

## **BIBLE STUDIES ON THE BOOK OF ROMANS by E.J. Waggoner.**

Study 15, (on Romans 13:1-8) p. 85 to 93

...so tonight we will take up a study of the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter....this chapter is frequently used and quoted to prove that civil government has something to do with religion; and the reason why this mistake is made, is that the chapter is regarded as a treatise setting forth the duties of civil rulers, and showing the limits to which their power may extend. But this is a mistake.

In this chapter, the apostle Paul is speaking to professed Christians. As we have already stated, this is proved early in the epistle where in the second chapter the apostle addresses those who rest in the law and make their boast of God. From that point forward, the epistle is addressed to those who profess to know God. In the seventh chapter the apostle says, "For I speak to them that know the law." So instead of the thirteenth chapter being simply a treatise on civil government, showing its duties and limits, it is addressed to the church, showing how they should relate themselves to God, so as not to be in conflict with the powers that be. If this is born in mind, it will be a great help in the solution of the very important questions which are considered in the chapter.

"Let every soul be subject to the higher powers. For there is no power but of God.; the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive unto themselves damnation." Romans 13:1 and 2. These verses are not to be construed as teaching that Christians must obey every command that civil governments may impose upon them. We may recall the time in which this was written, and the people to whom it was addressed.

It was written at a time when the Roman Empire held sway over all the known world, and it was especially addressed to the church at Rome, the capital of this universal Empire. The emperor reigning at that time was Nero, and he was doubtless the wickedest, the most blood-thirsty, and abominable licentious monarch that ever sat upon the throne of any kingdom. I suppose there never was another man in the world that combined so much evil in himself as Nero, the emperor of the Romans. He was a heathen, and a heathen of the heathens.

The laws which were enacted in Rome recognized the heathen religion, and were opposed to Christianity. In the reign of Nero occurred the most cruel persecution to the Christians that ever has been since the world began; and it was during this persecution that the apostle Paul lost his head. Therefore it is manifest that the apostle, when he says that we are to be subject to the powers that be, does not mean to convey the idea that we should do everything that the powers that be tell us to do. If the apostle Paul had done that, he never would have lost his head: but he suffered because the truth which he preached was opposed to the principles of the Roman government; and we cannot suppose that the apostle Paul would preach one thing and do another. Then the question arises, "What does he mean by exhorting us to be "subject unto the higher powers"?"

Take the case negatively. We are not to resist the powers that be. Why? Because we are children of the Highest, —children of the heavenly kingdom, and the rule of that kingdom is *peace*. The ruler of the kingdom is the Prince of peace. Therefore since we have been delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of His Son, we are to allow the peace of God to rule in our hearts. *Colossians* 3:15. For this reason we are to "follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." *Hebrews* 12:14.

In the 12th chapter of *Romans* we are instructed, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." That does not mean that we are to live peaceably with all men just as long as we can endure their provocation, and when that gets unendurable, that we are at liberty to have it out with them in a regular quarrel. But, it does mean that "if it be possible, as much as *lieth in you*," you are to live at peace with all

men. How far now, is it possible for the Christian to live at peace with all men? It is possible for him to be at peace with all men, as far as he himself is concerned, all the time. For, he is dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto Christ. Christ dwells in his heart by faith, and Christ is the Prince of peace. Then there are no circumstances under which the Christian is justified in losing his temper and declaring war either against an individual or a government.

In *Galatians* 5:18, we are told that, "If ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law," The works of the flesh are the works which are done by those who are under the law, and in the enumeration of these works we find the word "strife." Therefore a Christian cannot enter into strife, because he is not in the flesh. Strife can have no place in us: therefore so far as we are concerned it will be peace all the time. But if those men with whom we have to do, steel their hearts against the truth of God, and will not be affected by the truth, they will make trouble, but the trouble will be on their part; with us there will be peace all the time.

In *I Peter* 2:21 and onward, we are told that Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps. He, when He was reviled, reviled not again: when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously. The case of Christ before the Sanhedrin, before Pilate, is an instance of perfect peace. Therefore, if we follow the example of Christ, and the exhortation of Paul, which being inspired must be in harmony with it, we shall not arrive at that point where so many say that, "forbearance ceases to be a virtue." If we are Christians, we have the love of Christ abiding in our hearts. That love is charity, and charity endureth *all* things.

Christ, in His sermon on the mount, commanded us "that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." Now does He mean what He says or not? Does that mean that if a wicked man comes up to us and offers personal violence, we are to defend ourselves, or not? We leave this question open for you to decide for yourselves.

No matter under what government a Christian is living, he is in duty bound not to resist its ordinances. All governments, good, bad, or indifferent, are ordained of God; so that the wickedness or evils existing in the government give no excuse to the Christian for resisting. Governments are all ordained of God, and they are all better than anarchy; but they are not ordained to take charge of and promote or carry out religion, because God has not delegated His authority in matters of religion to any earthly power, although they are ordained of God.

Now how about being subject to the powers, yet not always obeying them? Take a familiar example. Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylon, and his was certainly a government ordained of God, for God had given all the lands over which he ruled into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and all nations were to serve him, and his son and his son's son. Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold and commanded that when the music sounded, all the people were to bow down to it. It was told to the king that the three Hebrews, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had not fallen down and worshiped the golden image. The king called them to him, and told them that although they had disobeyed him, he would overlook that offense, if when the music sounded again, they would worship the image. "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy god, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

They did not resist the king. He gave them an alternative. They could do one of two things, —bow down to the image, or be cast into the furnace. They disobeyed the order to bow down to the image; but they did not resist the alternative to go into the furnace. And moreover, they told the king that their God was able to deliver them out of his hand; but they did not know whether He would or not. That would not matter any way. If He did not choose, to deliver them, they were to be burned. That was all right; they would yield up their lives, triumph in death, and in that way be delivered out of his hand, if in no other.

What is the relation of Christians to civil government? Christ is the anointed One. For what was He anointed? "To preach good tidings [the gospel] unto the meek; . . .to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." Now there will be a time when the kingdoms of this earth will become the kingdoms of our Lord .and of His Christ, as is stated by the prophet.

In the second Psalm, we read, "Ask of Me and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance,' and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." But what is He going to do with them? Dash them in pieces. That time has not come yet; therefore Christ, the Mediator, has nothing whatever to do with the governments of earth; His rule is a spiritual rule in the hearts of His people His kingdom, for He sits upon a throne and rules, is a rule over the hearts of His people. He rules in the hearts of men, where it is impossible for the kings of the earth to rule. Strife may rule there all the time; but they cannot prevent it; or peace may have dominion, and they cannot disturb it. He sits upon a throne of grace, and there He dispenses grace without interfering with the governments of earth and in a way which they cannot hinder.

The great men of this earth exercise lordship over others; but Christ has commanded that it be not so among His people, but he that would be greatest among them, should be the servant of all.

Take Daniel as an example of how men should be subject to the powers that be, and still be subject to God. There was a decree established, that whosoever should ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days after the passing of that decree, save of the great king Darius should be cast into the den of lions. Daniel occupied a high position in the government, and he was a peaceable citizen, as every Christian must be. It would have been very easy for him to say, "I do not need to ask anything of any man for thirty days, and I can shut myself up in my house where no one can see me, and there I can worship God quietly, and so I will carry on my religion and worship the God of heaven, and still not stir up the anger of the king against me.

This is a question of vital importance to us. When persecution is liable to come upon us, shall we cease to work openly in our fields on the first day of the week, as we have been doing, and do something quietly in our houses, so that no one will see us, or should we do as Daniel did? He opened his windows and did exactly what they told him not to do,—make petitions to the God of heaven. He did it openly where his enemies could see him do it, although the decree had been passed that for following such a course he should be cast into the den of lions, Are we not, when for fear of persecution, we work quietly in our houses where no man can see us, —are we not hiding our light under a bushel? Some say that there is no need of being foolhardy. That is very true; but shall we be foolhardy if we do as Daniel did? Shall we say that he made a mistake?

In *I Peter 2:13*, we are told, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing, you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: as free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king." This is parallel with the statement in the 13th of *Romans*, as is seen by verse 7.

Peter carries this same principle into the minor things of life, and immediately after speaking of the duty of obedience to the king, he speaks of the duty of servants to their masters. If we find ourselves subject to a master, and there is no difference whether he rules over one or over millions, we must all be subject to him. But supposing that the master be a bad man, and he commands those who are under him to do something that is wrong, then what? "For this is thankworthy if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." *I Peter 2:19-20*.

If a man finds himself the subject of a bad master, and he does everything that that bad master tells him, how can he suffer for it? He is a willing tool in the hands of his master; but the suffering is brought by the fact that

he will not do the wicked things commanded; and this is what is acceptable in the sight of God. He has disobeyed the power, and because he has disobeyed it, he suffers; but he suffers for well doing: If he obeys that wicked master, he must disobey God. This we know would be wrong. But it is perfectly right to disobey the wicked decree of a master or government, provided always that when the punishment comes, we take it patiently. This is acceptable with God. The very fact that a man suffers for well doing, shows that he is the servant of God, and accepted of Him. Then how is it that we can be subject to the powers that be, and yet go directly contrary to what they say?— By submitting to the punishment, but not doing the evil thing they commanded us to do. As Christians, we owe allegiance to God, the highest power, and to Him alone.

“Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power?” “Do that which is good,” and we shall have praise of the same. The same truth is brought out by the prophet Isaiah when he says, “Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the Lord of Hosts Himself; and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread.” *Isaiah* 8:12, 13. Christians must sanctify the Lord in their hearts; then He will be their fear, and they will not fear what men shall do unto them.

Peter brings out the same truth when he says, “But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and be ready, always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.” *I Peter* 3:14, 15. Don’t be afraid of the terror. Why? because we have sanctified the Lord God in our hearts, and He is our fear. God is with us, Christ is with us, and when men cast reproaches upon us, they cast them upon our Saviour. He is the one that suffers, not we.

We are to sanctify the Lord in our hearts and to be ready always to give a reason of the hope that is in us. It has seemed to me from the connections of these words, and the scripture that is quoted, that the special time when we are to give this answer of the hope that is in us, is the time when we are brought before magistrates for well doing. What help have we? We have sanctified the Lord God in our hearts by taking His word into our hearts so we need not make any great provision for what we will say. For God will give “a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries will not be able to gainsay or resist.” *Luke* 21:15.

It seems to me that the most important thing for all of us who have this special truth which is bound to bring us into trouble with the powers that be, is to sanctify the Lord God in our hearts by the Spirit of God and His word. We must become students of the word of God, and followers of Christ and His gospel. I believe there are farmers and mechanics among us, who, although they have never been able to put texts together so as to preach a sermon, have nevertheless sanctified the Lord in their heads by faithful study of His word. These men will be brought before courts for their faith, and they will preach the gospel there by way of their defense, because God in that day will give them a mouth and wisdom, that their adversaries can neither gainsay nor resist.

Sometimes people say that there is no use to make our faith prominent and thus to court persecution. But if we follow such a policy as this, brethren, what are we doing but hiding our light beneath the bushel? If you do not allow any one to see the shining of your light, what good does it do?

Sometimes we are in danger of working so diligently to stay persecution, so that we may be able to carry forward the work in peace, that we neglect the work. We are told that if we disobey the laws and are put in prison, our wives and families will suffer, and that the first duty we have is to provide for them. Now, brethren, how far can we carry this? Shall we show our loyalty to God, or shall we hide it? 0, says one, “We can keep our religion; but we can keep it quietly; we must not leave our families to suffer!” Brethren, what doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and yet lose his own soul? The Master says, “He that loseth his life for My sake shall find it.”

Go back to Daniel’s case. He did not keep quiet: he prayed openly.

“Yes; it was all right for Daniel to do that, but it is different now in the nineteenth century.” No; it is not. It is just the same. The people might have said it him, “Daniel, you can do your people good in the position of influence you hold; you can keep them from being persecuted. Now don’t go and get shut up in that den of lions, and lose your life, and bring great calamity upon your people!” But Daniel did go to the den of lions, and he went there for living out his faith openly, and in a way that all men could see it, and did it bring calamity upon his people? No; indeed. In consequence of his obedience, the name of the God of Heaven was more highly honored and revered in that nation than it ever had been before.

It is our duty to preach the gospel; to arise and let our light shine, and if we do that, God will hold the winds as long as they ought to be held. Brethren, the third angel’s message is the greatest thing in all the earth. Men don’t regard it as such; but the time will come in our lifetime when the third angel’s message will be the theme and topic of conversation in every mouth. But it will never be brought to that position by people who keep quiet about it, but by those who have their trust in God, and are not afraid to speak the words which He has given them.

In doing this, we will not take our lives in our hands, and I thank God for it. Our lives will be hid with Christ in God, and He will care for them. The truth will be brought to this high place simply by men and women going forth and preaching the gospel and obeying that which they preach. Let people know the truth. If we have a peaceful time in which to spread it, we will be thankful for that. And if men make laws that would seem to cut off the channels through which it can go, we can be thankful that we worship a God who makes even the wrath of men to praise Him; and He will do it, —He will spread His gospel by means of those very laws which wicked men have enacted to crush out its life. God holds the winds, brethren, and He commands us to carry the message. He will hold them as long as it is best for them to be held, and when they begin to blow, and we feel the first puffs in the beginning of persecution, they will do just what the Lord wants them to do.

We sing,—  
If through unruffled seas,  
Calmly toward heaven we sail,  
With grateful hearts, O God, to Thee,  
We’ll own the favoring gale.  
But should the surges rise,  
And rest delay to come,  
Blest be the sorrow, kind the storm,  
Which drives us nearer home.

We often sing that, brethren, when we don’t believe it. For when we see the storm coming, we think it is not best for us to let it come so we hide from it or try to prevent it. But everything works the counsel of God’s will. The storm will hasten the calm, and rest will not delay to come.

“Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor. Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.” *Romans* 13:7, 8. If you do this, you live peaceably with all men, as far as lieth in you. If you love your neighbor as yourself, that is the fulfilling of the whole law; because a man, to love his neighbor, must love God, because there is no love but of God.

If I love my neighbor as myself, it is simply because the love of God is abiding in my heart. It is because God has taken up His abode in my heart, and there is no man on earth who can take Him away from me. It is for this reason that the apostle refers to the last table of the law, because if we do our duty toward our neighbor, it naturally follows that we love God.

Sometimes we are told that the first table points out our duty to God, and constitutes religion, and that the last table defines our duty to our neighbor, and constitutes morality. But the last table contains duties to God just as much as the first one. David, after he had broken two of the commandments contained in the last table when making his confession, said: "Against Thee, and Thee only have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight." God must be first and last and all the time. And if the requirements of God demand that we go contrary to the requirements of man, we must obey God and trust our all to Him.

It matters not whether wicked men hedge up the way; we should "go forward" with our work. When Israel was going out of Egypt, they came to a place where the Red Sea was before them and the mountains and the hosts of the Egyptians behind; but the command of God to Moses was, "Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward." But how could they with the sea before them and their enemies behind? That did not matter. God said, "Go forward."

These things are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come. The Israelites were to go forward on the word of God. It mattered not if the sea was before them. God opened it so that they passed through dryshod. But if He had not, they could have gone through on top of the water just as well. They could have gone over on the word of God. That was the *way* that Peter walked on the Sea of Galilee.

We must ever remember that we are the children of God; and being children of God, we have overcome the world. All these lessons that we have had are to prepare us for the time of trouble. "Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God (which is the Lord Jesus Christ), that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."