

**THE LETTER OF PAUL
TO THE ROMANS
July 11, 2018**

Chapter 13

Are Christians to support whatever policies the government deems appropriate?

How Romans 13 was used in Germany

The German Christians was a movement within the German Evangelical Church that existed between 1932 and 1945. It began as an advocacy group to influence church elections and eventually came to represent the ideological principles of Nazism. Like the Nazis, the people in the group were anti-Semitic and racist. The movement was sustained and encouraged by four factors:

- 1917 was the 400th anniversary of the posting of the Ninety-Five Theses by Martin Luther. The movement used this anniversary event to endorse German nationalism. It emphasized that Germany had a preferred place in the Protestant tradition and it legitimized their anti-Semitic views.
- Luther placed less emphasis on the Old Testament and removed the importance of the Jewish community from the Bible which for the German Christians endorsed their way of thinking.
- Those in the movement used Romans 13 (a favorite of Luther) to justify their demands for the people to respect and obey secular authority.
- It revived the notion that Germans needed to remain a *pure* race.

How Romans 13 was (and is) used in America

- Romans 13 was often cited during the American Revolution of 1775 by those who favored obedience to King George III of England.
- After Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 the passage was again cited. The act allowed slaves who had escaped to freedom in the North to be forcibly returned to their owners in the South. Romans 13 was used to correct anyone who challenged the lawfulness of slavery.
- Romans 13 was again cited in the civil rights movement by Martin Luther King Jr. in his letter written from a Birmingham jail. He differentiated between just and unjust laws. He said he would be the first to obey just laws and it was his moral responsibility to do so. Conversely, he had a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws.

June 14, 2018

Attorney General Jeff Sessions defended the administration's policy of separating immigrant children from their families at the border by quoting from Romans 13. He said:

I would cite to you the Apostle Paul and his clear and wise command in Romans 13 to obey the laws of the government because God has ordained them for the purpose of order. Orderly and lawful processes are good in themselves and protect the weak and lawful.

White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders also said:

It is very biblical to enforce these laws.



An Attempt to Discover What Paul is saying in Romans 13:1-7

Christians should not frivolously disregard civil authority.

We have freedom from the law through the death of Jesus Christ.

It is not a license for us to consider ourselves free from civil law.

But this passage is based on those in authority having a relationship with God.

The Roman governing authorities did not understand themselves as servants of God.

Governments can serve the purposes of God whether those in authority intend to do that or not.

But governing authorities are to promote the good and punish the evil.

Such a social order has behind it the authority and purpose of God.

A government that claims absolute devotion to itself ceases to be an agent of God.

Instead it has become an idolatrous opponent of God.

Governments that claim for themselves divine prerogatives are no longer of God.

Paul describes governments as agents which are to promote good and punish evil.

When a government reverses those roles it ceases to be what Paul addresses in Romans 13.

Therefore Romans 13 is speaking to both citizens and to governing bodies.

There are limits to their power especially if the power is used to promote evil or self-interests.

How does one decide at what point a government is no longer of God?

The answer lies in the larger context of the Bible.

There is no dimension of life that is beyond the concern of God or outside his power or control.

The rule of God is not limited to that of religion only.

Those who govern are ultimately accountable to God as are we.

Read Mark 12:13-17

One has an obligation to the civil authorities as well as to God.

Our obligation to God does not rule out an obligation to civil authorities.

Our obligation to civil authorities cannot rule out our obligation to God.

Obedience to civil authority is a Christian duty.

It is to be exercised within the framework of our more far-reaching commitment to God.

God is a God of order and not disorder.

Anarchy is not a possible Christian stance.

It is not permissible in the name of Christ to provoke disorder for its own sake.

Romans 13:8-14

Christians also have an obligation to their neighbors.

Love is the key to our relationship with others and is the fulfillment of the law as given to Israel.

Love is the Christian rule of the Christian life that is centered on actions and not emotions.

To love our enemy means we work for their good and not to do them harm.

Love acts for the good of another.

Romans 14:1-12

Danger of self-righteousness: We use our convictions to measure the convictions of others.

Paul does not take sides on whether the *weak* or the *strong* are more correct.

His intent is to emphasize the threat the distinction makes for Christian unity.

His advice to both groups is to respect the convictions of others.

Paul lists three reasons why condemnation of the other is wrong:

- A Christian is a servant of God and a member of the household.
We cannot criticize someone in our own house.
- Although our practices may differ they each grow from a common root.
All are done in order to honor God.
What is done to honor God may not be condemned by those who prefer another way.
- To set oneself up as judge is to sanction oneself to what belongs properly only to God.
The danger of self-righteousness is the same danger of self-idolatry.
Either one sets us up to be *gods*.
We have enough to worry about with our own conduct without additional burdens.

Along with our freedom come responsibilities.

We will not be judged on whether or not we are worthy of salvation (accomplished in Christ).

We will be judged on the quality of our Christian life.

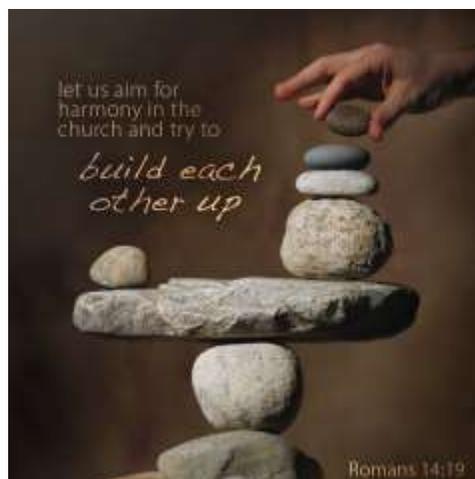
It emphasizes the need for responsible action on the part of Christians.

Flexibility within responsible limits demands tolerance for behaviors of varying kinds.

This is not a license for anything goes ... within the realm of a responsible response is freedom.

Decisions are based on making sure our actions do not hinder the faith of another.

We need to do everything to honor God.



Romans 14:13-23

At issue is our right to use our freedom and responsibility in a way that is constructive.
In this example one is not a better Christian because of one's diet.
No one can tell Christians what they may or may not eat on religious grounds.
Yet that clear message is tempered by responsibility to others.
There are people who have not reached the maturity of faith to realize their freedoms.

So ...

The limits of our freedom point to what is good for our neighbor.
Love is what limits our freedom for the sake of the other.
To flaunt our freedom is to abuse it.
What is at stake is the unity of humankind in Christ.

The elimination of dietary rules made it possible for Jews to associate with Gentiles.
Yet if that freedom is used to offend those very people then it becomes a hindrance.
The test of human behavior remains to do what must be done to honor God.

Christ did not act to please himself but acted to please God.
Christ died on the cross for the benefit of all humankind.
It is in thankful response to God that we must act accordingly.

July 18 (Last Class) – Romans 15-16