

## Romans 13 Submitting to Authority

### **Text**

<sup>1</sup>Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

<sup>2</sup>Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. <sup>3</sup>For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; <sup>4</sup>for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. <sup>5</sup>Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. <sup>6</sup>For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. <sup>7</sup>Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

<sup>8</sup>Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.

<sup>9</sup>For this, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>10</sup>Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

<sup>11</sup>Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. <sup>12</sup>The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. <sup>13</sup>Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. <sup>14</sup>But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

### **Key Points in the text**

- When we are obedient to God fearing leaders we are obedient to God.
- Keeping in mind what Jesus said when asked about the commandments of God, and responded in part to love your neighbor as yourself.
- We need the Holy Spirit to do these things.

### **Text Study**

Verses 1-7: An appeal to submit to authority as an expression of love under grace.

Verse 1a, The Command (appeal), **<sup>1</sup>Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities.**

- This is a blanket statement given by Paul to the church. In this section of chapter 13 he will go on to give reasons, consequences, and application.

Verses 1b-2, 1st Reason and its consequences, **For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. <sup>2</sup>Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.**

- God is Sovereign, and therefore if a person is in authority or submission it is because God put them there.
- When we oppose those God put in authority it is the same as opposing God's authority.
- Paul says that those who oppose God will receive condemnation.

Verses 3-4, 2nd Reason and its consequence, <sup>3</sup>**For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same;** <sup>4</sup>**for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.**

- If you are doing what has been commanded of you by those in authority you have nothing to fear from them but rather praise because God has put them there for our protection and guidance.
- The power of the sword has been given to those in authority by God and if we do evil we should live afraid of the power of the sword.

Verse 5, The Command repeated, <sup>5</sup>**Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake.**

- What should cause a believer to follow those in authority is not the punishment we will receive on earth but also because our conscience will tell us that we have opposed God.
- This should be much more important to the believer, not because it will cause us to lose our salvation but because we have disrespected the One who gave us our salvation.

Verses 6-7, Particular Applications, <sup>6</sup>**For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.** <sup>7</sup>**Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.**

- Based on what Paul has just written we should do the following, not based on if we like it or not but because we know it is right.
  - Paying taxes (direct taxes)
  - Paying customs (indirect taxes, such as revenue and duty taxes)
  - Giving respect (fear)
  - Giving honor

The Objection (Where things go wrong).

- When Paul wrote the above he had in mind a godly example of being under authority, which looks like this:
  - We ought to submit to God
  - Authorities ought to submit to God
  - Therefore our submission to God is expressed in our submission to authority.
- When the authorities do not submit to God things break down.
- Remember that authorities get their power from God not from the following:
  - The people (democracy), Heredity (the divine right of kings), Wealth (plutocracy), or Military power (autocracy)
- Paul well knows that rulers do not always submit to God and may therefore call for the people to do things in opposition to God or His commands. In this case we are not called to submit to man but to God, meaning we resist what is evil and do what is good.
  - This will still result in authorities using the power of the sword against us.
  - Submitting to God and not man in this way is another example of how we show that we have our focus on our future glory, our present peace with God, and our past justification.
- Scriptural support for opposing authorities in these situations:
  - Acts 5:29
  - 1 Peter 2:13-17
  - Mark 12:13-17
  - Revelation 13

Verses 8-10: The appeal to fulfill the law by love.

Verse 8a, The Command, <sup>8</sup>**Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another**

- We have a debt that remains outstanding between us and every human being that God places before us, to love them.
- Love those who God puts in your path or your life, people like: parents, children, church family, co-workers, and yes even those who are our enemies.

Verse 8b, The Reason, **for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.**

- This is what God wants and therefore it is law for us.
- Since chapter 12, our focus has been on having and showing grace and love to others, first to the church and now to all people. This is always a sincere grace and love, not just a happy face or done from compulsion.

Verses 9-10, Proof of the Reason, <sup>9</sup>**For this, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”** <sup>10</sup>**Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.**

- Love does not replace these commandments but is defined by them. We show love by following these commandments.
- By quoting the second part of Jesus' words from Leviticus 19:18, Paul again reminds us that we should put others before ourselves.
- If we want to know what love looks like we should look to the commandments and the words of Jesus, not to the world.

Verses 11-14: The appeal to clothe yourselves with Christ.

Verses 11-12a, Doctrine: The Age to Come is Dawning, <sup>11</sup>**Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed.**

<sup>12</sup>**The night is almost gone, and the day is near.**

- The doctrine here is that we should live knowing that the dawning of a new time is coming soon.
- Our Future Hope of glory with Christ Jesus, is not far off but near, puts importance on our sanctification and loving like Christ.
- This is for sure a wake up call.

Verses 12b-13, Implications, **Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.** <sup>13</sup>**Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy.**

- Dawn is coming folks, stop behaving as if it is still night because soon dawn will come and the light will reveal all that was hidden in the dark.
- Paul lists here a bunch of things that tend to happen in literal darkness, but also in the darkness of someone living in sin.
- Paul says if you are a child of God get out of the darkness you have been brought into the light, act like it.

Verse 14, Divine Enabling, <sup>14</sup>**But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.**

- We live under grace, and the Spirit lives in us, we are empowered by the Spirit to do these things, we just need to walk in the Spirit.

## Application

- Walk in the Spirit
- When it is hard to show grace, turn your mind to Jesus and His example outlined in Philippians 2.

## Next Week's Lesson Prep/Preview

Text: Romans 14:1-15:13

Focus: A Church Shaped by Grace

Devotional: 1 Corinthians 8

Preparation: 4 Principles for the Exercise of Christian Liberty

### 4 Principles for the Exercise of Christian Liberty

Sinclair Ferguson

It was years ago now, but I still remember the discussion. I was making my way out of our church building some time after the morning service had ended, and was surprised to find a small group of people still engaged in vigorous conversation. One of them turned and said to me, "Can Christians eat black pudding?"

To the uninitiated in the mysteries of Scottish haute cuisine, it should perhaps be said that black pudding is not haggis! It is a sausage made of blood and suet, sometimes with flour or meal.

It seems a trivial question. Why the vigorous debate? Because, of course, of the Old Testament's regulations about eating blood (Lev. 17:10ff).

Although (as far as I am aware) no theological dictionary contains an entry under B for "The Black Pudding Controversy," this unusual discussion raised some most basic hermeneutical and theological issues:

- How is the Old Testament related to the New?
- How is the Law of Moses related to the gospel of Jesus Christ?
- How should a Christian exercise freedom in Christ?

The Council of Jerusalem, described in Acts 15, sought to answer such practical questions faced by the early Christians as they wrestled with how to enjoy freedom from the Mosaic administration without becoming stumbling blocks to Jewish people.

These were questions to which Paul in particular gave a great deal of thought. He was, after all, one of those appointed by the Jerusalem Council to circulate and explain the letter that summarized the decisions of the apostles and elders (Acts 15:22ff; 16:4). Faced with similar issues in the church at Rome, he provided them with a series of principles that apply equally well to twenty-first-century Christians. His teaching in Romans 14:1–15:13 contains healthy (and very necessary) guidelines for the exercise of Christian liberty. Here are four of them:

Principle 1: Christian liberty must never be flaunted. "Whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God" (Rom. 14:22, NIV).

We are free in Christ from the Mosaic dietary laws; Christ has pronounced all food clean (Mark 7:18-19). We may eat black pudding after all!

But you do not need to exercise your liberty in order to enjoy it. Indeed, Paul elsewhere asks some very penetrating questions of those who insist on exercising their liberty whatever the circumstances: Does this really build up others? Is this really liberating you—or has it actually begun to enslave you (Rom. 14:19; 1 Cor. 6:12)?

The subtle truth is that the Christian who has to exercise his or her liberty is in bondage to the very thing he or she insists on doing. Says Paul, if the kingdom consists for you in food, drink, and the like, you have missed the point of the gospel and the freedom of the Spirit (Rom. 14:17).

Principle 2: Christian liberty does not mean that you welcome fellow Christians only when you have sorted out their views on X or Y (or with a view to doing that).

God has welcomed them in Christ, as they are; so should we (Rom. 14:1, 3). True, the Lord will not leave them as they are. But He does not make their pattern of conduct the basis of His welcome. Neither should we.

We have many responsibilities for our fellow Christians, but being their judge is not one of them. Christ alone is that (Rom. 14:4, 10-13). How sad it is to hear (as we do far too often) the name of another Christian mentioned in conversation, only for someone to pounce immediately on him or her in criticism. That is not so much a mark of discernment as it is the evidence of a judgmental spirit.

What if the measure we use to judge others becomes the measure used to judge us (Rom. 14:10-12; Matt. 7:2)?

Principle 3: Christian liberty ought never to be used in such a way that you become a stumbling block to another Christian (Rom. 14:13).

When Paul states this principle, it is not a spur-of-the-moment reaction, but a settled principle he has thought out and to which he has very deliberately committed himself (see 1 Cor. 8:13). When that commitment is made, it eventually becomes so much a part of our thinking that it directs our behavior instinctively. We are given liberty in Christ in order to be the servants of others, not in order to indulge our own preferences.

Principle 4: Christian liberty requires grasping the principle that will produce this true biblical balance: "We ... ought ... not to please ourselves.... For even Christ did not please himself" (Rom. 15:1-3).

There is something devastatingly simple about this. It reduces the issue to the basic questions of love for the Lord Jesus Christ and a desire to imitate Him since His Spirit indwells us to make us more like Him.

True Christian liberty, unlike the various "freedom" or "liberation" movements of the secular world, is not a matter of demanding the "rights" we have. Dare one say that the American Founding Fathers, for all their wisdom, may have inadvertently triggered off a distortion of Christianity by speaking about our "rights" to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? The Christian realizes that before God he or she possesses no "rights" by nature. In our sinfulness, we have forfeited all of our "rights."

Only when we recognize that we do not deserve our "rights" can we properly exercise them as privileges. Sensitivity to others in the church, especially weaker others, depends on this sense of our own unworthiness. If we assume that we have liberties to be exercised at all costs, we become potentially lethal weapons in a fellowship, all too capable of destroying someone for whom Christ has died (Rom. 14:15, 20).

That does not mean that I must become the slave of another's conscience. John Calvin puts the point well when he says that we restrain the exercise of our freedom for the sake of weak believers, but not when we are faced with Pharisees who demand that we conform to what is unscriptural. Where the gospel is at stake, liberty needs to be exercised; where the stability of a weak Christian is at stake, we need to restrain it.

This is all part and parcel of "living between the times." Already, in Christ, we are free, but we do not yet live in a world that can cope with our freedom. One day we will enjoy "the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21). Then may we eat black pudding whenever and wherever we want to! But not yet. For now, as Martin Luther wrote, "A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to every one."

As it was with the Master, so it is with the servant.