

# Living within a Society

Thomas Robinson, *Life Renewing* 3, October 1, 2017

## Romans 12:17 – 13:10

<sup>17</sup> **Don't repay anyone evil for evil**, but choose to **do things that are excellent** in the sight of all people. <sup>18</sup> If possible, so far as depends on all of you, **live peaceably with all people**. <sup>19</sup> **Don't avenge yourselves**, my beloved people, but leave room for the wrath, for it is written, "*Vindication is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.*" [Deut 32:35] <sup>20</sup> On the contrary, "*if your enemy is hungry, feed them; if they're thirsty, give them a drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on their head.*" [Prov 25:21-22] <sup>21</sup> Don't be conquered by the evil, but **conquer the evil with the good**.

13:<sup>1</sup> Let every life (*psyche*) **be subject to overarching authorities**. For **there is not an authority except by God**, and so those that are have been arranged by God. <sup>2</sup> As a result the one who opposes authority has resisted the arrangement of God, and those who have resisted will receive a judgment on themselves.

<sup>3</sup> For **those who rule** are not a **fear** to the good deed, but to the evil. Do you wish not to fear authority? **Do the good**, and you will receive praise from it. <sup>4</sup> For it is **a servant responsible to God** for you toward the good. But if you do the evil, be afraid. For authority does not bear **the sword** without an intention to use it. For it is **an avenging servant** responsible to God, for **wrath** on the one practicing the evil. <sup>5</sup> From this flows a necessity to be in subjection, not only because of the wrath but also because of **conscience**.

<sup>6</sup> For because of this also you pay tribute taxes, for they are service workers responsible to God, implementing this very thing. <sup>7</sup> **Pay** the obligations due to all: to whom **tribute**, pay tribute; to whom **tax**, tax; to whom **fear**, fear; to whom **honor**, honor.

<sup>8</sup> **Owe** no one anything, except to **love one other**, for **the one who loves the other has fulfilled law**. <sup>9</sup> For "*You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,*" [Exod 20:13-17] and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" [Lev 19:18] <sup>10</sup> **Love does no evil to the neighbor; therefore love is law's fullness**.

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## Romans 12:2

<sup>2</sup> Don't let yourselves be shaped by this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, in order that you may discern what is God's intention – which is for what is good and pleasing and mature.

## Daniel 4:28 LXX God's Authority is Supreme over Human kingdoms

<sup>28</sup> "King Nebuchadnezzar, The kingdom of Babylon has been taken away from you and is being given to another ... so that you may recognize that the God of heaven has authority in the kingdom of humans and he will give it to whomever he desires.

## Daniel 7:13-14 LXX The 'Son of Man' receives authority over all the earth

<sup>13</sup> I beheld in a vision of the night, and upon the clouds of the heaven came one like a son of man. ....

<sup>14</sup> And authority was given to him, and all the nations of the earth, and all glory was serving him. And his authority is authority of the age to come, which shall never be removed – and his kingship, one that will never be destroyed.

## Mark 10:42-45 Jesus speaks of patterns of authority

<sup>42</sup> So Jesus called his disciples and said to them, "You know that among the nations those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are dominate over them. <sup>43</sup> But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant (*diakonos*),

<sup>44</sup> and whoever wishes to be first among you must be everyone's slave (*doulos*). <sup>45</sup> For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve (*diakonein*), and to give his life a ransom for many."

2 Corinthians II:23-25 Paul describes some of his encounters with authorities

<sup>23</sup> "... Imprisonments ... floggings, and often near death. <sup>24</sup> Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods [Roman], once I received a stoning ..."

Acts 4:18-20 Peter and John refuse to obey the Sanhedrin

<sup>18</sup> (The Sanhedrin commanded Peter and John) not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. <sup>19</sup> But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. <sup>20</sup> For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

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## Looking At Authority from Below and Above

Rom 13:1-7 are verses that have been used and misused in many different ways across the centuries. After Constantine the church was attracted to the power of the state to enforce conformity (unity). Luther, Zwingli, Calvin all wanted civil authorities to enforce doctrine. King James I of England (KJV) believed in the divine right of kings and made sure the KJV translation supported his view: 'He is the minister of God'/'It is a servant responsible to God.' Paul writes from Corinth to Rome in the time of Nero. Jews had been expelled from Rome. Paul has suffered Roman imprisonment and beatings (Act 16). The emperor cult was flourishing. Paul looks at Roman authority as a citizen/Jew/Christian and as a victim of Roman hostility. Rome's overarching authority is real and dangerous but Paul knows that it is not ultimate. Paul is reflecting on the worlds the believers live in. The challenge not to let this age mold the believer but to experience the renewal of the mind to live embodying God's rule in Christ.

## Peaceable Kingdom and Avenging Authority

In Rom 12 Paul described the way of life and thought defined by Jesus: genuine love, showing honor, helping, welcoming, blessing, never avenging, conquering the evil with the good. Being true to the power of God manifested in God's love on the cross and in resurrection. But in Rome or Corinth they live engulfed in that other world. Paul reflects here in abstract terms, speaking of "authority" rather than emperor or governor, and echoes OT usage. Jews long reflected on the power of empires. Note the prophets, and esp. Daniel: Empires are idols or evil beasts, their authority is high among nations but always under God's judgment. Daniel serves the king but disobeys him and warns of Israel's God's authority to remove him. The king could be good but is corrupted and made foolish by power and becomes demonic. Paul knows that God does not intend the world to be anarchic, lawless. God wants authorities. Authority is a servant responsible to God to promote good for people. Paul urges believers to act in ways that fit God's intention. But the authority, seen in the empire, is not the peaceable kingdom. It deals with all people, including evil-doers and is an avenging servant inflicting the sword. It uses the self-serving and violent thinking of this age and thus often is distorted: Paul had felt its abuse and would die under the sword. In Rome, and often since, authority made itself responsible to no one, but it's always responsible to God, not given power by God (to persecute the church or enforce racism, for example), but under judgment.

## Belonging to One Kingdom, Living within Another

How do we negotiate the two worlds when today we're part of both? In a democracy, citizens are the overarching authority choosing officials. Expect authority to do its job as servant. Influence it for the common good to the fullest extent of our power, but know its real limitations. We deal honestly with the obligations that it requires, taxes, fear, honor.

We implement to the fullest extent a community of God's kingdom, embodying genuine love for neighbor, service, rejection of evil, a life of excellence and beauty. We share life together.