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## Give Place to Wrath: Relating to Authorities

*Romans, Part LIX*

Romans 12:17-13:7

Stuart W. Bryan

### I. David and Saul (Ps 57 cf. 1 Sam 22:6-23)

*Romans 12:17–13:7*

<sup>17</sup>Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. <sup>18</sup>If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. <sup>19</sup>Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. <sup>20</sup>Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." <sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

<sup>1</sup>Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. <sup>2</sup>Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. <sup>3</sup>For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. <sup>4</sup>For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. <sup>5</sup>Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. <sup>6</sup>For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. <sup>7</sup>Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

### II. Give Place to Wrath

#### A. Vengeance is Mine, says the Lord (12:17-21)

Notice that *vengeance is not* \_\_\_\_\_; *vengeance is God's*. The human sense of indignation at suffering injustice is a sign of God's righteous ordering of the universe and of our creation in the very image of God. We know that injustice is wrong. But Paul reminds us that we must not permit our cries for justice to twist us into practitioners of \_\_\_\_\_. We must not be *overcome by evil*.

#### B. Submit to God's Avenger of Wrath (13:1-7)

It is in this context of personal vengeance that Paul discusses civil authority. He addresses the proper role of civil authority in the context of responding to evil. So here's a short summary of Paul's teaching in our text: Don't take personal vengeance. Rather, let God deal with criminal acts. In this life, one of the ways God does this is through civil authorities. These authorities have been appointed by God to rectify injustices. So submit to them and support them in their labors.

##### 1. *Civil authorities exist by God's decree – so submit to them! (1-2)*

In verses 1-2, Paul commands us to \_\_\_\_\_ to civil authorities because those authorities exist by God's \_\_\_\_\_. God is the One who has ordained civil government; hence, to be a scofflaw, an anarchist, or an egalitarian is to rebel against God. As Calvin writes (p. 281):

*"If it is the will of God to govern the world in this manner, any who despise His power are striving to overturn the order of God, and are therefore resisting God Himself, since to despise the Providence of the One who is the Author of civil government (iuris politici) is to wage war against Him."*

2. *Civil authorities exist to praise good & punish evil – so practice good! (3-5)*

In vv. 3-4, Paul commands us to practice \_\_\_\_\_ works because the duty of civil authorities is to reward those who practice good and punish those who practice \_\_\_\_\_. The civil authority is God's \_\_\_\_\_ – executing His just judgment on the wicked; hence, to be overcome by evil and become an evildoer is to invite God's judgment upon oneself through the magistrate.

Our Lord Christ sings as the Righteous Authority in Psalm 101:

*<sup>1</sup>I will sing of mercy and justice; To You, O LORD, I will sing praises. <sup>2</sup>I will behave wisely in a perfect way. Oh, when will You come to me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. <sup>3</sup>I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; It shall not cling to me. <sup>4</sup>A perverse heart shall depart from me; I will not know wickedness. <sup>5</sup>Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, Him I will destroy; The one who has a haughty look and a proud heart, Him I will not endure. <sup>6</sup>My eyes shall be on the faithful of the land, That they may dwell with me; He who walks in a perfect way, He shall serve me. <sup>7</sup>He who works deceit shall not dwell within my house; He who tells lies shall not continue in my presence. <sup>8</sup>Early I will destroy all the wicked of the land, That I may cut off all the evildoers from the city of the LORD.*

The duty of civil authorities is to reward those who practice good and punish those who practice evil. As N.T. Wright says:

*"Government and magistrates may be more or less good or bad; but - and this is Paul's basic point - government qua government is intended by God and should in principle command submission from Christian and non-Christian alike." (Wright, 619)*

3. *Civil authorities must collect taxes – so render them! (6-7)*

The reason that all human societies have civil authorities that receive \_\_\_\_\_ from their citizens is because civil authorities derive their existence from God's decree. They are God's *ministers* – here the Greek word *leiturgos* – public servants. Whether they know it or not, they are serving God with these public funds and thus accountable to Him for how they use them.

### III. Sphere Sovereignty

In Romans 13, Paul lays out a Christian philosophy of civil authority. Civil authority is not evil in itself. The authorities that exist in the world have been appointed by God. Hence, both the anarchical and egalitarian impulses which claim that civil authority is intrinsically evil are wrong and naïve. *Civil authority is \_\_\_\_\_ because it is ordained of God.*

God has ordered human society into three basic spheres: family, church, and state. Each of these authorities represents and enforces God's authority in its sphere. Because civil authority has been established by God, Christians have an obligation to submit to it. As Peter writes:

*<sup>13</sup>Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, <sup>14</sup>or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. <sup>15</sup>For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—<sup>16</sup>as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. <sup>17</sup>Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king. (1 Peter 2:13–17)*

### IV. Conclusion