

Our Duty within Society # 44 Romans 13: 1-10

Paul has covered many aspects of the Christian life within the book of Romans up to this point. He spent a large portion, over half of the letter, dealing with the spiritual aspect, particularly regarding salvation. In the previous chapter Paul addressed our social interaction with those around us. Our text today deals with another aspect of Christian life: our civil responsibilities within a secular society.

Paul speaks at length regarding our submission to those in authority over us within the government. The approval rating for elected officials in America is at its lowest point in recorded history. Many today feel as if their voices aren't being heard and those in positions of influence are more concerned with special interest groups than the needs of the people they represent. It is easy in today's environment to feel disenfranchised and even resentful toward government officials. We must bear in mind that human government was ordained of God and He expects us to honor this system of order.

As Paul penned these words, Nero was in charge of Rome. He was a brutal man who had little sympathy for Christians, and yet Paul reminded believers of their responsibilities regarding governmental authority. As difficult as our society has become, our struggles pale in comparison to the believers living in Rome in Paul's day. Let's examine the [responsibilities](#) Paul speaks of as we consider: [Our Duty within Society](#).

I. Our Responsibility to God (1-2) – Paul reveals our primary responsibility, even regarding human government, is to God. He speaks of:

A. God's Sovereignty (1) – [Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.](#) We are reminded that God holds supreme authority, even over those who govern us. The power and influence they possess is given of God. They would have no power within society if God had not permitted and provided it.

- This will enable us to endure even when faced with difficulties and injustices brought about by those who rule over us. We will not always agree with every decision that is made, but we can rest knowing God is sovereign in our lives, and that includes those who are placed in authority over us. God is not surprised or unaware of the situations we face in America. He has placed the leadership as it has pleased Him, all in accordance with His sovereign will and plan!

B. Our Submission (2) – *Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.* Paul reveals those who resist the rule of law and the authority of government are in fact resisting the ordinance of God. God established human government and He expects us to live within the parameters established in society. The rebellious and unlawful will be chastised of the Lord.

▪ Paul deals with specific laws and responsibilities further in following verses. We are expected to live within the laws that govern society. For the most part, these laws are created and enforced for the common good of all citizens. I am thankful we do not live in a lawless society, where there are no rules or standards. However, Paul is not speaking of reckless abandon here. He wrote several epistles from prison because he refused to cease preaching the Gospel. Peter boldly proclaimed that we ought to obey God rather than man. We are expected to abide by the laws of the land as long as they don't contradict biblical principles and Christian conscience. We are now facing unprecedented attacks on religious liberty and Christian conscience. Matters may become legally permissible and socially acceptable, but lack biblical authority or support. When laws and regulations are contrary to biblical principles, civil disobedience is in order. As we discovered, our first and foremost responsibility is to God and His Word.

II. Our Responsibility to Government (3-7) – Here Paul further discusses our responsibility regarding human government. We are expected to:

A. Regard the Laws (3) – *For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same.* This reveals common sense and bears truth even today. Those who make and enforce the laws are not against those who obey the laws; they seek to hinder and punish those who are rebellious in society. Those who live in obedience to the law will enjoy favor of those who rule over them. We are expected to obey the laws within society. If we break those laws, we can expect to face the consequences of our actions.

B. Respect the Leaders (4-5) – *For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.* ^[5] *Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.* Again we are reminded that those in places of authority are placed there of God, according to His divine ordinance. They are called upon to protect the law abiding and punish the lawless. We are expected to submit to their authority.

- We are to respect the office and position, even if we disagree with the person who holds that position. I have little confidence in our current administration, but I respect the office of President. The same must be true for each level of government and the authority each possesses. If laws are passed that go against Scripture and our Christian conscience, and we resort to civil disobedience, even then we must do so with respect for those in authority. We will not stand accountable for decisions they make, but for how we behave within in society and toward those who do hold positions of authority. Even in disagreement, we must remain respectful.

C. Render our Levy (6-7) – *For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.* ^[7] *Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.* Here Paul speaks of the levy we are expected to pay within society: taxes, customs, dues, honor, etc... There are two aspects revealed.

1. Financial – We are responsible to pay tribute to whom tribute is due. This speaks of our taxes in general. None of us enjoy paying taxes, but we are commanded to do so. Jesus said we were to render unto Caesar that which was his. We are also responsible to pay custom to whom custom is due. This refers to taxes on the goods we receive.

2. Personal – Paul also speaks of paying personal and moral levies. This goes back to respect for those in leadership. We are to offer fear and honor to those in authority. This doesn't speak of cowering fear, but of reverence and respect for the office and position. Again there may be fundamental differences in social, spiritual, economic, or other issues, but we must honor the office and those who occupy it at the present time. As we honor those in leadership, we honor God who established their position and placed them in that position.

III. Our Responsibility in Goodwill (8-10) – Finally Paul speaks of our responsibility in goodwill toward those within society at large. This responsibility has several aspects. This first is:

A. Social (8a) – *Owe no man anything.* Many use this to advocate the dangers of purchasing on credit, and I am sure we are all well aware of those dangers. Many today are in a terrible situation due to poor financial planning. I do not believe that is the focus Paul had. He is speaking in broader terms in regard to what we have already discussed. We are to pay our debts within society, fulfilling every obligation we have whether it is financial or moral. Christians must be

recognized as those who understand and meet their obligations. Much damage has been done to Christian witness by those who are unwilling to meet their obligations.

B. Spiritual (8b-9a) – *Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.* ^[9] *For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet.* We are to live our lives before others within society according to the Word of God. There should never be any question regarding our spiritual standing among the world. When our lives are lived in light of God's Word, we will live right before men. That isn't to say the world will embrace us because of our spiritual stand, but they will not have cause to accuse in regard to our faith. We must maintain a positive Christian witness among a world that watches our every move, looking for cause to accuse and condemn.

C. Sacrificial (9b-10) – *and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* ^[10] *Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.* Paul affirms the great commandment given of Christ our Lord: love our neighbor as we love ourselves. This requires sacrifice, being willing to place the needs of others on the same level as our own. We are to be considerate and compassionate toward others. A harsh, judgmental attitude will never reach those who need Christ, but sacrificial love will.

- In reality, this sacrificial love ought to be the characterizing trait for all of life and practice. We must love those with whom we disagree. We must submit to those in authority with a heart of love. The passage doesn't imply this will be easy, but it is expected. Of all the traits we possess, love should shine above the others!

Conclusion: This passage has not been very difficult to discern, but it is often difficult to practice. Our society is getting less tolerant of our faith and it will continue to get worse. We will be faced with some decisions we had rather not make, but we must remain true to the Word and will of God. We must put God first, as our priority, and we must also maintain respect for those in authority over us.

Submission can be difficult, but Jesus provided the supreme example. He submitted to death on the cross for our benefit. Surely we can submit to His will for our lives, seeking to honor Him in all we do. Living this life will require a closeness with the Lord. In fact, it would be impossible otherwise. In today's society, we need a right relationship with Christ more than ever. If you haven't submitted to Christ in salvation, I urge you to do so. If you have, I urge you to submit to obedience in following Him.