

That We Might Bear Fruit For God

Lesson 14

The Christian's mind renewed in attitude toward the world: Civil government. (Romans 13:1-7).

By F. M. Perry

“(1) Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. (2) Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. (3) For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same; (4) for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil. (5) Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. (6) For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. (7) Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.” (Romans 13:1-7 NASV).

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Lesson 14

The Christian's mind renewed in attitude toward the world; Civil government. (Romans 13:1-7).

Questions for study.

1. In preparation for study of Romans 13:1-7, review Romans 8:28. Do the "all things" of Romans 8:28 refer to all things which are considered "good?" Does God use worldly governments, whether "bad" or "good, to execute His purposes on earth? Will any worldly government, survive God's final spiritual judgement?
2. Also review Romans 9:14-24. In Romans 9:22-23, identify the kind of things which are "vessels of wrath" and "vessels of mercy" which God has prepared on earth. Does the Holy Spirit ever lead Christians to be "vessels of wrath?"
3. Relate the truths concerning God's use of "all things" (Romans 8:28) as "vessels of wrath" and "vessels of mercy" (Romans 9:22-23) to the instructions to Christians in Romans 13:1-7. Who, in Romans 13:1, may be identified as a "vessel of mercy" and who may be identified as a "vessel of wrath?" "Every person?" "Governing authorities?"
4. How did Jesus interact with the "governing authorities" during His life, trial, and crucifixion? Give examples of the Apostles' interaction with "governing authorities" during their "bearing of fruit" described in Acts.
5. When Paul said that earthly rulers are not a cause of fear to those who do good, was he ignorant of the immoral and tyrannical ways in which some governments exercise power? What did Paul mean in Romans 13:3? How does Paul's expectation of persecution of Christians in Romans 12:14 fit into these instructions? If you 'lived under a government which was antagonistic toward Christianity, such as

People's Republic of China, or Iran, how would you apply Romans 13:1-7 to your life?

6. What two reasons are given for the Christian to be in subject to governing authorities? (Romans 13:5).

7. Explain how the "conscience" is involved in our subjection to governing authorities? (Romans 13:5).

8. Why is the Christian's attitude toward governing authorities important in his bearing of fruit for God?

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Lesson 14, The Christian's mind renewed in attitude toward the world: Civil government. (Romans 13:1-7).

Questions for study.

1. In preparation for study of Romans 13:1-1, review Romans 8:28. Do the "all things" of Romans 8:28 refer to all things which are considered "good?" Does God use worldly governments, whether "bad" or "good," to execute His purposes on earth? Will any worldly government, survive God's final spiritual judgement?

In Romans 8:28 Paul said, "... We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." In this statement the "good" that is produced by God's action is for those "who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." The "all things" which God causes to work together are not necessarily "good." An important truth to be learned from this statement is that God can bring "good" things to His people even from "bad" occurrences. Consider all the good that God has brought from the Roman government's actions which led to the crucifixion of Jesus. Consider the fact that God often has used evil governments to bring about His good purposes (for instance, the taking into captivity of the Israelites by the Babylonian government by which means God protected and preserved a remnant to carry out His purposes on earth).

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). In fact, Peter revealed that the "present heaven and earth ... are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment ..." (2 Peter 3:7). No worldly government will survive God's final judgment.

2. Also review Romans 9:14-24. In Romans 9:22-23, identify the kind of things which are "vessels of wrath" and "vessels of mercy" which God has prepared on earth. Does the Holy Spirit ever lead Christians to be "vessels of wrath?"

Paul said in Romans 9:22-24, "What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles."

We are all under God's control from the standpoint that we cannot effectively resist His will. We cannot do anything that will thwart God's purpose. If we act the way God wants us to act, He uses us to accomplish His purpose. If we act contrary to the way He wants, He still uses us to accomplish something of His purpose.

God uses those who oppose His purpose as "vessels of wrath" as He did evil Pharaoh. God endured with great patience while Pharaoh fought against His purpose for Israel. We see that God actually used Pharaoh's evil actions to demonstrate His own power and glory to the world. And in the end, God's purpose to free the Israelites was fully carried out.

On the other hand, God uses those who turn to Him in faith as His "vessels of mercy," to convey His gospel of mercy to the rest of mankind, both Jews and Gentiles. Today each of us either chooses to believe and be obedient to God and be used as a "vessel of mercy," or he chooses to disbelieve, be disobedient to God and be used as a "vessel of wrath."

Romans 9:23-24 makes it clear that the "vessels of mercy" are those "which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called," from among Jews and Gentiles. Today, God's "vessels of mercy" are Christians who are committed to God's purpose for them. This would seem to indicate that God has precluded the use of any Christians as His "vessels of wrath." (This may be a debatable point. It can be argued that God used His committed people, the Israelites, as "vessels of wrath" against the evil people of Canaan. Did not God use David, "the man after God's own heart," as a "vessel of wrath" against

the evil nations of Canaan? David and the Israelite people were also used as "vessels of mercy" to carry on the lineage leading to the birth of Jesus on earth, and to prepare the world for the incarnation of the Son of God. It might be argued that God may use His committed people as "vessels of mercy," "vessels of wrath," or simultaneously as both!

3. Relate the truths concerning God's use of "all things" (Romans 8:28) as "vessels of wrath" and "vessels of mercy" (Romans 9:22-23) to the instructions to Christians in Romans 13:1-7. Who, in Romans 13:1, may be identified as a "vessel of mercy" and who may be identified as a "vessel of wrath?" "Every person?" "Governing authorities?"

Those identified by Paul in the phrase "every person" (Romans 13:1) are the Christians at Rome to whom Paul was writing. Christians are those to whom Paul referred in Romans 9:22-24 as those "whom He also called," and those to whom He wished to "make known the riches of His glory." Thus the phrase "every person" refers to God's "vessels of mercy." The "governing authorities" of Romans 13: 1 are referred to in Romans 13:4 as those making up the entity that is "an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil". Thus it is the "governing authorities" who fit the definition of Paul's phrase "vessels of wrath."

The "governing authorities" to whom "every person" is to be in subjection, is identified as an entity which "bears the sword" and becomes a servant (or minister) of God "to avenge" and "to bring wrath upon the one who practices evil." Governments then may be said to be God's "vessels" for bringing God's "wrath" upon those who practice evil. In serving this purpose, governments are "ministers of God for good." Governments are part of the "all things" which God causes to work together for good to those who love Him and who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

4. How did Jesus interact with the "governing authorities" during His life, trial, and crucifixion? Give examples of the Apostles' interaction with "governing authorities" during their "bearing of fruit" described in Acts.

When Jesus was asked by the Pharisees if it was lawful to give a tax to Caesar, Jesus answered, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:21). Jesus interacted with the "governing authorities" in precisely the same way that Paul called on Christians to interact with "governing authorities" in Romans 13:5-7. "Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; ..."

It was the "governing authorities" who arrested Jesus, brought Him to trial, and crucified Him. Jesus reacted to the "governing authorities" by submitting to them, even though it meant His death by crucifixion. Jesus, the Son of God, had the power to prevent the "governing authorities" from harming Him. But Jesus did not use that power against the "governing authorities." Instead He submitted to unjust crucifixion! In His actions, Jesus demonstrated His respect for the fact that the "governing authorities" were serving as "a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil." Of course, we know that Jesus did not "practice evil", but God had placed on Him momentarily all the evil that mankind had practiced before, or would practice after His crucifixion!

When, after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, the Apostles and other disciples went forth to preach the gospel, they were told by the "governing authorities" to cease their preaching. However, Peter and John answered the decree of the "governing authorities" on one occasion with these words, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard." (Matthew 4: 19-20). On another occasion Peter and the Apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men." (Matthew 5: 29). Their insistence on continuing to preach, even after being commanded by the "governing authorities" not to preach, resulted in their being arrested and even put to death. We see in the actions of these Apostles, who were inspired by the Holy Spirit of Christ, the real meaning of Christ's words, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

5. When Paul said that earthly rulers are not a cause of fear to those who do good, was he ignorant of the immoral and tyrannical ways in which

some governments exercise power? What did Paul mean in Romans 13:3? How does Paul's expectation of persecution of Christians in Romans 12:14 fit into these instructions? If you 'lived under a government which was antagonistic toward Christianity, such as People's Republic of China, or Iran, how would you apply Romans 13:1-7 to your life?

Paul said, in Romans 13:3, "For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil." Yet Paul had just warned Christians in Romans 12 to expect persecution and tribulation in their lives. Surely Paul was not ignorant of the fact that much of the persecution and tribulation in the lives of Christians would come from various "governing authorities," even though the Christians were doing no evil but were doing good. Some "governing authorities" of the world today label the "good" that is done by Christians as "evil," for example, the "Governing authorities" of Iran and The Sudan. And in these countries Christians have cause to fear for their lives.

Apparently the "good behavior" spoken of by Paul in Romans 13:3 is not always "good" in the sight of the "governing authorities." Then the "good behavior" must be in reference to the sight of God! And the "fear" that is mentioned here in Romans 13:3 must not mean that one will never have a fleshly fear of wrong treatment from "governing authorities." The "fear" that one need not have is spiritual fear for his soul's welfare. Jesus said in Matthew 10:28, "Do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul." Christians need have no fear of the ultimate outcome in their spiritual environment if they do good in the sight of God.

In fact, Christians cannot live and teach the gospel of Christ in countries like Iran and The Sudan without being in fear of arrest and imposition of the death penalty for breaking laws which forbid such teaching. Yet, Christians must obey God rather than man, and Christians need not fear those who can kill only the body.

6. What two reasons are given for the Christian to be in subjection to governing authorities? (Romans 13:5).

One reason Christians are to be in subjection to governing authorities is because of "wrath." The "wrath" mentioned here is the action of the government toward those who do evil. In "bearing the sword" and in avenging and bringing wrath upon those who practice evil, the government is a "minister of God." Thus, the "wrath" exercised by the government is actually exercised in behalf of God. It is God's wrath and Christians should respect the government in its exercise of such wrath.

Another reason Christians are to be in subjection to governing authorities is "for conscience' sake." The "conscience" mentioned here is the conscience of the Christian. The function of a person's conscience seems to be associated in scripture with the personal spirit of the person. A Christian's personal spirit is the most holy dwelling place of Christ's Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:17-20; Romans 8:16). The committed Christian's conscience is open to being trained by the Holy Spirit. When Christians read the words of the Holy Spirit spoken through Paul in Romans 13:1-7, the words not only are presented to the mind and intellect of the Christian's soul, they are affirmed by the Holy Spirit as a standard for Christian living and the standard will be stored in the conscience. Thus, a Christian will be prompted by his conscience' affirmation that he must "be in subjection to the governing authorities." The conscience assists the Christian in following the leadership of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 8:1-11).

7. Explain how the "conscience" is involved in our subjection to governing authorities? (Romans 13:5).

The answer to this question is given in answer to question 6., above.

8. Why is the Christian's attitude toward governing authorities important in his bearing of fruit for God?

The Christian can bear fruit for God only through his committed following of the Holy Spirit. Romans 13:1-7 was inspired in Paul by the Holy Spirit and was preserved for Christians for the purpose of leading them in fruitful lives. All people, Christians and non-Christians alike, live under the influence of governing authorities. The lives of Christians

under governing authorities are examples to non-Christian people. It is through the lives of Christians that the Holy Spirit's influence is brought to the lives of non-Christians.