

Romans 13

Christians and the State

Most scholars agree that Paul wrote Romans around 57-58 AD, while he was in Corinth during his third missionary journey (cf. Acts 20:3). This was during the reign of the Emperor Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus. Nero's infamous reign is usually associated with tyranny, extravagance and debauchery. Christians were targeted by Nero in 64AD, being scapegoated for the devastating fire which destroyed much of the city.

Romans 13 offers Paul's exhortation for Christians to be subject to the government.

Note similar passages by Paul in the NT:

1 Timothy 2: 1-2

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.

Titus 3: 1

Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work,

1 Peter 2: 13-17

For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, ¹⁴ or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. ¹⁵ For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. ¹⁶ As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. ¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Read Romans 13: 1-7 Why would Paul write these words?

Some possible reasons that Paul wrote these words stressing civil obedience

1. In Acts, it was the Jewish angry mobs that followed him, persecuting him, plotting to take his life. More than once it was the Roman authorities that saved his life. Paul may have figured that it was safer in the hands of the recognized (though hated) authorities than in an unruly mob.
2. The Jews were notoriously rebellious towards Rome.
"Palestine, especially Galilee, was constantly seething with insurrection. Above all, there were the Zealots. They believed that God would not be helping them unless they embarked on violent action to help themselves. Their aim was to make any civil government impossible. They were fanatical nationalists sworn to terrorist methods. Not only did they use terrorism towards the Roman government; they also wrecked the houses and burned the crops and assassinated the families of their own fellow Jews who paid tribute to the Roman government." Barclay
3. We cannot entirely dissociate ourselves from the society in which we live and have a part. Everyone has a duty to the state, even if someone like Nero is on the throne.
4. We owe our protection to the state. Otherwise, it's the law of the jungle.
5. Ordinary people use a wide range of services which individually they could not enjoy – water, light, sewage, roads, etc. These things are available only when we agree to live together.

6. Even a system like the Roman Empire was divinely ordained by God to save the world from chaos – The Pax Romana gave Christian missionaries the chance to do their work, traveling on the system of Romans roads.
7. Verse 7 - therefore, pay your public debts – taxes, and revenue (or tribute)
 - Taxes: Ground tax (1/10 of all the grain, 1/5 of all the wine or fruit)
 - Income tax (1% of your income)
 - Poll tax (paid by everyone between the ages of 14-65)
 - Plus: customs duties, import and export taxes, crossing bridges, using roads, entering markets.
 Paul insists that Christians must pay their tribute and their taxes to the authorities, however galling it might be.

Is Paul saying that all the Caligulas, Herods, Neros and Domitians of the NT times, and all the Hitlers, Stalins, Amins and Saddams of our times, were personally appointed by God, that God is responsible for their behavior, or that their authority is in no circumstances to be resisted?

Paul means rather that all human authority is derived from God's authority, so that we can say to rulers what Jesus said to Pilate, 'You would have no power (authority) over me if it were not given to you from above.'
Pilate misused his authority to condemn Jesus; nevertheless, the authority he used to do this had been delegated to him by God." Stott

Read Romans 13: 8-10 Paul turns to private debts

1. Owe no one anything "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Christianity is not an excuse for refusing our obligations to other people; it is a reason for fulfilling them to the utmost.
2. There is one debt that must be paid every day, because it is owed every day: Love one another.

Read Romans 13: 11-14

1. Remember that Paul and the Early Church all expected Christ to return in their lifetimes. Thus, they lived with an urgency. How: Living in the light, honorably
 - Not: reveling - undignified, a nuisance, like a reveling crowd
 - drunkenness - disgraceful
 - debauchery - immorality, no value in fidelity
 - licentiousness - shamefulness, not caring who sees them
 - quarreling – uncontrolled and unholy competition, the opposite of Christian love
 - jealousy – cannot be content, looks w a jealous eye on the blessings others have
2. Instead: put on the Lord Jesus Christ, making no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. This is the verse that Augustine read that God used to change his life. God's word found him.