

13:1: *Let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers: for there is no power but of God; and the (powers) that be are ordained of God.*

In the previous chapter Paul presented lots of information about Christian living. This chapter provides practical information about our responsibilities to the governing authorities, and this information was addressed to “*every soul*.” In this passage as well as other places (1 Pet. 3:20; Acts 7:14) *every soul* (*psuche*) means *every person*. A full commentary on this word (as well as the other parts of man’s nature) can be found in the commentary on 1 Thess. 5:23.

God requires *every soul* (person) to be in “*subjection*” to the “*higher powers*.” The words *every soul* show this teaching to be universal. Christians and non-Christians are to submit to the governing authorities. This duty is imposed upon all because all power comes from God (1b). This point is so important it is found in the Old Testament (Dan. 4:17, 25, 34-35). Even Jesus made this point (see Ps. 62:11 and Jn. 19:10-11).

Higher powers is actually the translation of two separate terms (*exousia*—a plural noun that has the sense of *authorities* and *huperecho*, a word meaning *being above/higher*). While there are some commentators who believe these words should be understood as “angelic powers” (or human governments plus angelic beings), it appears the right sense is “state officials” (Brown, 2:609). Three times in this verse we find the word *exousia* (*authorities*). It is also used in verses 2 and 3. *Subjection* is explained in the following paragraphs.

The apostle knew that God has “*ordained*” (*tasso*) earthly government. In other places this term is translated “*appointed*” (Mt. 28:16; Acts 22:10). In Classical Greek *tasso* described the arranging of troops or ships so they would be positioned for battle. Here it means “God’s appointment of ‘the powers that be’” (Brown, 1:476). Since this point is made with a present tense verb, it seems only right to conclude that God is still doing this today. For information on how this point relates to corrupt governments and officials, see the comments below.

Though governing officials may believe that their power comes from a source other than God, Scripture says that governments are of (from) God. God gives men and nations the power to form and sustain governments. Those who have government jobs only possess them because God allows it. A cross-reference that demonstrates man’s ignorance of this fact and God’s control of human governments is Jn. 19:10-11. Were it not for God, no human being, government official, nation, etc. would have any power at all. In view of this all people, officials, and nations should humble themselves before God because He allows people and nations to have power. Knowing that a government’s power comes from God implies several points, some of which are these: (1) If a government is in power by God, it is right for the government to create rules consistent with God’s will and nature. (2) God has given man free-will (choice). Governments are well advised to follow this divine precedent. (3) God is good and righteous; governments should behave in the same manner. (4) God is a religious object who welcomes worship. Governments should not sanction a religion in the sense they create a “state church,” but they should encourage citizens to be people of faith. Being of the “right faith” (see the commentary on Jude 3) is especially good.

Once a system of government is established, men are to obey the laws that are enacted unless the statutes conflict with Scripture (Acts 5:29). If we find a conflict between God’s word and the government, the example left by Daniel should be followed (see Dan. 1:8). As a young man, Daniel refused to eat certain food (this food would have resulted in dietary defilement). This refusal was necessary because the king’s order violated God’s law.

Daniel’s refusal was made with a godly spirit (Dan. 1:12-13). According to Dan. 1:14 he was allowed to reject the food. Midway through the book of Daniel this principle is again illustrated (6:4-9, 22). On this later occasion, Daniel again showed respect for civil authority (6:28). If civil authority or civil government must be opposed, it must be challenged with respect and great care. Christians have no authority to form mobs, be involved with riots, or involve themselves in acts of terrorism.

McArthur (p. 13) stated, “The verb translated ‘be subject’ is an imperative. The Greek word is *hupotasso*, a military term meaning ‘to line up to take your orders.’ Every one of us should get in line to submit to those who are commanding us. Who does the commanding? The higher powers. The

phrase literally means ‘The authorities who have authority over us.’ That is a double phrase in the Greek text, *exousiais huperexousiais*. They are the supreme ruling power. They’re called ‘rulers’ in verse 3. The text makes no distinction between good rulers and bad rulers or fair laws and unfair laws.”

This information may be supplemented with material from Mt. 23:2-3. The authority that was invested in “*Moses’ seat*” was not diminished or nullified even though it was improperly used. In a similar way, governments may improperly use their power, but this does not remove their God-given authority to govern and enforce laws.

There are times when obeying a government’s rules and regulations is difficult. Governments make some rules and laws that we do not like and do not want to obey. Some object to the Social Security system, paying a high percentage of their income for state and federal taxes, wearing seat belts, abiding by established speed laws, etc. Whether we like all of our laws or not, we have a divine obligation to obey them.

When studying this section of the Bible, many ask if evil and corrupt governments are *ordained of God*. In view of what Paul wrote, we must say *yes*. No government or government official has power unless God allows it. There has never been a tyrant who has seized power without God’s permission. No government exists unless God permits it (compare Jn. 19:11 and Acts 17:26). God permits evil governments and rulers to be in power, but He does not necessarily *sanction* evil governments and rulers. This principle is similar to polygamy. In the past, God permitted men to have multiple wives, but He did not sanction or endorse the practice. God permits some things of which He does not approve because mankind has freewill.

Whether a government is good or bad, God can use it to accomplish much good. And, because God is ultimately in control of governments, we have an obligation to obey the laws that our officials enact. If we fail to obey the government, we fail to obey the one who controls it (God).

“God has decreed governments but not what form they shall be. Among the nations, there has been every form of government from tribal rule to democracy, monarchy, and dictatorship” (CBL, Romans, p. 203).

If Christians obey the laws of the land, they should not have too many problems with the government. Those who are in power should look upon God’s people with favor because Christians are law-abiding citizens (3b). Other New Testament passages tell us that obedience is a good way to keep reproach out of the church (1 Pet. 2:13-15; 4:15-16).

Although the citizens of a country should be obedient to the civil authorities, there have been many cases of rebellion. During the first century, there were Jews who questioned the legitimacy of the Roman tax system (Mt. 22:16-17). There were also seditions (Acts 5:36-37). At one point Jews were expelled from Rome (Acts 18:2). In the first century there were even “*Zealots*,” a group that believed there was no king but God. This group also believed that taxes should be paid to God and God alone. The Zealots refused to submit to the governing authorities, and they showed their rebellion by violent acts such as murder and assassinations. Since the Jews were accustomed to rebellion and sedition, those who were converted may have been inclined to continue rebelling against Rome. Also, since the Romans saw Christianity as an extension of Judaism (Acts 18:12-17), they may have assumed that Christians also believed in civil disobedience. It was absolutely necessary to teach the first Christians obedience to civil government. Civil disobedience would have severely hindered the Lord’s work. Today this teaching is still needed.

Though some argue civil government has not come from God (it has been alleged that it came from Nimrod, Gen. 10), this cannot be correct. Paul specifically said *God* ordained governments. Also, the participle Paul used is in the *perfect* tense; this signifies that God ordained the governments in the past and He continues to ordain governments. This participle is also in the *passive* voice. This further proves God was the one who instituted governments. Governments exist because of God.

13:2-3: *Therefore he that resisteth the power, withstandeth the ordinance of God: and they that withstand shall receive to themselves judgment. 3 For rulers are not a terror to the good work, but to the evil. And wouldest thou have no fear of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have*

praise from the same:

If Christians resist governing authorities when God's will is not being violated they are guilty of resisting God. This is the only possible conclusion because God has “*ordained*” governments (1b). Christians may not like the government they have or respect their leaders, but God requires that we live with and under the system we have. We must obey our leaders as fully as possible because resistance, when there is no Biblical basis for it, is sin.

There are two different words for “*resist*” in verse 2. The first term (*antitassomai*) is found only here, Acts 18:6—“*opposed*”; Jas. 4:6; 5:6; 1 Pet. 5:5. It is a present tense verb that means “to arrange one's self opposite or against, to resist” (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 378). Considering the definition and meaning, Paul described the type of person who habitually and defiantly resists governing authorities. Paul described a malcontent protestor or someone who would have tried to overthrow a government. Anyone who has this kind of mindset and behaves in this way will be punished (2b).

Towards the end of verse 2 is the second word for *resist* (*anthistemi*), a term found twice in this text. In other places this term is used in a positive way (Gal. 2:11; Eph. 6:13; Jas. 4:7). Here, however, it has a very negative sense. Human opposition to an established government (unless Christians are being asked to violate God's divine laws) is rebellion to God (His “*ordinance*”) and thus worthy of judgment.

Some believe the “*judgment*” (*krima*) in 2b refers to *judgment by the civil powers*. This interpretation says that civil authorities will punish those who habitually resist the government. It is also possible to join the *judgment* with 2:5. This second explanation says that there will be a *judgment* (prosecution) for civil disobedience at the end of time. Both of these points are true, but we do not know which one of them Paul meant.

In the United States there have been cases of civil disobedience, attempts to subvert local, state, and national powers. There have been Presidential assassins. This section of Romans says that all of these things were wrong, and that those who carried out these acts deserve punishment. These kinds of sins deserve punishment because they are crimes against the government and the one who ordained the government (God).

A study of the Bible reveals three forms of penalties (punishments). These were **restitution**, **corporeal punishment**, and **capital punishment**.

The punishment of *restitution* kept people from being incarcerated. Those who received this form of punishment had to somehow *restore* what they took or damaged. A New Testament example of restoration is found in Zaccheus (Lk. 19:8).

Another form of Biblical punishment was *corporeal* punishment. This punishment was also one that did not involve confinement. Those who received corporeal punishment were disciplined by whippings and beatings. Corporeal punishment was often public, and once it was over, the one who was punished returned to everyday life.

Capital punishment was the ultimate form of punishment. Those who were punished in this way died. Capital punishment was used for the most serious offences whereas the corporeal and restitution punishments were used for lesser crimes. Some of the crimes that merited the death penalty were:

- **Murder**, Num. 35:16-18; 30-31
- **Adultery**, Lev. 20:10
- **Incest**, Lev. 20:11, 12, 14
- **Bestiality**, Ex. 22:19
- **Sodomy**, Lev. 20:13
- **Promiscuous behavior before marriage**, Deut. 22:21
- **Raping an engaged virgin**, Deut. 22:25

- **Kidnapping**, Ex. 21:16
- **Fornication by a priest's daughter**, Lev. 21:9
- **Witchcraft**, Ex. 22:18
- **Offering of a human sacrifice**, Lev. 20:2-5
- **Striking or cursing one's parents**, Ex. 21:15, 17
- **Disobedience to parents**, Deut. 21:18-21
- **Blasphemy**, Lev. 24:11-14
- **Desecrating the Sabbath**, Ex. 35:2
- **Issuing a false prophesy or spreading false doctrine**, Deut. 13:1-10
- **Offering sacrifices to false gods**, Ex. 22:20
- **Refusing to abide by a court's decision**, Deut. 17:9, 12
- **Idolatry**, Lev. 20:2

For more information on the types of punishments and several more references see the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia article entitled "*Punishments*." An examination of both testaments reveals several reasons for punishing those who commit crimes. The following five points summarize these reasons.

- Evildoers must be punished to help maintain justice.
- Evildoers must be punished because this is a function of civil government (Rom. 13:4b).
- Those who commit crimes must be punished because punishment deters others from engaging in wrongdoing. Even though this fact is sometimes disputed, it is true. If *punishment is swift* (Eccl. 8:11; Prov. 20:26, 30, Living Bible), penalties and punishments are a deterrent.
- Punishment sometimes leads to a criminal being restrained or incarcerated. In at least some cases, this makes society a safer and better place.
- The infliction of punishment may permit rehabilitation to take place.

We live in a society that often insists on placing offenders into jails or prisons. This approach to crime and wrongdoing is fairly new. In the early days of America, the Puritans used *corporeal* punishment. Those who committed crimes sat in stocks with their heads, hands, and arms stuck through holes. The early Americans understood the value of corporeal punishment and this system worked. It worked very well. Those who committed very serious crimes were either banished or executed. The Quakers had a different method of punishment; they practiced incarceration. The first American prison was called the "Walnut Street Jail." By 1790, the law had established imprisonment as the normal way to punish criminals (adapted from MacArthur, p. 33).

A careful study of the Old Testament shows that the Hebrews did not use a prison system to deal with wrongdoing. Even though prisons can be found in Roman culture as well as other ancient civilizations, the Jews had little use for incarceration. One of the few passages that does mention confinement is Jer. 37:15.

Instead of locking people up, the Jews practiced instantaneous payment or punishment for people's crimes. This was an excellent system that worked very well. Our society has a slow justice system and has little interest in capital and corporeal punishment. Unless things drastically change, our prison system will likely be the preferred method of punishment for many more years and the inmate population will continue to grow.

Returning to the study of civil government in Romans (13:3), we are provided with additional

information about civil authorities. Those who are “rulers” (*archon*—a term that here describes officials from the first century Roman government) are to be a “terror” (*phobos*) to “evil” people (compare Eccl. 8:11). *Terror* has the sense of “that which strikes terror” (Thayer, p. 656) and “that which arouses fear” (Gingrich and Danker, p. 863). In the Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (3:433) this definition is offered: “fear of legitimate punishment by earthly authorities.” Rulers, if God’s will is being followed, will **not** punish those who are trying to live by the rules and be good citizens. Civil authorities will turn their punitive efforts and attention to those who deserve to be punished (the *evil* members of society). Because of what governments are partly designed to do (punish wrongdoers), Christians should “fear” (*phobeo*) them. This term, used in the clause “*wouldst thou have no fear of the power?*,” is the verb form of *phobos* (the word used previously in this verse). Kittle’s comment on this *fear* (9:215) is quite insightful: “This is addressed to enthusiasts who want to pursue their own path of freedom from the traditional structure of obedience.” Though some were apparently tempted to go their own way, Paul “counsels obedient subjection to given powers” (*ibid*).

There have been instances where governments have terrorized and punished law-abiding citizens. These same governments have honored and aided men and women who were wicked. God permits this because man has free will. However, any government that blesses the wicked and injures the righteous is rebelling against God’s plan for civil government. Rebelling against God on an individual or national level always results in punishment. God wants governments to “praise” (3b) good citizens (and this certainly includes Christians). Christians should be appreciated and not hated by all who are in positions of power. If governments fail to do this, God will judge them. Nations are judged in time and people are judged in eternity.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrews lived under a system of government that consisted of three parts. The first part to this system may be described as *without pity* (Deut. 19:13). Those who lived under the law could not use a “sad story” to reduce or remove their guilt. No matter how the judges felt towards the accused, the feelings were excluded from the verdict and punishment. This factual approach to the law was partially designed to keep others from committing the same crime (Deut. 19:11-20).

The Old Testament system was also *impartial*. No one received special treatment under this system (compare Deut. 13:6-10). Anyone who committed a capital crime and was properly convicted was to receive the death sentence. Whether the criminal was a brother, sister, mother, father, or a prophet of God, there were no exceptions.

The third element in the Old Testament system was *speed*. The execution of punishment was swift (Deut. 25:2-3).

When a system of justice has these three characteristics, it will be a *terror* to those who engage in *evil*. On the other hand, if a government does not use these three principles (and this is generally true of the United States), what will be the result? Some will receive “*pity*” because of a hard luck story. There will be cases when some who are guilty will be fully punished for their crimes, but others, because of their power and influence, will escape prosecution. Not using these three principles also means that punishment will be delayed. In our country, there are numerous inmates on death row. Many of these inmates make appeals that last for years and the cases cost millions of dollars. The Old Testament provides an excellent model for justice. Any nation that follows it will be immeasurably blessed.

One of the most fundamental tasks for any government is to restrain evil by punishing those who commit crimes (3a). While some governments do a better job of this than others, virtually every government prosecutes citizens for serious crimes such as rape, robbery, murder, and terrorism. Even the worst governments have established some kind of standard of right and wrong. Thus, to some extent, governments are following God’s plan.

When we think about being submissive to the government, we must conclude that America was born because this principle was violated. The American Revolution is inconsistent with what Paul wrote. Although we appreciate our freedom (and some who read this material have willingly and honorably served this country), some of our forefathers created this nation by rebelling against civil authority. MacArthur (p. 3) said, “the United States was born out of a violation of Romans 13:1-7 in

the name of Christian freedom. That doesn't mean God won't overrule such violations and bring about good (which He did in this case), but the end never justifies the means."

At the present time, the Christians in this nation enjoy a significant amount of liberty and freedom. Being submissive to the government is not difficult. While we hope that this will always be true, what if a time comes when the civil authorities in this nation become hostile to Christianity? Will we continue to obey the instructions in Rom. 13? Our answer must be *yes*.

In his book *Mere Christianity* (pp. 78-79) C.S. Lewis observed, "Human beings live forever, while the state is only temporal and thus reserved to comparative insignificance." This author's point is that only our souls are eternal. If we expend most or all of our time and resources trying to change the government and dabble in politics, we will lose sight of the Lord's work. Freedom is a cherished blessing, but if it is lost it will not be the end of the world for Christians.

If our freedom is ever taken away, we should remind ourselves of the world that Jesus entered. The Lord came into a world where slavery abounded. It has been estimated that for every free man there were three slaves in Jesus' day (MacArthur, p. 6). The Lord entered into a culture where there were *absolute rulers*. The Caesars had virtually unlimited power and Rome eventually became very unfriendly to the cause of Christ. Herod had so much authority that he was able to order the death of all the male children in Bethlehem who were under the age of two (Matt. 2:16). Also, when Jesus came into the world, taxes were high and there was religious persecution.

Although serious problems existed when the Lord came into the world, Jesus did not spend His time battling government officials. He had no plans to overthrow Rome. Neither did He attempt to eliminate slavery. He left the speeches about economic and political issues to the politicians. He also refused to wave the flag of Judaism. Jesus focused on eternal things. This was the right choice because the Roman Empire no longer exists. Christians should learn from Jesus and apply His example because the earth and everything on it will eventually perish (2 Pet. 3:10-11).

There will be times when Christians will want to interact with their government on certain issues (especially in the area of morality). While these opportunities can and should be used, our emphasis must be in the spiritual realm. We must be good stewards with our national liberties (1 Cor. 4:2), but we must also bear in mind our primary mission (Lk. 19:10). MacArthur (p. 23) put the matter this way: "If you're going to be thrown into prison, make sure you're there for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and not for political protest."

In the first three verses of Rom. 13, Paul presented three reasons for subjecting ourselves to our government officials and laws: (1) Human government exists because of God's decree (1b); (2) Resisting the government is resisting God (2a); (3) Resisting the government leads to punishment (2b).

13:4: *for he is a 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 a minister of God, an avenger for wrath to him that doeth evil.*

When we think about the government, we do not usually view it as a "*minister of God*" (the word from which *minister* is translated is *diakonos*, *deacon*). For a full study of *minister*, see the introductory information in the commentary on 1 Tim. 3:8. According to Paul, governments are *ministers*, and he made this point in the present tense ("*is*"). Governments are to be servants (this suggests tyranny is wrong), and they should *continually* help people and do the job God intends for them to do. As ministers, they should consistently be "*good*" to the people who are law-abiding citizens and put *fear* into those who commit crimes.

A second description of governments is found in verse 7. While many translations again use the word *minister* in verse 7, it is a different word (*leitourgos*). Using two separate terms, and especially *leitourgos* in verse 7, provides a death blow to the idea that God should have no part in a nation's laws, policies, or anything else. Were it not for God, nations and their governments would not exist. Governments may not realize it, but in verses 4 and 7 Paul claimed a *partnership* between God and government. Many today see a strong contrast between God and government, but Paul did not see the two as being complete opposites. There is a connection, but this alliance does not, as noted above,

mean having something like a state sponsored church. Christians must affirm their President, Senators, Congressmen, Court Justices, and all other officials are *servants* (ministers) of God. Those who serve in these positions may not be Christians or even religious, but they are part of the process God has chosen to use in controlling nations and societies. When Christians realize these points they have an answer as to whether or not a Christian may serve in government. If governments are truly *servants of God*, and this is exactly what the opening verses in this chapter teach, how can a Christian sin or be guilty of wrongdoing if he or she is serving or employed by this God ordained institution?

A sound argument for a Christian being part of the military and engaging in armed conflict may be formed in this manner: (1) Governments have been ordained by God (Rom. 13:1-4). (2) Christians must live under the control of their government and be obedient to its laws and statutes (Rom. 13:1-2, 5). (3) These principles are illustrated by taxes (Rom. 13:6). Governments levy them and Christians pay them. (4) Governments also “bear the sword” (Rom. 13:4). They are entitled to punish those who do wrong as well as have an army. (5) Since a government is authorized to have such a force and Christians are to live under the laws of their government, a Christian may help a government carry out the execution of wrong doers, be involved in the confinement of criminals, or be part of a government’s military. There are Christians who cannot conscientiously serve in this manner and this plus other matters related to the conscience are found in the next chapter.

In addition to saying that civil government is a *minister*, Paul revealed *how* a government is supposed to *minister*. A government is to “bear the sword” (verse 4). It is essential to notice that the text does *not* say, “a minister **and** an avenger for wrath.” The text says, “a minister, **an** avenger for wrath.” A government is supposed to serve its citizens as well as God. Part of this service includes punishing those who commit crimes.

There are many ways to punish criminals. One of these ways is described by the word “*sword*” (*machaira*), a word “generally used for the weapon of close combat in the first century. Josephus, who had a command for a time in the Roman army in Galilee, mentions it as the weapon of death worn at the side of the soldier” (Owen, p. 97). The *sword* was an instrument of death, and because Paul used this to illustrate his point, he believed in capital punishment. As MacArthur (p. 45) observed, those in Paul’s day didn’t use the sword to spank or fine people. Neither was the sword a decorative accessory for a military uniform. Vine (1:420) added, “A sword was actually worn by emperors and magistrates, as an emblem for their power of life and death; hence the metaphorical use of the phrase here.”

The *sword* in Rom. 13 is not “*vain*” (for nothing). Paul informed his readers that the government has the right to use the sword (an instrument of death). This right exists because governments are to punish those who commit crimes. When crimes warrant the death penalty (and some do), capital punishment is allowed and is to be practiced. Compare Acts 25:6-11 and Gen. 9:6.

Throughout time, some have objected to capital punishment. One objection to this practice (though objections are hard to understand in light of this chapter) has been based upon the passages that teach Christians to love and forgive all people. Some have asked, “How can capital punishment for a crime be harmonized with Christian love and forgiveness?”

Those who ask this question should be asked why we should allow civil authority to administer any type of punishment. If love and forgiveness negate capital punishment, how can lesser forms of punishment be justified? If love and forgiveness nullify one form of punishment, love and forgiveness negate all forms of punishment.

People familiar with Scripture know that love and forgiveness do not remove the consequences of sin. The person who is guilty of fornication and infected with a sexually transmitted disease can be forgiven for the sin, but he or she will still bear the consequences for the wrong. It should also be observed that God (who is full of love and forgiveness) will sentence many people to an eternal hell. The qualities of love and forgiveness neither conflict with nor negate punishment.

As punishment options are considered, one common suggestion is incarceration. Why not imprison people instead of *use the sword*? No one believes in killing every person who commits a crime. That kind of logic would end up executing people who get traffic tickets. We may not always agree on which crimes deserve death and which merit lengthy or life prison sentences, but there are

certainly cases where people deserve the death penalty. As noted above from Gen. 9:6 and Acts 25:6-11, both testaments speak of capital punishment. If it be argued by Christians that capital punishment removes the chance of repentance, it may be said (1) death eventually comes to all and all lose the chance to repent. Why should a person convicted of a crime and sentenced to death be given “more time” to repent and be saved? (2) Before a criminal is executed (at least in the United States), several years pass. There are inmates who die on death row. These years provide plenty of time for a convicted man or woman to study the Scriptures and seek salvation. (3) Capital punishment is a deterrent against crime—a needed deterrent, and it works if it is done in a reasonable amount of time (Eccl. 8:11).

In the fourth verse of this chapter we have a negative reason for obeying the government (we obey because of fear). Though some are opposed to using fear as an incentive for obedience, fear is a tool to discourage crime and sin. It is an aid that can help governments fulfill God’s will.

The word *avenger* (*ekdikos*) “denotes one who deals justice. It is used of God in 1 Thessalonians 4:6” (Vine, 1:420). Human rulers are supposed to dispense justice, and some of this justice is capital punishment.

13:5: *Wherefore (ye) must needs be in subjection, not only because of the wrath, but also for conscience’ sake.*

The first part of this verse is somewhat repetitive. We need to be good citizens to avoid being punished by God and by our government. The latter part of the verse adds another reason for being obedient—for the *sake of our consciences*. While the previous verse provides a negative reason for obeying governments, this verse provides a positive reason for complying with civil authority. Obeying civil authorities helps us have clean consciences. When people do not fear the government (verse 4), and they do not have consciences bothered by wrongdoing (verse 5), evil quickly spreads and affects every level of society.

A careful reading of this passage shows our *need* to be good citizens is an absolute must. In the Greek New Testament there are three words which convey the sense of absolute necessity and a sense of imperativeness (*dei*, *opheilo*, and the term here—*ananke*). Other passages that illustrate the meaning of *ananke* include Lk. 23:17; 1 Cor. 9:16; 2 Cor. 9:7; Heb. 7:12; Jude 3 (“*constrained*” in the ASV and “*needful*” in the KJV). “*Subjection*” (*hupotasso*) is the same term used in verse one.

Paul understood pursuit of a good conscience will not halt all crime. Having good laws will also not end criminal activity. However, these forces are powerful restraints that will limit crime and make any society a safer place.

The first five verses in this chapter introduce Christians to many different questions and areas of study. One of these questions concerns our involvement with or in civil government. How much association is a child of God allowed to have with civil authority?

Studious Christians have generally answered this question in three different ways. Some have alleged that Christians should not participate in the government at all. Those of this persuasion have even contended that voting is wrong. Others have argued that Christians can take part in any function of the government. The only exceptions to participation would be positions or situations where Christians would be asked or compelled to engage in sinful activities. The final position says that Christians may have a limited participation in government. That is, if someone can do a job in a non-governmental setting with God’s approval (be a recorder, tax assessor, secretary, etc.), a person may work for the government in this same capacity. All three of these positions are options since our involvement with civil government is a matter of judgment (Rom. 14:5b). We are allowed to choose whether we want to actively participate in the operation of our government. Our participation, however, cannot be a job that requires us to lie, cheat, steal, or engage in other sins.

The first five verses in this chapter may be summarized by these points: (1) God has given governments the right to control a nation’s citizens; (2) governments have the right and duty to punish criminals; (3) this punishment can and should include the death penalty; (4) we must be good citizens.

A key word in this passage (as well as other New Testament texts) is “*conscience*” (*suneidesis*).

Outside the New Testament this term first occurs in “AD 59. A former soldier, Lucius Pamiseus, having met a convoy of donkeys loaded with stones, led by a slave, received a violent kick from one of the donkeys. The terrified slave took flight: ‘the slave, aware of his crime, fled’” (Spicq, 3:332-333) because his *conscience* said he would be punished by the soldier. Our definition of this word is less aligned with secular use and more like New Testament writers. In Biblical terms, the *conscience* is “the interior faculty for the personal discernment of good and evil” (Spicq, 3:335). Our conscience is like a court; it makes judgments on the matters brought before it (Brown, 1:350). This is especially evident from Rom. 2:14-15. For additional information about the *conscience*, see the commentary on 1 Tim. 1:5.

13:6-7: *For this cause ye pay tribute also; for they are ministers of God's service, attending continually upon this very thing. 7 Render to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute (is due); custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.*

In this part of the chapter Paul turned to the subject of taxation. This topic is related to the previous verses. Governments are God’s “*ministers*” (verse 4). Thus, as God’s ministers, they are to be supported. Our *support* of this *minister* is to be continual because governments continually govern. This is the same principle that Paul stated in 1 Tim. 5:18.

It may appear to readers of English translations that *minister* in verse 4 is the same term used in verse 6. This is not correct. Here the term is *leitourgos*, a word that had several meanings in both Classical Greek and in the New Testament. In Classical Greek it described people from “governmental and public servants, to priests and prophets in pagan religions, and to angels as spiritual ministers of God. It is also used of demons, calling them ‘servants’ of the signs of zodiac” (CBL, GED, 4:54). In Heb. 1:7 this term is applied to angels. Later in the book of Romans (15:16) Paul used this term to describe himself. Expositor’s (2:697) says the use of the term here stresses “the official character of the service they render” and indicates “they are in their place by God’s appointment for the public good.” *Concerning* their “*attending continually*” (*proskartereo*), Expositor’s (2:697) well says this means “spending all their time on the work.”

Most know that governments sometimes spend too much money. There are also times when governments take too much money from the taxpayers and often fail to work as they should. Money from taxation is sometimes mismanaged and wasted. Because governments sometimes squander tax money and are poor *ministers* of finances as well as other matters such as justice, some have concluded that Christians do not need to pay their entire tax bill. This conclusion is wrong. These two verses teach that poor stewardship on the part of the government does not release us from or reduce our tax obligations. We may not want to pay what we owe, we may think that the tax system is unfair, or we may know of someone who cheats the system and doesn’t get caught. No matter how we feel or what others do, we are obligated to pay our taxes. We will be judged on whether or not we fully cooperated with the taxation system of our government.

Those troubled by excessive taxation may find some comfort from Scripture. Before America was founded, many others paid taxes and some of these taxes were very high. The book of Genesis (41:34-36) states that a 20% tax was placed upon the Egyptians. This taxation allowed the government to provide services for the people as well as make a profit (see Gen. 41:34-36, 53-57; 47:13-14). This tax turned out to be such a useful tool that the government made it a regular part of Egyptian life (Gen. 47:26). This taxation also included a religious exemption; in many parts of the world there are still exemptions for religious organizations and workers.

Other examples of taxation in the Bible are even more fascinating. In some cases, tax bills were *oppressive* (Neh. 5:4). The people in Nehemiah’s day faced such a high tax rate that they borrowed money to pay their tax bills. During another time in Israel’s history (1 Kgs. 12:4, 14), taxes contributed to the split of a nation.

There have been times when taxes were levied because of intimidation (2 Kgs. 23 - Jehoiakim was under pressure to give Pharaoh Necho money). Jehoiakim faced extortion (2 Kgs. 23:35). We know that the Hebrew people paid high taxes. One passage that describes their tax burden is Lev. 27:30-31.

God wanted ten percent of all that His people had. This tithe (which was ten percent) went to the Levites (Num. 18:21-24). The priests were not involved with animals and agriculture so this tax money was used to support them.

If the Hebrew people did not want to pay this tithe, they had an alternative (Lev. 27:31). This option may be illustrated with grain. If a tenth of a farmer's grain was worth \$100, and he wanted to keep all his grain, he could give money. If he took this option, he had to add an additional "*fifth*" (twenty percent) to the value of his tithe. This tax was *off the top*. It had nothing to do with the other offerings such as the free-will offering.

Another tax (the festival tithe) was also taken *off the top* (see Deut. 12:10-11, 17-18). This tax took ten percent of a person's grain, wine, oil, and the firstlings of his herds and flocks. What came from the festival tithe was taken to Jerusalem and eaten by Hebrew families and the Levites. We might call this a national potluck tax (MacArthur, p. 60).

In looking at the above references the Hebrews paid the first ten percent of their income to keep their government and religious systems intact. They paid another ten percent to support their nation's cultural and national heritage. The second tax (which was the festival tax) helped keep the nation unified.

A third tax paid by the Hebrews is described in Deut. 14:28-29 (these verses should also be read). This tax might be called the "*welfare tithe*." At the end of every three years, ten percent was taken to help those who were strangers, orphans, Levites, and widows. If we divide this tax by three (it was collected every third year), this tax was three and a third percent a year. The total tax burden from all these taxes was about twenty three and a third percent per year. This is very close to the twenty percent tax figure used in ancient Egypt.

After paying these taxes, the Hebrews were allowed to make additional contributions (Lev. 19:9-10). The people of Israel were to leave some of the harvest in their fields for the poor. The Lev. 19 reference shows that the poor had access to food, but it was not brought to them. The people had to go get it (compare 2 Thess. 3:10).

Another part of the Hebrew's giving is found in Ex. 23:11 (this passage should be read). The fields were not used every seventh year, but there were still some small harvests. These crops were given to the poor and the animals. This contribution must be added to the other taxes and offerings. There was also the giving described in Lev. 25. The final tax paid by the Hebrews is found in Ex. 30:13 (this passage should be read).

Depending upon how completely the people harvested their fields, the total tax bill for the Hebrews was between twenty-three and twenty five percent (MacArthur, p. 62). This figure does not count the "extra" contributions mentioned in the law (Lev. 25; Ex. 25:2). When the people failed to pay their tithes (taxes), they "*robbed*" God (Mal. 3:8-10). At the present time, those who fail to pay their taxes rob God because governments are God's servants. If we rob the servants, we rob the one they serve.

Information about taxation is found in both testaments. One of the places where this subject is discussed in the New Testament is Mt. 17. Matthew recorded how Jesus received money from a fish to pay the temple tax. The details surrounding this story, as the following paragraphs show, are very significant.

Jesus predicted that He would be betrayed and put to death. The parties responsible for this (Mt. 16:21) were the elders, chief priests, and the scribes. Jesus would die because of the Jewish authorities. According to Mt. 17:24, Jesus entered into Capernaum. The authorities, who would soon seek to have the Lord killed, asked Peter for tax money (24b, "*they that received the half-shekel*"). Jesus paid this tax (Mt. 17:27). At a later time, *this same fund* was used to pay Judas for betraying Jesus (Mt. 26:15 and 27:3). The Lord put money into the very fund that was used to later pay for His betrayal! Matthew added that those who controlled this fund were a "den of thieves" (Mt. 12:12-13).

If anyone could have objected to how tax money was spent, it was the Lord. Since Jesus paid into the tax fund that was controlled by *thieves*, and money was taken from this fund to betray Him, how can Christians *not* pay the taxes levied by their government? The Lord's example forever answers any questions about Christians and taxation.

The tax in Mt. 17 was the “*Double-Drachma Tax*,” a sum equal to about two days of pay. MacArthur (p. 64) notes that if this tax was not paid officials had the power to take compensation out of a person’s possessions. Money collected from this tax helped pay for the Passover season and was thus collected (paid) before that time. The coin that was required for payment (the “*didrachma*”) was not available during this time so two people (such as Jesus and Peter) often paid the bill with a “*shekel*” (or “*stater*”). The *shekel* equaled two *didrachmas*. A “*half shekel*” (verse 24, ASV) equaled one *didrachma*.

Matthew 17 has so much bearing on the subject of taxation that additional thoughts on this passage are appropriate. The officials (Mt. 17:24) asked Peter if Jesus paid the tax and Peter said “*yes*” (verse 25). The apostle apparently responded to this question very quickly. When Peter came to Jesus, the Lord knew what Peter had been asked and what he had said. Thus, 25b records the Lord’s question about a king’s relationship to the government. In the first century, a king’s family did not pay taxes. Peter knew this and correctly concluded a king’s family was “*free*” (not obligated to pay taxes).

The point of the Lord’s illustration is clear. The temple was the house of God. Jesus was the “*Son*” and therefore *free* (not obligated to pay taxes). God’s other children (such as Peter) also had no obligation to pay the tax (the *tax* in this context was the temple tax, not Roman taxes). Though Jesus had no obligation to pay, He didn’t want to “*offend*” people. He didn’t want to create a problem when one didn’t need to be created so He avoided problems by having Peter pay the bill. Peter was to go fishing and the first fish he caught would have the right amount of money in its mouth.

Jesus paid taxes to a system that was run by a *den of thieves* (Mt. 21:12-13), that engaged in *vain worship* (Mt. 15:8-9), and that *contributed to His death*. In view of these facts, we should be able to pay our taxes without too much complaining. If the officials who receive the funds mismanage or abuse what we send, the matter will be between them and God. Jesus had no interest in starting a tax revolt and we shouldn’t either.

The other incident related to Jesus and taxes is found in Mt. 22:15. This is an unusual passage because the “*Herodians*” got together with people who followed the Pharisees. Under normal conditions, the Pharisees and the Herodians hated each other. They also had very different beliefs. One of these differences involved Rome. The Herods were supportive of Rome while the Pharisees were opposed to Rome. Although these two groups were philosophically opposite, they put aside their differences to set a trap for Jesus (Mt. 22:15-16). The Pharisees tried to flatter the Lord. They said He didn’t play favorites. They acknowledged that He paid no attention to a person’s rank, how much money someone had, or anything else. This flattery also contained a question. They wanted to know if it was “*lawful*” to give money to Caesar (verse 17). The Pharisees were hoping for a “*yes*” answer. If they had received this answer they could have said, “Caesar claims to be God. Since you say paying the tribute is lawful, you are endorsing idolatry. Why do you teach that we should support a ruler and/or a government that is idolatrous and pagan?” If Jesus had agreed with the Pharisees, the Herodians would have reported Him to Rome. If He had sided with the Herodians, the religious leaders would have said that Jesus supported Rome. This would have made Him unpopular with the people.

This tax question, unlike the previous one, was a *civil matter* because the money went to the Romans (the other tax was a religious tax). The amount of the Roman tax was one “*denarius*.” This coin, according to Unger’s Bible Dictionary, “was a Roman silver coin in the time of Jesus and the apostles. It took its name from its being first equal to ten ‘donkeys,’ a number afterward increased to sixteen. The earliest specimens are from approximately the start of the second century B.C. From this time it was the principal silver coin of the commonwealth. In the time of Augustus eighty-four denarii were struck from a pound of silver, which would make the standard weight about sixty grains. This Nero reduced by striking ninety-six from the pound, which would give a standard weight of about fifty-two grains, results confirmed by the coins of the periods, which are, however, not exactly true to the standard. In Palestine, in the NT period, evidence points to the denarii as mainly forming the silver currency. The denarius was the daily wage of a laborer. The only way to compute the value of NT coins in current values is to consider what a laborer might earn in a day in various countries of the world (see Matt 20:2,4,7,9-10,13).”

The tax costing a *denarius* was one Jewish people hated to pay. Their distaste for it is seen in the number of revolts that occurred because of it. Thus, the question in Mt. 22:17 was a true test of the Lord's wisdom and skill. We too may not like what our tax dollars are spent on, who spends them, or the amount of money the government takes.

In Rom. 13:6 the word "*tribute*" (*phoros*) is defined as "direct tribute (property-or head-tax) of a subjected people to the foreign ruler" (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:436). It described a tax that had to be paid by every person. We might compare it to our income tax; it was an assessment on one's land, property, slaves, and capital. Aside from Rom. 13:6 and 7, this term is only found in Lk. 20:22; 23:2 where it is part of these famous words: "*to give tribute unto Caesar.*"

There is another word in the New Testament that has an even broader meaning than *phoros*. This word (*telos*) is used in verse seven, and the KJV and the ASV translate it "*custom.*" This second term described a tax on what we would call *commodities*. We might liken it to our tolls, sales tax, and transport tax (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:436 and MacArthur, p. 87). By using two different words in verses 6 and 7, Paul fully described the subject of taxation. These verses tell us that Christians need to pay all their taxes. In addition, the tense of "*pay*" (*teleo*) is present. It is not enough to pay taxes sometimes. When taxes are asked of us, they need to be paid.

In addition to paying their taxes, God's people have another responsibility. Christians are to "*fear*" those who are in positions of power. The word translated *fear* (*phobos*) is very similar to our English word *phobia*. The original term has a broad range of meanings that vary from being absolutely terrified of something to respect. In some places, this word even describes anxiety. Here *phobos* means "respect." Gingrich and Danker (p. 864) define it as "*respect that is due officials.*" In view of this word and definitions, crude jokes about those who collect taxes or scornful and hateful remarks are improper. The same is true of slurs or hateful comments about other parts of government like the IRS. Those who collect or ask for taxes as well as those who work in other parts of the government must be respected. Additional references for this point include 1 Pet. 2:17-18 and Acts 23:5.

Beyond having respect for those who collect taxes, Christians are to "*honor*" (*time*) those who are involved with civil service. Several meanings for this term can be found in the New Testament. In some places, *honor* describes money (Mt. 27:6, "*price*"). In this passage (Rom. 13:7), it means *honor*. Those who collect money and taxes (*tribute* and *custom*) are to receive respect and honor. Christians are to treat government workers with dignity and appreciation.

Another important word in verse 7 is the term "*render*" (*apodidomi*). The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (1:128) says this verb "takes on the sense of ethical obligation when it is used in connection with proper and just conduct or the repayment of a debt, as in Mark 12:17 par. Matt. 22:21; Luke 20:25." The meaning of this word is "give away, give back, repay" (same source, 1:27). See how this word is used in Rom. 12:17. Knowing what the word *render* means allows us to quickly understand the point. Christians are to pay what they owe. The payment of taxes is not a "gift" to the government. Rather, taxes should be viewed as a debt. Knowing and understanding this fact is essential to properly interpreting the next verse.

Christians are to pay "*all*" (*pas*) parties what is "*due*" (*opheile*), a word found only here, 1 Cor. 7:3, and Mt. 18:32. When writing the Septuagint, this term was never used. Here it has the sense of *money*—"the taxes owed to the state" (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:550). *Tribute* and *custom* are explained in the commentary on verse 6.

13:8: *Owe no man anything, save to love one another: for he that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law.*

This verse has troubled numerous Christians. Many have read this passage and concluded that all forms of credit are wrong. Those holding to this view have reasoned, "If we use credit we *owe* someone. Since *owing* (*opheilo*) someone is wrong, credit is wrong." This has been especially troubling for those who needed to borrow money for large purchases like houses, cars, and college. If we consider a parallel passage (God's people in some respects are in the *lending* business, Mt. 5:42), the conclusion commonly drawn by people must be rejected.

There is a connection between the word “render” in verse 7 (a word meaning *repayment of debts* of obligations) and “owe no man anything” (verse 8). When joined together these two verses mean all debts must be paid. Instead of condemning credit or borrowing, Paul told Christians to make good on their debts. This is true for our tax obligations as well as personal bills. As long as we are a “good debtor” (we pay the bills when they come due), God is pleased. Additional proof that using credit is right may be found in Phile. 17-18. Paul had an “account” (a “credit line”). Since this was permissible for Paul, it is acceptable for us.

A practical illustration of what Paul wrote may be drawn from the automobile industry. Suppose a car is financed for a four-year period and the payments are due on the 20th of every month. If the payment is made by the 20th of the month, does the Christian owe anything? The creditor, having received the monthly payment, would say nothing more is owed for that month; payment has been made. It is only when payments are *not made* that people owe in the sense of Rom. 13:8. When people fail to meet their financial obligations, this failure is sin. This sin is a form of theft. Not making car payments is tantamount to stealing a vehicle from a car dealer.

One of the debts we cannot pay (or repay) is “love” (8a). We are to “love our neighbor” and this is a perpetual debt. Our *neighbors* are the people Jesus described in Lk. 10:29-37. Other useful cross-references are Jn. 13:34-35; 1 Cor. 16:14; Eph. 5:2; Col. 3:14; 1 Jn. 3:14, 23; 4:7, 11, 21. Our *debt of love* may be described as “invincible good will, unconquerable benevolence” (McGuiggan quoting E.S. Jones, p. 376). McGuiggan (p. 377) also noted that “Love checks no pedigree or social record before acting. It is absolutely class and color blind. It doesn’t check the breath for liquor or the skin for puncture marks. It doesn’t find the long-haired boy obnoxious or the gaudy clothes intolerable.” When verses 7 and 8 are considered together, a contrast is seen. Paul emphasized “mutual love as the highest and most comprehensive obligation, which supersedes all other obligations—even those mentioned in v. 7” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:552). If we have the right kind of love, everything else will flow from that.

When we love our neighbor we “fulfill the law.” Paul made this same point in Gal. 5:14. When Paul described loving others, he used the word *agape* (this term is found in both Rom. 13:8 and Gal. 5:14). Both of these passages also have the word “fulfilled” (in each passage the term *fulfilled* is in the perfect tense). The combination of *love*, *fulfill*, and *law* means agape love allows us to meet all the demands and requirements of the law. The perfect tense tells us that having the right kind of love makes our obedience to God complete. Those who truly love are those who obey the laws and requirements under which they live (Jn. 14:15).

Even the Old Testament demonstrates the blending of love and law. Those under the Law of Moses were obligated to have this type of love (Lev. 19:18). However, this love did not release the Hebrews from keeping the other commandments such as the Sabbath day, honoring one’s parents, tithing, etc. The New Testament obligates Christians to love others as well as carry out other responsibilities (Rom. 12:9-21). Love is the fulfillment of the law because it motivates us to carry out all the Christian responsibilities found in Scripture.

13:9-10: *For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not covet, and if there be any other commandment, it is summed up in this word, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. 10 Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: love therefore is the fulfilment of the law.*

To fully appreciate the 9th verse the material in verse 8 must be studied. In the previous passage, Paul taught that agape love results in invincible good will and unconquerable benevolence towards others. When this type of love is in the heart, people will not commit sins such as adultery, theft, covetousness, revenge, tax evasion, or something else (verse 9). Agape love for both man and God would do away with murder. If people really loved God and their fellow man, there would be no adultery. Theft and covetousness would vanish. When people are seeking good things for their fellowman (and this is what agape love does), violating God’s laws is unthinkable. Love becomes the “golden chain” that binds people together.

Love has always been the essence of law. This was true for Moses' Law (Lev. 19:18) as well as the law of Christ. The best solution to crime and world problems is love for God and love for our fellowman. Any other solution is second best.

Concerning the sin of “*adultery*” (*moicheuo*), we find this verb 14 times in the New Testament, and “the Scripture is consistent in insisting that sexual relations outside the marriage covenant are sin” (CBL, GED, 4:215). “A person who truly loves will not commit adultery. If two people allow physical passions to entice them to sin, it is not because they love each other too much, but because they love each other too little. In true love there is respect and restraint” (CBL, Romans, p. 207). Inherent in the meaning of adultery is a relationship or partnership that God cannot and will not sanction.

The word translated “*kill*” (*phoneuo*) means “*murder*.” There is a difference between murder and killing and the Bible recognizes this distinction in verses like this text. Here the sense of the word is “the taking of human life for intentional and personal evil reasons. Such conduct is specifically forbidden by God and is certain to be judged with severity” (CBL, GED, 6:448). If there is not a difference between killing and murder, it is wrong to slaughter animals for food and to kill insects like flies. Failing to distinguish between *killing* and *murder* often creates confusion and leads people to erroneous conclusions. At the present time, many do not support the death penalty because they think capital punishment *murders* people. Scripture prohibits *murder*, but it does not prohibit the use of deadly force (i.e. killing).

A sin related to murder is *suicide*. When people are fully cognizant of their actions and they commit suicide they engage in “self murder.” If *murder* is wrong, “self murder” (suicide) is also wrong (in considering this point do not neglect to compare the information about Samson in Heb. 11:32 and Judg. 16:25-30).

When people engage in murder, they lack love (verse 8). This fact may be applied to abortion. Those who take the lives of unborn children commit murder. The unborn are children (see the commentary on the gospels, section 2, Lk. 1:39-41). Since those who commit murder lack love, it may be said that those who support and perform abortions also lack true love.

Another demonstration of unloving behavior is theft. “*Steal*” (*klepto*) is the term Jesus used in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 6:19). It is also used when trying to explain the disappearance of the Lord's body (Mt. 27:64—stealing the Lord's body would have been a sin!). Other meanings of this term include “to cheat” or “bewitch” and even “to conceal” (Kittle, abridged edition, p. 441). Love may also be cast aside by “*bearing false witness*” (*pseudomartureo*), a term found only in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and this passage (see the KJV and NKJV for this sin as it is not included in all Greek manuscripts). Here *bearing false witness* means “give false testimony” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:497). A final specific sin is “*lust*” (*epithumeo*), the same term used in Rom. 7:7, though here and there it is rendered “*covet*.” Thayer (p. 238) understands *covet* as here describing the *arousal* of lust (in various forms). Here is a strong desire for what is forbidden.

In both verses 9 and 10 Paul said our contact with “*neighbors*” (*plesion*) must be positive and negative. Positively, we are to *love* them with *agape* love—a love that transcends our opinions or emotions (this is a present tense verb). Negatively, Christians “*work no ill*” to neighbors. MacKnight (p. 123) offers a good expansion of the thought: “For *love restraineth a man from doing evil to his neighbour*, and leadeth him to do his neighbour every good office in his power.” This is a fuller explanation of our “*debt*” (verse 8).

13:11: *And this, knowing the season, that already it is time for you to awake out of sleep: for now is salvation nearer to us than when we (first) believed.*

The Christians at Rome had received many instructions as well as several reasons for being obedient. Here Paul added another reason for obeying God's will: “*salvation*” was “*nearer*” than “*when they first believed*” (became a Christian). The obvious meaning of these words is, “Time has passed since your conversion. Therefore, the return of the Lord is closer than what it once was.” Because the Lord's return gets closer and closer with each passing moment, these Christians were

told to “*awake out of sleep*.” God’s people were told to be alert, to practice agape love, and to present their bodies as a living sacrifice. This same message still needs to be preached because the Lord’s final return continues to grow closer and closer. “To ‘sleep’ indicates unconcern. Being ‘awake’ implies spiritual readiness” (CBL, Romans, p. 209). Given the context in this and the preceding chapter, *sleep* (*hupnos*) suggests a figurative meaning of “worldliness” (CBL, GED, 6:370). It “indicates the state of stupor, unconsciousness, and unawareness that accompanies indulging the flesh” (ibid).

Some such as Allen have argued this is not the proper meaning of the text. Some believe this verse refers to *physical death* instead of the Lord’s final return. According to this explanation, these Christians were getting closer and closer to the time of death. Because time was passing, they needed to do as much as they could for the Lord before they died. While this explanation is certainly true, the text says “*salvation*,” not *death*. The word *salvation* is more closely associated with the Lord’s final return than physical death.

When describing “*time*” (KJV) or “*season*” (ASV), Paul used one of two very important New Testament words. Bible writers had two words for *time* (*chronos* and *kairos*). In many places these words convey two separate ideas (in other texts, however, they can be synonymous). *Chronos* is like “tick-tock” time (setting a certain time and date). It is clock time or calendar time. *Chronos* is the kind of time an employee might count (the passing minutes or hours till he can go home, the days, weeks, or months that must pass before vacation time or even retirement). A fuller explanation of *chronos* can be found in the commentary on Acts 1:7, but a brief illustration is given here. Imagine a child who is waiting for his birthday. He or she eagerly looks at the calendar each day waiting for their birthday to come. This illustrates *chronos* time. When the day arrives, the child says, “today is my birthday.” At this point the interest in “clock time” diminishes and the focus is on the “special occasion.” It is now *time* to get out the cake and presents, not “watch the clock and calendar.”

We should not expect to find *chronos* used here, because that would suggest Paul and these Christians *knew the date of the Lord’s return*, information Christians do not have (Mt. 24:36). Here Paul chose the second term (*kairos*), a word associated with *special times* (see the illustration in the preceding paragraph). *Kairos* has been called “God time” because it occurs in places where key events, crucial times, special times, and decisive times are described. Here are some examples: Mt. 8:29 (demons recognize a “special time” for their existence); Mt. 12:1 (under the Old Testament the Sabbath day was a “special time”—see too Jesus’ words in verse 8, another indication of why this occasion was so important); Mt. 13:30 (harvest time is a “special time”); Mt. 21:34 (there is a “season” for fruit); Mk. 1:15 (the “time” had come for the kingdom of God); Lk. 8:13 (temptation is a “special time” because it can destroy our relationship with God); Acts 7:20 (when referring to the “time” of Moses’ birth, those in the first century were not thinking of the actual day and hour he was born. It was a divine time, a special and crucial time). Another example of *kairos* is Rom. 5:6 (Jesus died at the right time or “season”). Also in this book is the example in 8:18 (we must suffer for this present “time”). Life is a special period or occasion, but there is another period (“season,” Gal. 6:9) when we are rewarded. A final illustration for *kairos* can be found in Heb. 11:11.

13:12: *The night is far spent, and the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.*

The 11th and 12th verses are somewhat similar to each other. Time continued to pass for those in Rome, just as it does for us. There is no turning back the clock, and for some, the “*night*” is “*far spent*” (i.e. the body is old and cannot last too much longer). Too much time had been spent outside the service of God, so the remaining years must be dedicated to His service. All who are accountable are either “sowing to the flesh” or “sowing to the spirit” and will one day receive a harvest for the crop they planted (Gal. 6:7-8). Much “farm time” has been lost so we must make use of what we have left.

The “*day at hand*” may refer to the time Christians leave life and enter into paradise (Lk. 23:43). *At hand* comes from a single term (*engizo*) that is also used by James (see Jas. 5:8). In the Bible,

salvation is presented from three perspectives, the first of which is the *past* (we *were saved*, Eph. 2:1-5). There is a sense in which we are *presently* saved (Phil. 2:12). A *final and future* sense of salvation is expressed in Rom. 13:12 (1 Cor. 3:15 is another example of salvation being expressed as a future event). Paul's *day at hand*, just like the passage in James, indicates salvation in the third and final sense.

Because we have a limited amount of time, and the hours are continually slipping by, we must not only make the most of them, but must utterly forsake the "*works of darkness*." "*Cast off*" (*apotithemi*) is used in other verses to describe putting aside the old manner of life (see how it is used in Eph. 4:22, 25; Col. 3:8; Heb. 12:1; Jas. 1:21; 1 Pet. 2:1). Christians are to replace evil with an "*armor of light*." Paul presented these images and ideas in chapters 6 and 12, though here *armor* (*hoplon*) can be understood as "equipment" or "apparatus" (CBL, GED, 4:369). Paul's earlier references to living after the spirit instead of the flesh were expressed with statements like "*renewing of the mind*" (12:2) and "*putting the old man to death*" (6:6). The words "*put on*" are from a single term (*enduo*) that is often associated with the positive aspects of Christianity (verse 14 in this chapter; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:24; 6:11, 14; Col. 3:10, 12; 1 Thess. 5:8).

In the Greek text, there is a definite article ("*the*") before *works of darkness* and *armor of light*. This indicates Paul described the whole category of both works. Paul meant evil in every form is to be completely and thoroughly removed from our lives. The evil must be replaced with all types of good and righteous deeds. We, like Jesus, are to "go about doing good" (Acts 10:38).

13:13-14: *Let us walk becomingly, as in the day; not in revelling and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and jealousy. 14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to (fulfil) the lusts (thereof).*

Christians are to "*walk becomingly*." That is, God's people are to live in a way that casts a favorable light upon the church. To *walk becomingly* means to live like it is "*day*" (there is nothing to be ashamed of; we are not trying to hide our deeds in the dark). This principle may be related to all people; it is especially useful for teenagers. Aside from here, *becomingly* (*euschemonos*) is found only in 1 Cor. 14:40 (all things are to be done "*decently*" and in order) and 1 Thess. 4:12 ("*honestly*" in the KJV). "This trait is one that is observable to all people, believers and unbelievers alike" (CBL, GED, 2:652). "It signifies the characteristics of being 'acceptable, honest,' or 'becoming'" (ibid). Secular writers employed it for what was "fitting in daylight." *Becomingly* stood in contrast to "the carelessness, neglect, and indecency of 'night manners'" (Spicq, 2:139). *Walk* (*peripateo*) is the same term used earlier in this book (6:4; 8:1—KJV and Rom. 8:4). It is defined as "*Conduct oneself, live*" (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 3:75).

Although God wants His people to walk in a way that is upright and praiseworthy, most know at least one Christian who casts a dark shadow upon the church. There are churchgoers who are openly or secretly ungodly. These two verses specifically condemn the type of life that "says" but "does not" (Mt. 23:3).

Some of the sins related to *darkness* (verse 12) are found at the end of verse 13. The first sin is "*reveling*" (*komos*), a word meaning noisy frolicking or wild parties. In the KJV this is translated "*rioting*." Writers of Classical Greek used this term "to refer to the riotous processions and feasts connected with the worship of Bacchus and other pagan deities. Such reveling or rioting was often the consequence of drunkenness, and this explains why the New Testament writers always connect *komos* with drunkenness" (CBL, GED, 3:438). Aside from here, this term is only found in Gal. 5:21 and 1 Pet. 4:3. Spicq (2:354) defines it as "a drunken dinner party: 'no more intemperate parties or drunkenness.'" The word "*drunkenness*" (*methē*) does not need to be explained. This word is also found in Gal. 5:21 where Paul classifies it as a "work of the flesh." The next word ("*chambering*") seems to be a euphemism for illicit sexual intercourse. The original word (*koite*) is the Greek word for *bed*. Luke used this word to describe an actual bed in Lk. 11:7. In Rom. 9:10, this word is translated "*conceived*." See too how this term has a sexual connotation in Heb. 13:4. Sexual sin is "in the same category as reveling, drunkenness, strife, and envy" (CBL, GED, 3:369).

The sin of “wantonness” (*aselegia*) is also a work of the flesh and is fully explained in the commentary on Gal. 5:19. In general terms this word described *unbridled lust, excess, licentiousness, lasciviousness, or shamelessness* (Thayer, p. 79). Thayer’s definition for *wantonness* in this passage is “*wanton (acts or) manners, as filthy words, indecent bodily movements, unchaste handling of males and females, etc*” (pp. 79-80). Rienecker and Rogers (p. 379) also give a wonderful definition: “The word contains the idea of shameless greed, animal lust, sheer self-indulgence which is such a slave to its so-called pleasures that it is lost to shame. It is one who acknowledges no restraints, who dares whatsoever his caprice and wanton petulance may suggest.” The sins of “*strife*” (*eris*) and “*jealousy*” (*zelos*), acts that are sins against others, are also found in the Galatian letter (see the commentary on Gal. 5:20-21).

All the sins listed in verses 13 and 14 are synonymous with the parties, unrestrained sexual encounters, and drunkenness found in our world. The Romans had left these things behind, but Paul needed to again remind them to stay away from these things. In fact, verse 14 says “*But*” (*alla*, a strong contrast). The Romans were reminded to “*put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.*”

When the Romans first became Christians, they had *put on Christ* (Gal. 3:27). Those who become Christians clothe themselves with Christ. After the initial entrance into Christ, Paul said believers *continually put on* Jesus (Rom. 13:14). That is, Christians continue to learn and grow so they will be increasingly like the Lord. For additional information on *put on (enduo)*, see the commentary on verse 12. Continuing to improve our Christian life prevents us from “*fulfilling the lusts of the flesh*” and leaves “*no provision for the flesh*” (14b). If we do what is right, we avoid doing what is wrong.

Introduction to chapter 14: In preparing to study the next chapter, it must be remembered that Paul wrote to a congregation that consisted of people from radically different backgrounds. Converted Jews and Gentiles were worshipping together and the different racial backgrounds created some problems. Some of the problems were matters of opinion and not doctrine. Those from a Jewish background would have been especially sensitive to what food was eaten and to observing certain days. The Gentiles were unconcerned about these things. Since some had one set of beliefs about days and food and others had different opinions, a rift could have been created in the church. Thus, in the next chapter, Paul showed that some things are matters of opinion.

An excellent overview is given in the Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (1:171): “In Rome there were apparently two groups of believers, the ‘strong’ and the ‘weak.’ While the ‘strong’ were Christians with a very definite consciousness of authority and freedom, the ‘weak’ were (Jewish Christian) believers who had an uneasy conscience. Because of their pious dread (of impurity and transgression of the law) they ate no meat (Rom. 14:2) and kept certain holy days (v. 5). Paul bids the ‘strong’ (among whom he counts himself, 15:1) to accept those in the community who are *weak* in faith (14:1), and not to despise them (v. 3), just as he encourages the ‘weak’ not to judge those who have different opinions (i.e. those who believe they may eat anything), inasmuch as God has already accepted them (v. 3). One should not place an offense or hindrance in one’s brother’s way (v. 13). This advice is particularly aimed at the ‘strong.’ They should bear with the *weakness* of the *weak* and ‘not please themselves’ (15:1), for ‘Christ did not please himself’ (v. 3).”

Matters of opinion need to be judged by the conscience and people can disagree about them. While the word *conscience (suneidesis)* does not occur in this chapter, the concept or the effects of the conscience are clearly seen. One author (James E. Law, *Romans At A Glance*) put together a series of charts which is very helpful in trying to understand the differences between what is doctrine, what is an opinion, who is *weak*, and who is *strong*. Though many issues change with the passing of time, Law offers some principles that are quite helpful. The following comments come from his section on Romans 14; no page numbers are given because his book is page less.

When we think of spiritual liberty, we are dealing with an area that lacks Biblical legislation. In fact, three very broad categories for Christians are these: **things God has commanded, items God has prohibited, and matters of liberty.** Regarding *commands*, we may look at passages describing how to become a Christian, how to live our daily life for Christ, and how to worship. Under the *prohibitions* category Christians are to avoid sins like hate, envy, fornication, false teaching, etc. Our

areas of *liberty* include the kind of food we choose to eat, days we may wish to observe, whether or not to marry, our occupation, hobbies, where we live, etc.

For a proper understanding of these areas we must “believe and know the truth” (1 Tim. 4:3). Having this knowledge and understanding comes through an intensive study of the Scriptures (2 Tim. 2:15). With our study we recognize that we may draw an incorrect conclusion (1 Cor. 10:12), and may need to revise our conclusions. Along with these tools we pray for wisdom (Jas. 1:5). Christians use these techniques to divide issues into two categories: what *is* lawful and what is *not* lawful. No one has a right to practice what is *unlawful*. Too, not everyone has the right to practice what is *lawful*. A practice may be right in and of itself, but if a person’s conscience forbids doing the lawful act, it would be wrong to violate the conscience (Rom. 14:23). When we think about our liberties we realize that freedom must always have limits. We have “freedom of speech,” but we have no right to engage in slander. We have “freedom to marry,” but it must be in accordance with New Testament teaching (Mt. 19:9). There is “freedom for males to be circumcised,” but we cannot seek justification through circumcision (Gal. 5:3-4). We are entitled to eat whatever we want (Mk. 7:19), but we cannot cause a brother to stumble over our selection and use of food (Rom. 14:13, 20-21). Christians can have the attitude, “Give me liberty or give me death.” Our liberties are to be subordinate to love. Again and again elevating our liberties above love is wrong (1 Cor. 6:6-7; 8:8-9, 12-13; 9:12, 19-23; 10:23-33).

Much of this chapter deals with *judgment*, a matter which is just as relevant now as when this material was first written. Several passages show that God’s people will at times need to form a conclusion on certain matters. Christians make judgments, have opinions, and must sometimes be judges. Jesus once asked a person to judge a matter (Lk. 7:43), and said *right judgment* had been made. Jesus again introduced this concept in Jn. 7:24 and referred to making *righteous judgment*. Peter and John asked non-Christians to make a *judgment* (Acts 4:19). Certainly in this section of Romans Paul referred to Christians making judgments (Rom. 14:5). For other references, see 1 Cor. 6:2-5; 10:15; Acts 15:19; 16:4; 21:25. Towards the end of this book we also read about Christians making judgments (Rom. 16:17). Compare too Phil. 3:17; 2 Thess. 3:14; Tit. 1:10-13. All of us make judgments (have opinions), and most of us share those opinions at one point or another. If and when this is done in a congregational setting, we should make it clear that what is being said is *our judgment* and not a “*thus saith the Lord*.” Paul did this when writing to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 7:6-8).

While a lot of attention is put upon making judgments (decisions), there is also an emphasis on not being a hypocritical, fault-finding judge (Mt. 7:21; Lk. 6:37; Col. 2:16). Just as Joshua was told to not go to the “right or left” (Josh. 1:7), so a *balance* must be struck when considering matters of judgment. We can help find and maintain this balance by remembering other Christians are servants of God and not us (Rom. 14:4). God will accept some people who may make us uncomfortable (Rom. 14:4b). One day we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10), and if we showed no mercy in this life, we can expect a difficult examination before God (Jas. 2:13).

Upon considering all the preceding material, and especially Paul’s point in Rom. 14:4b, we must say there is room for disagreement among God’s people. In Romans 14, Christians abstained from eating meat (food Jesus had declared clean, Mk. 7:19), but the abstainers were still considered Christians (Rom. 14:1). Paul did not suggest this congregation divide or withdraw fellowship from those who refused to eat certain foods. Today we must expect similar disagreement because Christians are at different maturity levels (Rom. 14:1), and because some issues are matters of opinion (Rom. 14:5). When we disagree with people, love must always prevail. Unfortunately, this is not always what occurs (or how people feel) in a local congregation. *Strong* brethren can feel restricted because sharing their opinions on various matters might cause them to be labeled as “liberal,” “progressive,” etc. *Weak* brethren may be afraid to share their decisions because they fear of being viewed as weak and immature. Christians need to be frequently reminded of how the church is like a family, and there will be disagreements on various issues. Both the weak and the strong must be willing to express leniency and toleration towards fellow Christians.

How far should we go in tolerating differences? Perhaps an illustration is the best answer this commentary can give. Imagine a road with a steady stream of traffic. Lines are on the pavement, but the drivers do not stay exactly between the lines. Sometimes they are off to the right, sometimes off to

the left, but they are still on the road. When a car leaves the road, it becomes wrecked. In a similar way, Christians will *travel the road* to salvation, some to the left and some to the right. Unless we can establish that their beliefs and practices have caused them to *make “shipwreck of the faith”* (1 Tim. 1:19), we have no reason to reject them or withdraw fellowship.

Some have understood these points and quickly concluded that “doctrine does not matter.” Whatever someone wants to believe must be tolerated. This is absolutely false. When writing to Timothy, Paul spoke of a false doctrine which “*overthrew*” the faith of Christians (2 Tim. 2:17-18). When writing to the Galatians (5:4), Paul spoke of another error that, if embraced, causes Christians to “fall from grace.” When someone is in error, God says correct them (2 Tim. 2:25). Peter said Hell is reserved for false teachers who do not repent (2 Pet. 2:1, 17); we cannot fellowship and accept those who are not in fellowship with God. If we do not abide in the “*doctrine of Christ*” (2 Jn. 9), we do not have God. Our doctrine is only “*sound*” (or healthy) if it is of God (Tit. 1:9). Godliness as the Bible describes can only come from sound doctrine (1 Tim. 6:3). Incorrect doctrine is from demons (1 Tim. 4:1).

Both common sense and the Bible instruct Christians on how to deal with disagreements. When Christians do not agree, the first steps should be to restudy the topic (2 Tim. 2:15) and pray for wisdom (Jas. 1:5). Additionally, there should be an emphasis on a good attitude towards each other (Rom. 14:19) and a well thought out “defense” of the differing views (1 Pet. 3:15). God has given a “*pattern of sound words*” (2 Tim. 1:13, ASV). We have a pattern for becoming a Christian (the book of Acts) and how to live and worship as Christians (the New Testament). To see how all this information goes together, examples from Law’s book are given in the following paragraphs.

In a local congregation there is a new Christian; we will call her Sally. Sally came from a religious group which prohibits makeup, jewelry, and bright clothing. After her conversion, she meets up with Bobby and they become great friends. As Sally comes to worship, she sees women wearing bright clothing and all the right accessories; she feels uncomfortable. When the spring sales start, the two ladies go the local mall and Bobby sees Sally repeatedly pick up and put down some flashy accessories. It is clear Sally is thinking about trying to blend in better with her new friends, but her conscience is condemning her. Bobby has already discussed the issue with Sally, but Sally still maintains her uneasiness with bright clothing and a wide range of womanly accessories. Should Bobby and the other ladies at the congregation forego makeup and their wardrobes because of a *weak sister*?

In another congregation a few states away, elders are preparing to build a new building. Part of the plan includes a gymnasium which will add a half million dollars more to the building project. Everyone is in favor of the project except Jim. He believes this part of the project is a waste; the church building is for the work of the Lord, not entertainment. Though the elders have spoken with Jim on how this facility will be used in multiple ways, Jim believes it is wrong. What should Jim and the elders do?

Hundreds of similar situations could be offered (additional matters are listed below), and there is no way to give a “one answer fits every case” response. Several Biblical truths, however, can be used when people have differing views on a subject. First, is the person being *factious* about his or her view? Whether a person is right or wrong, a hateful and divisive approach is wrong (Rom. 16:17). Second, if a matter is an opinion (though this may not be recognized by one of the parties involved), a local congregation cannot allow itself to let this opinion be regarded as divine law (Col. 2:16, 20-23; Rev. 22:18). Third, there are times when Christians do not give in to a *weaker* party because doing so would create other and worse difficulties (Gal. 2:3-5). Fourth, we are not under obligation to give up liberties unless the other party’s *conscience* is violated. It is often the case that others may not like what we do (and this is usually what occurs), but their conscience is not affected. Fifth, some views which people have are false (i.e. opposed to New Testament teaching). If after a patient and long course of study the protester continues to resist the truth, the person may need to be refused (Tit. 1:10). Sixth, we must seek to be *longsuffering* as we deal with those who have differences (Eph. 4:2-3). Seventh, we must never forget or underestimate God’s help. When writing to the Philippians (Phil. 3:15), Paul suggested that God can and will help people come to an understanding of His word if this

is lacking. Compare too Mt. 7:7. Eighth, there is an interesting word in Acts 15:28 (*epanankes*), and it is found only here in the New Testament. This term has the sense of “absolute necessity.” When questions arise we might ask ourselves (and others), *Is it absolutely necessary for someone to have this view? Is having another view so serious that we believe the person’s soul will be eternally damned in Hell, and that if their view is not altered we have no choice but to engage in disfellowship?* Ninth, there will be times when Christians choose to separate themselves from other believers (Acts 15:39). If we cannot in good conscience fellowship with brethren who have views other than ours, and we have used all the preceding steps, we may resort to worshipping with brethren of “like faith.” In cases such as this we must still have love and right intentions towards those we have left. Decisions such as this will be based upon the Scriptures, the circumstances for the given situation, and the Christian’s conscience. Each situation is different, and this is illustrated in this chapter. All food is acceptable (Rom. 14:14), but Luke tells us Gentiles were prohibited from eating certain food (Acts 15:28-29). Circumstances do not change truth, but they can affect our choices and behavior. Timothy was told that forbidding marriage is a sign of apostasy (1 Tim. 4:3), but Paul recommended against marriage when writing to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 7:6-8). Tenth, we must always remember that we or those from whom we part company may later change and fellowship may be restored (such happened with Paul, Mark, and Barnabas). Too often brethren demand that someone immediately agree with their view or friendship and fellowship will be severed when they do not believe the issue is a “Heaven or Hell” matter. This is not brotherly love, wisdom, or consistent with the commands to study and seek out God’s will.

Here are some examples of other *matters of conscience* (opinion): Is it okay for a Christian to be cremated? What parenting techniques should and should not be used to discipline children? There can be disagreements over birth control, how money should be spent (or saved), the kind of music we listen to, which songs we should sing in worship, recreational activities, what kinds of jobs we do (hold), whether we think war is Christian or not Christian and whether the death penalty should or should not be applied. Some believe head coverings should be worn in the church building (1 Cor. 11); others do not. Others have strong feelings for or against holidays such as Christmas and Halloween. Many do not agree on which Bible translations should be used or are reliable. In an age of many medical advances, there can be disagreements over medical procedures and new technology. There may be times when we forego liberties out of love because we are to “*walk in love*” (Rom. 14:15). In other cases, the weak must simply bear with the strong.