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Resisting Unjust Authorities

Romans, Part LX

Romans 13:1-5 with Revelation 13:1-18

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I. Authority and Submission Reviewed

Revelation 13:1–18

¹Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. ²Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority. ³And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast. ⁴So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?” ⁵And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. ⁶Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. ⁷It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. ⁸All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

⁹If anyone has an ear, let him hear. ¹⁰He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

¹¹Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. ¹²And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. ¹³He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. ¹⁴And he deceives those who dwell on the earth—by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. ¹⁵He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. ¹⁶He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, ¹⁷and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

¹⁸Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666.

II. The Corruption of Authority

What do we do when human authority becomes corrupt? We believe not only in _____ – the ideal outlined by Paul in Romans 13 – but also in the _____ – the twisting of the ideal by human sin and rebellion outlined by John in Revelation 13.

A. The Rise of Beasts (Rev 13:1ff cf. Is 27:1; Dan 4:28-37; 7:1-14)

The *beast that arises from the sea* is Rome personified in Nero (13:18 - 666). The *beast from the earth* is the corrupt temple of Jerusalem personified in the high priest. In other words, a corrupt _____ was married to a corrupt church. Such corrupt authorities are like beasts – as God illustrated by turning Nebuchadnezzar into a beast for a time (Dan 4:28-37). But, when his understanding returned, he blessed God and acknowledged that God was the Lord.

B. The Lord of the Beasts (cf. Mt 10:27-33)

Even beastly authorities are subject to God (13:5,7) for He is Lord of the Beasts – they do as He directs. They are subject to His power. Hence, we know that God shall judge these beasts and deliver His people (13:9). Therefore, we needn’t be afraid of them (Mt 10:27-33):

²⁷“Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops. ²⁸And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. ³⁰But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹Do not fear therefore; you are of more value

than many sparrows. ³²“Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. ³³But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

III. The Patience and Faith of the Saints

We display the glory of _____ by humbly accepting positions of authority and using them to bless those under our care and by humbly accepting positions of submission and bringing joy to those who rule over us. Nevertheless, as a result of the fall, this relationship of authority and submission is often tainted by sin. Hence, Christians must, in faith, be prepared to _____ unrighteous laws and the rulers who would implement them.

A. The Saints

_____ means holy ones, those separated from the world to worship and serve the Lord. While the world worships the dragon in various forms, the saints worship God and the Lamb. The title “*saints*” reminds us that when we are facing a beastly civil authority, we need to gather with others who confess the Name of Christ and join them in worship and service of God. Further, it reminds us that we *are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses* (Heb 12:1) who have modeled how to respond to ungodly authorities. The Scriptures are full of faithful saints who were compelled to resist beastly authorities. Resistance to _____ is obedience to God.

B. The Patience of the Saints (cf. Ps 94:20)

“The suffering of afflictions, pain, toil, calamity, provocation or other evil, with a calm, unruffled temper; endurance without murmuring or fretfulness. Patience may spring from constitutional fortitude, from a kind of heroic pride, or from Christian submission to the divine will.” (Webster’s Dictionary 1828)

We Christians labor for the long term. All the ends of the earth shall remember and return to the Lord (Ps 22:27) – but this will take time. When opposition arises, don’t be surprised; but don’t be overwhelmed either. God is the Lord

C. The Faith of the Saints (cf. Ps 146:3-7; Acts 5:29; Rev 20:4;)

This brings us to *the faith of the saints*, our confidence that God’s favor is better than life:

³*Do not put your trust in princes, Nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. ⁴His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; In that very day his plans perish. ⁵Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, Whose hope is in the LORD his God, ⁶Who made heaven and earth, The sea, and all that is in them; Who keeps truth forever, ⁷Who executes justice for the oppressed, Who gives food to the hungry. The LORD gives freedom to the prisoners. (Ps 146:3-7)*

Our trust is in the Lord, not in civil authorities. When it becomes necessary to resist beastly authorities, we must do so as those in submission to God and His law. God is the Lord.

One may well ask: ‘How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?’ The answer lies in the fact that there are two types of laws: just and unjust. I would be the first to advocate for obeying just laws. One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that ‘an unjust law is no law at all.’ Now, what is the difference between the two? How does one determine whether a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas: an unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law.

IV. Conclusion