

Gamma

Romans 13

Study 21 New Relationships: The world

1. Look at Romans 13:1-7 and state why is it right to submit to the civil authority of the day?

First, Paul says to *because it is right*. He says God invented the state, the civil government. v.1c “The authorities that exist have been established by God.” This certainly means that a) civil governments in general are the institution of God, and therefore deserve respect and submission. But Paul may also mean that, b) the individuals who are ruling and exercising authority are in their positions by God’s “providential” control of all history. Daniel 4:17 says God rules over all human governments and “gives them to whoever he wishes.” Thus Christians are to submit, because of conscience (v.5) — in other words, from a recognition of the role God has given the state.)

Second, Paul says to *because it is wise*. He says that God designed human society in this fashion. “Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right... for he is God’s servant to do you good...” (vv.3-4). Paul is saying that human beings need government to hold people accountable to live in a way that makes it possible for people to live together. Without the threat of punishment, human self-interest would make society impossible. So the very system of human government is a wise one.

One way in which we see the practicality of government is in v.4: “He does not bear the sword for nothing.” “The sword” is clearly the power to punish those who do wrong with civil sanctions (fines, imprisonment, death, etc.) Imagine how chaotic it would be if every citizen “bore the sword!” We know of places and times in which that was the case, and no one wants to live under such circumstances. God’s plan is that only some people can bear the sword — we cannot all do it. In summary, we submit so government can work. If we don’t submit, there is no possibility for social order.

Perhaps there is a third reason. Paul says to *because it is fair*. Paul seems to be indicating that governing is hard work. *This is why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing*. Give everyone what you owe him. (vv.6-7) We are obliged to give them what we owe them. Since they do their part, we must do ours.

Case 1

Obeying the government of the day is not necessarily an easy thing to do especially if that government is an unjust rapacious brutal occupying force which is often corrupt with laws which are not always just. How does a Christian balance this up

1. Look at Mark 12: 14-17 and see how Jesus expects us to juggle the two

**And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk. And they came and said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?" But, knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." And they brought one. And he said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said to him, "Caesar's." Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they marveled at him
How does these verses help us ?**

Jesus was caught in a tricky situation where if he said that it was right to pay the tax he would have been accused of being a collaborator and traitor to his race and if he said not to pay the tax he would have run afoul of the Roman authorities. The principle he set was to give back to the Romans what they were entitled to namely the taxes as they are issued with Roman coins. Hence we are to obey the government of the day no matter who that government is. However the things that are God's is us.. we bear the image of God and hence our lives and loyalty belong to God. Our ultimate overriding allegiance is to God. Hence when the obeying the law will lead to injustice in the eyes of God then we must obey God rather than the law.

In Poland during world war 11 the law set the Nazis was that anyone who harboured a Jew would be breaking the law and was liable to be sentenced to death. Here we have a situation where the law of man was in conflict with the law of God where we love our neighbor. More than 50,000 Polish people obeyed God rather than the Nazi government and paid with their lives.

Some time ago in the news people were asked if they are Malaysian first or a Christian or Muslim first. Many people affirmed that they were Muslim first and then Malaysian

2. Living in a multiracial country do you think this is the kind of answer which will be consistent with our constitution?

This answer will be inconsistent with our constitution which states that that religion is the official religion but all religions will be freely practiced. The constitution was never based on one religion hence by placing ones religion first one would impose that belief upon the rest of the country negating the freedom of religion. The current tension even the in the state of Kelantan where certain pictures were banned from stores of non muslims is the result of religion controlling the state which will make living in a multiracial country difficult.

3. Taking in to account Romans 15 and Mark 12 how would we answer the question are we a Christian first or a Malaysian?

I think the wise answer would be that we are both Malaysian and Christian hence there is no hierarchy because as Jesus said “ my kingdom is not of this earth” when he was asked if he was the King of the Jews. As a Jew living under Rome he was absolutely obedient to the government and did not lead a rebellion even though he was the Messiah. At the same time he was the Son of God and the Messiah who would one day rule the world. In terms of our loyalty to the constitution it is first and foremost and does not conflict with my identity as freedom of religion is enshrined in our constitution. In terms of my faith it is to Jesus first and foremost but it is in different realms although the one will inform the other. My faith will determine who I express my loyalty to my country.

Case 2

Phillip Bowring wrote an article in the New York Times in 2004 about collaboration with and occupying force as Japan was during World War 11. He writes

“Japan was a harsh colonizer but also brought education, railways and industry. So it was not surprising that an ambitious Park Chung Hee assumed a Japanese name and graduated from a Japanese military academy in Manchuria in 1944. As President Park, his subsequent pivotal contribution to South Korean modernization is revered. So could the great Korean patriot have also been a collaborator? History says he was both.

In Indonesia, a young Suharto served in the Dutch and Japanese forces before joining the independence struggle. Elsewhere in Southeast Asia, Thailand not only officially sided with Japan for a while but used this alliance to grab back parts of Malaya, Burma and Cambodia, which it had lost to the European empires. It had to return these in 1945.

In Malaya, the Japanese occupation increased tensions between Chinese and Malays, who had a more neutral view of the Japanese. After the Japanese surrendered, many Malays accused of collaboration were killed. Even in mainly Chinese Singapore, working for the Japanese was unavoidable. Lee Kuan Yew, later the founder of

modern Singapore, learned the language and worked for Japan's propaganda agency."

- 1. Let us look at the situation in Romans 13 and taking in to account the fact that Rome was the occupying force in Palestine enslaving the Jewish population. There was also an underground rebel force of zealots who fought for national liberation. If you were a Malaysian who lived during the Japanese occupation what would your attitude be towards the occupying government of the day in terms of obedience?**
- 2. Is there are role for resistance or is Paul advocating that everyone be collaborators?**

Case 2

Noel's son Jacob was caught stealing from the neighborhood 7 and 11. He was caught with a small iphone in his pocket as he tried to run out of the shop but was caught by the store keeper. He tried lying his way out of the situation but the storekeeper called Noel instead of handing him over to the police. Noel took her son home and was at a loss of how to deal with him. She was very angry with him but her mother Nellie who is Jacob's grandmother was much more sympathetic and told her not to scold him. She said that we should not be so legalistic. All teenagers misbehave once in a while. Just love him, hug him and he will turn around. Love is all that matters she said.

What should Noel do to her son Jacob?

a) In v.9 he says: "the commandments... are summed up in... love your neighbor..." In other words, God's law is God's guidelines on how to love others. So here he is saying,

the laws are really just "love-lines." Then Paul reverses things and says also (literally) that *love IS fulfilling the law* (v.10). He defines love as scrupulously obeying God's law in one's relationship with one's neighbor. So he is also saying, *love is really just following the law*. In other words, Paul refuses to pit love and law against each other — the obedient thing is the loving thing, the loving thing is the obedient thing!

b) Now modern people don't see it this way. In the short-run, it often seems that the loving thing to do is to break the law. For example, often we know that the truth will hurt someone, so we lie. But Paul is warning us not to think we are wiser than God in determining what will hurt or help someone. Usually, when we talk about the "loving thing" we mean the "comfortable thing," that which will give the person the least disturbance or distress. The point of love is to do no harm (v.10). But only God knows what we need ultimately. He built our souls and hearts and he knows what we need. The law therefore is God's way of saying, "you want to do your neighbor 'no harm'? Well, here's how! Follow these guidelines, not your instincts or wisdom." Thus disobeying God's law is never simple disobedience! Every sin is also: a) an assault on God's wisdom and b) a failure of love.

Law and love are often thought to be incompatible. And there are significant differences between them, law being often negative ('you shall not') and love positive, law relating to particular sins and love being a comprehensive principle. But the advocates of the 'new morality' or 'situation ethics' ... insist that now...' love is the end of the law' because law is no longer needed. Love [supposedly] ...discerns intuitively what a true respect for persons will demand in each situation. But this expresses a naive confidence in love's infallibility. The truth is that love cannot manage on its own without an objective moral standard... Paul wrote not that 'love is the end of the law', but that 'love is the fulfilling of the law'. Law and love need each other. Love needs law for its direction, while law needs love for its inspiration."

– John Stott, *Romans*

Meditation

Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. (Romans 8:28-29 ESV)

What wrong attitudes do I need to repent of

What is it in these verses that bring comfort.

What is it in these verses that build me up

Meditate on these for the next week and come back to share with each other how God has spoken to you through the Holy Spirit.