

## Study 8 Obey the Law By Loving Others - Romans 13

In Romans chapter 13 Paul writes about two important ways Christians are to live lives as living sacrifices for God. The first involves the relationship between Christians and authorities, specifically civil authorities. The second involves how we are to love our neighbour as our self.

Like 1 Peter, it's helpful to understand the historical setting in which the apostle Paul wrote these inspired words. Emperor Nero came to power in 54AD at the age of 16. Nero's first 5 years were looked upon favourably as he respected the senate. But his rule later devolved into tyranny, extravagance, and cruelty. Nero was especially cruel to Christians. Paul wrote the letter to the Romans in 57 AD, when he still respected the decisions of his senate.

1 Peter also speaks about the need for Christians to submit to authority. It's helpful to note how Christians are to submit. Peter exhorts Christians to submit "for the Lord's sake to every authority" (1 Peter 1:13). In other words Christians should only submit when doing so will honour God. But if submission promotes sin and clearly disobeys God's commands, then Christians cannot, they must not, submit.

Read Romans 13:1-7

1. What does the apostle Paul write about authority and those who have authority (Verses 1-5)?
2. Paul describes leaders as servants: "He (the person in authority) is God's servant" (vs. 4) and "the authorities are God's servants" (vs. 6). Paul also calls himself "a servant of Christ Jesus". Even though Roman authorities at this time were not Christians, how might Paul's use of the word "servant" help us understand how authorities, in Paul's view, should exercise their power?
3. What are some of the reasons Paul gives for submitting to those in authority?
4. There have been times when Christians have resisted and not submitted to the authorities. When might resistance be necessary?

Read Romans 13:8-14

5. Why do you think love is a debt that can never be fully paid (vs. 8)?
6. In light of what we have read in this chapter, what do you think it means today to "clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ" (vs. 14)?

End by praying for our government officials. Ask God to give you and the church in Canada the wisdom to know what it means biblically to submit to authorities in a way that honours God and that demonstrates His love for our neighbour.

## Notes

John Stott in his commentary on this chapter notes there are 4 main models of the relationship between church and state that have been tried:

1. The state controls the church
2. The church controls the state
3. Constantinianism - A compromise in which the state favours the church and the church accommodates to the state in order to retain its favour.
4. Partnership – the church and state recognize and encourage each other's distinct God-given responsibilities in a spirit of constructive collaboration. This fourth model seems to be the best one in light of the teaching in Romans 13.

Question 4: Whenever laws contradict God's Law, believers must resist and not submit. When Pharaoh ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill newborn boys they refused to obey. When King Nebuchadnezzar issued an edict that all must worship his golden image, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused. When King Darius made a decree that no one could pray to any other god except to himself, Daniel refused. And when the Sanhedrin ordered a ban on preaching in the name of Jesus, the apostles disobeyed. "Whenever laws are enacted which contradict God's law, civil disobedience becomes a Christian duty." (Stott, pg.342)

"We need to be cautious in our interpretation of Paul's statements. He cannot be taken to mean all [evil leaders] were personally appointed by God and that God is responsible for their behaviour, or their authority is in no circumstances to be resisted. Paul means rather that all human authority is derived from God's authority. [Pilate for example] misused his authority to condemn Jesus; nevertheless, the authority he used to do this had been delegated to him by God." (Stott, pg. 340)

"Few sayings in the NT have suffered as much misuse as this one (Romans 13:1-7). As soon as Christians, out of loyalty to the gospel of Jesus, offer resistance to a State's totalitarian claim, the representatives of that State, or their collaborationist theological advisors, are accustomed to appeal to this passage, as if Christians are here commanded to endorse all the crimes of a totalitarian State." Oscar Cullman.