principle is even applied to rebuking sinners within the church. *"Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear"* (1 Tim 5:20).

In these various laws, the Lord has revealed how He is impacted by human sin – all evil doing. It should strike a certain fear in the hearts of those prone to disobedience, rebellion, and the offending of their peers.

From the death penalty to various other forms of punishment, civil authorities have been appointed by God to take His vengeance upon offenders. This arrangement is not to be questioned. Rather, such punishments are to be avoided by an honorable life.

One may be tempted to take this text and go further with it than the Spirit has. Such an inclination must be moritified. It is enough to take it seriously, and live so as to avoid social punishments.

WRATH AND CONSCIENCE

"⁵ Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake." As the Spirit is wont to do, He will now draw some conclusions for us. These conclusions are based upon the solid foundation of Divine ordination.

YOU MUST BE SUBJECT

"Therefore you must be subject . . ."

Other translations read, *"Wherefore ye must needs be subject."*^{KJV} *"Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection,"*^{NASB} *"Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities,"*^{NIV} and *"You must be obedient, therefore."*^{NJB}

By saying *"you must be subject,"* the Spirit accentuates how unreasonable it is NOT to be subject to the *"higher powers."* if they are ordained by God, how utterly foolish to resist them, or refuse to subject oneself to them!

Someone might object that subjecting ourselves to civil authorities might very well be to our harm. And, indeed, it does appear that way to the flesh. However, this submission is done in the persuasion that the Lord is truly *"the kingdom is the LORD'S: and He is the Governor among the nations"* (Psa 22:28). With great

boldness faith declares, *"The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me"* (Heb 13:6). The believing souls knows, *"The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will"* (Prov 21:1). We must be willing to trust the Lord in this matter, else our hearts will trouble us to the point of distraction.

BECAUSE OF WRATH

" . . . not only because of wrath . . ."

This is the lowest level of perception. If we are not subject to the authorities, choosing to ignore them, we will be punished. The fear of that punishment ought to provide some incentive for living in an orderly and unoffensive manner. If, by Divine decree, he does not carry the sword in vain, then it is the height of foolishness to proceed against the ruler or rulers of the land.

The *"wrath"* we seek to escape is primarily that of God, and secondarily that of the civil authority. It is God's wrath because He has put the authorities in place to punish evil doers. It is the wrath of the government because if we violate the law, he will execute wrath against us as directed by God.

As I have said, this is the lowest level of human incentive. It is better suited for those who are more beastly than manly, and are more stubborn than sensitive. The further a person is from God, the more needful this incentive becomes.

BECAUSE OF CONSCIENCE

" . . . but also for conscience' sake." This is the highest incentive – for the sake of one's conscience. One of the marks of a godly person is this: *"I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men"* (Acts 24:16). Our hearts will confirm that social order and tranquility is proper, and that we should do our best to maintain it, never disrupting it out of selfish ambition. After all, *"the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace"* (James 3:18). The objective of God's commandment involves obtaining and maintaining a *"good conscience"* (1 Tim 1:5). If one thrusts a *"good conscience"* from them, they will surely make *"shipwreck of the faith"* (1 Tim 1:19).

The writer of the book of Hebrews made this petition of his readers. *"Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly"* (Heb 13:18). Maintaining that good conscience with spiritual aggression

will have its impact upon our enemies, even if they are within the government. Thus it is written, *“Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ”* (1 Pet 3:16).

For conscience sake, therefore, let us subject ourselves in a godly manner to the authorities of the land. Let none of us be viewed by our rulers as wayward, disobedient, or rabble rousers. Rather, let us be noted for being good citizens who

are no threat to civility and tranquility.

Even when rulers have treated the saints unjustly, beating and incarcerating them, they were faced with a humble people. Imprisoned men like Joseph, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, Peter and John, and Paul, did not organize rebellions against the governments that treated them unjustly. The injustices leveled against them would be settled by God Himself, and they knew it. In the meantime, faith can confess with Paul, *“I know that this shall turn to my salvation*

through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death” (Phil 1:19-20).

If Joseph and Mary asked no question when they were taxed by Caesar, how will we be able to explain to them on the day of judgment why we refused to pay them to those God has placed over us? We have received more insight than they!

WHAT ABOUT TAXES?

“⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing.” We must never allow the wisdom of men to cause us to gloss the Word of the living God. Although this is a sensitive subject in many circles, the Holy Spirit speaks candidly concerning it, providing no opportunity for rebellion among the children of the Lord. If Jesus was born during a time of world-wide taxation (Luke 2:1-2), it should not surprise us that something good can occur when we pay our taxes as unto the Lord. This is one of the primary ways in which we submit ourselves to the *“higher powers.”*

PAY TAXES

“For because of this you also pay taxes . . .” Other versions read, *“For this cause pay ye tribute also,”* ^{KJV} *“This is also why you pay taxes,”* ^{NIV} and *“For the same reason you also pay taxes.”* ^{NRSV} And what is the reason for which taxes are to be paid? There is a twofold way of looking at this. First, the magistrates and officials have been ordained to subdue evil and encourage good. Our taxes, or tribute, will assist them in meeting this requirement. Second, because we will be punished if we do not pay them. Third, for the sake of our conscience, which is to be shaped by the Word of our Lord.

The Words of Jesus

This very issue of taxes, or tribute money, came up during Christ’s ministry among men. On one occasion, the Pharisees sent their disciples to Jesus, *“with the Herodians,”* who were a political party devoted to Herod. The question they asked of Jesus was this: *“Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”* The Spirit

Jesus’ telling point was this. The tax money has the image of Caesar upon it. Do not hesitate to give it back to him as he requires. The image of God, however, is upon man himself. He is, therefore, to give himself to God. One of the ways in which this is done is in the paying of taxes. Our text plainly says, *“Pay taxes!”*

GOD’S MINISTERS

“. . . for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing.” These authorities are *“God’s ministers”* in the keeping of order and social tranquility. The *“very thing”* to which they give themselves is ruling, or keeping order. *“. . . for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing.”* ^{NIV} The idea is that our taxes allow them to do their job more effectively.

If Jesus was born during a time of world-wide taxation (Luke 2:1-2), it should not surprise us that something good can occur when we pay our taxes as unto the Lord.

tells us that Jesus *“perceived their wickedness, and said ‘Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the tax money.’”* When they brought Him a *“penny,”* or Denarius, *“He said to them, ‘Whose image and inscription is this?’ They said to Him, ‘Caesar’s.’ And He said to them, ‘Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’”* His answer caused them to marvel, just as it has done today.

The effort required for a person to govern a people is too great for the average person. It requires *“continual”* involvement, with hardly a moment being their own. That is the very point of this text, though it may seem rather mundane: *“to take care of such things at all times.”* ^{BBE} Why should those who have been reconciled to God make the tasks of those ordained by Him more difficult? Both faith and reason affirm they should not. When heeded, believers will not.

RENDER TO ALL THEIR DUE

“⁷ Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.”

There is to be a certain consistency in our response to civil authorities. We are not given the liberty to pick and choose whom we will honor. This obligation is owing to the dignity that goes with any office ordained by God. If man himself, without regard to the position he holds, is to be given due honor because he is *“made after the similitude of God,”* (James 3:9), what of those who have been placed in positions of authority by Him?

We are living in a time of great disrespect and social rebellion. This passage should be declared often to the people of God, lest they be lulled into sleep by carnality, or the wisdom of this world. It is to be remembered that despising dominion is classed along with the exceeding sinners of Sodom and Gomorrah. They are more like Satan than they are like God (Jude 7-8).

RENDERING TO ALL THEIR DUE

“*Render therefore to all their due.*” While the deeds that follow are to be done on a voluntary basis, they are, nevertheless, **debts** to be honored. Because the saints are strictly charged to *“owe no man anything”* (Rom 13:9), they are to see to it these debts are paid, sincerely, respectfully, and as unto the Lord Himself.

To *“render”* is to pay, give, perform a duty, or discharge what is due. To fail in this regard is to be characterized by rebellion. In such a case, not only is the authority dishonored, the name of the Lord is also reproached, God is disobeyed, and the flesh takes the dominance.

TAXES THAT ARE DUE

“ . . . taxes to whom taxes are due.” Here taxes are called a debt – something that is *“due.”* It involves an obligation that has been placed upon us. Ultimately,

that obligation is to God, who has inspired these instructions. The amount of tax that is owed is to be paid, and it is to be paid to the one or ones to whom it is due. If Joseph and Mary asked no question when they were taxed by Caesar, how could we explain to them on the day of judgment why we refused to pay them to those God has placed over us?

CUSTOMS THAT ARE DUE

“ . . . customs to whom customs.” These are not *“customs”* in the sense of manners, or certain ways of doing things, i.e., *“it is not our custom”* to do thus and so. It is more related to *“customs”* costs related to imports and exports – a levy that is paid for the handling and transporting of merchandise. Jesus referred to such charges when He asked Peter, *“What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take*

If Joseph and Mary asked no question when they were taxed by Caesar, how could we explain to them on the day of judgment why we refused to pay them to those God has placed over us?

customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?” (Matt 17:25). All such dues are to be *“rendered”* or paid.

FEAR THAT IS DUE

“ . . . fear to whom fear.” This is a wholesome respect that will not allow the fearing person to disobey or disrespect the dignitary. There are certain people placed among us to whom fear is *“due.”* This is not a cringing fear that moves the individual to strive to merely please men. After all, *“The fear of man bringeth a snare”* (Prov 29:25). This is actually a fear that proceeds from the fear of God, not one that replaces it.

Solomon counseled his son, *“My son,*

fear thou the LORD and the king” (Prov 24:27). Under the Law, it was commanded, *“Ye shall fear every man his mother, and his father”* (Lev 19:3). That is a wholesome respect that will not speak reproachfully to them or dishonor them by disobedience or disrespect. This is a fear of offending or dishonoring, rather than a cringing fear of an evil doer.

HONOR THAT IS DUE

“ . . . honor to whom honor.” All men are not alike. There are some to whom honor is due. Children are to honor their parents – they owe them that honor (Ex 20:12; Eph 6:1). There is an honor that is to be paid to the aged. The Law prescribed, *“You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the LORD”* (Lev 19:32). This has all but been eliminated in our country, which has come to venerate youthfulness above maturity. Many religious programs cater to the youth instead of rising before the aged.

Peter wrote, *“Honor the king”* (1 Pet 2:17). Elders that *“rule well”* are to be *“counted worthy of double honor”* (1 Tim 5:17). Servants are to consider their masters *“worthy of all honor”* (1 Tim 6:1). Husbands are to give *“honor”* unto their wives” (1 Pet 3:7).

There are also certain customs and protocols related to meeting higher officials. God Himself, for that matter, has established a certain protocol in approaching Him: i.e., *“a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water”* (Heb 10:22). It should not surprise us that a faint reflection of this is involved in approaching dignitaries He has put over us. An example of such a protocol is seen in Esther’s approach to the king, who was her own husband. When she approached him to plead for her people, she *“put on her royal apparel.”* When the king held out the scepter of acceptance, she *“drew*

near, and touched the top of the scepter.” When asked concerning her request, she appealed to the good will of the king: “If it seem good unto the king” (Esth 5:1-3).

In my judgment, the modern church is sadly lacking in the requirements of this text. Disrespect reigns supreme among those bearing the name of Jesus

Christ—at least in the Western world. Both civil and spiritual leaders lack the respect that is due to them by the Word of the Lord.

CONCLUSION

Let those who imagine that spiritual life lacks practicality, give due heed to the passage we have just reviewed. This is an exposition of the nature of spiritual life. It is one of the ways “rivers of living water” flow from the “belly,” or inward parts of the children of God (John 7:39). Where such responses are not found, spiritual life is not found, for this is the way in which life from God expresses itself in the world.

Thus far, the Spirit has declared the following effects of justification, or the imputation of righteousness.

- ❑ The body is presented to God as a living sacrifice (12:1-2).
- ❑ Thoughts concerning oneself are in strict comportment with the measure of faith given (12:3).
- ❑ Care is taken to minister to the members of Christ’s body in strict accord with the gifts administered to us (12:4-8).
- ❑ Consistent and God-honoring attitudes are exhibited toward the people of God (12:9-10).
- ❑ Appropriate responses to the circumstances in which we find ourselves (12:11-21).
- ❑ Submission to the “higher powers,” or civil authorities (13:1-7).

In these matters, the justification of life is made known. This principle is

stated in the fifth chapter. “Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in **justification OF life**” (5:18). Some translations read “justification AND life”^{NRSV/NJB} Others read substantially the same, “acquittal and life.”^{NAB/RSV} The NIV reads, “justification that brings life.” While there is an element of truth in all of these expressions, in my judgment they fail to express the true meaning.

Ordinarily, it is the individual that is said to be justified. “. . . this man went down to his house justified” (Lk 18:14). “. . . all that believe are justified” (Acts 13:39). “. . . a man is justified by faith” (Rom 3:28). “For if Abraham were justified by works” (Rom 4:2). “. . . them he also justified” (Rom 8:30). “. . . ye are justified” (1 Cor 6:11), etc.

That is not, however, the manner of speaking in Romans 5:18. The Greek word used here is ζωης (zo-as). This precise word is used no less than forty-seven times in the New Covenant Scriptures. Forty of those times it is translated “OF life.” Phrases used include “days of life,” “resurrection of life,” “bread of life,” “words of eternal life,” “light of life,” “ways of life,” “Prince of life,” “newness of life,”

“Spirit of life,” “savor of life,” “word of life,” “book of life,” “promise of life,” “hope of eternal life,” “end of life,” “crown of life,” “grace of life,” “tree of life,” and “water of life.”

All of this may seem like an academic diversion, with little or no value. Yet, in my judgment, a most powerful facet of redemption is to be seen in this expression, and the passage before us.

In Christ Jesus, life itself, or living, is made acceptable to God: “Justification OF life.” Not only is the person sanctified, but the life lived by that individual is also made holy. Divine life exhibits itself in the expressions of life, not in a mere profession. Where these expressions are not found, there really is no evidence spiritual life.

Beginning with the twelfth chapter, the Spirit unfolds the manner in which the life of God expresses itself. The various admonitions set before us are not cold obligations, to be fulfilled under the bludgeon of threats. Even though they are duties, they are also evidences that we have been “made righteous” by a gracious God. The knowledge of this situation will prove a great encouragement for advancement to God-honoring maturity.

Refreshing Waters Renewal #12

July 31 through August 2, 2001 - Garner, North Carolina

Theme: Salvation’s Abundance

13 Sermons, 2 Audience Discussions, Numerous Personal Testimonies

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 8/10/2001. Continuing in our overview of the book of Romans, we will be covering verses 8-10 of the thirteenth chapter. The theme will be, "**LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR.**" Spiritual life manifests itself in certain responses to, and initiatives toward, those with whom we are associated, and to whom we are exposed. Those reactions and ambitions confirm the law of God has been written upon our hearts and put into our minds. Our meeting will convene at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

*The Blakely Family: Given, June, Benjamin, Jonathan, and Eva
406 South Sergeant Street, Joplin, MO 64801*

A place where believers can meet, fellowship, be edified, and express themselves.

Telephone: (417) 782-3063, Email: Given (GivenB@aol.com) June: (JuneE01@aol.com)

ADAH's Webpage: <http://wotruth.com/adah.htm> -- EVA's Webpage: <http://wotruth.com/Eva.htm>

*Benjamin (Bensvison@aol.com), Jonathan (Jonstalk@aol.com), Eva (Evablakely@aol.com)
Adah/Jason Hutchcraft (hutchcraftj@esr.edu)*

WORD OF TRUTH Website: <http://wotruth.com>

**WORD OF TRUTH FELLOWSHIP Website: <http://wotruth.com/wotf/wotindex.htm>
COMMENTARY on Romans: <http://wotruth.com/Romans.htm>**