

ROMANS

Chapter 13

Submission to the Authorities

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, 4 for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. 7 Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

Ch 13 Luth: "In chapter 13 [Paul] teaches honor and obedience to worldly government. Although worldly government does not make people righteous before God, nevertheless it is instituted in order to accomplish at least this much, that the good may have outward peace and protection and the bad may not be free to do evil in peace and quietness, and without fear. Therefore the good too are to honor it even though they themselves do not need it. Finally, he comprehends it all in love, and sums it up in the example of Christ: as he has done for us, we are also to do, following in his footsteps" (AE 35:379). (TLSB)

There are aspects of life which, it would seem, are not fit materials for this worship, portions of life which prove to be stubborn and intractable stuff when men attempt to weave them into the seamless robe of the new life. One of the most obvious and important of such areas of life would be the Christian's relationship to the Roman government, an institution completely identified with this world, a pagan power supported by pagan religious sanctions. To the Jews it seems a monstrously abnormal thing that God's people should live under pagan Roman rule. The coolly realistic Sadducees might come to terms with the anomaly of Roman rule, the Pharisees submitted to it in resignation as a judgment of God upon His people, the Zealots rejected it as intolerable and passionately rebelled. None found a really positive religious relationship to it. (Franzmann)

13:1 *be subject*. A significant word in vv. 1–7. (CSB)

This is a military term meaning to march in the proper order (cf Eph 5:21). (TLSB)

Paul's mandate that "every person be subject to the *exousiais huperechousais*" might have been a shocking statement to his original hearers, since Nero, then emperor of the Roman Empire, had been fiercely persecuting Christians around the Dispersion. As our Lord Jesus traced all human authority to God (Jn 19:11), it was important for these first-century Christians to understand that government is not the enemy. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

governing authorities. The civil rulers, all of whom were probably pagans at the time Paul was writing, Christians may have been tempted not to submit to them and to claim allegiance only to Christ. (CSB)

instituted by God.† Even the possibility of a persecuting state would not shake Paul’s conviction that civil government is ordained by God. But Paul wrote these words in A.D. 56–57, when the Roman government during Nero’s first five years as emperor (A.D. 54–59) was rated by later historians as one of the best periods of Roman rule, as Nero was influenced by two Stoic philosophers: Seneca (brother of Gallio; cf. Ac 18:12–17) and Burrus (commander of the Praetorian Guard). (CSB)

Paul’s words are inclusive because all authority originates from God, the higher authority to whom ultimate obedience is due both from those in authority and under it (cf Ac 5:29). Although Jews had occasionally clashed with Roman authorities during the Dispersion, they had long recognized the wisdom in supporting governments under which they lived. Paul encourages similar attitudes among Christians. (TLSB)

13:2 *resists...God* –Resisting government authorities normally has dual consequences, both from the civil powers and from God, who authorized the government to rule the kingdom of his left hand. The exception comes when the civil authorities demand what is clearly forbidden by God, wherein we must obey God’s higher power and joyfully suffer the punitive consequences of the government (Acts 5:29, 40–41). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

Believers may at times resist governmental authorities on account of God’s Word, but they must be ready to suffer the consequences (cf Ac 5:40–41). (TLSB)

judgment. Either divine judgment or, more likely, punishment by the governing authorities, since v. 3 (“For”) explains this verse; see also v. 4. (CSB)

13:3 *one who is in authority* – When we think of Paul’s experience in subsequent years, of how the ponderous machinery of Roman law moved to protect one citizen, Paul, in troubled Palestine and carried him to Roma upon his appeal to Caesar (Acts 22-28), one gets some conception of what Paul had in mind when he spoke of the “approval of those in authority.” (Franzmann)

Luther’s first use of the Law (a curb) explains the value of having civil laws that are designed to keep lawbreakers in check and to benefit the peace and safety of society as a whole (1 Tim 1:9; 1 Pet 3:17; 4:15). God’s people must be good examples of law-abiding citizens so as not to bring shame to the Church (1 Pet 3:15–16). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

do what is good and you will receive his approval. Paul is not stating that this will always be true but is describing the proper, ideal function of rulers. When civil rulers overstep their proper function, the Christian is to obey God rather than man (see Ac 4:19; 5:29). (CSB)

A Christian’s outward conduct toward those in authority should be peaceful and respectful (cf 12:18; 1Tm 2:1–2). (TLSB)

receive his approval. A general truth, yet there are also evil rulers. Although they receive their authority from God, He does not dictate how they use it. Governments all too often abuse their authority. (TLSB)

13:4 *he is God's servant.* In the order of divine providence the ruler is God's servant (see Isa 45:1). (CSB)

Gk *diakonos*, as in 12:7, but here the term is applied to those in earthly positions of authority who are to serve God and people. *sword.* God allows governments to use the death penalty. (TLSB)

As the Lord used the Persian King Cyrus as his servant in disciplining Israel, so he uses all government authorities as his *diakonos* to accomplish his ultimate will. That God gives the civil government the authority of punishing evildoers with the *sword* supports the use of capital punishment. As God's *ekdikos*, the government serves as the Lord's own hand in punishing the wicked (1 Ki 2:31; Rom 12:19). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

good. Rulers exist for the benefit of society—to protect the general public by maintaining good order. (CSB)

the sword.† The symbol of Roman authority on both the national and the international levels. Here we find the Biblical principle of using force for the maintenance of good order—including capital punishment. (CSB)

13:5 *sake of conscience.* Civil authorities are ordained by God, and in order to maintain a good conscience Christians must duly honor them. (CSB)

Christians can, in good conscience, come to different conclusions about how to respond to governments that fall short of God's standard in varying degrees. (TLSB)

The eye of faith sees in the authorities the hand of God. (Franzmann)

Christians are not under God's Law but serve him willingly as motivated by the Holy Spirit as he works through Word and Sacrament. While civil laws and punishment were not designed for honest and obedient citizens, Christians obey the laws of the land both to avoid punishment connected with breaking them and to keep a clear conscience before God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

13:6 *you pay taxes.* Because rulers are God's agents, who function for the benefit of society in general. (CSB)

Jesus also asserts this (Mt 22:15–22. (TLSB)

Unbelievers may grumble and complain at paying taxes, but God's people understand that this is how the Lord keeps peace, law, and order in society. Therefore, Christians welcome the opportunity to support those who serve in office on every level of government by paying their taxes. Whether they are Christians or not, the government officials are perhaps unknowingly serving God and his people by providing safety and services to the people they rule, even if it is imperfect or corrupt. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

If they are paying taxes in obedience to the Lord's command, they are in principle recognizing the place and function of the Roman authorities as "ministers of God," intent upon their duties as His ministers. (Franzmann)

ministers of God. Priestly term that elevates both the source of authority and the responsibility of those in power. (TLSB)

13:7 *respect...honor* –Paul is writing to the Romans during the first five years of Nero’s reign, that good beginning whose promise was to be belied by the excesses of that emperor’s later years. But it has been observed that of all the emperors under whom Paul lived there was hardly one who could be called, by ordinary standards of political justice, a “legitimate” possessor of his place and power. (Franzmann)

respect. Includes fear. *honor*. Implies a positive attitude. (TLSB)

Paul’s experience with the state had not been uniformly good. His rights as a Roman citizen had been outrageously ignored by the magistrates of the Roman colony of Philippi (Acts 16:22, 37; 1 Thess 2:2). At the time when he wrote his Second Letter to the Corinthians, a few months before his Letter to the Romans, he had been beaten thrice by Roman rods (2 Cor 11:25). Paul is speaking what has been revealed to him by the Spirit: he walks by faith here, not by seeing. (Franzmann)

Just as our Lord supported paying taxes to Caesar (Mt 22:21) and supported paying taxes to the Jewish temple (Mt 17:24–27), Paul encourages us to provide financial support, revenue, respect, and honor to all who are over us in every area of life: religious, employment, and governmental. Christians are not to be seen as rebels or troublemakers, but as those who bring honor and respect to Christ as they contribute to society and respect all who hold offices. There are no perfect rulers, just as there are no perfect parents, but the Fourth Commandment demands that we honor all parents, because it is in God’s order of society. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

13:1–7 While all governments fall short, Paul implies that the first-century Roman government was adequately carrying out its two essential functions: approving those who do good and punishing evildoers. Paul acknowledges that all authority comes from God, to whom ultimate obedience is due. “We must obey God rather than men” (Ac 5:29). Believers are to honor those in authority, obey the government, and pay their taxes (cf 1Pt 2:13–17). To fail to do so is to suffer the consequences from those in authority and possibly from God as well. God is the ultimate authority; He used His power to save us (1:16). • Thank You for caring for me through those You have placed in authority over me: my parents, teachers, and government officials. Guide them to use their authority according to Your will and help me to obey them. Bless those believers who live under corrupt governments, and guide their consciences to respond in ways pleasing to You. Amen. (TLSB)

Fulfilling the Law Through Love

8 Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. 11 Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. 12 The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

13:8 *owe no one*. To love is the one debt that is never paid off. No matter how much one has loved, he is under obligation to keep on loving. (CSB)

Paul does not oppose all loans but urges us to pay whatever we owe. (TLSB)

Although these words have been used at times to prohibit taking out monetary loans, the sense is that we not *opheilete* any outstanding debts of acts of love. We should not have outstanding financial debts that we ignore any more than to withhold other acts of love, which become merely good intentions. It is the loving motive of our actions that displays a heart that is right with God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

except to love – Previously, Paul said to pay taxes as owed (v 7); here he speaks of a higher duty—to love others. (TLSB)

Literally it says, “Do not owe anybody anything, except..to love.” It is one obligation that should never get completed, one bill that dare never be marked “Paid in Full.” (PBC)

Although some civic responsibilities can be completely met, Christian service is open-ended. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

each another. Includes not only fellow Christians but all people, as the second half of the verse makes clear (“fellowman”). (CSB)

the law. The Mosaic law, which lays down both moral and social responsibilities. (CSB)

One who loves perfectly would fulfill the requirements of God’s Law and be righteous before Him (cf Lk 10:25–28). Earlier, Paul excluded that possibility because of our sinfulness (3:20). Here, we strive to live according to God’s Law because we have been declared righteous “by the mercies of God” (12:1; cf 1Jn 4:10–11). (TLSB)

When asked to identify the Law’s greatest command, Jesus condensed both the first and second parts of the Ten Commandments by saying: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” [a distillation of the first table, Deut 6:5]. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself” [the second table, Lev 19:18]. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” In other words, such a love, freely shown to God and to the neighbor, captures the Law’s deepest intention. (LL)

13:9 Further explains the last statement of v. 8, namely, that love of neighbor encompasses all our social responsibilities. (CSB)

“Paul, when encouraging the regenerate to do good works, clearly presents to them the Ten Commandments” (FC SD VI 21). (TLSB)

Commandments Five, Six, Seven, Eight, Nine, and Ten, along with the Fourth Commandment alluded to earlier, are part of the second table of the Law. They focus on our relationships with other people as compared with our relationship with God. Loving God is defined by the way in which we love other people (1 John 2–4). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

Every commandment requires love for God and our neighbor. (PBC)

your neighbor. Jesus taught that our neighbor is anyone in need (see Lk 10:25–37), which is probably the idea Paul has in mind here. (CSB)

Jesus similarly identifies this as an apt summary of the Law (Mt 22:37–40; cf Gal 5:14). (TLSB)

as yourself. Not a command to love ourselves but a recognition of the fact that we naturally do so. (CSB)

13:10 *love does no wrong* – To love is to place another before self; this is to be a “living sacrifice” (12:1). (TLSB)

love is the fulfillment of the law – In appreciation for having been accepted by God, the Christian now wants to show appreciation by living the new life that conforms to God’s commandments. Such a life reflects the love toward God and our neighbor that Paul urges here. (PBC)

As Christians consider how to behave or react in various situations with others, it must always pass the test of *agapē*. Whether disciplining our children, responding to the hurts and attacks of others, exercising our freedom to eat or drink whatever we wish, or providing for the needs of others, all our actions must flow from the motive of true, godly love. Although this merits us no grace from God, it reflects Luther’s third use of the Law in instructing us how we are to live (Romans 12). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

We love because He first loved us. As He kept the full Law out of His love for God, He enables us to submit to authorities by the power of His love. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 4)

This kind of admonition in Romans does not come out of nowhere! The love these verses ask is not just a warm felling; nor is it a pious resolution to be more patient or longsuffering. Christian love (agape in Greek) is an act of the will; it can be commanded. But this love can only be willed by those who themselves have experienced God’s underserved mercy in Jesus Christ. Only the Gospel motivates and empowers any and all expressions of Christian love. The love Christians show to neighbors, and even to enemies, is so contrary to ordinary human conduct that it is the single greatest sign to the world of the authenticity of Christian discipleship (See John 13:35). (LL)

13:11–14 In this section, as in other NT passages, the certain coming of the end of the present age is used to provide motivation for godly living (see, e.g., Mt 25:31–46; Mk 13:33–37; Jas 5:7–11; 2Pe 3:11–14). (CSB)

13:11 *know the time.* The time of salvation, the closing period of the present age, before the consummation of the kingdom. (CSB)

kairos – It could also be understood time of crisis or last times because they know they are in the last times. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

For Christian of every generation, “the present time” is no time for spiritual slumber. In fact, the window of opportunity to lead a life of love and service to God and our neighbor becomes smaller with each passing day. (PBC)

What we do in this life, we do realizing that “the present time” is a prelude to God’s eternity. (LL)

The hour. The time for action. (CSB)

wake from sleep – hpnos – Is figurative for “delay, carelessness and indifference.” It is a picture of someone who is too lazy to be ready and just wants to hit the snooze button. A Christian life is not like that. It is one of eager anticipation. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

“Paul is not speaking of those people who are dead in the sin of unbelief...but rather about Christians who are living lukewarm lives and snoring in their smugness” (Luther’s Works 25.478). St Paul’s words are like a splash of cold baptismal water in the face of us who are so snoozy! (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

Spiritual inattentiveness. (TLSB)

for salvation. The full realization of salvation at the second coming of Jesus Christ (see 8:23; Heb 9:28; 1Pe 1:5). (CSB)

Christ’s death and resurrection have provided salvation, but He will come again and lead us to experience it fully (cf 5:9–10; Heb 9:28). Each day, His second coming is one day closer. (TLSB)

ora – The eschatological aspect is reinforced by the word “hour.” It is the same word Christ used to denote the time when he would be glorified and the purpose of his coming would be fulfilled (Jn 2:4; 17:1), and also the time of his return (Mk 13:32). All of these times are part of the prophetic “day of the Lord,” when God intervenes in history to save his people and judge the unbelievers. They also include every time the Word and Sacraments are shared. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

is nearer. Every day brings us closer to the second advent of Christ. (CSB)

sotaria – This is THE salvation we are all waiting for, the final deliverance. Every day since we were brought to faith, this salvation comes nearer. Here we are now entering Advent and a new Christian year. May it not be the last for you and for me? It will be the last for a now a few. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

The full realization of our salvation, either at our death or at the second coming of Christ, is always imminent. It could be today! Hence in view of the rapid passage of time, the message is clear: seize the opportunity to live a life of righteousness. (PBC)

Salvation here means the close of this age, when our Lord will return to take those who believe in Him to be with Him forever. (LL)

13:12 *The night.* The present evil age. (CSB)

night is far gone...day is at hand. A clear example of the NT teaching of the “nearness” of the end times (see Mt 24:33; 1Co 7:29; Php 4:5; Jas 5:8–9; 1Pe 4:7; 1Jn 2:18). These texts do not mean that the early Christians believed that Jesus would return within a few years (and thus were mistaken). Rather, they regarded the death and resurrection of Christ as the crucial events of

history that began the last days. Since the next great event in God’s redemptive plan is the second coming of Jesus Christ, “the night,” no matter how long chronologically it may last, is “nearly over.” (CSB)

The picture is of an approaching dawn. This present age of darkness is passing away; light is dawning. (TLSB)

The night – this present age – is marked by sin, suffering, futility, and death. (LL)

the day. The appearing of Jesus Christ, which ushers in the consummation of the kingdom. (CSB)

The day dawned with Easter morning and the present age will give way entirely when Jesus returns on that day which is almost here. (LL)

works of darkness – Deeds of the sinful nature (cf Gal 5:19–21). (TLSB)

put on the armor of light – Reflect the light of Christ and exhibit the fruit of His Spirit (Mt 5:16; Gal 5:22–23; cf Eph 6:10–17). (TLSB)

The plural of *opla* signifies equipment, which in the case of a soldier means defensive and offensive armor. Christians do not walk about in garments of ease and leisure. They face a battle or warfare, forced on them by forces of evil. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

Armor is the right word, for we are in a constant fight with our own sinful nature, which is only too ready to give to all kinds of temptation. (LL)

13:13 *walk properly* – Having Christ’s righteousness by faith also enables and empowers us to live a new life marked by true holiness in our daily lives and conduct. While such life and activity is not what saves us, holiness of living is not simply an optional feature of the Christian life. It is the mark and sign that our faith truly is living and active. We realize then why Paul devotes almost four chapters of this letter (chapters 12–15) to sanctification, that is, holiness of living on the part of the redeemed children of God. (PBC)

Only decent behavior is appropriate in the light of day. Any other lifestyle undermines the Christian witness and threatens to cancel our confession of faith. (LL)

not in orgies – *komos* – Feasting given to excess and closely related to drunkenness. Luther says that the Greeks outdo the Germans and indeed the whole world, because they give attention to banquets [orgies] so enthusiastically that they even devised a god who was in charge of this as a useful activity. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

sensuality – The word here is really *koitais* or beds which suggests multiple partners – what we might call “sleeping around.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

jealousy – This verse provides a sample list of the kind of conduct that Christian men and women cannot approve. It is no shopping list for the Christian. (LL)

13:14 *put on the Lord Jesus Christ.* See Gal 3:27. Paul exhorts believers to display outwardly what has already taken place inwardly—including practicing all the virtues associated with Christ. (CSB)

Baptismal language (Gal 3:27). Refers to living out our Baptism each day (see SC, Baptism, Part 4, p xl). (TLSB)

This process began in our baptism where sometimes the child is dressed a white baptism gown. By renewing our baptism we daily put on this white dress of Christ's righteousness. – Being clothed with Christ means, first and foremost, accepting by faith the righteousness Christ has earned for us. (PBC)

God makes it possible. Among the many spiritual resources God makes available to us, none is more powerful than Holy Baptism. For, as Paul reminds us in Romans 6: “We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” (Romans 6:2; 5-7). In Galatians Paul specifically says our being clothed with the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ came about through baptism: “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (Gal 3:26-27). Jesus is our companion and strength for walking in the light of the day. With Christ as companion, and continually strengthened by His means of grace, we will be busy with acts of love and service, and there will be no time for the thoughts of how to indulge the desires of the sinful nature. Stay in the Son-Shine, Paul urges us, and do not retreat into darkness. We stay in this light when we cling to the help God provides so abundantly: His Gospel word of forgiveness; the constant reminders of our baptism, through which we became God's children; and Christ's gifts of His own body and blood in the Lord's Supper, to which we return for evidences that we can touch and taste His grace and forgiveness. (LL)

make no provision for the flesh – Believers still have sinful, fleshly desires that at times lead them astray (7:14–15), but they should not plan to gratify those desires. (TLSB)

13:8–14 The requirements and essence of God's Law have not changed from the OT. The Law shows us how to love others as we have been loved by God in Christ. “All have sinned and fall short” of God's requirement to love Him and others (3:23). The Gospel calls us to rely on God's mercy in Christ, which then motivates us to love as we have been loved. The context of Rm assures us that God declares us righteous, not because of our ability to love, but solely because of Christ, who “is the end of the law” (10:4). • Father, You have loved me in Christ and declared me to be Your righteous child. Empower me to love and serve others through Christ. Amen. (TLSB)