

109. The Book of Romans 12:19-13:5

Paul's Epistle to the Romans

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(11-12-25)

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In our study of the Book of Romans, we have come to the application portion of the book.

Romans Chapter 12 is without a doubt one of the most practical sections on sanctified living for Christ that you'll find anywhere in the New Testament.

Romans 12:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, "*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,*" says the Lord.

Paul is admonishing Christians to resist the temptation to avenge wrongs that are done to us and to simply let God administer justice upon those who wrong us as He sees fit.

That's why Paul admonished us—

Ephesians 4:26-27 (NKJV)

²⁶ "Be angry, and do not sin" [by bringing judgment upon another who has wronged you]: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, ²⁷ nor give place to the devil.

Some people are taken back by this—that Paul is telling Christians to 'go ahead and get angry— but just don't sin.' They're taken back because in their minds anger is sin, but that's not true—it's possible to get angry about something and not sin.

There is such a thing as *righteous* anger.

The righteous anger of God is always connected to His judgment against sin—which will culminate during the Tribulation Period with a worldwide judgment (Revelation 6-19).

God's anger is not an outburst of temper (God is not a divine hothead); it is holy anger against sin that has been building and building like a volcano (sometimes over the centuries)—which He has graciously restrained to give the people of this world time to repent—

2 Peter 3:9 (NKJV)

⁹ The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise [of coming judgment], as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

However, someday the righteous anger of God will no longer be restrained and will finally be released erupting in cataclysmic worldwide judgments.

In the New Testament we see God's righteous anger demonstrated in Jesus when He cleansed the Temple (Matthew 21:12-13); and when the spiritual leaders of Israel didn't want Jesus to heal on the Sabbath forcing the sick and infirmed to keep on suffering (Mark 3:5).

And so, once again, not all anger is sin—there is such a thing as *righteous* indignation (anger).

In fact, I think it's sinful to look at the injustice and oppression in our society and not get angry—indifference is not a virtue! We should be angry with injustice, hatred, crime, corruption, abortion, racism, immorality, blasphemy, and other sins against the innocent or against Holy God. However, much of the anger we express is not of the righteous variety but rather self-centered and uncontrolled anger which stems from wounded pride or feelings of being wrongfully treated by another.

The Bible often speaks of anger being "*kindled*" as though anger can be compared to fire.

I suppose that's as apt a description as any because before anger becomes a *consuming fire* it must first be—kindled, nurtured and fueled. We're all guilty of letting our anger *smolder* or *simmer* under the surface as we nurture and fuel it until suddenly—it bursts forth like a raging fire destroying whatever it touches.

That's why Paul warns if you're angry make sure that it doesn't lead to sin by dealing with it quickly—or else you will give Satan an opportunity to gain a foothold in your life and especially in your marriage.

If your anger isn't dealt with quickly through loving forgiveness—it will be *internalized* and become what the Bible calls "*a root of bitterness by which many become defiled*". (Hebrews 12:15)

One pastor put it this way—

"When anger is allowed to become a root of bitterness it will produce the poison fruit of hatred, slander, gossip, malice, revenge—and in some cases even violence.

And so, to keep this from happening and your anger from escalating Paul gives a practical exhortation—"Don't let the sun go down on your anger."

A good way to safeguard against anger leading to sin is to not let the day pass without working it out with the person involved—and the sooner the better because the longer you wait the more bitter you will grow and the more severe the consequences of your actions will potentially become."

How many couples—who really do love each other, have let anger fueled by pride become a root of bitterness that eventually choked the life out of their marriage?

The two hardest things for a human being to say—"I'm sorry" and "I was wrong."

Remember—forgiveness isn't earned it's bestowed—it's given as a gift of grace even as Jesus did with us. God will handle all vengeance upon evil doers—our response should be:

Romans 12:20 (NKJV)

²⁰ 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."

Notice that Paul isn't just advocating for the absence of hostilities toward our enemies—but also for going the extra mile by showing them kindness.

One author and pastor,

“Christianity goes beyond non-resistance to active benevolence. It does not destroy its enemies by violence but converts them by love. It feeds the enemy when he is hungry and satisfies his thirst...To withhold vengeance is one thing, it requires only doing nothing—but to actually return good for evil is quite another thing altogether.

To heap live coals on a person’s head means to bring him to “burning shame” over his hostility by surprising him with unconventional kindness.

In Paul’s day, when a fire went out in a home, it was difficult to reignite it. Therefore, if someone’s fire went out,

the women would carry live coals in clay jars upon their heads to share with the person who had no fire. Thus, the implication here was not of burning one's enemy, but of warming him in order to ultimately win him to the Kingdom."

Romans 12:20–21 (NKJV)

²⁰ 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."* ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

I'll share 2 stories that illustrate this truth—both involve Abraham Lincoln.

One of Lincoln's biographers wrote—

"One of Abraham Lincoln's earliest political enemies was Edwin M. Stanton. He called Lincoln a "low cunning clown" and "the original gorilla." "It was ridiculous for people to go to Africa to see a gorilla," he would say, "when they could find one easily in Springfield, Illinois." Lincoln never responded to the slander, but when, as president, he needed a secretary of war, he chose Stanton. When his incredulous friends asked why, Lincoln replied, "Because he is the best man for the job."

Years later, as the slain president's body lay in state, Stanton looked into the coffin and said through his tears, "There lies the greatest ruler of men the world has ever seen." His animosity was finally broken by Lincoln's longsuffering, nonretaliatory spirit. Patient love won out."

I read once how a Massachusetts congressman named Thaddeus Stevens bitterly wished to 'crush' the South after the South lost to the North in the Civil War.

When he heard President Lincoln stress the importance of binding up the wounds of the nation by forgiving and reconciling—Stevens was furious and pounded his fist on the cabinet table and shouted, *"Mr. Lincoln, I think enemies ought to be destroyed!"*

To which President Lincoln quietly responded, *"Mr. Stevens, do I not destroy my enemy when I make him my friend?"*

Destroy your enemies with love and kindness by turning them into brothers and sisters in Christ!

Chapter 13

Romans 13:1–2 (NKJV)

¹ 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. ² Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

In Romans 13 Paul is dealing with *civil* government.

In every ordered society there must be authority and submission to that authority—otherwise you have a state of anarchy, and no society can survive for long in anarchy. So, God instituted human government to maintain law and order and to keep societies from descending into anarchy and chaos—because He knows that even bad government is better than no government.

There is an exception, of course—a Christian is not required to obey if the government orders him to sin or to compromise his loyalty to Jesus Christ (Acts 5:29).

There are times when a believer must, by obeying God, incur the wrath of man—and in such cases he or she must be prepared to suffer the consequences. But under no circumstance should a Christian rebel against the government or join in an attempt to overthrow it.

This does not mean that God approves of everything earthly leaders and governments do—He certainly doesn't approve of corruption, brutality, and tyranny!

The Bible assures us that someday corrupt leaders will stand before Him, give an account and be judged for the way they exercised their authority over others on the earth. But the fact remains that all governmental authorities are appointed by God.

Both Paul and Peter (not to mention Jesus Himself) commanded us to be good citizens and submit ourselves to governmental authorities. We are commanded as Christians to pray for our leaders whether we agree with them or not, whether we voted for them or not—godliness respects the office God has ordained.

Michael the archangel respected Lucifer; David respected Saul; and Daniel respected Nebuchadnezzar.

Many in our country believe that Donald Trump is an illegitimate president and say things like— *“He’s evil, he can’t be from God and therefore Trump isn’t my president!”*

You don’t read things like that coming from Daniel, David, Paul or the other New Testament writers.

Romans 13:1–2 (NLT)

¹ Everyone must submit to governing authorities. For all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God. ² So anyone who rebels against authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and they will be punished.

Paul is telling us that anyone who disobeys or rebels against the government is disobeying and rebelling against the God who has ordained that government. Whoever resists the authority of government earns and deserves punishment (judgment). As a general rule that is true—however, there are exceptions.

There are times when God accepts rebellion against authority—and even commands it (Acts 5:29)!

As we have already pointed out, the Bible has some pretty clear admonitions about respecting and obeying governing authority and being good citizens as Christians—

1 Peter 2:11-17 (NKJV)

¹¹ Beloved, I beg *you* as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, ¹² having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by *your* good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation. ¹³ Therefore submit (obey) yourselves to every ordinance (law) of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men-- ¹⁶ as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. ¹⁷ Honor all *people*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

As Christians we live in two worlds—the *physical* and the *spiritual*; and we’re citizens of two kingdoms—*America* and *heaven*. As such we must learn to live in both simultaneously—which is not always easy. There are many Christians who choose to live in one—almost to the exclusion of the other—let me explain.

There are many Christians, especially because of the current political climate, that are so focused on American politics (the kingdom of man)—that their allegiance to the Kingdom of God on the earth is secondary.

Then you have other Christians who seem to think that because human government is corrupt—they don't have to participate in it—they don't have to vote or pray for government leaders ("they're all corrupt so why bother?") or fight against evil laws that kill the unborn or curtail our religious freedoms.

Both of these are extreme positions that lack balance—and balance in the Christian life is critical if we're going to be good citizens of both heaven and earth.

This was an issue in Jesus' day—a hot button issue that His enemies tried to use against Him—

Matthew 22:15-17 (NKJV)

¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in *His* talk. ¹⁶ And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men. ¹⁷ Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"

There were actually three taxes imposed by the Roman government:

1. *A land tax of one tenth of the grain and one fifth of the wine and oil produced was assessed annually.*
2. *An income tax which amounted to one per cent of a man's income.*
3. *A poll tax (sometimes referred to as a 'head tax'), which was levied on all men from fourteen to sixty-five and on all women from twelve to sixty-five.*

This poll tax amounted to one denarius per year—a denarius was a day's pay for a soldier and average working man. This was a tax that everyone had to pay simply for the privilege of existing!

Of all the taxes imposed by Rome upon its subjects, this is the one the Jews hated the most, this was the one that infuriated them the most—and this was the tax the Pharisees and Herodians were talking about.

Taking all of this into account the question which the Pharisees and Herodians put to Jesus was a masterpiece of demonic cunning—

- *If he said that it was lawful to pay this tax—then the people would have considered Him a traitor to Israel and the LORD and turned against Him.*
- *If He said that it wasn't lawful to pay this tax—then these men would have reported Him to the Roman government, and they would have arrested Jesus as a revolutionary.*

Either way the Pharisees and Herodians must have thought they had Jesus in a trap from which there was no escape!

Matthew 22:18-21 (NKJV)

¹⁸ But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why do you test Me, *you* hypocrites? ¹⁹ Show Me the tax money." So they brought Him a denarius. ²⁰ And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" ²¹ They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

The Greek word for “**render**” is a word that means to “*pay or give back*”.

In this context it means paying a debt owed to the Roman government for services rendered. So here Jesus is teaching that, as God’s people, we live as citizens of two kingdoms—the kingdom of man (human government) and the Kingdom of God (divine rule).

There will always be those who want us to choose one kingdom over the other—but Jesus taught us that since both have been ordained by God, and we live in both simultaneously we must try to live in harmony with the two and maintain a *balance*.

And that means we obey the laws of our country—while at the same time living in obedience to the laws of God.

When our country was first established the overwhelming majority of our Founding Fathers were Christians—and so many of the laws they put in place in our country came right out of the Bible. In those days it was easy to obey the laws of government—because so many were based on the laws of God.

Of, course all that is changing and today many of the laws of our nation run contrary to the laws of God which has made it difficult to live in harmony with the state.

However, in the beginning of our nation’s history it wasn’t that way—as Paul said:

Romans 13:3 (NKJV)

³ **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.**

As a rule, people who do what is right do not need to fear the government.

Paul is only speaking of those who break the law—that they have reason to fear the government for being lawbreakers.

Romans 13:3–4a (NKJV)

³ 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. ⁴ **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...**

Paul tells us that the ‘**rulers**’ of civil government (whether presidents, prime ministers, governors, mayors, or judges—they are **ministers of God** in the sense that they are *servants* and *representatives* of the Lord.

They may not know God *personally*, but they are still the Lord’s servants *officially*.

Thus, David repeatedly referred to the wicked King Saul as the Lord’s anointed (1 Samuel 24:6, 10; 26:9, 11, 16, 23).

In spite of Saul’s repeated attempts on David’s life, the latter would not allow his men to harm to Saul—Why? Because Saul was the king, and as such he was the Lord’s minister (servant).

Romans 13:4 (NKJV)

⁴ 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.**

One author said—

*“As servants of God, rulers are expected to promote the **good** of the people—their security, tranquility, and general welfare. If any man insists on breaking the law, he can expect to pay for it, because the government has the authority to bring him to trial and punish him. In the expression **he does not bear the sword in vain** we have a strong statement concerning the power which God vests in the government.*

***The sword** is not just an innocuous symbol of power; a scepter would have served that purpose. **The sword** seems to speak of the ultimate power of the ruler—that is, to inflict capital punishment (Gen.9:5-6). So, it will not do to say that capital punishment was for the OT era only and not for the New. Here is a statement in the NT that implies that the government has the authority to take the life of a capital offender.”*

People argue against this by quoting Exodus 20:13 in the KJV—**“Thou shalt not kill.”**

The Hebrew word translated **“kill”** in the KJV specifically means **“murder”** and is so translated in the NKJV—**“You shall not murder.”**

Capital punishment is not murder—it is God ordained justice:

Genesis 9:5–6 (NLT)

⁵ “And I will require the blood of anyone who takes another person’s life. If a wild animal kills a person, it must die. And anyone who murders a fellow human must die. ⁶ If anyone takes a human life, that person’s life will also be taken by human hands. For God made human beings in his own image.

Romans 13:4-5 (NKJV)

⁴ 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.

⁵ **Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake.**

What this means is that we should be obedient citizens of the government for two reasons—the **fear of punishment** and the desire to maintain *a good conscience* toward God.

The New Testament lays down three great principles with regard to the individual Christian and the state.

The state is not the *automatic* enemy of the Christian and the Church—although, as I just said, in our country the state seems to be growing more and more antagonistic towards Christianity and its followers.

But in general, the state is not automatically the enemy of the Church—because... Come back next week.

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower—please reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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